



SUNFLOWER

Tuscany

walks and drives



8 DRIVES

75 WALKS/GPS

ONLINE UPDATES

This is a sample from the
PDF edition of
Landscapes of
TUSCANY

a countryside guide
Fourth edition



Elizabeth Mizon
updated by Sunflower Books

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 152 pages, plus two pull-out touring maps, in the full book



SUNFLOWER BOOKS



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface | 5 |
| Acknowledgements; Books; Glossary | 6 |
| Getting about | 7 |
| Picnics and short walks | 8 |
| Touring | 12 |
| 1 The foothills of the Apennines — the Mugello | 14 |
| 2 Hilltop villages and gentle hills of the Chianti | 17 |
| 3 Marble mountains of the Alpi Apuane, and the Garfagnana | 20 |
| 4 The cool hills and forests of the Pratomagno, and the valley of the Casentino | 24 |
| 5 Hilltop fortress towns west of Siena | 28 |
| 6 The dramatic landscape of the Sienese Crete | 31 |
| 7 Around Monte Amiata — volcanic landscape, hot springs and skiing | 34 |
| 8 Southern Tuscany, forgotten since the Etruscans | 37 |
| Walking (● see explanation of symbols on page 40) | 40 |
| Grading, maps, waymarking, GPS | 40 |
| When to walk in Tuscany | 41 |
| Where to stay | 41 |
| Right of way | 42 |
| What to wear | 42 |
| What to carry | 42 |
| A word of caution | 43 |
| What you <i>need</i> to know | 43 |
| How to ask for help | 43 |
| Refreshments | 44 |
| Fences and gates at vineyards | 45 |
| Buses | 45 |
| Websites and emergency telephone number | 46 |
| The country code and safety guidelines | 46 |
| The walking notes | 47 |
| WALKS NORTH OF FLORENCE | |
| <i>Around Florence</i> | |
| ● 1 From Bivigliano to Fiesole | 48 |
| ● 2 Circuit from Fiesole via Settignano and Vincigliata | 52 |
| ● 3 Circuit from Cercina via Monte Morello | 57 |
| <i>The Mugello</i> | |
| ● 4 Circuits around San Piero a Sieve and Trebbio | 61 |
| ● 5 Circuit from Sant'Agata via the Apennine ridge | 66 |
| <i>In the Alpi Apuane</i> | |
| ● 6 Along Michelangelo's road | 69 |
| ● 7 Circuit below Monte Procinto via the Alta Matanna refuge | 72 |
| ● 8 Circuit from Fociomboli via Favilla and the Foce di Mosceta | 75 |

4 Landscapes of Tuscany

In the Garfagnana

- 9 Bagni di Lucca circuit 79

The Alpe di San Benedetto

- 10 Monte Falco, Monte Falterona and the source of the Arno 83

WALKS BETWEEN FLORENCE AND SIENA

In the Pratomagno

- 11 Circuit from the abbey at Vallombrosa via Monte Secchieta 86
- 12 Circuit from Caspri via Monte Cocollo and Poggio Montrago 89

The Chianti

- 13 Circuit from the Badia a Passignano 93
- 14 Sezzate River circuit 96
- 15 Circuit from Gaiole via the Castello di Meleto and Barbischio 100
- 16 Circuit from Monte San Michele via Volpaia 101
- 17 Volpaia circuit via Castelvechi 107

Around Volterra

- 18 Circuit from San Donato (near San Gimignano) 110
- 19 Circuit from the walls of Volterra 113

WALKS SOUTH OF SIENA

In the Crete

- 20 Circuit from Monte Oliveto via San Giovanni d'Asso 116

The Val d'Orcia

- 21 From Montalcino to the abbey of Sant'Antimo 120
- 22 Circuit round Bagno Vignoni 124
- 23 Circuit of three castles, from Castiglione d'Orcia 128
- 24 Circuit from Vivo d'Orcia on the slopes of Monte Amiata 132

WALKS IN SOUTHERN TUSCANY

- 25 From Pitigliano to Sovana 136
- 26 Circuit from Saturnia 140

Index 143

Fold-out touring maps

inside back cover

ARTICLES

| | | | |
|------------------------------|----|----------------------------|-----|
| Tuscan food | 29 | Olives and olive oil | 99 |
| Monte Senario | 50 | Vineyards | 103 |
| Ice house | 51 | Iris | 106 |
| Stonemasons | 53 | The hoopoe bird | 106 |
| Castello di Vincigliata | 55 | Cypress tree | 107 |
| The parish church at Cercina | 58 | Country dwellings | 111 |
| Mezzadria | 63 | Burraia | 112 |
| Cattle | 65 | Umbrella pines | 115 |
| Cyclamen | 68 | Monte Oliveto Maggiore | 117 |
| Marble from the Alpi Apuane | 71 | Truffles | 118 |
| Sweet chestnuts | 74 | Glow-worms or fireflies | 121 |
| Charcoal-making | 77 | Religious street furniture | 127 |
| Hunting | 82 | Ilex tree | 129 |
| Hellebores | 86 | Willows | 130 |
| Wild boar | 88 | Tracks | 131 |
| Terraces | 90 | Peasant life | 135 |
| Badia a Passignano | 94 | The Etruscans | 137 |
| Church bells | 95 | Wild food | 139 |



Preface

Before we lived near Florence, we had a vague idea that Tuscany and the 'Chianti' area were almost synonymous. How wrong we were.

