

il Po

along the big river



Province of Rovigo
Department of Tourism

il Po

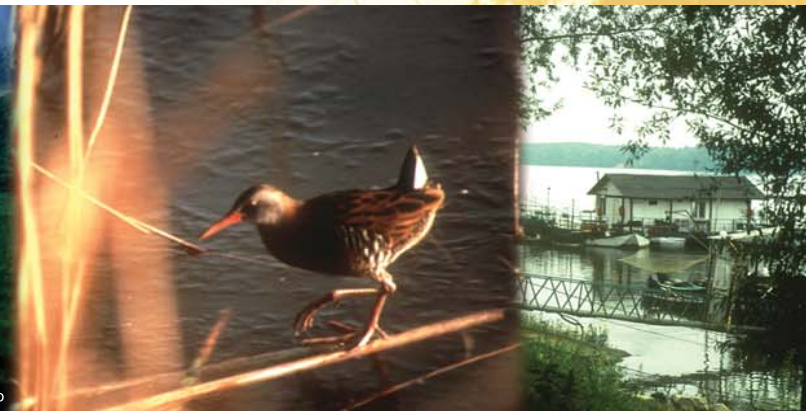
along the big river



photo by L. Bottaro



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Province of Rovigo
Department of Tourism

Province of Rovigo



Symbols

-  Railway Station
-  Docking
-  Ferry-boat
-  Tourist Information Office and Tourist Reception
-  Break Area
-  Museum
-  Industrial Archaeology handmade product
-  Naturalistic Emergency
-  Naturalistic path
-  Architectural Emergency
-  Villa
-  Archaeological site
-  Riding School
-  Horse-riding
- Nautical rowing centre

Introduction

It's with great pleasure that I am writing the introduction to this tourist guide. I wish this brochure may be helpful, however tiny this guidebook may seem, for those visitors who intend to travel along the "left bank of the Po river". The big Po river is acknowledged as the main environmental element of our territory, therefore its entire flow must be lived and discovered as a unique naturalistic and cultural reality. This brochure should be considered as complementary to the one that has formerly been issued on the Po Delta. It is intended to be an invitation to live all the suggestiveness of the flow of the Po river, that, like a friend, guides us in the discovery of real treasures of nature, art, history.

