

The Stilicone Trail

Fiesole – Olmo (km, hrs) Enjoy a walk in Fiesole immersed in nature from Fiesole northward to Olmo.

Stilicone Trail in the Hills around Fiesole :

The Stilicone path immerses the visitor in the verdant surroundings of Fiesole dotted with vineyards, olive groves, medieval churches, and ancient watch towers in a territory once inhabited by the Etruscans.

The route stands out for its vast array of plants, wildflowers and numerous species of wild orchids.

Why is the trail named after Stilicone?

The trail goes through an area called Montereppi (Mons Regis), the scene of a battle between the troops of the Western Roman Empire led by the Roman general Stilicone (of Vandal origins) and the Ostrogoth troops led by King Radagasio on August 23 406 AD. The image of the Roman helmet on the brochure logo refers to this Roman period of history, while the image of the church refers to the old parishes of Montereppi and Santa Margherita a Saletta which date back to the tenth century. Last, below the two symbols one can see a figure of a Vase or Amphora, the drinking vessel that refers to the Etruscan times, the presence of springs, and to the later the subsequent Roman resting sites during the battles with the Barbarian troops.

The Battle

The Ostrogoths invaded Italy to avoid being overrun by the Huns.

To escape being attacked and subjugated by the invading Huns in the fifth century, the Ostrogoths, who were from the area west of the Carpathians, north of the Danube, and east of the Pannonia region, had started to invade the territory of the Roman Empire. Ostrogoth king Radagasio's troops counted over 200 000 soldiers divided into three parts which had sacked all of Northern Italy.

Roman general Stilicone had issued new laws allowing the use of both the Huns and Visigoth troops for ally support. In the meantime, Radagasio and his army had reached Florence, but as soon as Stilicone arrived in the area, the Ostrogoth king was defeated. Although Radagasio attempted to escape, he was captured and beheaded in front of the gates of the city of Florence. Unfortunately there were no traces left of this cruel battle. When King Radagasio had invaded Florence and vicinity, Stilicone had divided his army into two units, and because of the contour of the Mugnone river basin (district of Fiesole), the general was able to launch an attack on both sides of the river definitively defeating the Ostrogoths at Montereppi.

The Churches

Sant'Ilario in Monterecci is one of the oldest churches of the diocese of Fiesole, dating back to the eleventh century. The church was assigned the status of Parish (Pieve) and was given permission to practice baptisms.

Santa Maria a Saletta (renovated and restored several times) also dates back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries according to the books from the Bishopric of Fiesole. The church was believed to have been built on the site of earlier Etruscan ruins as many artefacts from the area attest.

Wild Orchids

The country of Italy hosts 210 **species of wild orchids, 41 of which** are in the countryside around **Fiesole where there are particularly** good soil conditions with an abundance **of** springs.

Wild orchids are plants that **through time have developed a sophisticated method of reproduction. For example, some orchids use tricks to lure pollinating insects. One species of** orchids has flowers, which **mimic a female abdomen and exude a** pheromone, which **attracts the male to mate with the** flower; **subsequently it will pollinate other orchid flowers of the same species.** The tiny seed, however, must live **in symbiosis with a mushroom** to germinate.

As one can see, wild orchids are a protected species in the region of Tuscany and by law cannot be picked, sprayed by pesticides, and the **wild grasses** cannot be cut before they flower - **as this would impede** not only their reproduction, but **also their conservation.**