From Florence we discovered the richness of the countryside that could be reached on foot even from the centre of the city. The richness comes from the unique history of the area; not only from the influence of the nobility with their wars and battles, and later from their love of art and culture, but from the peasants, whose labours have shaped the hill-sides, built the tracks and the tiny wayside chapels.

Recent history has also left its mark. After the two world wars, farming families abandoned the countryside for apartments in the towns. The countryside was left almost free to return to nature. And nature returned abundant, providing natural rock gardens of *Cistus* and miniature evergreens. Wild flowers painted the floor of the olive groves yellow and white in late spring. Wild blue irises and vivid red poppies decorated the dry stone walls. Butterflies, bright green lizards, and silent animals completed the picture.

Although the farmhouses are once more being lived in, much of that richness remains, as does the myriad of paths and tracks that link one tiny hamlet with another through this free-range landscape.

And this we found just around Florence. From there we explored further and realised that richness is a feature of the whole of Tuscany. There is such a variety of beautiful countryside. Within Tuscany's boundaries are set, side by side, an array of landscapes so diverse it is as if a geography teacher had set it up as a sampler. To the north and east are the high mountains of the Apennines, steep and austere as any mountain barrier. Sub-Apennine ranges are enclosed within, the most distinctive of which is the Alpi Apuane. These mountains are more like the Dolomites in structure, are on the west coast and are famous for providing Italy with much of its marble.

There are of course the rolling hills of the Chianti, so photogenic with their lines of vines, hilltop villages and cypress trees. Further south the hills become more gently curved and sensuous, but divided by strange, deeply-eroded ravines. This is the Sienese Crete, which stretches almost to the slopes of Monte Amiata, an extinct volcano, now a ski

6 Landscapes of Tuscany

resort. Surrounding the volcano is land rich in minerals and hot springs. What better than a therapeutic bath after a long walk? Flat coastal plains, deep limestone canyons, lush river valleys; Tuscany has so much — and all bathed in walker-friendly weather and decorated by some of the world's best architects and landscape architects.

Whether you explore by car or on foot, Tuscany needs time. There is so much to see, so many surprises waiting for you. Whether it is discovering a minute hamlet of old houses with bright red geraniums tucked into every sort of pot, or wild flowers that you know only as garden flowers, or a porcupine quill lying on the path, it needs time. Stand and stare; let the beauty and the history and the friendly people seep into your soul. Do half of what you intended, then come back another time to see some more. — ELIZABETH MIZON

Acknowledgements

I could never have had the adventure of preparing this book without the support and companionship of my husband Grayham. Thanks, too, to all my friends from all over the world who accompanied me exploring these memorable hills. They made this task even more wonderful. Lastly, I want to thank my publishers, Sunflower, who have updated later editions.

Useful books

For the historical background to man-made monuments I enjoyed the *Cadogan Guide to Tuscany, Umbria and the Marches* (2001, now out of print but available on the web), whereas *Wild Italy* (Sheldrake Press) has good material on wild life and nature. If you have enjoyed using this book, Sunflower covers many more areas in Italy: see inside the front cover.

GLOSSARY

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <i>agriturismo</i> — farms providing holiday accommodation; see photo on pages 34–35 and 'Where to stay', page 41 | <i>est</i> — east | <i>passo</i> — pass |
| <i>balze</i> — cliffs, crags; see photo on page 92 | <i>fattora, fattoria</i> — see articles on pages 63, 111, 135 | <i>pietra serena</i> — 'serene stone'; see articles on pages 53 and 71 |
| <i>bivio</i> — fork, junction | <i>foce</i> — pass, shoulder or mouth | <i>pizzo</i> — peak |
| <i>bosco</i> — woodland | <i>fiume</i> — river | <i>poggio</i> — hillock, knoll |
| <i>buca</i> — cave, hole | <i>frana</i> — landslide | <i>ponte</i> — bridge |
| <i>burraia</i> — cold store; see article on page 112 | <i>grotta</i> — cave | <i>ovest</i> — west |
| <i>callare</i> — pass | <i>lago</i> — lake | <i>rifugio</i> — mountain hut/refuge, accommodation for hikers |
| <i>capanna</i> — hut | <i>marginetta</i> — sacred stone shelter; see article on page 127 | <i>rocca</i> — ruined castle |
| <i>cava</i> — quarry; see article on page 71 | <i>marmo</i> — marble | <i>sella</i> — saddle |
| <i>cima</i> — summit | <i>mezzadria</i> — crop-sharing; see articles on pages 63 and 111 | <i>sentiero</i> — path, trail |
| <i>col/colle</i> — pass | <i>montagna</i> — mountain | <i>sorgente</i> — spring |
| <i>collina</i> — hill | <i>monte</i> — mount | <i>sud</i> — south |
| <i>contadino</i> — peasant | <i>mulattiera</i> — mule track | <i>tabernacolo</i> — shrine; see article on page 127 |
| <i>costa, cresta</i> — ridge | <i>nebbia</i> — fog, mist | <i>torrente</i> — stream |
| | <i>nord</i> — north | <i>valle</i> — valley |
| | | <i>via ferrata</i> — steep route with fixed steel cable |



Getting about

Unless you are the sort of person who really enjoys delving into train and bus timetables and conquering their mysteries, the answer to getting about in Tuscany must be the **car**. Bringing your own car to Italy is eminently feasible; indeed I have always enjoyed the 14-hour drive from the Channel ports, when we have taken two days for the drive. Hire cars are readily available at all airports, but can be much less expensive if you organise the hire car before you arrive in Italy.

Trains are reasonably reliable and inexpensive for those lucky enough to have a destination that happens to be on a train line.

