



SUNFLOWER

Sicily

walks and drives



8 DRIVES

70 WALKS/GPS

ONLINE UPDATES

This is a sample from
the PDF edition of

Landscapes of **SICILY**

a countryside guide
Seventh edition



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This shorter sampler includes some of the introductory text, the introductions to each of the main sections (Picnicking, Car Touring and Walking) with an example of each. There is a total of 168 pages, plus two pull-out touring maps, in the full book.



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



Preface

Speaking metaphorically, the landscape is the key that opens the door to a deeper understanding of Sicily. The fascination I feel for this island of endless variety has not left me from the moment I first set foot there in 1993. Since that time, I've spent the equivalent of several years travelling around Sicily. Many books have been written about the island; understandably, the majority deal with art history and archaeology. Others offer advice on the 'right' way to experience Sicily. Yet travel can be seen as a high art which calls for a more unhurried pace than is the norm in our present age of highly developed tourism. Keeping in mind that time is a precious commodity, this book is an invitation to rediscover the leisure that allows travel the chance to become a true journey.

Sicily is full of surprises. Its highest mountain is, at the same time, an active volcano — the largest in Europe. With eruptions occurring at regular intervals, Etna constantly makes its presence felt. Fortunately, there is no danger to human life. Etna is a rather 'peaceful' volcano, not an explosive fire mountain. Towering over all other Sicilian mountains by more than 1300m/4250ft, the volcano at its summit reaches an elevation of 3300m/10,825ft. Climbing Etna takes one through varied climatic zones, each with its own distinctive vegetation. It is almost like taking a trip from Palermo to the North Pole. Subtropical orange and lemon groves give way to stands of oak and the southernmost beech forests in Europe. Up to an elevation of 2500m/8200ft, the ground is covered by a layer of thorny shrubs known locally as *spino santo* (*Astragalus siculus*). Lava beds void of all plant life extend from here to the peak, which is covered with snow for much of the year. In 1987, Etna became a regional park and was placed under environmental protection. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2013.

The ancient theatre of Taormina provides the frame for the classic view of Etna and the Bay of Naxos. Famous Taormina is a small town located in the foothills of the Monti Peloritani. These mountains, with their jagged peaks and wide valleys, are the geological continuation of the Calabrian Aspromonte, separated only by the narrow Straits of Messina.

In the Tyrrhenian Sea, off the northern coast of Sicily, lie

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the Aeolian Islands, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The archipelago forms a volcanic bridge which extends from Etna to Vesuvius at the Gulf of Naples: seven volcanic islands, two of which, Lipari and Vulcano, are described in this book.

A chain of mountains runs along Sicily's northern coast: the Peloritani in the east, followed by the Nebrodi and the Madonie. In 1993 a regional park was established in the forested Nebrodi. These mountains are characterised by gently undulating contours, in spite of the fact that the highest peak is over 1800m/5900ft. However, where limestone deposits begin to emerge, as they do at Alcara li Fusi, the landscape becomes much more dramatic. The Madonie range, which became a regional park back in 1989, consists of rocky limestone mountains whose forests are home to the richest variety of plant life in the Mediterranean.

These limestone mountains continue to the west. The Conca d'Oro and Palermo are both encircled by mountains, while barren peaks protect the Zingaro park from the raw west wind and allow dwarf palms to flourish. The Egadi

At Vulcano's Gran Cratere





Getting about

If you have enough time and patience — the magic word is *pazienza* — almost any town or village in Sicily can be reached by **train** or **bus**. But some of the interesting archaeological sites and almost all of the walks are difficult to reach by public transport (if it *is* possible, it is noted in the relevant walk). If your time is limited, and you want to discover Sicily on foot — and at your own pace — a **car** is indispensable.

You could drive to Sicily: heading down Italy's 'boot' is time-consuming, but great fun. Alternatives are **overnight ferries** like the Grandi Navi Veloci line from Genoa to Palermo, SNAV from Naples to the Aeolian Islands or Palermo, Tirrenia from Naples to Palermo and Traghettilines from Naples to Catania. A **day ferry** connects Salerno with Messina (see 'Useful addresses', page 58).

All of the major **car rental** companies (*Noleggio Auto*) have offices at the Palermo and Catania airports. Vehicles can also be rented in most of the provincial capitals.

There are several pleasant **train** journeys, such as along the coast from Trapani to Messina, and further on to Syracuse. Don't miss the ride between Syracuse and Ragusa! A trip on the **narrow-gauge Circumetnea railway** is a wonderful experience. Departing from Catania or Giarre-Riposto, the train rounds Etna several times a day (see 'Useful addresses'). The stretch Catania–Giarre is served by the FS state railway.

