

# “SANTELLE” TOUR

BETWEEN OLD LANES, SHRINES, LEMON HOUSES  
AND WATER MILLS. DISCOVERING A HIDDEN GARGNANO



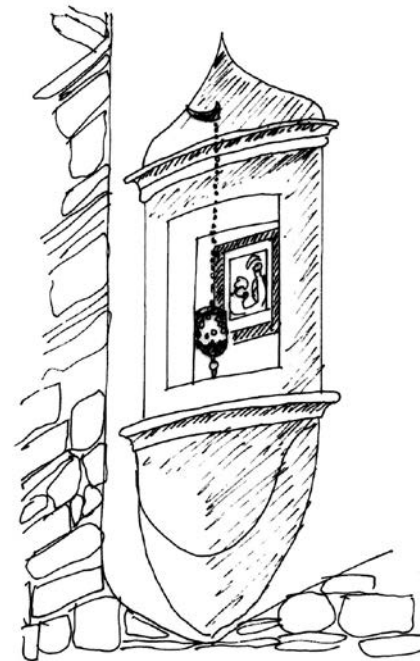
WALKS ALONG  
GARGNANO'S  
PATHS

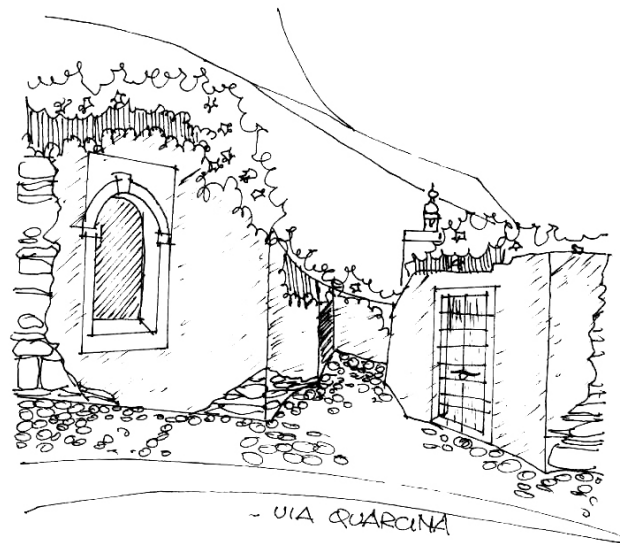
The excursion starts from the **harbour (1)** of Gargnano. In the center of the square we take the lane beside the tobacco shop and go into Gargnano's oldest quarter marked by old fishermen's houses, one next to the other: now we're in **Via Forni (ovens)**, a name which comes from the past use of some of the old shops.

We note the nice architectural play and an interesting **enamelled clay shrine (2)**: this is the first of a sequence of sacred images, locally called “**santelle**”, that we will find along our excursion. Reaching a vault under an “arch house”, we turn left, passing under the main road **Gardesana** stone bridge and we find a **fountain (3)** which gave water, in former times, for drinking and washing, to the center of Gargnano. Going uphill (notice, on the right, another well-restored Holy Mother “**santella**” of the '800's), at the intersection, we take the center, wall sided road (Via Dosso).

After about 100 meters there's another intersection with a shrine which used to be called “**Madunina dei fèr**” **(4)** (“Holy Mother of the tools”, protectress of working tools), recently removed for restauration. Keeping to the right, we go on the stone-paved road till the next intersection with the ever-present shrine **(S. Carlo) (5)** and we head towards the road marked n.37 to Musaga: we are in the evocative **Via Quarcina**, in former times a very important connection with the mountain part of Gargnano (**Montegargnano**) and therefore, at every intersection, guarded by a sacred image to protect the wayfarer and invite him to pray.

Let's pass through the **Olive grove**, with it's high stone walls. In a wider part **(6)**, beside a wall topped with barbed wire, we can rest for a while and admire a nice view of the lake and the **S. Martino steeple**. At the back, higher, we can see the white pillars of a **lemon house (7)** with its bright-coloured house and the stone





shed (**casello**) used to store wooden frames and roof, for the winter. The slope has been completely terraced to make possible what, at the time, was a real industry (lemon, olive and laurel trees growing): a system that characterized Gargnano's territory for centuries.