Taxis are expensive, so be sure to get a quote before you start your journey.

The most comprehensive form of public transport is the **bus**. There are regular inter-city services and services to small towns and villages. These latter, however, are designed to get villagers into town to work, not walkers into villages in the morning. Services are very scarce at weekends. Tuscany is served by several bus companies, now under the umbrella of Autolinee Toscane (see page 45). Many of them run special whole or part-day sightseeing coach trips. Details of these are available as handouts from the tourist offices and in hotels.

Many of the walks in this book are accessible by public transport, and under 'Transport' I tell you which bus line operates the route and the journey time; you can search current timetables and prices on the web. If you do intend to rely on public transport, then I recommend you stay in a city which is a transport hub. Florence and Siena especially are well served. You will also need to spend some time planning, and be good at time-keeping.

Generally the buses are reliable and comfortable, but getting timetable information by telephone can be very difficult; it is best to visit the bus stations or access the Autolinee Toscane website given on page 45. Remember that Autolinee Toscane is an umbrella company, having taken over from various local bus companies; this means that the bus you are expecting may have a different name on the side.

All the walks are on or near car tours. Either follow the tour itself, or use the touring map for a more direct route. GPS coordinates are given for parking places, so you can set your satnav. Almost all the walks are circular. If the walk is linear, there will be buses to get you to the start or back.





Picnics and short walks

When Italians eat in the countryside it is usually at a restaurant with a good view and a large car park, or they set up a dining area near their car, with table, chairs, and tablecloth. They are often escaping the city heat. Official picnic areas with tables are quite rare in Tuscany, but places to picnic are not. Pick your spot among the acres of unfenced, uncultivated land. All you need is something to sit on, like a car rug! As Tuscany is so wooded, it is rare that there isn't a tree to provide a little shade. Just leave no trace of your having been there, especially as landowners are very tolerant of tidy picnickers.


Below I suggest a few picnic places where you might either swim or take a short walk. As many of the picnics lie along or near the route of walks, you can see their location on the appropriate large-scale walking map, where you will also find the symbol **P**; otherwise, see the touring maps.

1 FLORENCE

5-10min on foot. AT  or  to Piazzale Michelangelo. From the busy Piazzale cross the road at a zebra and walk uphill on Viale Galileo. Turn left up Via del Monte alle Croci, then go right on the footpath just before Via di Giramonte. Here you will find many cypresses behind the church and

cemetery of San Miniato — a grassy, shady spot. There are more cypresses and benches on Via del Monte alle Croci lower down.

2 MONTE PRATONE (map pages 48-49)

25min on foot. Access by : from Fiesole (the 8km-point in Car tour 1) follow signs for Olmo. About 2km further on, turn right for Monte Fanna. When this road turns left about 2km uphill, park a short way along on the left, by a red and white bar gate. Follow the track (CAI 2) past two barriers, up to the receiving station at Monte Fanna. From here the track continues 5min more to Monte Pratone, a wide meadow with fine views. It is a wonderful spot on a summer evening, when you walk back towards the lights of Florence.



Left: reservoir at Vetta le Croci, a favourite spot for Italians to picnic on Sunday afternoons (Car tour 1, Walk 1)

3 MONTE SENARIO (map page 48-49; nearby photo overleaf)

up to 10min on foot. Access by 🚗 to Monte Senario (the 22km-point in Car tour 1); park before the church. Walk back down the road to the large gate by a cross. Go through the gate to the ridge path, with plenty of picnic spots (but the best views are near the gate). Near the monastery there are many short walks to hermitages (and the ice house shown on page 51).

4 GIOGO DI SCARPERIA (map pages 66-67) 🚗

20-30min on foot. AT 🚌 302A or 🚗 to the Giogo Pass in the Mugello (38km from Florence; the 56km-point in Car tour 1). Alight or park at the pass. From here you can follow the red and white waymarks of the CAI 00 to the east or northwest. Either walk east along the ridge track across from the bar, to find shaded picnic tables on the left and panoramic views of the Apennines (20min). Or follow the footpath a little way uphill from the bar, to the northwest (a climb of 150m/500ft; 30min): you will reach a spectacular ridge with views southwest over the Mugello and its horseshoe of mountains, and northeast to Firenzola set in a ring of peaks. There are many picnic spots in the meadow here.

5 CAMAGGIORE (touring map; see photo on page 10)

5min on foot. Access by 🚗: follow Car tour 1 past Firenzuola (the 67km-point). After the road crosses to the eastern bank of the river, turn left downhill to Camaggiore (at 74km). Park up by the church. You can picnic or swim by the bridge.

6 LA PANCA (map page 97)

10-15min on foot. Access by 🚗: park in the hamlet of La Panca (the 32km-point on Car tour 2). As you enter the hamlet from the north, take the first lane on the right — it has a CAI fingerpost. Park where the lane ends and continue on foot along the track. This track is the CAI 00 and CAI 18. Either take the CAI 18 track off to the right, to a pretty clearing where a lean-to covers a long rickety table and seats (10min; no view). If you prefer less space but a view, continue up the CAI 00, alongside the green fence. After 10min you will reach a sunny bank with a view over the Chianti hills.

7 PARCO DI MONTE SAN MICHELE (touring map)

20min on foot. Access by 🚗: park at the road junction as soon as you reach the ridge of Monte San Michele (the 41km-point in Car tour 2). Walk to the right along the track, and up the path on the right to the large cross on Monte Domini. View over the Arno Valley and the Alpe di San Benedetto in the Apennines. For a shady site, continue by car: turn left at the ridge and follow the signs for the hotel (43km), where there is a large picnic area.

