

TESTI ELEMENTI SENTIERO DELLA FORESTA

You are in Ciampediè, in the “Campo degli Dei” [the Field of the Gods], in their home. Look, it is true! A spectacular show of rocks, of spires and green. A marvellous, enchanted world. A place to get to know, to enjoy and experience.

Once, man would come up to this magical place to work. Now we come here, serene, walking through sites where those distant times have left their legends and their mark, through extraordinary forests and paths that take us up into the vast mountains. The surrounding landscapes are so fascinating that we often fail to see the details, to discover the secrets that are only apparently hidden.

We have used one of the marks/trails, the Forest Trail (*Sentiero della Foresta*), so that we can see and appreciate these things together.

Unhurried nature walks, surrounded by vegetation, stopping every so often to look around, near and far, and giving yourself the chance to be surprised by the signs on the mountains and in the woods. Now you can learn to see and to recognise these signs.

MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPES

Forests that crown the peaks and meadows. Towns and villages, immersed in green, at the bottom of the valley.

A harmony of shapes and colours in a landscape that has been moulded by nature as well as by human activity over centuries of mountain living and civilisation.

Man and nature can live together according to the intelligence and sensitivity of each.

WATER

Whether there is a great deal or just a little, water is always precious and it forms the basis of life for every living thing.

After filtering through into the ground, water undergoes a slow, lengthy journey before coming to the surface once more, purified and enriched by minerals, as it gradually passes through different places.

Each spring, no matter how small, is as precious as the good water it provides, and every one is jealously guarded.

TREES AND WATER

On a hot summer's day, a single tree can absorb more than 100 litres of water, a small part of which is used for its growth with the rest re-entering the atmosphere in the form of vapour.

Thus every tree binds three of the earth's essential elements to itself: soil, air and water.

MOUNTAINS AND ROCKS

What a spectacular sight, formed by crags, rock faces and spires. Yet 200 - 250 million years ago, this area was covered by sea, with shallow waters with Caribbean-like temperatures. The rocks we see today were formed in these conditions, following the build up of shells, coral and other marine organisms.

These rocks began to deform and rise out from the sea some 10 - 20 million years ago as a result of the collision between the African and European continental plates, creating these mountains and the whole chain of the Alps. The mountains as we see them today are the result of more recent phenomena, especially in the last 10,000 years, such as the action of ice and rivers, and the landslides and erosion caused by water, wind, and freeze/thaw cycles

The Dolomites get their name from geologist D. Dolomieu, who was the first to discover the composition of the rock, Dolomite, which is a calcium magnesium carbonate.

TREE ROOTS

Roots are what anchor a tree to the soil, supplying it with water and nutrients. If we counted all of them, down to the smallest, we would find that every plant has more roots than leaves. What is surprising is the ability of roots to explore the soil intelligently, learning to avoid any obstacles and neutralising toxins and anything that could damage the life of their tree.

Because trees are truly wise and intelligent!

SO MUCH LIFE BELOW THE GROUND!

So much life below the ground! In just one square metre of the soil explored by roots there can be 80-100 earthworms and billions of micro organisms, fungi, algae, and bacteria, etc., which decompose and transform leaves, branches and anything else that falls to the ground into fertile soil. A hidden, invisible life that gives and prepares life for all of the beings that exist above ground.

HOW LONG ARE TREE ROOTS?

The largest roots are at least as long as the lowest branches, and even more in poorer soils. Therefore, the roots of this tree are almost 10 metres long and they explore the soil in an area of some 300 square metres.

AND THEY ARE REALLY USEFUL! Not just for the life of the tree. Roots harness the soil, making it stable and allowing it to drain deep down. It is also thanks to roots that the soil in the forest is able to absorb and soak up large amounts of water – about 500 litres per cubic metre of soil – that will be used in part by the trees, with the rest slowly seeping underground and feeding into the springs and watercourses. That is why, where there are dense woodlands, there are no floods, even in cases of extremely heavy rainfall.

THE WORLD OF THE WOODS

The woodland is a great world of trees, many trees that cover and shade it all. However, if you look carefully, you will see that there is much more to it than just trees. Everywhere there are grasses, bushes, moss, lichen and although we do not always see them, large and small animals. A living universe, where each creature has its precise role in the marvellous balance of nature. And in summer, the rhododendron blooms transform this place into a magical garden.

“...A great and eternal beauty passes
through the whole world, and it is
distributed fairly over that which is
small and that which is large

Reiner Maria Rilke

HOW OLD ARE THESE TREES?

The larger, taller trees are 200 - 300 years old or more, but even this small fir, which is less than a metre tall is over 50 years old. Trees grow slowly up here, in the harsh high mountain environment, especially when they are young. Before they grow taller, they first put down secure roots.

THE LONG JOURNEY OF THE SWISS PINE

The Swiss Pine is a tree that originates in Siberia, and it arrived here thousands of years ago, during the Ice Age. Its seeds, which are large and round and cannot be carried on the wind, were brought here by the Nutcracker, a bird who loves to eat them. To be able to eat them all year round, this bird transports and hides the seeds, although it sometimes drops some during flight and may forget some of its hiding places. Therefore, it is thanks to the wings of the Nutcracker that the

Swiss Pine was able to make the long journey from Siberia to the Dolomites and it continues to spread through our high mountain environments.

