

## The Roman Road: a transhumance route

The Roman Road area is bounded by the right bank of the Farfa River on the south, the Salaria road on the east, the Tancia provincial road on the west, and the Rieti plain on the north side. Except from the presence of ancient settlements (*Colle Lunga, Casaprota, Montenero, Monte San Giovanni, Ornaro, etc.*), the environment features an intact and continuous woodland surface, which covers several thousand hectares. This woodland constitutes a large part of the recharge area for the Capore Springs. For this reason, it has been designated as a protection zone for the springs, which today are tapped by ACEA to supply the Peschiera-Capore aqueduct system, serving the city of Rome.

For centuries, the area has been crossed by an interconnected system of paths, used both on foot and on horseback, which served different purposes: some ensured connections between settlements, others linked the inland areas to the city of Rome and its territory. The latter are the so-called “*Roman roads*,” a network of secondary routes recorded under this name in the old Papal land registries. This term was commonly used to indicate ancient routes forming a system of roads parallel to the Salaria. They were used both for the seasonal migration of flocks toward the Lazio plain, for trade, and for the passage of pilgrims.

Nowadays this route system has fallen into disuse, giving way to modern vehicular routes that have favored valley-bottom paths. Nevertheless, the civic land administrations of Colle Lunga and Montenero have launched a local network project, funded by the PNRR, with the goal of restoring the functional use of a section of *Roman roads* that runs inside their municipalities. This project restored a highland path that crosses their lands and connects with *St. Francis’ Way*, very close to San Giovanni Reatino. The road has been designated as **CAI trail no. 350**, as it continues towards Fonte Colombo, one of the four Franciscan sanctuaries of the Valle Santa.

The Roman routes have very ancient origins, dating back to the Bronze Age and the “Old Apennine civilization” (1700–1200 BC). The economy of human groups in that era was based on agriculture and on a form of livestock farming that was partly nomadic and partly sedentary. The word *transhumance* comes from the Latin *trans* (beyond) and *humus* (land), meaning seasonal pastoral migration along the *tratturi* (from the Latin *tractoria* = the roads of the shepherds). It has an history that most likely coincides with the history of livestock farming itself. Transhumance was already regulated and controlled in Roman times by a system of laws and customs duties, since it represented a significant source of State revenue. Over the centuries it was used in many different regions of Europe and today it is included in UNESCO’s list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Along the transhumance routes, shepherds needed to find water, pastures, shelters, and enclosures to feed, water, and house both their animals and themselves. This fundamental necessity gave birth to settlements that, depending on the period, could take different forms: small villages in prehistoric times; large farms made up of dwelling structures with a large courtyard for livestock, in the Roman era; in the Middle Ages, inns and churches connected to areas used as shelters for both people and animals.

In some areas these settlements gave rise to villages and cities (for example, Benevento, Spoleto and Rome), which became very final destinations of various transhumance routes, as well as to great abbeys, such as the *Farfa Abbey*, located along the main transhumance roads, which provided shepherds with safety and protection.

The road axis connecting the territories of Montenero and Collelungo is well defined in a large quantity of documents and in the memory and oral tradition of the communities.

The road section connecting the two territories is clearly documented in the maps of the Gregorian Cadastre (1816–1835) of Collelungo, and was referred to as “Roman road”. Weirldy, it is not the same for Montenero, where it appears only for a short stretch under this name, approximately from the farmhouse of Osteria di Scrocco up to the hill known as “*Collacchi*,” near the Capitignano area.

At that point, it disappears, and there are no traces of any road continuing beyond. Fortunately the existence of a Roman road is unquestionably attested in the Farfa documentation (especially the *Regesto Farfense*) of the 10th century and in later notarial records, dating from the 14th–15th centuries. These sources confirm the presence of an important communication route—referred to as the “*Roman road*” or the “*Road to Rieti*,” underlining its role as a link between the Urbs and the Rieti area. A link that for centuries served as the path of transhumance as well as the passage of people and goods.