8 PASQUILIO PASS (touring map)

5-10min on foot. Access by 🚗: park at Pasquilio Pass. After San Carlo (7km on Car tour 3) and Pariana, take the next right turn (this turn is so sharp that you must first carry on a short distance to a lay-by where you can make a U-turn). Some 6km along, the road ends at the Pasquilio Pass, where there is a track to a hotel and a WW2 monument. Walk up some steps, then take the path past the statue of

Touring

In choosing these tours my intention has been to provide an overview of Tuscany's varied and beautiful landscapes. All of these areas are also perfect for out-of-doors activities such as hiking, biking, horse-riding and picnicking.

The tours are largely devoted to the countryside, although many do visit famous towns and villages. The historical and artistic treasures of Tuscany are discussed in standard guide-books, and information is available from tourist offices. The addresses, websites and telephone numbers of relevant **tourist offices** are given at the top of each tour, but bear in mind that it is not always easy to make contact by telephone (Saturday morning is the best time). English is usually spoken at the tourist offices. Remember they, like everyone else in Tuscany, will be closed between 13.00-15.00 (or 16.00) for the long lunch break, opening again until about 19.30.

The tours are either circular or start and finish on motor-way access points. Join the circuit where convenient. All the tours *can* be done in a day, although you may prefer to take longer. Where possible, I have indicated where the tours can be shortened. Don't expect to average more than **20mph/35kmh**, especially on mountain roads. *Drive carefully!*

The **touring maps** inside the back cover (1:400,000) are designed to be held out opposite the touring notes and



contain a **key to the symbols** in the touring notes. These maps are ideal for *planning*, but if you wish to buy another map for *touring*, I recommend the 1:200,000 'Toscana' map published by the Touring Club Italiano.

Petrol stations are found usually only in towns and villages and are often closed on Sundays. *Do fill up before you set off*. Motorway services are open 24h. **Bars** are really important in Italy — not only for a great coffee, but for toilets, bus tickets, and general information.

Signposting in Tuscany is very reliable so, rather than give complicated directions, I have just indicated the signposting. Parking areas in towns are also well marked. **Road numbers** are variously prefixed by SS (*strada statale*), SP (*strada provinciale*), or N (*numero*), but you need only note the *number*. The **road signs** are international, but always keep in mind the following important **motoring laws**.

- **Vehicles coming from the right** have priority at crossroads, unless the road markings indicate otherwise.
- **Unbroken lines** in the centre of the road must not be crossed.
- **At a junction with traffic lights**, pedestrians can be crossing the road with a green light, while cars have a green light to turn right or left. The **pedestrians have priority**.
- **Motorway signposting** is green; main roads are signposted in blue.
- Always carry all your **documents** with you when you drive: passport, licence, car registration document, insurance certificate and 'Green Card' (the latter not essential, but advisable).

Opening hours can be very erratic. If you find something that you want to see is open, seize the opportunity!

Pitigliano (Car tour 8; Walk 25) from Madonna delle Grazie Church



Car tour 1: THE FOOTHILLS OF THE APENNINES — THE MUGELLO

**Florence • Fiesole • Bivigliano • Vaglia • San Piero a Sieve •
Scarperia • Gingo di Scarperia • Firenzuola • Palazzuolo sul Senio
• Passo Sambuca • Borgo San Lorenzo • Florence**

146km/90mi; 4h driving

On route: Picnics (see **P** symbol and pages 8-11) 1-5; Walks 1-5

Opening hours, information
offices (i), and market days (♂)

Fiesole: *i* at Via Portigiani 3/5;
tel: 055 5961311; ⚖ Sat

Borgo San Lorenzo: *i* (for the Mugello region) at Piazzale

Lavacchini; tel: 055 8456230; ⚖️
Tue


Palazzuolo: *i* at Piazza E Alpi 1,
tel: 055 8046125; ⚖ Sat;

Museum (of peasant life; free or small entrance fee payable) open Sun/holidays from 15.00-18.00 (16.00-19.00 in July and Aug)

This day-trip into the mountains to the north of Florence takes you from the flat valley of the Arno up to the Sambuca Pass. Inevitably, in this mountainous area the winding roads demand concentration, but they are generally well maintained and afford some spectacular alpine views. If you are in Tuscany in high summer, this is a particularly good drive, as the air cools mercifully on the climb and you pass a river perfect for an icy dip. The far point of the drive is the village of Palazzuolo, one of the finalists in the 'Ideal Village' competition for the whole of Italy.

From Florence take the well-signposted road to Fiesole, attractive all year round, with its coloured villas perching on the hillside, but particularly stunning in April, when the wisteria and lilac are in blossom. There is much to see in **Fiesole**★ (8km/5mi                                                      

Continue up through the village, following signs for Olmo (you pass the turn-off right for Monte Fanna and Monte Pratone after 2km; **P2**). The road winds

above the Mugnone River through typical Florentine countryside — olive groves, farmhouses and villas. Go straight over two crossroads. There is a field and a reservoir on the right at the second crossroad, **Vetta le Croci** (17km/11mi ) , where city-dwellers love to picnic on Sunday afternoons — it's shown on page 8.