Pieluigi Valentini

Chairman of the District
Committee on Tourism



Foto di F. Meneghetti

On the left:
canoes at the Polesella
landing

Top:
Eddy between the villages
Trecenta and Sariano

On the right:
Fishing along the Po river



photo by F. Meneghetti

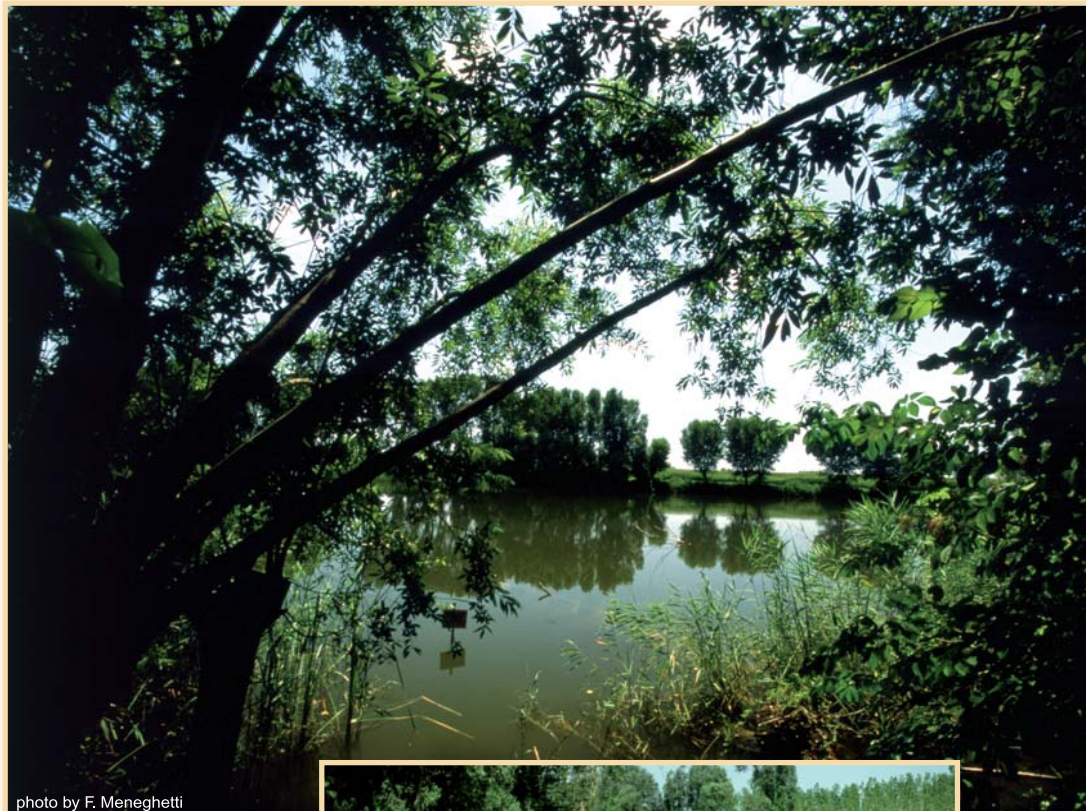


photo by F. Meneghetti

Foreword

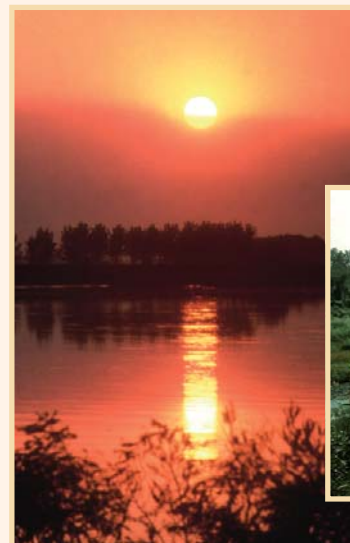
Along the left bank of the Po river

The Province of Rovigo is marked off by the two biggest Italian rivers: the Po and the Adige. It has its origin in the waterways that with their alluvial contribution gave rise to this western belt of the Po valley. This area is situated in the most southern part of the Veneto region. Its past is anything but univocal and flat, as it was marked by conflicts, which were extremely harsh at times. During the Middle Ages the Estensi family from Ferrara, the Scaligeri family from Verona, the Gonzaga family from Mantua, the Carraresi family

from Padua came up against each other, eventually the Republic of S. Marco prevailed on all of them.

Therefore a borderland, contended by different powers from the regions Veneto, Lombardi and Emilia that left their mark within the history of the Polesine area. The mark left by the two "Signorie" that from the XV century until 1797, date of Napoleon's arrival, was particularly strong. They divided the Polesine up into two parts: the Northern area under the influence of the "Serenissima" (Republic of S. Marco) and the Southern area controlled by the Este family (Ferrara), later replaced by the Papal State in 1598 after the death of Alfonso II d'Este which did not have any heir to the throne. The part of the Polesine controlled by Ferrara was called "Transpadana Ferrarese".. The border that divided it from the territory controlled by the Republic of S. Marco was not always well defined, it was mainly marked by rivers: Poazzo and Canabianco river in particular.

It was not until 1815 with the Congress of Vienna, with the simultaneous end of the political autonomy of the regions Veneto and Lombardia now under Austrian domination, that the natural borders of Polesine, the two big rivers Po and



Two naturalistic
views of great
charm: a sunset on
the river and a
blooming flood plain

Adige, natural lines were outlined. These territorial boundaries were later confirmed by the third War of Independence by the Italian State that recognized definitively as integral part of the Veneto region the original portion of inter-fluvial territory that made up the Province of Rovigo, also known as "Italian Mesopotamia".

However a secular history made up by uses, customs and traditions anything but homogeneous could not and should not be cancelled by a political-administrative decision, so that still today the coastal area of the river Po is still strongly influenced by Ferrara. The villages of Melara, Bergantino, Castelmassa and Calto, situated in the most western part mix with Mantua villages. This aspect enriches the natural vocation of Polesine as land of relations, open to different social and cultural influences, eager to offer its visitors a multiplicity of aspects linked tradition, and this can be seen especially as culinary specialities are concerned. The cuisine aspect has not to be underestimated.

