Discovering the valley and its historical and cultural traditions, from the Waldenses to the partisans, never forgetting the indigenous population

At the exit to Turin, right at the end of Corso Unione Sovietica, stands the Hunting Lodge of Stupinigi, looking as if it has come out of an 18th century painting, surrounded by its park and farmland. It was designed by Juvarra with the assistance of numerous other architects (Alfieri, Prunotto, Bo) and today is the home of the Museum of Art and Furnishing, with a display of outstanding furniture, paintings, and other objects, both from Stupinigi itself and from other Savoy Residences. It is also a venue for special temporary exhibitions. Continuing along the main road 23 for about ninety kilometres, you reach Sestriere. But along this road, one of the two arteries that will take visitors up to the Olympic mountains, there are numerous possible detours to visit small towns with long historical and cultural traditions, full of workshops that work with wood, ceramics, and cast iron.

To start with, we can look for Cavour on the map, the town of the “Natural Rock”, an outcrop from the top of which “you can see all the Alps, from Monte Viso to Monte Rosa, and the entire vast, empty plain of Piedmont”, as Edmondo De Amicis said in his “At the doors of Italy” in 1892. There is also a wonderful view from Villa Peyron, where numerous celebrities have stayed, from San Giovanni Bosco to Luigi Einaudi, Queen Victoria and King Ahmed Fuad of Egypt.

Appena usciti da Torino, proprio al fondo di corso Unione Sovietica, si staglia, come in un quadro del Settecento, la Palazzina di Caccia di Stupinigi, arricchita dal parco e dai terreni circostanti, costruita su progetto di Juvarra con la collaborazione di numerosi architetti (Alfieri, Prunotto, Bo). Oggi è sede del Museo di Arte e Ammobiliamento con la sua esposizione di mobili, dipinti e oggetti di grandissima qualità provenienti sia dagli arredioriginari della Palazzina, sia da altre Residenze sabaudhe anche sede di ricercate mostre contemporanee. Proseguendo oltre, imboccata la statale 23, continuando per una novantina di chilometri, si arriva fino a Sestriere. Numerose, lungo il percorso di una delle due arterie che guidano alle montagne olimpiche, sono però le deviazioni verso piccoli centri urbani dalle lontane tradizioni storiche e culturali, ricchi di laboratori del legno, produzioni ceramiche, lavorazione del ferro battuto.
Tanto per incominciare, vale la pena cercare sulla cartina Cavour, il paese della Rocca naturale, dalla cui vetta «si vede tutto il cerchio delle Alpi, dal Monte Viso al Monte Rosa, e tutta la pianura piemontese, così vasta e aperta» secondo la visione di Edmondo De Amicis nel suo ‘Alle Porte d’Italia’ del 1892. Una mirabile vista si ha da Villa Peyron, che ha ospitato da San Giovanni Bosco a Luigi Einaudi, passando per la Regina Vittoria e il Re d’Egitto Ahmed Fuad.

Oggi Cavour si estende all’interno di quella che, dal 1995, è la Riserva Naturale Speciale. Da non perdere l’Abbazia di Santa Maria di Staffarla, fondata nella prima metà del secolo XII per opera dei Monaci Cistercensi, e alcune pitture rupestri risalenti al post-paleolitico. Purtroppo, dell’antica funzione difensiva del comune, non rimangono che i ruderi di una fortezza distrutta nel 1690 dai francesi e costruita proprio sulla cima della Rocca. Tre anni di assedio e gravi carestie hanno duramente depauperato il comune, dove resta però la chiesa di S. Lorenzo costruita nel 1600 e un delizioso centro cittadino con interessanti negozietti e ristoranti.

Prima di arrivare a Pinerolo, in collina si trova San Secondo, il cui centro storico risale al XVIII secolo. Di quell’epoca sono rimasti alcuni edifici residenziali di pregio architettonico e l’antico pozzo, ora il simbolo del paese. Di particolare interesse artistico è la chiesa parrocchiale, bell’esempio di barocco piemontese, dell’architetto Giuseppe Girolamo Buniva nel 1773. Da segnalare anche la settecentesca chiesa della Confraternita della SS. Trinità, e il tempio evangeliaco valdese, inaugurato nel 1958. La vocazione residenziale di San Secondo ha comportato lo sviluppo di una nuova area urbana attorno a piazza Europa, che – per la sua particolare struttura ad anfiteatro – fornisce un invidiabile scenario per spettacoli ed eventi culturali. Alle sue spalle sorge un grande parco attrezzato, cuore verde del paese.