The presence of a series of ancient small natural lakes – some of which are also listed in the Gregorian Cadastre – testify to the presence of a road that must have been used specifically for the passage of livestock. These reservoirs—including the lakes of *Casale Lungo*, *Menta*, *Fajtti*, *Scossa*, *Rescagnano*, *Cupojo*, and *Rocca*—used to provide refreshment for animals and people on the move and were part of the axis still existing today, delineating a north-south way that traces, at a higher altitude, the Via Salaria that runs down the valley.

Furthermore, the presence of a rural village called “*Rescagnano*” (documented as back as the early 10th century) presumes the existence of a communication route connecting this settlement with other districts —San Giovanni Reatino, Rieti, to the north—and Casaprota, Collelungo, Ponte Buida, Farfa to the south. Although not documented in the Gregorian Cadastre, that Roman road forked into two directions to the north: to the left it descended towards Cerchiara and the Canera Valley, while to the right it continued, as mentioned, towards Rieti and its valley. For centuries, it must have served as a good alternative to the Tancia pass for the transhumance.

Herds, therefore, could take this second route instead of the shorter one that crossed the Canera Valley and descended from the Tancia towards the Tiber Valley and the Tyrrhenian Sea. This alternative route passed at a higher altitude, crossing the territories of Montenero and Casaprota, descending many other valleys to finally land on the Lazio coast, south of Rome.

These roads were used not only by shepherds and their flocks and transhumant people but also by traders of essential goods such as salt and wool; by artisans such as silversmiths and skilled stonemasons known as *The Lombard masters* (see the [Arch of San Clemente ndr](#)); by artists and painters who left us their frescoes. They fostered the circulation of ideas through cultural exchanges, knowledge, religion and art.

Over time many permanent settlements known as *vici* or *pagi* developed on the outskirts of these roads. Today’s evidence of these settlements can be seen in place names (*dapacu*, *peschi’e rampuni*, *chiusi*), in

ruins (Saracen walls on Via Capolecase), in rural churches (San Clemente, San Nicola a Colle Lungo, San Michele a Casaprota), in chapels (Madonna della Quercia "Mamma Nostra", Sant'Angelo), and in the "Castra" of Colle Lungo and Casaprota, Montenero, Ornaro, etc.

Sheep farming was obviously connected to the wool market: in the 14th and 15th centuries it was a driver of economic wealth comparable to that of oil extraction for Arab countries today. Connected to this activity was the "fulling mill" for wool processing, still existing and documented in the 17th century next to the large Mill close to Le Capore spring.

The Roman road that runs in our territory starts from the Apennines and splits into two branches (one directed to Casaprota and the other to Colle Lungo) just before the edge point of Valle Forcana. It then descends toward the roman countryside where, since 1477, Pope Sixtus IV obliged all shepherds in the Regno della Chiesa to take their flocks for the winter.

Transhumance increase in Lazio started in 1800, just after the crisis of Regno delle Due Sicilie. As an example, the Amatriciana transhumance has had for a long time the roman countryside as its main destination.

The outward journey (*demonticazione*) and return journey (*monticazione*) were done on foot, following the Salaria road. They took an average of seven days, with several stops, starting from the Amatrice area during the first rains of September, passing through Cittaducale and continuing towards Rome following many shortcuts. Traveling concerned walking an average of 20-25 km per day, during night time, stopping in the morning to feed and rest the animals.

Once arrived at Osteria dell'Ornaro, in order to avoid the deep Rio Secco valley, two passages were recommended: Scrocco di Montenero (featuring an old inn whose services were enjoyed by Giuseppe Garibaldi and his men, during their escape from Mentana) or through the villages of Ornaro and Poggio San Lorenzo, following Osteria Nuova, Nerola, and Passo Corese. In May, the route would reverse direction.