THE TALE OF THE LITTLE SWISS PINE

I know I am still small, but I am already 50 years old. The Nutcracker hid some seeds here to eat them in the winter, but it failed to find some of them. Perhaps on purpose. And so I was born. I have grown slowly, like all trees up high in the mountains. Before I grew upwards, I put down firm roots, just as the bigger trees and even by the bird to which I owe my life advised me. Now I will grow more quickly and I will become a big old tree, producing many seeds so that lots of small pines like me can continue to tell our beautiful story; a true story, like mine.

THE TREE ON THE ROCK

“What bad luck,” I said to myself when I was born on this rock two hundred years ago! “There is no soil to nourish me and it’ll be really cold!” But I was wrong. This rock stores heat and it transmits it to me, like a hot water bottle on my feet, when I need it most. To find water and nutrients, all I have had to do is grow longer roots. For me, high up here in the mountains where the cold conditions the life of every tree, growing on this rock has been like being born under a lucky star.

SO MUCH GOOD CLEAN AIR!

Twenty trees are enough to give us the oxygen one person needs to breathe.

Here in the Fassa Valley, there are more than 2000 trees for every inhabitant. So much good clean air!

MESSAGES FROM THE STUMP

Each stump is a reminder of a tree that has been cut down. If we look carefully, we can see a sequence of rings in the wood; these are the annual growth rings of the tree. Each one has a lighter part, showing the early wood, and a darker one for later wood. Moreover, every ring is different; some are narrower, showing difficult years with cool, short summers, while broader rings show better years, with warmer summers. This sequence of rings shows us the tree’s life history, together with a weather report for every season. In fact, it is thanks to the trees that we know the weather conditions for the last millennium.

“...more in woods than in books.

Trees and stones will teach you ...”

St. Bernard

RESIN

Trees make resin as a defence mechanism, to seal injuries and to protect their wood against parasites, water and frost... Resin also contains antibiotic substances and mountain folk use it for its medicinal properties.

LIFE’S JOURNEY ON A ROCK

This large boulder fell from the rock face thousands of years ago. It did not remain alone. Life has grown on it, starting with the algae and lichen that have found a firm base here, and followed by moss, where a little water is trapped, then grasses and bushes with their flowers, and then trees in the spots where a little soil has built up over time. There is also no shortage of animals. This boulder shows the long, certain journey that has led to life on earth for all beings, including humankind.

WHY DO THE BOTTOM BRANCHES OF TREES LOSE THEIR LEAVES AND WITHER?

Leaves need sunlight to photosynthesise and thus to contribute to the growth of the tree. When they remain in the shade, they cannot produce new matter and become useless, even using up more oxygen than they produce. This leads the tree to rid itself of them, allowing them to fall.

LIGHTNING SCARS

This larch was struck by lightning many years ago, opening a deep scar along its whole trunk. However, the tree did not give up; it is still alive and every year it sends its foliage higher to explore new pieces of sky.

The ability of trees to deal with and overcome every difficulty is quite surprising.

BARK LICHEN

Look how many different-coloured lichens there are on the bark of this tree! Lichen is not a parasite; it does not damage the tree, it just lives on the trunk. All lichen needs to survive is air and a little moisture. That is why it prefers to grow on the north-facing side of the trunk, which is damper and shaded. Since lichen lives on air, it is a vital indicator of atmospheric pollution.

THE WOOD IS HOME TO ANIMALS

Animals find food and shelter in the forest. You cannot always see them because wild animals like to stay in quiet areas, far away from people. Nevertheless, they are there and they leave traces of their passing. This fir has been grazed by a stag or a roe deer or perhaps even by a chamois. When we cannot see the larger animals, we can always appreciate the smaller ones – the sight or song of a tit or the colours and flight of a butterfly are enough to make us feel part of this extraordinary, friendly world.

THE SILENCE AND SOUNDS OF THE WOOD

The wood is a place in which to feel at peace, a place of quiet serenity. During a walk, stop and listen every so often; free your mind and appreciate the birdsong, the sound of the wind, the gurgling of a stream...a symphony of thousands of voices.

And the silence; the silence of a rock far from the sky, the silence of the mountains. A silence that we should all learn to listen to.

THE FALLEN TREE

This fir was knocked down by the wind many years ago. Eventually, every tree that is not cut down and used will wither and fall to the ground. But for every tree that falls, another will grow. Thus, trees change as generations pass, but the wood and all it stands for will remain forever. This also happens in woods that are correctly managed by people.

As time passes, the wood from fallen trees is decomposed by millions of microorganisms to create new soil. Because in nature, everything is used, everything is recycled and nothing is wasted.

HOW THE WOOD IS USED

This tree was cut high decades ago. Why? Because once, when the mountain area was poor, people would work in the woods in wintertime, even in deep snow.

In summer, there were other things to do, such as cultivating the fields, building houses, etc... These woods have always been used by local people for wood to be worked or burnt. However, they have always been used correctly, without causing any destruction, in the knowledge that it is not possible to demand more of the woods than they can give if they are to remain a complete and eternal resource.