Pochi chilometri di statale e si entra in Pinerolo, adagiata allo sfociare della Val Pellice e della Val Chisone, nata poco prima dell’anno 1000 come rocca per la difesa delle incursioni saracene. Ancora oggi dal belvedere di Villa La Graziosa sul lato di San Maurizio, si ammira la bellissima pianura: lontane, le Alpi Cozie che dividono l’Italia dalla Francia, intorno boschi di faggi e larici dove conoscere l’antica attività di produzione del carbone di legna, un tempo molto diffusa.

Today Cavour stands inside the Special Nature Reserve that was created in 1995. In the area, visitors should not miss the Abbey of Santa Maria at Staffarda, founded in the first half of the 12th century by Cistercian monks, or a series of post-Paleolithic rock paintings. Unfortunately all that remains of the town’s original defensive structure are the ruins of a fortress destroyed in 1690 by the French, which was built on the Rock itself. A three-year siege and serious famine severely impoverished the town, but the 17th century church of S. Lorenzo and the delightful town centre with its interesting small shops and restaurants do still survive. On a hill just outside Pinerolo, we find the town of San Secondo, whose centre dates back to the 18th century. A few houses of architectural interest remain, as well as the old well, now the symbol of the town. The parish church is particularly interesting, a good example of Piedmontese baroque, designed by Giuseppe Girolamo Buniva in 1773. The 18th century church of the Confraternity of SS. Trinità, and the Waldensian Evangelical church, inaugurated in 1958, should also be seen. San Secondo’s vocation as a residential town has resulted in the development of a new urban area round piazza Europa, shaped as an amphitheatre and an ideal setting for cultural events and performances. Behind it is a large equipped park, the green lung of the town.

Pinerolo is a few miles away on the main road, resting at the mouths of the Pellice and Chisone valleys, founded shortly before 1000 AD as a fortress to hold off Saracen incursions. Today it is still possible to admire the beautiful plain from the belvedere of Villa La Graziosa on the hill of San Maurizio; in the distance the Cottian Alps that divide Italy from France, and all around beech and larch woods that point to the ancient production of charcoal, an activity that was once so widespread in the area.
The various periods in the history of what has been called the “most French town in Italy” are revealed in its attractive Mediaeval centre, with low ‘portici’ or arcades, narrow streets, and the Mediaeval façades of the palazzi and churches, interspersed by unexpected views of the Alps or of the plain stretching towards Turin and the Langhe. There is a delightful walk along three kilometres of covered portici, past elegant stores and interesting bookshops, and visitors should not miss the 11th century cathedral of San Donato, the Senate House or Palazzo Vittone, where the Civic Art Gallery is housed. Poi una meritata pausa per assaggiarne una fetta del panettone o della torta Zurigo, gustosa ricetta Belle Époque. Interessanti, inoltre, il museo Etnografico ed i centri culturali di eccellenza, il Centro Studi e Museo d’Arte Preistorica e il Museo Nazionale dell’Arma di Cavalleria, l’unico esempio di museo d’arma fuori Roma, noto anche all’estero. Numerosi, inoltre, i castelli disseminati nel pinerolese, antiche magioni visitabili, dove poter cenare e addirittura pernottare: oltre a quello di Pinerolo, quello di Osasco, Macello, Piossasco, Miradolo, Buriasco, della Costa di Cumiana e Villa il Torrione. Infine merita una visita il Parco Ornitológico Martinat (Tel. 0121 303199-303204), una voliera di 13.000 metri quadrati, la più grande al mondo, dove si incontrano oltre 2400 animali provenienti da ogni parte del mondo, ed il Museo del Gusto di Frossasco.

Rilevante è stato il ruolo del Pinerolese nella storia della Resistenza: già a partire dai primi giorni dopo l’8 settembre, infatti, si stanziarono sui monti formazioni partigiane e oggi, attraverso diversi itinerari che percorrono la val Pellice, la val Germanasca e la bassa val Chisone, si può ricostruire un’importante fetta della storia d’Italia (per info www.comune.pinerolo.to.it/cd/resistenza/).

Zone che coincidono, inoltre, con le Valli valdesi; da secoli caratterizzate nelle tradizioni, nella cultura e nell’architettura, dalla presenza di questa minoranza cristiana non cattolica.