Lemon cultivation employed a large number of workers, also coming from neighbouring areas and granted such an important economic source for the wealthy families of owners, to justify the range of investments that

modified radically the natural habitat, creating enbankments, pillars, wooden frames, wood storages, tanks, irrigation ducts, stone stairways: a complex that is a unique example of its kind and sets Gargnano in the geographical and economical center of this part of the Garda shore developing such a typical cultivation. Walking beside a **lemon house**, the road narrows and becomes a mere path, shadowed by the tree.

Afterwards, at the intersection with **Via Mulini** (40 min. from the start and 200 meters of gradient), we begin to come down on a cement road, to the point, locally named "**El Pùlpit**" (the pulpit) (**8**), in a dominating position on the coast. Beside a sharp bend, an orange house has an antique, small but nice "**santella**". The rural stone houses now are different from the lemon grove ones, where the verticality dominates: they are **old water mills** for olives and wheat or **orges** to work the iron, now adapted as houses. The power that operated the machinery necessary to these works, the water, was provided by a complicated system of ducts and pipes which diverted the water according to anyone's need.

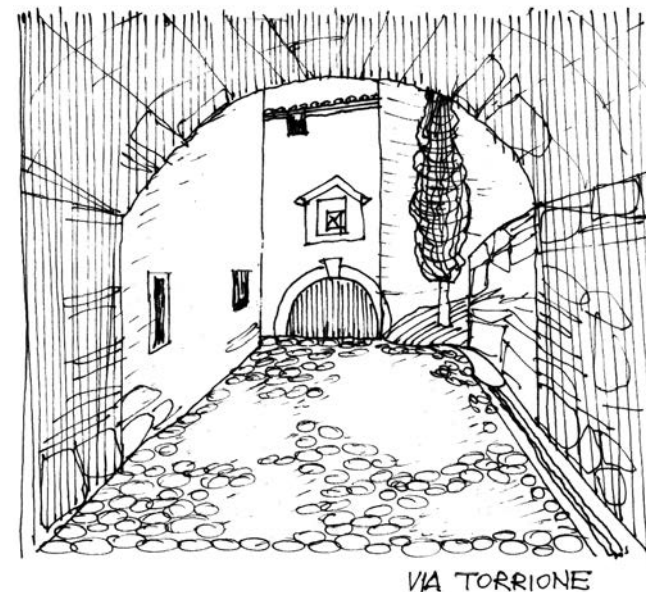
Now the plants are dismantled but beyond some remains like millstones or stone ducts, which can't escape a careful look, the downpour of the water and the colour of a place wedded to the past, to season-scanned rhythms and small daily gestures, still is left. Even along **Via Mulini**, we can find religious drawings maybe not of high artistic level, but well integrated with the "naïf" environment.

Coming down on the steep roadbed, a typical local building has another example of this kind of art.

After the further junction, we have to go left and cross the main road

"Gardesana", going downhill for a few meters: taking the lane, only 20 meters after, on the right, we pass the steepest point, helped by a handrail. At the small but charming junction (more "santelle") (**9**), we take a left covering the small stone bridge and cross the stream that used to feed the water mills. We're again between the high lemon-grove stone walls and we pass through **Via Torrione**, ending beside the old **Società Lago Di Garda** complex (**10**), only a few years ago, the sorting center for the crop of lemons and mill for olives and laurel berry. Aside the complex, towards the center, we can't miss the visit to the monastic compound of **S. Francesco Church** (**11**).

Since the XIII century, the labours of the friars, introduced in the area, the lemon farming, as is witnessed by the beautiful capitals decorating the nice



**internal cloister.** From here, deviating on the foot-bridge on the lake, seeing the old houses rising directly from the water, we find the little **harbour**, where we started an hour and a half ago.

To enjoy the tour we suggest you to proceed without hurry and look around to discover all the characteristics that the landscape can offer (nature, architecture, views).

The trail can be done with normal, comfortable dress.

The steep and eventually slippery downhills need suitable shoes!

**Time: hrs 1,00 / 1,30**

*Text, map and pictures by Franco Ghitti*

*Translation by Gianfranco Scanferlato*

# Legend

1. Gargnano's port
2. Santella via Forni
3. Fountain
4. "Madunina dei fèr"
5. Santella S. Carlo
6. Via Quarcina - Panoramic point
7. Lemon House
8. "El Pùlpit"
9. Via Torriore
10. Società Lago di Garda
11. S. Francesco church and cloister