The Aeolian Islands are best reached by **ferry** or **hydrofoil** from Milazzo. The Egadi Islands are best approached from Trapani (see 'Useful addresses'). You can do without a car on the islands (and in many cases, cars are not permitted).

Tonnara di Scopello (Car tour 5)





Picnicking

There are many official picnic areas in Sicily, often established by the forestry service. Unfortunately, many of these sites are just off the road and have no views. On weekends, Sicilians enjoy a *scampagnata*, a family outing where everyone eats together in the fresh air ... and the company is more important than the scenery.

The 27 suggestions listed here are either particularly attractive official picnic areas or idyllic spots which can quickly be reached on foot. They are indicated on the touring maps and relevant walking maps by the symbol **P**.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are available throughout the year. Good Sicilian bread, with a distinctive yellowish tint, is made from durum wheat. The cheese from the Madonie, Nebrodi and Iblei mountains is especially delicious. Good sausages are made in the Madonie and Nebrodi as well. The Sicilians share with the Italians a passion for good spring water. You'll often see whole families stocking up at the wells, filling bottles and canisters. A must for dessert is *pasta di mandorla*, an almond cake which every pastry shop bakes according to its own recipe.

Sicilians like to eat out, and we should follow their example. Thanks to the legacy of Greek, Punic, Roman, Arabic and Spanish invaders, Sicilian cuisine is varied and extensive. One could say that, in Sicily, history goes via the kitchen directly to the stomach.

All picnickers should read the country code on page 56 and go quietly in the countryside.

1 MONTI ROSSI (touring map and map page 61, photo page 60)

Car tour 1: The **Pineta di Monti Rossi** (833m/2730ft) is an *area attrezzata* (official picnic site) at the northern edge of Nicolosi. Open daily 08.00-19.30 in summer, 09.00-17.00 in winter (www.nicolosietna.it/nicolosietna/area-attrezzata-pineta-montirossi). Picnic tables, toilets, barbecues. Pines provide shade, and there is a view to Mount Etna. An easy walk leads up to the rim of the **Monti Rossi** crater (Walk 1).

2 PIANO DEL VESCOVO (touring map)

Car tour 1: There are some picnic tables at the **Piano del Vescovo** (1376m/4515ft), shaded by trembling aspens (*Populus tremula*). Another good spot can be reached after a short walk (2.3km/1.5mi; 45min) into the **Vallone degli Zappini**, the valley that leads north to La Montagnola. The path ends under a large beech tree, by the **Acqua della Rocca** (one of the very few springs on Etna) in a little cave. This place

used to be frequented by the local shepherds.

3 CASA PIETRACANNONE (touring map and maps pages 64-65, 67, photo page 67) ♣

Car tour 1: Park on the Strada Mareneve, then walk down the cart track to the **Casa Pietracannone** (1150m/3770ft). The house stands on old lava, which had engulfed an ancient, weathered tree-trunk. The remaining hole resembles a cannon and gave the house its name. Picnic tables have been set up in the abandoned apple orchard under big Etna broom. You can buy groceries in Milo or S. Alfio. In autumn fresh fruit is sold by street vendors. Walk 3 starts at the Casa Pietracannone.

4 ROCCA NOVARA (touring map and map page 93, photo page 93)

Car tour 2: You don't have to climb the peak of **Rocca Novara** (Walk 14) to enjoy the splendid views over Novara di Sicilia, the Tyrrhenian coast and the Aeolian Islands. Just go as far as the saddle (40min), where there are good places to sit. You can buy everything you need for your picnic in Novara di Sicilia.

5 CUBA DI S. DOMENICA (touring map)

Car tour 2: Driving from Francavilla towards Castiglione, a track branches off right just past the bridge over the Alcantara River. Park here. Follow the signposted and red/white-waymarked E1 path upstream, parallel to the river. Cross the narrow asphalt road after about 15 minutes and keep straight ahead between drystone walls. After a few minutes you reach the **Cuba** (ruins of a lovely Byzantine church). From the small hilltop

you'll enjoy a fine view of Mount Etna and Castiglione di Sicilia. The **little gorges of the Alcantara** are just a few steps away. Return the same way (2km/1.2mi; 40min). You can also get close to the Cuba by car. From the road to Castiglione, turn right towards Randazzo at the Bivio Galuzzo, and follow signs to the Cuba.