Risalendo il fondo della val Pellice, in una zona ancora relativamente pianeggiante, s’ incontra Luserna, patria dell’omonima pietra pregiata fonte di sussistenza di intere generazioni ieri come oggi. Le ‘lose’ dei tetti delle case, le fontane e i camini: la pietra tagliata in ‘fogli’ , caratterizza tutta l’architettura della zona ma non soltanto: anche il tetto della Mole Antonelliana, simbolo di Torino, è ricoperto del suo foglio lamellare. Il comune più popoloso della valle si divide in tre nuclei: da Bricherasio s’incontra per primo San Giovanni e il maggiore tempio valdese dell’area, dalla facciata neoclassica e pianta ellittica del 1806. Procedendo oltre, la zona pianeggiante di Airali, sede del Comune, e l’originario borgo medievale cresciuto intorno all’im-
an aviary of 13,000 square metres, the largest in the world, which is the home to over 2400 animals from all parts of the world.

Pinerolo paid an important part in the Resistance movement; partisan groups established themselves in the mountains immediately after the Armistice of September 8, 1943, and today various itineraries through the Pellice, Germanasca and lower Chisone valleys recreate an important slice of Italian history (for information, www.comune.pinerolo.to.it/cd/resistenza/).

These areas are also the Waldensian valleys, steeped for centuries in the traditions, culture, architecture and presence of this Protestant minority.

The first place you encounter along the Pellice valley, in a fairly flat area, is Luserna, the home of the valuable stone by the same name that was the mainstay of entire generations in the past, and even today. The ‘lose’ or flat stones are used for roofs, fountains and fireplaces; these ‘sheets’ of stone are typical of the architecture of the area, and further afield, in fact they were even used on the roof of the Mole Antonelliana, the symbol of Turin. The largest town in the valley is divided into three zones: arriving from Bricherasio, the first you meet is San Giovanni, which has the largest Waldensian church in the area, built in 1806 with a neoclassical façade and elliptical layout. This is followed by the plain of Airali, the home of the municipality, and the original Mediaeval village that grew up around the important 11th century market, surrounded by the 12th century church of San Giacomo, the home of the Conti di Luserna and the Convent of San Francesco.

After Luserna, the buildings and institutions of Torre Pellice underline that this is the Waldensian capital: the first Church was built here in 1555, in the central Coppieri dis-
strict. All around there is evidence of the Waldensian culture and traditions, from the ‘Foresteria’ guest house to the Museum and the interesting ethnographic exhibition. The Waldensian House, part of the Church built in 1852, after the Edict of Emancipation of February 17 1848 that granted political and civil rights, hosts the ceremony that marks the opening of the Synod every year. The College built in 1835 and the Waldensian ‘Convitto’ or boarding house, built in memory of 500 Waldensians who died in the first world war, are both worth seeing. And finally the Waldensian Youth Centre and the Deaconess’s House, the centre of the nursing order that works in numerous hospitals and clinics. Just outside the town is the Waldensian Hospital, the first institute built to serve the Waldensian populations in the 19th century. And we must not forget the Ice Rink, the pride of the local population who follow the exploits of their local Ice Hockey team.

Back on the main road to Sestriere, the next town is **Porte**, built on the valley floor along the Chisone river, around the baroque parish church of San Michele Arcangelo, and the beautiful Villa Giuliano, now the Town Hall. The 18th century buildings of the silk spinning mill can still be seen next to the 19th century mill. The beauty of the scenery can be appreciated from the Alpini fountain above Borgata Giai, or, better still, from the hill of San Benedetto that overlooks the valley and the nearby town of San Germano.

Not far away, on the other bank of the Chisone, is the characteristic old town of **San Germano Chisone**, which was transformed by the graphite mines and imposing cotton mill. The large Waldensian museum, dedicated to the role of women, and the splendid urban park of Villa Widemann, now the Town Hall, next to the parish church of San Germano, tell the history of a frontier town. De Amicis saw it in the late 19th century, and described it as a postcard of the past. Today the area is a famous postcard among tourists. Those charming mountains, their slopes covered with vineyards, dressed with heather and beech-trees further down, where the Waldensian farmers moved “in the middle of those charming mountains, their slopes covered with vineyards, their books under their arms, the young ‘barbetti’ climb up to go to study with their itinerant teachers, in the lovely farmhouses on the peaks”.