It is with this awareness that we are about to follow a long itinerary divided into 7 stop-overs. We will mainly follow the bankside path along the left bank of the Po: from Melara, where the river enters the Polesine area until Papozze where the first two arms of the great waterway originate(Po in Venice and Po in Goro). This itinerary is rich mainly in environmental attractions, thanks to the bright games that nature offers on the water of the river, the white beaches that suddenly open up in the thick vegetation of the flood plains, undisputed reign of various species of birds, but also a very interesting route to follow thanks to the artistic and architectural aspects that a land having a millennial history can boast.



The Polesine itinerary along the left bank of the river Po starts from **Melara**, the town which is situated in the most western part of the Rovigo province. The environment here is very interesting from a naturalistic, artistic and architectural point of view. From the bankside road, visitors are mainly attracted by the right hand side, the water of the great river, the wooded margins close to the shore, swallows and seagulls flying on their heads. Since ancient times man has drawn precious



photo by L. Bottaro

Itinerary n. 1

Melara - Bergantino

means of sustenance from nature, elements such as honey, from which the place-name Melara derives, as the an authoritative Roman naturalist Plinio the Old suggested: "*Mellaria a melle colendo*". After the dark days of the Middle Ages the village reflourished in the X century, thanks to Empress Adelaide, wife of Ottone I, that donated Melara Court to the Benedictine Friars to drain the land and favour the flourishing of a thriving community. From the bankside road looking to the left, the village stands very close to the river bank. The big church dedicated to *S. Materno* immediately draws the visitors' attention. The church was designed in 1705 by Vincenzo Santini, the most appreciated XVIII century architect from Ferrara. Inside the archpriest quarters there are very interesting paintings among which the one depicting the *Madonna del Lume*, that a local historian, on the ground of archive researches, claims it can be ascribed to the great Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli. In front of the church, on the left hand side, stands the turret-shaped Bell-Tower. The belfry is much more antique than the church, because it was erected in 1404 on the remains of a pre-existing fortress. On the opposite side of the road there is the *Chigi*

Arch, a commemorative building that was built towards the middle of the XVII century by Cardinal Sigismondo Chigi. A visit to the *Town hall* is strongly recommended, as it was recently restored. Once it used to be the residence of the marquis *Villa*, with two slender pyramid chimney-pots. In the square, within a central flower-bed, there stands a monument dedicated to *Amos Bernini*, a patriot of the Italian Risorgimento, one of the most prominent characters of the Polesine area, who was engaged in the draining activities, a member of the Italian Parliament and Mayor of Rovigo. Inside the *Town Hall* some archaeological findings on pre-historical site are exhibited. They were found in the so-called



Top: Chigi Arch - Melara

Left: San Materno Church - Melara

Bottom: Town Hall - Melara



Mariconda area, where more than 3.000 years ago there was a village dating back to the Iron Age. *Villa Borghi Leati* stands out. It was restored very recently, it dates back to the XVI century and was rebuilt in the XVIII century; it has two great die ridges and it used to be the residence of the Viscount and the Estensi Governor. Back to the bankside road, taking the path in the direction of the river flow, we meet the little *Church of S. Croce*. It was built in the XVI century and it was recently restored. In the distance the structures of the modern carousel factories can be noticed. The talent of the inhabitants of Melara is well-known from the XIX century with the staging of the famous Carnival. In the last few years this embraced the most advanced technologies thus creating very sophisticated carousels that are also exported overseas to the United States, together with the fireworks manufactured in one of the most important Italian companies in the sector that has its headquarters here.



Top: S. Croce Church in Melara

Right: Parish Church in Bergantino



Our itinerary proceeds along the great hook designed by the river Po, at the summit of which stands **Bergantino**, that owes its name to a *brigantine*, i.e. a sailing vessel that can sail on rivers. Also in this case the first encounter we make is that with a blooming nature, that seems to invite us to a break near the running water. We then reach the wide flood plain composed mainly by willow groves, where the *White Willow tree* (*Salix alba*) prevails together with *False Indigo Bushes* (*Amorpha fruticosa*) and by examples of *White Poplar* (*Populus alba*) together with a few *Black Poplars* (*Populus nigra*). Some trees are covered by a liana called *Sycios angulatus* that during the summer gives a luxuriant aspect to the scrub, evoking views which are typical of tropical forests. As far as birds are concerned, apart from many examples of passerines (*Wrens*, *Tomtits*, *Robin Redbreasts*, *Ouzels*, *Pendulines*), the area is steadily populated by *Royal and common Seagulls*, *Mallards*, *Little Grebes*, *Baldicoots*, *Moorhens*, *Grey herons* and *Dwarf herons*. The core of the village are Vittorio Emanuele street and Matteotti square. The latter is marked off by the historical buildings of Bergantino. *The Parish Church* was built at the end of the XVII century, next to it stands a streamlined bell-tower designed and built by Vincenzo Santini in 1731. It contains valuable paintings among which the "*Pala della Sacra Famiglia*" (Sacred Family) made by the Bolognese painter Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747). On the northern side of the square there is *Diani Palace*, historical building, its main feature is a central turret which was erected in