6 MARINA DI COTTONE (touring map)

Car tour 2: From Fiumefreddo drive 3km to the pleasant pebble beach of **Marina di Cottone**, at the mouth of the Fiumefreddo River. A nature reserve, the Oasi di Fiumefreddo, is nearby — apart from the Ciane River near Syracuse (Walk 36), the only place in Sicily to see papyrus growing wild. Linguaglossa, Piedimonte Etneo or Fiumefreddo are good places to shop for your picnic.

7 SOLAZZO (map pages 96-97)

Car tour 3: In spite of its low height, the **Solazzo** peak (1530m/1518ft) is one of the best viewpoints in the Nebrodi. The peak is easily reached in 30 minutes from the **Portella Femmina Morta** (see Shorter walk 15). Sandstone rocks make good seats, oaks offer shade, and the view to Mount Etna is marvellous.

8 CHRISTO SIGNOR DELLA MONTAGNA (touring map)

Car tour 3: The town of **Cesarò** is dominated by a larger-than-life statue of Christ, rising on a sandstone rock. Follow the signs 'Christo Signor della Montagna' out of the town centre, past the Hotel dei Nebrodi and a couple of grocer's shops. Turn right along Via Piturro and park beneath the rock. Steps take you to the top in



Touring

With more than 25,000 square kilometres, Sicily is the largest region in Italy and the biggest island in the Mediterranean. The eight suggested car tours (covering almost 2000km) not only take in all the important places and the most beautiful sites, but afford an overview of Sicily's immense variety of landscapes. Realistically, you will probably only be able to cover two or three of these tours in a single holiday, especially if you want to walk as well.

The tours follow little-used secondary **roads** as much as possible, taking you to places well off the beaten track and emphasising possibilities for **walking** and **picnicking**. All the picnic and walk suggestions either lie on the main route or are reached via short detours. With one exception, all tours are written up as circuits, beginning and ending in places that are particularly interesting and good bases for accommodation. At appropriate intervals the *cumulative distance* covered is given in kilometres (all signposting is in kilometres).

Take care to fill up with **petrol** regularly, as it is against the law in Italy to carry reserve fuel. As a rule, petrol stations are closed from 12.30 to 15.00 and from 22.00 until 07.00, but at self-service stations you can fill up 24 hours a day — so carry a couple of unwrinkled 10 or 20 euro bills with you.

The pull-out touring map is designed to be held out opposite the touring notes. The symbols used in the touring notes correspond are explained on the map key. *But I strongly recommended that you buy a good, larger scale touring map*, especially if you will not be using a satnav or smart-phone. Some of the walk starting points can be hard to locate — which is why we print GPS coordinates at the top of each walk. For touring, I think the best maps are from the Touring Club Italiano (1:200,000) and Michelin (1:220,000).

View from the Imbarcadero di Mozia over the salt pans of Trapani, with Monte Erice rising in the background (Car tour 5)



Car tour 1: AROUND MOUNT ETNA

Catania (centre) • Nicolosi • Rifugio Sapienza • Piano Provenzana • Bronte • Adrano • Catania (ring road)

*159km/99mi; 5-6 hours' driving
(allow at least one day for this tour)*

On route: Picnics (see pages 10-16) 1-3; Walks 1-8 (with accommodation tips)

The circuit starts in Catania and rounds Mount Etna on well-built roads. On the Strada Mareneve between Fornazzo and Linguaglossa you must carry snow chains between December 1st and March 31st.

On this tour you will discover the many faces of Europe's highest active volcano. From sea level at Catania the road rises to almost 2000m and crosses several vegetational zones, from the subtropical to the alpine. Like any active volcano, Etna is a dynamic mountain and is subject to permanent change. The eruptions in 1991-92 completely filled the Valle del Bove with fresh lava, and continuous eruptions since 1998 have given the Cratere di Sud-Est (one of the four summit craters) its prominent cone. In 2021 it reached a height of 3357m, which was then surpassed by the Voragine crater (3403m) after the spectacular paroxysms in summer 2024.



Leave the centre of **Catania**★ (🚗🏠🏔️🌳🌋🏠🏠🏠) from the traffic circle on Via Andrea Doria just south of the Parco Gioeni: follow 'Etna Sud'. The villages of **Gravina** and **Mascalucia** (🏠🌳🏠) blend into each other. **Nicolosi**★ (15km 🚗🏠🏔️🌳🏠🏠) is a typical small town on the flanks of the mountain. The Parco dell'Etna has its headquarters here in the former Benedictine monastery of San Nicolò. Nicolosi lies at the foot of Monti Rossi, a crater which was formed during the 1669 eruption, when lava reached the city of Catania and partially destroyed it. At the northern end of the village, off the SP92, you'll find the entrance to the **Pineta di Monti Rossi** (16km 🚗WC; Picnic 1), where Walk 1 begins and ends.