Now follow signs to Vaglia. At the next major junction turn right towards the monastery of Monte Senario. This ridge road is one of my favourites, with its panorama towards the endless grey-blue mountain horizons where the tour is heading. The monastery rises straight ahead. As you follow the signs for the monastery, stop at a parking area with a huge wooden cross, to visit the ice house shown on page 51. It is just down the rough track from the top end of

16 Landscapes of Tuscany

road to the left, and then the second road to the right, following the signs to Gabbiano and the golf course. This is the prettiest, yet most unassuming of roads. It links all the farms sitting on the ridge, the whole in a basin surrounded by the dramatic Apennines. After an unsealed stretch, at a crossroads where the road ahead is signposted to Lumena, turn right into **Sant'Agata** (42.5km/27mi 🏰🏰🏰; Walk 5), another gem of a hamlet with an important and beautiful 12th-century church.

Now you are heading down towards Scarperia. Just before Scarperia*, take the bypass left for Firenzuola and Imola (*not* signed when last checked; it is the SP503). Continue towards Firenzuola via the **Giogo (Yoke) di Scarperia**, a pass at 882m/2893ft (56km/35mi 🏰🏰🏰🏰P4). A stop is a must if you are a peak-freak like me. The Apennines ridge walk CAI 00 crosses here (Alternative walk 5).

The road to Firenzuola curves down the valley with broad views over a varied landscape of alpine meadows and forests enclosed by the peaks of the northern Apennines. **Firenzuola** (67km/42mi 🏰🏰🏰🏰🏰) is a working town that had to be rebuilt after the war. The old street plan was retained, giving the place a friendly feel. Leave Firenzuola in the direction of Imola. The road is bordered by great cliffs of stone, shaped by quarrying of *pietra serena*. Now the road meanders

parallel with the river, which flows through the gorge below. Watch for dramatic rock strata at **San Pellegrino**. After crossing the river over 5km further on, 'Camaggiore' is signed to the left (74km/46mi). If you are hot and sticky, turn left here, cross the bridge, park up at the church and head for the river — a popular swimming and picnicking spot (P5; photo on page 10). Otherwise take the next right for Palazzuolo, up and over the watershed with flowering meadows and far-reaching views. **Palazzuolo**★ (95km/58mi 🏰🏰🏰🏰🏰) is an attractive village, with a river in the centre, parks, and old stone houses clustered along the hillside.

To end the tour, retrace your route to the edge of Palazzuolo, but then go left (signposted to Florence) on the N447 that climbs over the Alpe di San Benedetto via the **Passo Sambuca** (1061m/3480ft). This alpine road joins the road from Marradi at the **Col dell'Alpe** (110km/68mi). Go right here and, at **Borgo San Lorenzo**★ (118km/73mi 🏰🏰🏰🏰🏰), follow signs for Florence. Back at **Olmo**, turn right to **Vetta le Croci**, then left for Pratolino to round the top of the valley. Join the SS65 at **Pratolino**, where the Parco Demidoff is open to the public in summer. Keep left on the main road, the Via Bolognese, back to **Florence** (146km). (From Pian di San Bartolo, 9km short of Florence, a road signposted right to Cercina gives access to Walk 3.)

*Scarperia★ (46km/29mi 🏰🏰🏰🏰🏰) is famous today for making knives, an industry that developed from swords and armour production in the past. The notable Palazzo Vicari, now the town hall, was built

in 1306, but has been modified over the centuries, partly as a result of earthquake damage. The exterior is covered with stone coats of arms of the local families, almost like sticking plaster keeping the place together.



Walking

There are walks in this book for everyone, and feature panels which I hope will be of interest to go along with them. Almost every walk has a long or short variation — or both! — so although only 26 main walks are listed, there are actually 75 different walks — including those on pages 8-11. Before you walk, be sure to check for any users' updates on Sunflower's website: see the 'UPDATE' tab on the Tuscany page.

Grading, maps, waymarking, GPS

There is a quick overview of each walk's grade in the Contents. But since almost all the walks have shorter or alternative versions, see the walk itself for full details. Here is an explanation of the two gradings of walks in this guide:

- 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

Any of the above grades may be followed by:

- *possibility* of vertigo — for those with no head for heights at all

The maps in this book are based on Openstreetmap mapping (see page 2), very heavily annotated from notes in the field and GPS work. We hope that these maps, which we have found to be very accurate on the ground, will be a boon to walkers. It is a pity that we have to reproduce them at only 1:50,000 to keep the book to a manageable size; some users buy the pdf of the book as well — or you could enlarge them on a colour photocopier. If you like to take an area map with you, the series I recommend is 'Carta dei Sentieri e dei Rifugi 1:25,000' published by Edizioni Multigraphic.

CAI means 'Club Alpino Italiano'. Its members are the wonderful people who walk the lanes with pots of red and white paint. They waymark the trail with the distinctive red and white flashes shown in the photo on page 2, as well as doing many other good things to help hikers. In general their waymarks are reliable, except occasionally when a local land-owner has tried to obliterate them. Often you can still spot them, however. *If you are following a CAI trail and haven't seen a waymark for five minutes, you have probably missed the way.* A few other walks in this book follow locally-waymarked routes; if this is the case, I describe the waymarks. Bear in

mind, however, that some of the walks only follow *part* of a waymarked route, so don't just follow waymarks without reference to the text!

Free GPS track downloads are available for all these walks: see the Tuscany page on the Sunflower website. Please bear in mind, however, that GPS readings should never be relied upon as your sole reference point; conditions can change overnight. But even if you don't use GPS, it's great fun opening our GPX files in Google Earth to preview the walks in advance!

When to walk in Tuscany

Tuscany is a wonderful place for walkers, as its temperate climate and geography make it possible to walk all year round. The myth of continuous sunshine is not totally baseless. The winter can produce many gloriously sunny days, perfect for walking. But late spring, especially May, is probably the best time of year, followed by autumn.