A shepherd poet from Terzone di Leonessa in the late 19th century described the passage:

*Quindi per la Città ( Rieti ) fanno il passaggio,*

*Presso l'Ornaro hanno la sera alloggio;*

*Seguendo poi ciascuno il suo viaggio*

*Passa di S. Lorenzo in mezzo al poggio;*

*Và per fangose vie pien di coraggio*

*Che gli serve il baston di forte appoggio,*

*E di Nerola omai s'io non vaneggio*

*All'antica osteria giunger li veggio.*

*Then they pass through the city (Rieti),  
Near the Ornaro they lodge for the evening;  
Then each following his own journey,  
He passes by San Lorenzo in the middle of the hill;  
He goes along muddy roads full of courage,  
For he needs a strong stick for support,  
And now, if I'm not wandering,  
I see them arriving at Nerola at the ancient inn.*

The shepherds' skill at poetic improvisation was undisputed and can be rediscovered in the so-called "*Canto a braccio*"; the locals, however, satirized shepherd's ability:

*Lu pecoraru quanno va' in Maremma,  
se crede da esse giudice e notaru.  
La coda della pecora è la penna,  
la pelle della pecora è la carta,  
lu sicchiu de lo latte è u calamaru.*

—

*The shepherd when he goes to Maremma,  
he thinks he's a judge and a notary.  
The sheep's tail is the pen,  
the sheepskin is paper,  
the milk bucket is an inkwell.*

The *Roman Road*'s value drop off after the construction of carriage roads in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a matter of fact in the *New Land Registry* (1936), the road was called "*ex Romana*" and its name was borrowed by the new road connecting to the Salaria.

The practice of transhumance continued even after the opening of the roads, sometimes carried out on trucks. Transhumance on foot ceased completely after the Second World War.

1 Angelo Felice Maccheroni, *La pastorale siringa*, in VII canti. Florence, 1848. A. F. Maccheroni (1803–1888) was a shepherd from Piedelpoggio di Leonessa, and in his work, written in the so-called "macaronic" style, he addresses all aspects of the life of the transhumant shepherd.

## CAI trail 350: on the track of ancient presences...

The Roman Road partially overlaps with the CAI 350 trail, which connects Colle Lungo to the Franciscan Sanctuary of Fonte Colombo in Rieti. This fact recalls ancient presences whose traces are still visible today.

The itinerary begins in Piazza XXIV Maggio in Colle Lungo, also known as "*la Rota*": the name referred both to a complex apparatus (parts of which were reused in the war memorial) for reducing limb dislocations in pack animals, and to the place where it was located.

On the edge of the square was the Church of Saint Nicola, outside the walls. The cult of Saint Nicola just like that of Saint Clemente were most likely imported from environments in Rome where the Greek influence was still present during the Middle Ages. Another hypothesis sees pilgrims returning from the pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Nicola in Bari, demonstrating that the road was part of a pilgrimage route.





Shortly after the beginning of the route in Via Capo le Case and along the roadside, there were remains of Roman buildings in *opus reticulatum* (*i casarini, u puzzone*), *l' Arelatinu* (a natural rock esplanade used as a threshing floor for grains and legumes), and the Chapel of Madonna della Quercia, also known as "Mamma Nostra": places and artifacts that evidence the vitality of the area which may have favored the first forms of permanent settlements.





Many other remaining elements date back to ancient times, such as:

- the base of an oil press, demonstrating the antiquity of olive cultivation in the area;
- a funerary altar dedicated to a woman, Vettiena Secundina, by her husband, Lucio Fulcinio Secolare;
- the generic name of the village (il pago), which still lives in the name of a district of the present-day town







The connection with Rieti may have favored, albeit late during the 17th century, the establishment of a small Franciscan convent next to the Church of the Madonna della Croce, located halfway between Colle Lungo and Casaprota; this settlement, however, had a short life. The CAI 350 trail traces the connection between this site and the Franciscan sanctuary of Fontecolombo in Rieti, from which the settlement may have originated.





The first stop of the climbing is at the **First Belvedere**, where you can enjoy a panoramic view with Mount Soratte in the foreground. In case of clear skies, in the background it is possible to spot the Tolfa Mountains, Monte Romano (on the border between Bracciano and Nepi), and the Cimini Mountains.