the XVI century (on the ruins of a small fort destroyed by the Venetians during the Salt War) by Giovanni Romei, who was appointed Earl of Bergantino by the Este family. Carlo Diani purchased the building in 1841

Diani Palace - Bergantino



and had the drawbridge and the pit that still surrounded it removed. On the southern side of the square there stands *Strozzi Palace*, that derives from the extension and refurbishment of an old hunting lodge. One portion of the building hosts the *National Museum of Carousels*, that documents the evolution of the entertainment offered since the Middle Ages by the so called "factory of dreams".. This activity has strong roots in Bergantino Melara where thriving manufacturing companies extend up to the town of Castelnuovo Bariano. The area is considered the "Districh of Carousels" from an economic point of view.



Museum of Carousel in Bergantino



Itinerary n. 2 Castelnovo Bariano, Castelmassa, Calto

preexisting fortress. Today this town looks undoubtedly modern: even the parish church was totally rebuilt in 1929 in Gothic revival style. The XVIII century *Parish Church in S. Pietro Polesine* is more interesting from an historical and artistic point of view. Its main feature is constituted by the two twin bell-towers placed at the two sides of the façade. The village of S. Pietro Polesine is situated 6 kilometres inland, in an area that was reclaimed in the XVII century during the great draining works made by the earls of Bentivoglio. In this area there are some

interesting archaeological findings dating back to different periods, preserved in the building that formerly hosted the elementary school, and now houses the *Civic Museum*, inaugurated in 1982 by Castenovo Bariano Town Council in association with the members of CPSSAE (Polese Centre on Archaeological and Ethnographical studies). The museum exhibits dmire pre-historic findings of a pile-dwelling village dating back to the Bronze Age (XVIII sec. a. C.) which was located in nearby Canar; moreover there are show-pieces dating back to the Roman Age and there is a remarkable collection of pre-renaissance ceramics which were found in Torretta, at the base of the

ancient tower which marked the border between the Veneto Republic and the Duchy of Ferrara and Mantua.

Let us go back to Castelnovo on the bankside road, beyond which the majestic river unravels, ahead of which there is a wide flood plain and a fluvial island rises. Poplar trees dominate on the rest of the vegetation, alternated by various species of shrubs and flowers. In the last few years one portion of the flood plain has been hosting researchers conducting experiments on phyto-depuration sponsored by the University of Padua, exploiting the natural purifying power of reeds (*Phragmites communis*).

The bankside road undergoes a deviation to give way to the great bridge connecting the area to Sermide, that in 1971 replaced the boat transportation service, which had been planned after the unification of Italy, but came into being only in 1902. In the flood plain we can see a big *furnace* which today is used only in part, it is there to witness a period in which all along the Po there where many brick manufacturing companies that exploited the clay of the river.

The landing stage of the Nautical Club means that we have already reached the town of **Castelmassa**. We are immediately attracted by the rectangular square that stands from below the bank, closed at the opposite side by the beautiful *church dedicated to S. Stephen*. This very original square was chosen for the cover of the famous book "*Don Camillo*" by *Giovannino Guareschi*, a writer that

The furnace in
Castelnovo Bariano



here is commemorated by a plaque since 1992. The church was built in 1674, and its main feature is an elegant balcony with overlapping orders, reaching its climax with a curved gable that hosts a big shell. The church has a coeval slender bell-tower, and it contains interesting works by painters of the Veneto and Ferrara Schools, among which one dedicated to S. Francis ascribed to *Guercino*.