Continuing along the SP92 in direction of 'Etna Sud', the summit of Mount Etna rises ahead. Older and younger lava layers overlap, and numerous craters line the road. After the eruption of 1983, the road had to be rebuilt above the hotel La Nuova Quercia (23km 🏠🌳). The new road cuts through the black and barren lava, which left only the occasional tree or little 'island' of woods in its wake. Lay-bys encourage short stops (🚗). Looking back, the silhouette of the Monti Rossi stands out clearly. Shortly before the KM17 road-marker, you could turn left towards 'EtnaAvventura' and the starting point of a nature trail, the 'Sentiero Natura Monte Nero degli Zappini' (32km). Continuing on the SP92 (rebuilt after the flank eruptions of 2001-03) you reach the highest point of the tour at the **Rifugio Sapienza** (34km 🚗🏠🏠🌳WC). A cable car goes from here up to a height of 2504m/8213ft, from where you can either walk or take one of the SITAS jeeps up to the site of the old Torre del Filosofo (2919m/9574ft), buried in lava long ago.

Do make a short stop in front of the **Crateri Silvestri** (35km 🚗🌳WC; Walk 2), pretty craters which can easily be circled on foot. It is the classical 'hike' for most of the tourists from Taormina. From now on the road descends towards Zafferana. The landscape is painted in a broad palette of colours: pine woods and grass-covered slopes alternate with black or reddish cinder slopes, and yellow-flowering Etna broom (*Ginesta aetnensis*) flourishes in late summer. The road leads past the **Piano del Vescovo**, a little plain

Descending back to Monte Silvestri Superiore (Walk 2)



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(39km 🚗⚠️; Picnic 2). *Possible detour:* A road leads north from here for a little over 2km, to Monte Pomiciaro (🏠), from where you would enjoy an excellent view into the Valle del Bove and the 1991-92 lava flow. You could then just follow the same road back to the SP92 further east (+ 7.5km).

Approaching Zafferana Etnea you'll see the lava flow which threatened the village in 1992. From **Zafferana Etnea** (50km 🚗⚠️🏠🚗) head north on Via Roma (SP59i), eventually ascending through a beautiful forest of oaks. The vineyards on the right belong to the Baron di Villagrande. Beyond **Milo**, the road rises further, to the houses of **Fornazzo** (56km). The village of Sant'Alfio★ (🚗⚠️🏠🚗) lies nearby.

Continue your tour along the Strada Mareneve (SP59iii, signposted to 'Etna Nord' among others); it starts here in Fornazzo and crosses the 1979 lava flow straight away. Gaining height, Etna's summit craters come into view again, this time from a new perspective. On a right-hand bend you pass the **Casa Pietracannone**

(61km 🚗⚠️; Picnic 3; Walk 3) on the left. Shortly after, a road from Sant'Alfio and the *agriturismo* La Cirasella (🏠🚗) comes up to join the Strada Mareneve. Beyond some chestnut groves the road runs through a turkey oak wood, the **Bosco Cerrita**. The first birches appear a little further up. The crest of the Serra delle Concazze, with the Pizzi Deneri (Walk 5), dominates the landscape up to the left. Turn left (68.5km) on a signposted cul-de-sac road, to the **Rifugio Citelli** (70.5km 🚗⚠️🏠🚗WC) — a mountain hut (not always open) and starting point of numerous walks (Walk 5).

Returning to the Strada Mareneve, you cross the broad lava flow of 1865; the Monti Sartorius (Walk 4), with their black cinder cones, rise to your left, while the mighty crater of Monte Nero (Walk 6) is ahead. The road starts to descend towards the 2003 lava, and you reach a crossroads (72km): turn left, on a cul-de-sac road to the **Piano Provenzana** (75km 🚗⚠️🏠🚗WC), a winter sports centre and starting point of several walks (Walk 6). Jeeps drive up towards Etna's summit craters from here.

Piano Provenzana (Walk 6): bleached skeletons of pine trees after the 2003 eruption





Near the ruined Torre del Filosofo: a crater from the 2001-02 eruption, in snow

The Strada Mareneve descends through tall pine woods towards Linguaglossa, passing a number of picnic sites and mountain huts (A). Then the pines give way to oaks and chestnuts. Between the tree trunks you catch glimpses of the Peloritani range, Taormina and Linguaglossa.