The next town along the main road is **Villar Perosa**, whose links with the Agnelli family are particularly strong. The town’s development coincided with the construction of the RIV plant in 1906 on the banks of the Chisone, which became the European leader in the production of ball-bearings, originally patented by Roberto Incerti. Today the plant still operates, but with other owners, and it also hosts the factory, a small museum that tells the story of the plant’s history and its role in the development of the city. The Catastrophic Edict of 1848 that granted political and civil rights, hosts the ceremony that marks the opening of the Synod every year. The College built in 1835 and the Waldensian ‘Convitto’ or boarding house, built in memory of 500 Waldensians who died in the first world war, are both worth seeing. And finally the Waldensian Youth Centre and the Deaconess’s House, the centre of the nursing order that works in numerous hospitals and clinics. Just outside the town is the Waldensian Hospital, the first institute built to serve the Waldensian populations in the 19th century. And we must not forget the Ice Rink, the pride of the local population who follow the exploits of their local Ice Hockey team.

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houses a Museum of Mechanics and the Ball-bearing. It stands opposite the delightful Agnelli Village housing estate built for the workers. The town is divided into 5 districts known as Fumo (smoke), Nobili (noble), Municipio (Town hall), Russi (Russians) and Borgo di Sopra (Upper Village), which contains the 18th century church of San Pietro in Vincoli, built in the baroque style by the school of Juvarra on a hill overlooking the valley. The elegant Villa Agnelli, known as “the Castle”, was completed in 1718. The park features rare citrus, citrus, rose apple and bergamot trees, and is luxuriously decorated with shaded avenues and fountains. The architect is not known, although the name of Filippo Juvarra is mentioned, and it is probable that he may have supplied some drawings for the reconstruction or extension of an earlier building. The façade is similar to that of Madama Reale’s castle in Turin. The church of San Pietro in Vincoli, also built in the 18th century, in the baroque style by the school of Juvarra, stands on a hill overlooking the Chisone valley. We must not forget the local artisan traditions, for example the work of Giuliano Marconi, who creates pipes out of briarwood.

Continuing along the road, the next town is Pinasca and the difficult history of this Waldensian town and its twin town of Dubbione, is narrated in the Ethnographic Museum (‘Living in the Valley’). At the heart of an area of rich woodlands and pastures, in the 19th century the district was known for its leather tanneries, and the production of charcoal and walnut oil. Today cheese is still made, and mushrooms abound in the woods behind the parish church of Dubbione and the Catholic church of Pinasca, built on the ruins of an earlier Waldensian church.

The next stop is Perosa Argentina, where there also used to be a number of silver mines, in addition to the stone quarries that are still worked. Today it is the home of the Gouthier Comprehensive Institute and the Valli Chisone e Germanasca Mountain Community, whose headquarters are located in the Tron Park, and of an Exhibition of the Resistance and Air-raid shelters, both in Gay Park. The interesting baroque church of San Genesio stands majestically on top of a hill, and contains valuable works by the sculptor Augusto Rungaldier.

Crossing over the river at Perosa, you enter the narrow, tortuous Germanasca valley, which is crossed by a winding road that follows the Germanasca river through the towns of Perrero, Massello, Prali and Ghigo. The appeal of this valley, which is terraced initially, but harsh and steep later, lies in its ancient villages which keep old traditions alive, and where grandparents still tell stories about fairies and treasure troves.

The first village is Pomaretto which is protected by the Luigi Fort and the Banchette Tower, and its historical and cultural origins are displayed in three important Waldensian buildings, the hospital, the Convitto and the Latin School, a training college. The Convitto contains a permanent exhibition of ancient trades, an unusual collection of wooden models sculpted by Carlo Ferrero and dressed by his wife Enrichetta, and offers an excellent overview of local social history. The Pertusa Rock is also interesting, excavated to create a 40 metre irrigation tunnel that takes water from the Chisone. The surrounding vineyards still produce the delicate Ramie wine, and a delightful walk along the old mule path linking the outlying hamlets to Pomaretto, helps visitors to understand the role of vine-growing in the economy of the old villages.