There are two snags to bear in mind. Tuscany's weather is unpredictable; there can be snow at Easter, cool temperatures in August, or a week of rain in June. The weather can also be extreme, with long periods of very heavy rain (especially in October and November), and extremes of temperature in the winter and summer. As with so much in Italy, the secret is to be flexible and well prepared. Fortunately there are plenty of museums and churches to visit, if being out-of-doors is not an option.

July and August have the most predictable weather: it is hot, sometimes very hot; thus they are the least suitable months for walking. But by starting early in the morning, it is still possible to walk — in wooded mountain areas.

Walking in the mountains needs special care. Check the weather forecasts, or talk with the local people. In winter, walking in the mountains of Tuscany is a completely different sport, needing proper equipment, expertise and local knowledge. Unexpected storms are common, especially in the spring and autumn.

Where to stay

For those relying on public transport, it is better to stay in a city, probably either Florence (Firenze) or Siena. If you have a car, you can choose a more rural setting. For mountain lovers, staying towards the north of Tuscany would be more convenient. We always stay at farms that rent rooms or apartments. They are usually in the prettiest places (see the photo on page 35), of a high standard and not expensive. Search the web: 'agriturismos tuscan' offers a large choice.

Right of way

You can walk almost anywhere in Tuscany. Because hunters have the right to hunt on any but fenced-off land, it seems walkers have the same privilege. Italians seem very relaxed about hikers. Although many of the paths, including CAI routes, are on private land, it is not usually a problem if you follow the Country code (see page 46). Signs indicating private property are there to deter motorised traffic.

Some paths that once led straight to the farm door are being rerouted, as the farms are renovated. If a path is fenced off, look for a new route which often follows the fence.

What to wear

In warm, dry weather, I recommend light cotton clothes, usually long trousers and a long-sleeved shirt over a T-shirt. This is for protection from sun, brambles and insects. If you may be walking in hot sun, protection is essential: sunhat, sunglasses and a high-factor sun cream.

Trainers or strong shoes with good grip are fine for all the walks, except where walking boots are specified: they give welcome ankle support and grip. Do not wear sandals: they give no protection from snakes.

For wintry weather, wear your clothing in layers, so that you can make adjustments as your body temperature changes. Avoid denim jeans, as they can be very cold, especially if they get wet. On a winter's day, I always pack gloves, scarf, hat and a windproof, waterproof jacket and trousers.

What to carry

For very short walks, you really need nothing except your camera and a bottle of water in summer. But most of the walks are long enough to demand a few essentials.

In summer you must take plenty to drink (at least 2 litres for a whole day's walk). Many Italians bottle water from way-side springs for home consumption. Ask the locals whether it is safe to drink: 'E potabile, l'acqua?' or use purifying tabs if you want to be sure. Take sun protection as mentioned above, and insect repellent. In winter, as well as extra clothing and waterproofs, I pack extra food and a torch carried in a waterproof rucksack.

For walks in wilder areas, as well as the above take a compass, gps or smartphone, perhaps an area map (see page 40), a whistle, and matches. A stick can be useful; it lessens the wear on your knees, and gives wonderful support for obstacles such as fords, tricky ascents and for passing big dogs!

Whenever you walk, always carry a small first aid kit, a knife, and some high-energy food, like sweets or dried fruit.

The walking notes

As with recipes, it is better to read through all the walking notes before setting off, but if that is asking too much, at least read through one complete stage, so that the landmarks en route are firmly fixed in your mind. Relax until you get there, then read the next section completely. Treat the notes rather like clues in a treasure hunt.

The timings are guidelines only, and may vary according to weather conditions, etc. The times do not include any breaks, other than catching your breath at a viewpoint, so *allow plenty of extra time* to stand and stare, and picnic.





















Do refer to the map, as it will give you a feel for the general direction of the walk. Words can be ambiguous, and landmarks do occasionally change.

Unless the notes advise otherwise, always keep to the main trail, ignoring all other minor paths.

The words *path*, *trail*, *track* and *road* have specific meanings in the walking notes.

- *Path* means footpath, not usually wider than 1m/3ft.
- *Trail* is used for old routes, worn by time, for example, 'mule tracks'. These are generally 1.5-2m/4-6ft wide.
- *Track* refers to an unsealed vehicle track, whether used by 4-wheel drives, farm vehicles or even motor cars.
- Roads are surfaced.

Below is a key to the symbols on the walking maps:

| | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
|  | main road |  | spring, tank, etc |  | church, chapel |
|  | secondary or minor road |  | picnic suggestion (see pages 8-11) |  | cross, tabernacle |
|  | unsealed road |  | CAI route number |  | cemetery |
|  | track, trail |  | best views |  | picnic site with tables |
|  | path, steps |  | bus stop |  | pylon.transmitter |
|  | main walk |  | railway station |  | start/end.waypoint |
|  | alternative walk |  | car parking |  | tourist information |
|  | other described walk |  | building |  | mill.factory |
|  | altitude |  | castle, fortress |  | cave |

Walk 1: FROM BIVIGLIANO TO FIESOLE

See also photos on pages 8, 10, 15 and 56

Distance/time: 17.8km/11mi; 4h30min

Grade: ● moderate, with ascents of about 430m/1390ft overall, otherwise mostly downhill. Suitable all year round, except in high summer

Equipment: as page 42; also walking boots if the ground is wet

Transport: ~~bus~~ from Florence to Vaglia (journey 30min) or 25 to Pratolino terminus (journey 20min), then taxi (see page 45; return on AT 7 from Fiesole to Florence (journey time 30min)

Refreshments: café-bars at Bivigliano, Monte Senario; bar/restaurant at Vetta le Croci (not far off the walking route)

Short walks

1 Monte Senario circuit

(5km/3mi; 1h30min). ● Easy, with ascents of 225m/735ft; equipment as page 42; access as main walk or by : park in the wide square before Bivigliano (the 24km-point in Car tour 1; 43° 53.620'N, 11° 19.299'E). Follow the main walk to the T-JUNCTION at (1h10min-point), then turn right and follow the road back to **Bivigliano**. At the main road in the village turn left for your bus or car.