About 4km before Linguaglossa, turn left on a narrower road towards 'Randazzo/Bronte' (90km). This road offers open views into the Alcantara Valley and towards the Peloritani and Nebrodi mountains. Shortly after the town of Randazzo comes into view for the first time, a cul-de-sac road off left (signalled by a lava rock inscribed 'Parco dell'Etna') leads down to the Case Pirao (102km; Walk 7). Continue straight ahead, crossing the 1981 lava flow. At the **Bivio Dagala Longa** junction (108km), turn left on the SS284 towards Bronte.

The road climbs effortlessly uphill past orchards and vineyards. Etna's summit craters are visible to the left, while the undulating Nebrodi stretch out to the right. The town of Troina stands out in the west like an eagle's nest above inland Sicily's plains of grain. At

the northern entrance to **Bronte**★ (117km M) you'll see a road signposted to the restaurant Villa Etrusca. It's on Viale Kennedy and runs southeast to the starting point for Walk 8. Even if you don't like hiking, this little diversion into a bizarre lava landscape is very worthwhile (+12km there and back). Leave the old town of Bronte still on the SS284 signed for Adrano and Catania; the Monti Erei are visible on the far side of the Simeto Valley. Turn off left for Adrano (133km); don't be put off by the ugly outskirts — the old town of **Adrano**★ (135km M) definitely merits a short visit.

Then continue the journey on the good SS284, through well-cultivated countryside. The gulf of Catania opens up ahead. Past **Paternò** (M), join the SS121 expressway and follow it to **Misterbianco**, where you pick up the motorway ring road round **Catania** (159km). Here you can decide which way to continue your tour. If you are moving on to Taormina, the drive along the Riviera dei Ciclopi, past Acireale, is beautiful.



Walking

There is no tradition of hiking as a leisure activity in Sicily. This is fully understandable, given that for generations farm workers had to either walk or ride a donkey long distances to reach their fields and olive groves. Travelling on foot was a sign of poverty, and today, when one says in Italian *facciamo una passeggiata*, what is meant, of course, is a ride in the car! But time brings change. Many of the walks in this book follow old mule tracks, and gradually the word is starting to get around the tourist offices and the park administration that there are crazy foreigners around who *want* to walk and who want to see a Sicily beyond the temples and Taormina. As a result, new paths are now being created and the old mule tracks waymarked. We *stranieri* are setting an example.

The walks described in this book are as varied as Sicily's landscapes. You can stroll along a beach, with the scent of the maquis wafting on the breeze, or explore ancient ruins; you can hike through a shady forest or an alpine meadow, or scramble up a rock face; you can sail to islands floating on a shimmering turquoise sea, or climb an active volcano. There is something for everyone in Sicily. And walking in Sicily gives you the opportunity to experience one of the most ancient and varied cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean.

G rating, waymarking, maps, GPS

All the walks in this book are **graded** according to the level of difficulty. This grading reflects not only the length and ascent/descent on the walk, but the nature of the terrain and the condition of the trails. There is a quick overview of each walk's **grade** in the Contents. But because many walks have shorter or alternative versions, see the walk itself for full details, including easier options. Here is a brief overview of the four gradings:

- very easy — more or less level (perhaps with a short climb to a viewpoint); good surfaces underfoot; easily followed
- easy-moderate — ascents/descents of no more than about 300-500m/1000-1800ft; good surfaces underfoot; easily followed
- moderate-strenuous — ascents/descents may be over 500m/1800ft; variable surfaces underfoot — you must be sure-footed and agile; possible route-finding problems in poor visibility
- very strenuous-expert — only suitable for very experienced hillwalkers

Any of the above grades may be followed by:

- ⚠ danger of vertigo — for those with no head for heights

At the top of each walk there is a short description of the terrain and the condition of the trails. Even the most demanding routes should present no problems for experienced hikers. Most of the hikes rated easy-moderate are suitable for children.

The various sections of the Italian and Sicilian Alpine Clubs (CAI, CAS; see ‘Useful addresses’ on page 58) offer good advice about **guided hikes**. Club members and friends can participate in numerous organised mountaineering activities — an ideal way to get to know the people and the land.