To the side lays out the **Maceraro** - *Pietraia dei Piani Ferrari*. The inherited name of the ancient arable land that later became pasture, originates from “maceraro” a long deposit of stones accumulated over time by farmers who cleared the land of their presence.

The land then levels out into a natural balcony: **Torcione**, a popular playground until the late 1960's for boys playing soccer. The reasons for the name are difficult to pinpoint.





After the Torcione, the route climbs again toward a pass: **La Scossa**. From the top of this mountain, the transhumant shepherds coming from the Apennines with their flocks could glimpse for the first time the end of their journey.

This stretch of road that goes over the top of the mountain overlooking Colle Lungo must have been particularly moving for the shepherds who, for the first time after days of tiring walking (*When you arrived in Rome you were dead, you and the sheep!*a shepherd remembers), could glimpse their destination: the Lazio plain and, in particular circumstances, even the sea line on the horizon. The poet's words come to mind:

*E vanno pel tratturo antico al piano,  
quasi per un erbal fiume silente,  
su le vestigia degli antichi padri.  
O voce di colui che primamente  
conosce il tremolar della marina!  
(Gabriele D'Annunzio – I Pastori)*

—

*And they go along the ancient path to the plain,  
almost along a silent, grassy river,  
following the traces of their ancient fathers.  
O voice of him who first  
knew the trembling of the sea!*

From La Scossa, a short path leads to **La Castagna**, the summit from which there is a view of the mountains Terminillo, Giano, Nuria, Navegna, Cervia, Pellicchia, and Monte Gennaro, the Lazio plain, Rome, and the Cimini mountains. In 1944, during their retreat, the Germans set up an artillery position there.

The route then descends toward **Valle Forcana**, where one branch of the road leads down to Casapota, while the main route continues toward Osteria di Scrocco, in the territory of Montenero. It is told— with a hint of sarcasm—that Giuseppe Garibaldi and the few followers who remained with him after the defeat at Mentana (1867) stopped to eat and drink for free at the Osteria di Scrocco. The story is more than just a tale since Garibaldi's passage left concrete traces in the village: the nickname "Garibaldi" given to Giuseppe Mazzatosta, a man of impressive size, and the reputation of being a Garibaldian that followed Stefano Zonetti, a tradesman, both during his life and after his death.

After a stretch that follows the current provincial road, the path plunges back into the woods, reaching the area known as **Forcella**, a name that indicates a road junction. The landscape is characterized by vast woodlands of oak, holm oak and hornbeam.

The entire highland area, starting from Colle Lungo, is poor in natural springs but rich in biodiversity. A fair amount of rainfall has made it possible to create semi-permanent ponds on clay beds to collect rainwater for watering both resident and transhumant grazing animals. These numerous small lakes have always been a vital resource for the territory, essential for sustaining livestock and making possible the agricultural, forestry, and pastoral use of the upland areas, which would otherwise be unworkable.

The landscape alternates between hilly zones interrupted by small flat areas and mountainous terrain with modest peaks. The undergrowth yields abundant products, and the wildlife includes wild boar, roe deer, red deer, wolves, porcupines, martens, polecats, and a variety of bird species.

The *Rescaniano* site, which lies along the route, is documented in manuscripts left to us by Gregorio da Catino, a monk of the Farfa Abbey (1060–1113). From these documents—priceless for understanding the history of the early Middle Ages—we learn that a trial was held in this area, presided over by an envoy of Emperor Otto I, which resulted in a judgment (the *placitum ottonianum*) restoring to the Abbey of Farfa properties located here that had been usurped. The records also testify to the presence of inhabitants, a church dedicated to Saint Martin, and a "public road," corresponding to the Roman road.

**Interdiction.** The areas run by collective ownership are subject to landscape protection pursuant to Law 431/1985. In these areas, including the related paths and mule tracks, it is forbidden for anyone to drive off-road with motor vehicles. (Regional Law, March 30, 1987, no. 29).