2 Bivigliano to Vetta le Croci

(6km/3.7mi; 2h). ● Grade as Short walk 1; equipment, access as main walk; return on AT 319A back to Florence. Follow the main walk to **Vetta le Croci** (), then turn right to the BUS STOP.

If you have only time to do one walk in Tuscany, then choose this one, because it gives you a taste of everything these hills offer: vast panoramas of endless horizons, steep wooded hillsides, holy places, old farms, gentle olive groves, and imposing villas. There are places to linger and look about you, and other sections where you can really get into your stride and pound down the lanes. When you return to Florence, you can point to the distinctive shape of Monte Senario on the far horizon and say, 'I walked from there'.

Start the walk from the BUS TERMINUS (●) at the spacious piazza in **Bivigliano**. Follow the main road into the village, a good place for a morning coffee if you had an early start. Continue on the main road, watching out for a road on the right called VIA DI P.

CHIARESE (on a bend to the left; 10min). Take this road and follow

CAI 65 WAYMARKS. When the road divides after 50m, continue to the right on VIA DELL' ALTARE. This soon becomes a track and climbs left into the woods, to a junction where CAI 65 DIVIDES (15min). Follow the track uphill to the right. Five minutes later, *leave* CAI 65: turn right uphill on an unwaymarked path (). Your



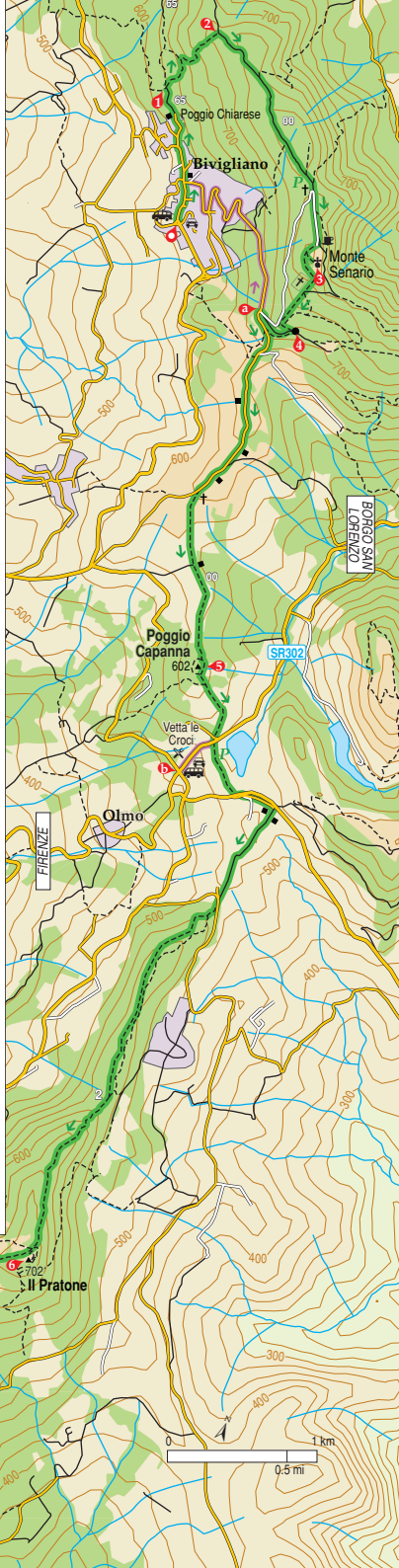
path then turns right (**20min**) and takes you up to a **RIDGE TRAIL (2; CAI 00; 30min)** — part of the 'VIA DEGLI DEI' (Way of the Gods).

Turn right along the ridge but, 10 minutes along, turn left off the main trail, following the red and white waymarks (**40min**). You come to the pretty setting for Picnic 3 just before the route veers to the right and meets the road up to the monastery. Follow the road uphill. Just before the bar and monastery, note the signposted trail on the right: this will be your ongoing route.

After visiting **Monte Senario (3; 1h)** — its history is detailed overleaf — return to the signposted trail and follow it downhill. It is the route to the cemetery and steps straight downhill below the monastery wall, past the **STATIONS OF THE CROSS** and through an austere pine plantation. Impressive gateposts mark the end of the church land.

At this point you will meet a bend of the road leading back to the monastery. Just before continuing downhill, turn left to visit the huge **ICE HOUSE (4)** shown overleaf. If you go round to the back of the building, you can see inside it, to where the ice was stored.