When the first edition of this book was published in 2001, there was very little **waymarking**, apart from a few marked trails in the Parco dello Zingaro, the Riserva di Vendicari, the Parco dell’ Etna, and in some regions managed by the forestry service. Since then there has been some change; for example, the Forestry Commission has been quite active in the province of Syracuse. But the Parco dei Nebrodi and Parco delle Madonie could do more. The province of Palermo showed the greatest initiative of all, developing a network of waymarked trails and publishing corresponding hiking maps. But alas, their enthusiasm has not extended to *maintaining* these mapped, ‘official’ trails! Moreover, the last 15 years have been difficult economically and politically, which has affected general trail maintenance, so some signposts may well be missing when you are on your walk.

The Istituto Geografico Militare (IGM; www.igmi.org) publishes both 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 topographical **maps** of Sicily. These maps are, however, sadly outdated. Litografia Artistica Cartografica published several hiking maps at 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 — including Etna, Madonie, Nebrodi and Zingaro. They did not find an audience, and their website is no longer available, but you may be able to find some old maps online.

The **maps** in this book are based on Openstreetmap mapping (see page 2), but have been heavily annotated from my notes and GPS work in the field. I hope that these maps, which I have found to be *very* accurate on the ground, will be a boon to walkers. It is a pity that they have to be reproduced at only 1:50,000 to keep the book to a manageable size; some walkers buy the book *and* download pdf files from the Sunflower website to enlarge the maps (or enlarge them on a colour photocopier). Here are a few other useful maps I recommend, which can be obtained *while supplies last*. Look for downloadable trails (*‘sentieri’*) and maps on the official websites of the nature reserves (see ‘Useful addresses’ on page 58).



Sailing to Lipari (Walk 13) on the Florette

Ticks in the Mediterranean region may occasionally carry the bacteria *Rickettsia conorii*. This infection responds well to antibiotics and usually runs its course with no ill effects. The best protection against ticks is a pair of long trousers, especially when walking through high bushes or scrub.

Where to stay

There are accommodation tips for most of the walks. In Sicily, the idea of *agriturismo*, or holidays on a farm, is growing ever more popular, and recent years have seen the growth of B&Bs. The following websites may prove useful: agriturist.it, siculus.com, camping.it, airbnb.com, booking.com and tripadvisor.co.uk.

Organisation of the walks

This book describes 41 main walks and a number of variations. More walk suggestions are in the Picnicking and Touring notes. A look at the fold-out map shows that some areas are more suitable for hiking than others. While the Aeolian and Egadi islands merit a visit of several days, they can also be easily reached on day trips, and I have described one walk each for the islands of Vulcano, Lipari, and Levanzo. Note that on these islands the traveller can — and sometimes must — make do without a car.

Every walk begins along the route of one of the eight car tours; in some cases, a short detour leads to the starting point. Only rarely can the trails be reached by public

transport. For every car tour (except Car tour 7), I have included an average of five varied walks with different levels of difficulty. Taken together, they give a good overview of the region's diverse landscapes. Usually several walks can be reached from the places I recommend as overnight bases.

Begin by looking at the fold-out map and noting the walks that are nearest to you. Then turn to the appropriate route description where, at the top of the page, you will find planning information: distance, time, grade, equipment, how to get there and suggestions for shorter and longer walks. Modify the route as you like, to suit your own abilities and the weather conditions.

Throughout each walk description, **cumulative times** are given for reaching certain landmarks. These are only rough estimates, based on my own times, and making no allowance for rest stops. I recommend that you compare your own pace with mine on a number of short hikes before setting off on a longer trip. On long hikes, especially in unfamiliar terrain, you should avoid being caught in the dark. Most of the hikes are designed as half-day walks.

Below is a **key to the symbols** on the walking maps.

	motorway		page reference:		start/end.waypoint
	main road		map continuation		windmill.turbine
	secondary road		other walk		pylon.aerial
	4WD track		church. chapel		recommended picnic spot (see page 10)
	rough track		cemetery.shrine		best views
	footpath		factory		mill
	route of main walk and direction		bus stop.parking		cave
	alternative route		spring, tank etc		visitors' centre
			ancient site		

Country code

Please keep the following countryside code in mind at all times:

- The land and its people should be treated with respect.
- Protect yourself and others from the danger of fire.
- Do not make unnecessary noise.
- Keep to public paths across farm land.
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and stone walls.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Take your litter home.
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees.

Glossary

Below are some of the words and phrases you may see on signposts, maps or in this book.