On one side of the square there is a solid portico, on the opposite side, among the other buildings, the remodelled *Palace Bentivoglio* stands out, next to there is the "*Oratory del SS. Nome di Maria*", on the façade it has three elegant XVIII century sculptures by Andrea Ferrari. From square "Libertà" let us proceed to square "della Repubblica" where we find *Palazzo Conti*, the Town Hall



Top: Castelmassa
square and
Bentivoglio Palace

Bottom: flood
plain



and *Palazzo Riminaldi*, that hosts the "Banca Agricola Mantovana"..

On the same square the beautiful Arcade of *Theatre Cotogni*, is an interesting XIX century building that has been waiting restoration works for years. The renovation of the "*Tempietto del Crispo*" is even more urgent. This name derives from the name of the totally degraded architectural complex to which it belonged and that in the XVII century was owned by the family of the marquis Crispi Manfredi. The small church dedicated to S. Rocco and S. Sebastian, built in the XVIII century, today is in a severe state of neglect. It is situated in Ca' Matte, on the road that connects the town with the famous sugar factory Eridania, near the big industrial area, the main economic and occupational reference point of the area.

Let us go back to the bankside road towards **Calto**, with a look at the waters of the river Po and at the vegetation that in some points can develop next to the shore behind

candid beaches. To our left the countryside opens up. It is divided into regular rectangles and its picturesque colours change according to the seasons and to the crops cultivated. In Calto there



are flood plain as well with a private pier, where some boats are docked. On the opposite side, beyond the bank, a straight road leads to the main square of the village with a church and the town hall. The *Parish* church id dedicated to S. *Rocco* and it dates back to 1707. Next to it there is the vicarage, a Renaissance building refined by a beautiful portico. The *Town Hall* building derives from a XVIII century building that has been totally renovated in different moments; in the façade there is a commemorative plaque for Costantino Munari, a "carbonaro" that the Austrians sent to the prison Spielberg together with other patriots from the Polesine area, among whom the earl Oroboli di Fratta. The most flamboyant historical building is *Villa Fioravanti* (now *Roveri*), dating back to the XVIII century. It is not far from the centre, following a typology deriving from the military Emilia ar-chitecture, it has two side bodies like protection turrets to the central part. The name Fioravanti reminds us of two important contemporary artists: Edvardo and Estevan, considered among the 100 painters that better represent the XIX century Po valley art. Going out of the centre and taking once more the bankside road, we are attracted by a very peculiar hamlet. The houses here, that we wish will soon be restored - have preserved the original typologies of the past: we are in *Co' dei Mulini*, a place-name that reminds us of the main activity of the area: milling.

Top: Cotogni
Theatre in
Castelmassa

Right: Parish S.
Rocco Church in
Calto



Top: Parish Church in S. Pietro
Polesine

Left: Parish -Church in
Castelnovo Bariano





Let us proceed along the bankside road, around the flood plain that in the **Salara** area becomes really wide, with a thick poplar forest in the midst of which a private dock opens up. In the past in this point the river branched and then rejoined near Ficarolo, thus creating a wide island that was within the jurisdiction of Mantua. Then the northern part of the river gradually silted up, therefore the entire fluvial island called "*Bosco Papino*" (Pope's wood) rejoined the Polesine land. However it was not until 1847 that an administrative acknowledgement sanctioned that the wide wooden area was controlled by the province of Rovigo and not by that of Mantua. Therefore the village of Salara that stood on the branch that has disappeared today is a bit distant from the Po river. In the past this river was used for transportation of salt from the sea to this village by boat, the place name derives from the word salt. In the past the *S. Croce Benedictine Monastery* was an important place in Salara. This great architectural complex (today widely renovated and adapted to private homes) was at monks' s h a p e

Itinerary n. 3

Salara, Sariano, Trecenta

necessities but was also a hospital and hostel offering a safe shelter to travellers from the XII century onwards.