Proseguendo si incontra Perrero, che fu, dal 1704 al 1708, la capitale della Serenissima Repubblica della Val San Martino, con Pomaretto, Inverso Pinasca e Chianaviere, detta anche ‘Repubblica del sole’, una zona franca sotto la tutela del re di Francia, che ambiva ad avere un avamposto in terra protestante. Fu fortificato già in epoca medievale, e, con le sue case alle pendici di un aspro sperone roccioso ai piedi del vallone di Maniglia, divenne crocevia commerciale e centro strategico. Ospita il tempio valdese accanto alla parrocchiale mariana, mentre a San Martino, nei pressi del vecchio cimitero, sono visibili i resti dell’omonima chiesa dell’XI secolo da cui prese il nome la valle. Perrero, inoltre, annovera tra i suoi nomi illustri la prima donna avvocato d’Italia, Lidia Poet, nata a Traverse. Sul versante opposto si apre il vallone di Faetto, con la spettacolare strada alpina che raggiunge, a quasi 2400 metri di quota, i laghetti della Cialancia. Superato Perrero la strada si biforca in due direzioni. Seguendo il ramo in direzione di Massello, si segnala un’interessante e facile passeggiata che porta fino a Balziglia, nel Vallone del Ghinivert, dove ebbe luogo un celebre episodio della resistenza valdese che fermò un intero esercito francese con quattrocento uomini: le memorie dell’impresa sono conservate sul posto in un piccolo museo.
The next village is Perrero, which was the capital of the Serene Republic of Val San Martino from 1704 to 1708, with Pomaretto, Inverso Pinasca and Chianavatore; it was also known as the “Republic of the Sun”, a free-trade area under the patronage of the king of France, who wanted an outpost in this Protestant land. It had been fortified in the Middle Ages and with its houses built on the slopes of a harsh rock spur at the foot of the Maniglia valley, it became a trading crossroads and strategic centre. The Waldensian church and Catholic church stand side by side, while the ruins of the 11th century church that gave the valley its name are visible in San Martino, near the old cemetery. Italy’s first female lawyer, Lidia Poet, was born in Travers, a hamlet of Perrero. The Faetto valley opens up on the other side of the river, with a spectacular mountain road that climbs up to the Cialancia lakes at an altitude of almost 2400 metres.

After Perrero the road divides. The fork towards Marsello follows an interesting, easy path to Balziglia, in the Ghinivert valley; a famous episode in Waldensian history occurred here when the resistance stopped an entire French army of four hundred soldiers, an exploit that is recorded in a small museum on the spot.

The fork to Prali is as narrow as it is panoramic, and it passes Paola, and the largest talc mine in Europe. Still partly active, it includes a museum and organises fascinating guided tours (www.scopriminiera.it – Tel. 0121 806987) in wheeled trucks that follow the miners’ footsteps.

Prali is in an enchanted valley at the Waldensian heart of the Cottian Alps. Once you pass the beautiful Rodoretto valley and the Waldensian museum in the Beckwith with school in the village, that focuses on the social history of the area, you enter the Prali plateau; above it are the Thirty Lakes of Envie, and the 2,868 metre peak of Cournour that overlooks the French park of Queyras. The old church and numerous rural buildings are still intact in the oldest nucleus known as Villa. And finally, you can climb further up to the Ghigo basin with its pastures and fir-woods, tourist and cultural facilities – the large historical museum in the old Waldensian church, the only place of worship that has survived the religious wars, and which hosted a thanksgiving ceremony for Waldensian exiles who returned to their valleys after the Glorious Return of 1689. The most important building in Prali is the large Waldensian ecumenical centre of Agape, which blends perfectly with the forest that surrounds it. Begun in 1948 by Tullio Vinay, it was built by volunteers, with the contribution of all the Waldensian churches in Europe, to host international meetings and seminars.

At this point we return to main road 23, and head for Fenestrelle, ‘finis terrae’ at the extreme eastern end of the land dominated by the Cottians, who were allied with Rome. Many people will associate the name of Fenestrelle with the San Car...

Nel cuore valdese delle Alpi Cozie, Prali è al centro di un’incantevole conca: superato il suggestivo vallone di Rodoretto e il museo valdese allestito nella scuola Beckwith del villaggio che documenta la storia sociale dell’area, si entra nell’altopiano di Prali, sormontato dai Tredici Laghi di Envie, dominato dalla vetta del Cournour, 2868 metri e affacciato sul parco francese del Queyras. Nel nucleo storico denominato Villa, sorge l’antica chiesa ancora intatta, così come le costruzioni rurali. Infine, salendo ancora, si raggiunge la conca di Ghigo, dove, tra pascoli e confine, si trovano gli insediamenti turistici accanto ai punti di attrazione culturale. A cominciare dal grande museo storico nel vecchio tempio valdese, l’unico edificio sacro sopravvissuto alle guerre di religione, che ospita per una cerimonia di ringraziamento gli esuli valdesi tornati alle loro valli dopo il Glorioso Rimpatrio del 1689. Fiore all’occhiello di Prali, il grande centro ecumenico valdese di Agape, in perfetta simbiosi con la foresta che lo avvolge. Iniziata nel 1948 per volontà di Tullio Vinay, l’opera fu realizzata col lavoro volontario e il contributo di tutte le chiese evangeliche europee, destinata ad ospitare incontri e seminari internazionali.