Abbreviations

CAI (Club Alpino Italiano) — Italian Alpine Club
CAS (Club Alpino Siciliano) — Sicilian Alpine Club
SP (Strada Provinciale) — provincial road
SS (Strada Statale) — state road
STR (Servizio Turistico Regionale) — tourist board

Geographical names

l'abbazia — abbey
l'abbeveratoio — watering place
l'area attrezzata — picnic site
l'azienda agriturismo — country inn and restaurant
il baglio — fortified estate
il bivio — road junction
il bosco — wood
la cala — bay
il campo — field
la casa — house
la cascata — waterfall
la cava — quarry, gorge
la chiesa — church
la città — town, city
la colata lavica — lava stream
il colle — hill
la contrada — quarter (of a town)
la costa — coast
il cratere — crater
l'eremo — hermitage

la foce — estuary
il fiume — river
la fontana — fountain
il fontanile — watering place
la fonte — spring
la foresta — forest
la gola — gorge
la grotta — cave
l'incrocio — crossroads
l'isola — island
il lago — lake
il mare — sea
la masseria — farmstead
la montagna — mountain
il monte — mountain
la mulattiera — mule track
il mulino — mill
l'ovile — sheepfold
il paese — country, village
la pianura — plain
la pineta — pine forest
il pizzo — peak
il poggio — height, elevation
il ponte — bridge
la portella — mountain pass
la punta — spit of land
il rifugio — refuge, hut
la riserva — nature reserve
la roccia — rock
la rovina — ruin
il santuario — sanctuary
scavi (pl.) — archaeological digs
la sella — saddle
il sentiero — footpath

la spiaggia — beach
la strada bianca — gravel road
la strada provinciale — provincial road
la strada statale — state road
lo stretto — strait
la tonnara — place to catch and process tuna fish
la torre — tower
il torrente — torrent
la trazzera — mule track
la valle — valley

Directions

sempre dritto — straight ahead
a destra — to the right
a sinistra — to the left
attraverso — through, via
attraversare — to cross
salire/scendere — ascend/descend
qui — here
lì/là — there
da — from
davanti — in front
di fronte — opposite
dietro — behind
dopo — to
fino a — as far as
lontano — far
vicino — near, close by
sotto/sopra — under/above
su — on
verso — to, towards
il nord/il sud — north/south
l'ovest/l'est — west/east

Walk 5: SERRA DELLE CONCAZZE AND THE PIZZI DENERI

See also photo on pages 68-69

Distance: 11.3km/7mi; 6h45min

Grade: ● very strenuous walk with almost no shade. In good visibility orientation is easy; if the weather deteriorates, you should turn back. Let the people at the Rifugio Citelli know your plans. Ask about weather conditions and current volcanic activity! The ascent to the Pizzi Deneri is steep; volcanic sand and slag make the climb exhausting. Icy slopes are a danger until late spring and early summer. Ascent/descent of 1165m/3822ft, up to a height of 2847m/9338ft.

Equipment: walking boots, wind/sun protection, spare layers and extra warm clothing, food and water

How to get there and return: ☞ park at the Rifugio Citelli (tel. 0959 30000, rifugiocitelli.it, 37° 46.248'N, 15° 3.625'E), where you can eat and stay overnight (if it's open). For more accommodation suggestions, see Walks 3 and 6.

Shorter walk: ● Follow the main walk up to the WOODEN POST at the 2h30min-point (④) and return from there — certainly a worthwhile excursion with marvellous views (6.7km/4.2mi; 3h35min).

While the ascent to the Pizzi Deneri is undeniably tough, the visual rewards are great. On a clear day the panoramic views from the ridge and the peak are astounding. To get so close to Etna's summit craters is an awesome experience: they constantly gasp and smoke, and the air reeks of sulphur. Irregular explosions make the ground tremble and shudder. Before you come up here, take local advice!

The walk begins at the **Rifugio Citelli** (●; 1741m/5710ft), where the Serra delle Concazze rises in front of you to the west. Follow the road a short way downhill and, at the end of the METAL BARRIER, turn left into the little birch wood. The narrow path, waymarked in places with RED-PAINTED WOODEN POSTS, zigzags quickly uphill. You come to a CLEARING, where the remains of a sheepfold can be seen by a tumble-down shelter. After 50m/yds, at a JUNCTION (①; 1840m/6037ft; 20min), the return leg of the walk joins from the right.

Keep to the left here. RED ARROWS mark your clear path to the south. Subsequently you'll cross a series of MELT-WATER GULLEYS. Shady birchwood copses alternate with open glades, where the black sand is dotted by thorny

cushions of *Astragalus*. After striding through a VALLEY BASIN, the path crosses over the **Grotta di Serracozzo** (②; 1835m/6020ft; 40min), a lava cave dating from the 1971 eruption. Exploration of this fascinating grotto should only be undertaken in company of expert speleologists.