The church and the town hall are situated at the



Next:
fluvial
docking

centre of the village. The XVIII century *Parish church* is dedicated to S. Valentine: the patron saint is remembered in the painting "*Jesus crucified with the Saints Valentine and Carlo Borromeo*", by the painter Ercole Sarti, known as the dumb of Ficarolo, who was active in the Ferrara area in the first decades of the XVII century. Some findings of Roman origin are preserved in the *Town Hall*, to witness how ancient this village is. The cultivation of strawberry, and the Fair that takes place every year at the end of May constitute an interesting occasion to visit Salara. Let us now follow the road towards Trecenta to reach the small village named **Sariano**, where our attention is drawn by the peculiar s h a p e

the historical building, surmounted by a central Tower known as "The Castle". It is in fact "*Casa Pepoli-Spalletti*" which was built in the XVI century



Rural building in the countryside near Salara

on a pre-existing medieval fortress the tower of which, embodied in the house, still remains. Next to the owner's house there is a cottage that was adapted to cattleshed and hayloft (also this has a turret on the side used as a pigeon-house) that emphasizes the mainly rural function that this complex has taken on over the centuries as against the original. Nearby there is the *Church of S. Maurelio*, which was built at the beginning of the XVIII century incorporating partially a XV century chapel, that still has precious frescoes, waiting to be appropriately restored. Between Sariano and Trecenta we find an area which has a very strong naturalistic appeal with many small lakes known as "*Gorghi*". They are spring sheets of water (probably a inheritance of the ancient routes of the Po river) that are

Bottom: Santa Croce Monastery in Salara



Top: Pepoli Spalletti Palace, known as "Il Palazzon" in Trecenta



Portal leading to Pepoli-Spalletti Court in Sariano

real natural oasis, in which common reeds coexists with Poplar trees and Alders offering a natural habitat for avifauna: *Moorhens*, *Mallards*, *Baldicoots* as well as *rodents*, in fact there is a colony of coypus. Let us proceed on our fascinating path among eddies, also characterized by the presence of interesting rural estates, like for example *Gaspera Court*, with a wide owner's house next to a four-storey tower and an elegant hayloft with five semicircular arcades alternated with pilaster strips. Then we reach **Trecenta**, the so-called "*Palazzon*", that is *Pepoli-Spalletti Palace* seems to greet us. It is a prominent building that according to the rules of Emilia military architecture has the central part backward as against the two side bodies shaped like a turret. The palace was built on an ancient massive building probably used as a lock to control the waters flowing into the Canalbianco, recently restored. Inside there is a peculiar helicoidal staircase and a spacious reception room with

balcony and XVII century decorations. This is the proof of the entertaining role the palace had, in fact in the past it hosted lavish moments for the high society.

Let us now proceed on to the central square where there is *Villa Trebbi*, XVIII century building that has been widely renovated and currently hosts the town Hall. This was a reference point in the first decades of the XIX century for the "Carbonari" meetings in Trecenta. Another XVII century building faces the square, dominated by a *Tower* which is the symbol of Trecenta, it hosts the library, then there is the XIX century *Theatre*.

Nearby we also find the XVIII century *Biasi Bellini Palace*, where the Institute for Agriculture has its headquarters today. This building was a legacy by the brothers Mario and Teodosio Bellini, that lived here. Across the XIX and XX century they experimented innovative cultivation techniques, thus giving a strong revitalising impulse to agriculture in Polesine. Another famous personality who lived in Trecenta in the same period was *Nicola Badaloni* - remembered in a monument placed in front of the primary school. He was very



The Gaspera eddy- Trecenta



Top: Villa Trebbi, the Trecenta Town Hall

On the side: building with turret in the square of Trecenta



Bambino. Also the church interior is beautiful. Among the various painting there is one dating back to the XVI century: the "*Adoration of the Magi*" by Carlo Bononi. Near the Parish Church there is a nice "*tempietto*" dedicated to the "Beata Vergine", with oval plan, known also as the temple of the "Madonna della Cintura", or even as "S. Chiara" due to an image of the saint. Also this was designed by V. Santini.



On the side: Bellini Palace in Trecenta



From the digression that led us to Trecenta, let us go back towards the Po river, heading on to **Ficarolo**. Back to the bankside path, we are attracted by a rural ensemble which is rather composite and has an ancient look: we have reached *Ca' Polesine*, characterized by a succession of blocks and lean-to built over the centuries within the so-called *Bosco Papino* area, that we have already mentioned in Salara. We also find a big brick building dominated by a high chimney that reveals what this ensemble was in the past: the *sugar factory Eridania*, formerly known as *Bellini-Nuvolari*. The factory was started in 1901 by the rich Bellini family from Trecenta, whose entrepreneurial skills have already been illustrated in the previous itinerary.