A questo punto si ritorna sulla statale 23, in direzione di Fenestrelle, monumento simbolo della Provincia di Torino (info 0121 83617 fenestrelle@montagnedoc.it), la ‘finis terrae’ all’estremo lembo orientale di quello che fu il dominio dei Cozii alleati di Roma. Ai più sarà nota per il forte San Carlo voluto da Vittorio Amedeo II per allontanare definitivamente i francesi che, arrampicato sul dorso della montagna, sbarra la valle dalle pendici del monte Orsiera fino al letto del Chisone con i forti S. Carlo, Tre Denti, Elmo, Valli, collegati da una scala coperta di 4.000 gradi. Anche il borgo medievale alle sue pendici ha fascino da vendere: dall’antico campanile otagonale della chiesa gesuitica all’organo dell’Ottocento nel parrocchiale di San Luigi, passando per la cappella seicentesca di Chambons e per l’antica chiesa del Priorato di San Giusto nella verde piana di Mentouilles ricca (come dice il nome) di piacentelli di menta. E poi, ovviamente, il forte, attrezzato per visite guidate e sede di numerosi eventi, tra cui spettacoli e concerti. Altro fiore all’occhiello del paese delle ‘piccole finestre’, sulla strada per il colle delle Finestre, è il centro di soggiorno di Pra Catinat nel parco del’Orsiera ricavato dall’ex Sanatorio Agnelli, modello europeo di didattica ambientale nel cuore di un’area montana verdissima, meta d’elezione degli escursionisti: dalle bergerie Jouglard e il rifugio Sellarie si sale al lago Carodnet alle falde dell’Orsiera, oppure agli incantevoli laghetti della Manica su cui torreggia la vetta della Cristalliera, la maggiore cima del parco naturale.

Poco oltre, lungo la statale 23, si consiglia il bivio per Usseaux, gioiello di architettura rurale montana, con i suoi murares. Nel borgo si passeggiava lungo i viottoli lastricati, all’ombra dell’antica parrocchiale di San Pietro e tra le splendide fontane seicentesche, il forno e il mulino restau- rati. Baciato in fronte dal sole, Usseaux offre uno spettacolare panorama dei pascoli che dal Chisone salgono ad ampie balze fino alla borgata Balboutet e a Pian dell’Alpe.
The fortress climbs up the mountainside, blocking the valley from the slopes of Mount Orsiera right down to the Chisone river, with the forts of S. Carlo, Tre Denti, Elmo and Vallì, linked by a covered stairway of 4,000 steps. The Medieval village on the mountainside is full of character: from the ancient octagonal bell-tower of the Jesuit church to the 19th century organ of the parish church of San Luigi, the 17th century chapel of Chambons and the old church of the Priory of San Giusto in the green plain of Montouilles, which is covered with plants of mint, as the name suggests. Then there is the fort itself, which organises guided tours, and is the venue for several events, including theatre and concerts. Another attraction of the town of the ‘small windows’ is the Pra Catina holiday home in the Orsiera Park, on the road to several events, including theatre and concerts. Another attraction of the town of the ‘small windows’ is the Pra Catina holiday home in the Orsiera Park, on the road to several events, including theatre and concerts.

A little further along main road 23 is the junction for Usseaux, a jewel of rural mountain architecture, where you can walk along streets paved with stone in the shadow of the ancient parish church of San Pietro and visit the splendid 17th century fountains, and the restored oven and mill. Bathed in sunshine, Usseaux offers a spectacular panorama of the pastures that extend from the Chisone in large terraces up to Borgata Balboutet and Pian dell’Alpe. Lovers of cheese and fit excursionists who like to walk through shepherds’ huts, alps and farms, can follow the military road which crosses the Finestre pass into the Susa valley, or follow the crest as far as Sestriere, passing the Gran Serin fort and Assietta trenches. This area was the theatre of war, and can be explored starting from the frozen lake of Laux, on whose banks the first Waldensian refugees settled, and which is reached from a junction on main road 23, shortly after the turning for Usseaux. The view takes in the Troncea valley and the ramparts of the Orsiera-Rocciavré park, and the high pastures above the forest of the Gran Bosco of Salbertrand. A genuine archaic, uncontaminated Alpine garden that is well worth a visit, like the splendid sundials in the village at the bottom of the valley. A path over the gentle slopes reached the Lago della Manica, an excellent point from which to observe Mount Cristalliera and the herds of moufflons which are often to be found on its slopes.