As the path now continually gains height, the birch trees lose height — until they make place for low thorny shrubs. After further ascent we finally reach the **Serra delle Concazze** (③; 2043m/6703ft; 1h45min). From the edge of this RIDGE you look down on the vast expanse of the Valle del Bove. It's hard to imagine that what today looks like a lunar landscape was once a lush green pasture — hence its name, 'Valley of the Oxen'. On a clear day the smoking summit craters of Etna in



the west look so close you could touch them. In periods of high volcanic activity you can hear the hissing and growling; it's like thunder.

Following the ridge, climb further up. **RED-PAINTED WOODEN POSTS** mark the ideal route, keeping a safe distance away from the sheer drop to your left. To the right you look out over the Alcantara Valley to the Peloritani Mountains, Taormina, and the Strait of Messina. After about 45 minutes the path describes a slight curve to the right away from the edge. At this point a **WOODEN POST (4; 2140m/7021ft; 2h30min)** marks the start of the the route you will take back downhill.

Continuing the ascent to the Pizzi Deneri (more or less pathless), after a few minutes you're back on the **Serra delle Concazze** (2200m/7220ft; **2h35min**), now level with Monte Simone, a perfect cinder cone rising from the bottom of the Valle del Bove. On the next rise, **LOW STONE WALLS (5)**, set up by mountaineers, act as windbreaks. To the north lies the Piano Provenzana (Walk 6). After a short ascent you reach the point at the

foot of the **Rocca della Valle** where the path turns 90° right, away from the edge (**6; 2375m/7792ft; 3h15min**). Freshly fallen volcanic sand and slag make for difficult walking here, and it is hard to make out the **CAIRNS** on the slope. Follow your nose as the path, *only* marked with these cairns, describes a wide arc and, after a tiring climb, reaches the **TOP OF THE Rocca della Valle (7; 2738m/8982ft; 4h)**.

As the ridge narrows, you enjoy more views to both sides: to the left you overlook the Valle del Bove, to the right Monte Frumento delle Concazze and Monte Nero (Walk 6) on the far side of the Piano Provenzana. When it's really clear, you can even see the Aeolian Islands (Walks 12 and 13) in the north.

Beyond a first, dilapidated **GROUP OF ANTENNAS (4h20min)** the climb continues a bit less steeply, until you come to the **HIGHEST OF THE Pizzi Deneri (8; 2847m/9338ft; 4h40min)**, marked with more **ANTENNAS** and a small **METAL CROSS**. Beneath the ridge lies the white igloo-shaped building of the **OSSERVATORIO VULCANOLOGICO**. A desert-like plateau of black sand stretches out



Milk-vetch cushions (Astragalus siculus) on the slope after 5h45min

on the northwest side of the observatory — the **Piano delle Concazze**. On the far side of the **Valle del Leone** are the smoking summit craters.

Retrace your steps from here to

In 2013 a so-called ‘yellow zone’ was defined (see map on pages 64-65): this comprises the area above the north/south service track that connects the area around the Torre del Filosofo (2920m) with the area near the Observatory of Pizzi Deneri (2850m), and it includes the summit craters. When there is no eruptive activity or when there is just normal activity (like steam coming from the summit craters and other vents, or small occasional explosions limited to the immediate vicinity of the vents), free visits are allowed outside the yellow zone (subject to the park’s normal rules of conduct) or within the yellow zone (but only if accompanied by certified mountain guides). See www.guidetnanord.com/en. In case of an alert, of course other rules apply (see www.ct.ingv.it for the latest news).

the 2h30min-point beneath the ridge. On the way back there are fine views down over the Monti Sartorius craters (Walk 4). Look out for the **WOODEN POST** (④; 2140m/7021ft; **5h45min**) and start the next descent. At first the path follows a **LAVA RIDGE**, then crosses a broad sand field, heading towards Monte Frumento delle Concazze. The particularly gorgeous milk-vetches shown above (*Astragalus siculus*), endemic on Etna, grow on this slope. Their thorny cushions shine green in spring and bright gold in summer.

After you have a final view of Monte Frumento delle Concazze, the **PATH BENDS RIGHT** (⑨) towards the Rifugio Citelli. First you cross the 1979 **LAVA FLOW** to the right, then you descend parallel to the lava and swing right once more. **CAIRNS** help with the orientation. Shortly afterwards the loop closes at the **JUNCTION** (①; 1840m/6037ft) first encountered at the 20min-point in the walk. Passing the **SHEEPFOLD**, you reach the road and shortly afterwards the **Rifugio Citelli** (6h45min).

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