Then return and follow the road down to a **T-JUNCTION (1; 1h10min)**. Turn left downhill towards 'FIRENZE'. (*But for Short walk 1, turn right uphill for 'Bivigliano'.*) Continue along the

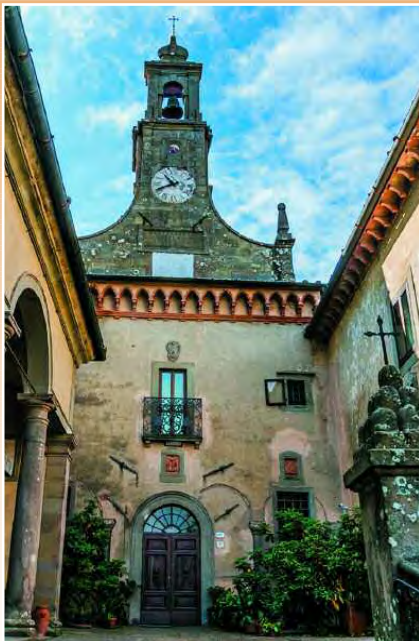


Sanctuary of Monte Senario

The Sanctuary of Monte Senario was founded by seven holy men from Florence in 1241, on a high hill (815m/2673ft) given to them by the nobleman Giuliano di Bivigliano.

They first built cells so they could become hermits separated from the world. Later other pious men were inspired to join them, and the Order of the Servants of the Holy Lady was formed. The church was consecrated in 1717, and the original hermits were canonised in 1888.

Today the buildings are a working monastery, used especially for spiritual retreats. The area has many grottoes, tabernacles and hermits' cells that can be discovered by exploring the paths around the monastery.



road for about 1.5km (watching out for traffic), until you come to a CAI WAYPOST FOR 'VETTA LE CROCI' (1h30min). Take the path to the left here (still CAI 00), up towards a clump of trees capping the hillock. You may now start noticing some intermittent new waymarks — for 'AN' the ANELLO DEL RINASCIMENTO, the 'Renaissance Ring' circuit around Florence. Your path circles to the left of the hill just before the summit (6; Poggio Capanne), then heads down towards the reservoir in the distance shown on 8. As you approach the main road, watch out for a right turn in the fields and take it, meeting the main road just above the crossroads of Vetta le Croci (6; 2h). *(Short walk 2 ends here, turning right along the main road to a bus stop at the crossroads.)*

Cross the road at the 'FIESOLE' sign and take the waymarked path 50

opposite (photo on page 15, top right), walking uphill and parallel with the long side of the reservoir — a much-favoured picnic spot with city dwellers. You are now heading towards the ridge on your right, which will lead you to Monte Pratone. When you meet a second road, cross it and go left on VIA MASSETO. Now you are following CAI 2, which turns right and rounds a house. Continue on to a third road, cross it, then follow it uphill a short distance. Beyond the road sign, waymarked CAI 2 (also the Via degli Dei and Anello del Rinascimento; 2h30min) continues to the right, on a ridge path to the summit.

The summit of Monte Pratone (6; 702m/2302ft; 3h30min; Picnic 2) hosts a monument extolling the virtues of this beautiful spot, as well as a fire look-out tower. Head down past a

RADIO RECEIVING STATION (3h35min), join a gravel track, and walk a little over 1km down to a **ROAD (7; VIA SAN CLEMENTE; 3h55min)**. Turn right downhill, with views towards Fiesole.

When you come to a **T-JUNCTION (4h)**, turn left on the rather busy road for 'FIESOLE'. To avoid the traffic through the village, I suggest you take the back road which is a little longer but much more pleasant. Five or so minutes down the main road, turn left uphill at a junction (**8; VIA PERAMONDA**), following the sign to a campsite.

When you are almost at the top of the hill, ignore the right turn into the camping ground and continue down to a T-junction. Turn left here and, a short way along, turn right uphill at another junction. At the next, more complicated junction, take the second street on the right (**VIA F POETI**). At the end of the handrail, where the road opens out, you will see a terrace, from which a tarred trail runs off to the left. Take this. Continue downhill and turn right at the T-junction, to the **PIAZZA AND BUS STOP in Fiesole (9; 4h30min)**. (Don't worry if you miss any of these charming back lanes; if in doubt, any right turn will bring you onto the main road to the centre.)



ICE HOUSE

This extraordinary structure was built in the 1880s by the monks of Monte Senario. It is thought to be one of the largest surviving ice houses in Europe. While most of the others were used to store ice for cooling drinks in summer, this one served an altogether different purpose.

Placing ice on painful areas of the body was one of the few methods of pain relief known at that time.

The building itself was originally very elegant, faced with marble and stone and topped with a cupola above the dome. Filling it with ice during the winter was not difficult, just laborious. The monks built small ponds near the ice house. During winter nights, the temperature dropped, turning the pond water into ice which they collected and stored. The monks then loaded the ice onto carts and made regular trips to the hospitals of the city — truly 'angels of mercy'.

Tuscany

Fourth edition

This book features **walks** and **drives** from the Carrara marble quarries in the northwest down to southern Tuscany, with particular emphasis on the countryside around Florence and in the Chianti. While the region's historic towns and architectural highlights are often focal points for these excursions, the role of the Tuscan peasant in creating this glorious landscape is stressed throughout — especially in the **wealth of articles** about flora, fauna, customs, cuisine and history that accompany the main text.

- 75 long and short walks, for all ages and abilities
- topographical walking maps
- free downloadable GPS tracks
- satnav guidance to walk starting points for motorists
- 8 car tours and fold-out touring maps
- strolls to idyllic picnic spots
- public transport details
- update service for the latest information



'Driving, walking or going by bus, you'll be happy to have this book for company.' — *SUNDAY TIMES*

Sunflower Books
sunflowerbooks.co.uk
UK £17.99 USA \$23.00

I S B N 978-1-85691-571-7



9 781856 915717