Ca' Polesine - Ficarolo

Itinerario 4

Ficarolo, Gaiba, Stienta

The industrial complex was abandoned 20 years ago, the wash basins now are inhabited by various kind of birds, such as the *Night Heron* and the *Grey Heron*.

The centre of the village is marked by an eye-catching leaning *Tower Bell* next to *S. Antonino Church*, dominating the square. It is a slender tower, 72 metres high, in original making as the rest of the church. Both were designed in 1763 by the Ferrara architect Gaetano Barbieri. The façade of the parish church inspired by traditional models of Renaissance architecture looks very pretty, however the interior of the temple is really amazing: it has an unexpected oval plant and elaborate decorations, in line with the astonishing effect typical of baroque art. Also the painting are very interesting: they were painted by Ercole Sarti, Giuseppe Ghedini and Alberto Mucchiati, three artists from Ficarolo very active among the Ferarra painters in the XVII and XVIII centuries. The religious ensemble strongly influences the centre of Ficarolo, due also to the presence of a *big arcade* that connects the church to the vicarage, by architect Barbieri. The building has a positive stage effect and circumscribes the square thus giving it a pleasant sense of intimacy as if in an open air sitting-room.

Not far from here there is also the interesting XVII century "*Chiesa del Carmine*". This church is open to the public only on the occasion of liturgical festivities. Then at the centre of a beautiful park, there is the elegant *Villa Schiati*

Giglioli which now hosts the Town Hall. It is a late XVI century stone building, wide turrets on the sides culminating with substantial pinnacles. It was embellished in the XIX century by an elegant



Top: Villa Schiati Giglioli - Ficarolo



On the left: S. Antonino Church - Ficarolo

double stairway.

Some plaques remember that some famous celebrities stayed in the palace, among which *Christine of Sweden* in 1655 and *General Cialdini* in 1866 during the Third War of Indipendence set his headquarters here. These historical memories highlight only in part the importance that this village had in the past. The name of Ficarolo is linked to two particularly dramatic moments: one having a natural nature, the other having a military nature. The first is the "Rotta di Ficarolo"- the flood- which took place in the middle of the XII century (some people think it was a spontaneous event, whereas others claim it was provoked by a fellow named Sicardo). After this event the destiny of the river Po changed, from then on in fact it

abandoned the main arm south of Ferrara towards Ravenna, to originate the new course called Po of Venice.

The most important military episode in which Ficarolo was involved as battlefield, took place during the Salt War fought between 1482 and 1484 between Estensi and Venetians: the fortress of Ficarolo where the Estensi troops were barricated resisted a long time to the assault of the Venetians, that eventually won, allowing the honours of war to their enemies at the moment of the surrender. Nothing is left of the fortress which had been armed by Ercole I d'Este, who had among his defenders Federico di Montefeltro from Urbino who died during the war against the Venetians.

Let us therefore go up the backside road again to meet once more the big river, known also as "Padus padrone" whose sight commands respect and admiration. Next to the shore from the side of the water the flood plain gets wider. It is partly cultivated with poplar trees and partly with plants that grew spontaneously. The bankside road follows a hook of the river, in the middle of which there is the *Boschina island*, with a luxuriant nature.

Let us go back to our path until we reach **Gaiba**. The name of this place derives from the word "gaybo" that means flow of water. The core of the



S. Giuseppe Church - Gaiba

village is very close to the embankment and is assembled around *S. Giuseppe church*, built by the marquis Fiaschi to act as a "praegrande et spatiosum" oratory , then it became the parish church in 1734. It has a single wide nave and has an exquisite wooden carved pulpit and a XVIII century painting portraying the *Adoration of the Magi*.

The beautiful *Villa Fiaschi Stampanoni* stands nearby. It has XVI century lines however it dates back to the first half of the XVIII century. The annexed *Chapel dedicated to S. Anne* is in rococo style and it is embellished by a painting by Cignaroli inspired to the saint. Near Caselle and the embankment there are the melancholic remains of an ancient *Benedicine court*.

Following the bankside road in the Gaiba area, we enter the big *Bonello flood plain*. The landscape here is peculiar and is different from the other flood plains we have met so far: here there are clear signs of the presence of human beings: there are farms and group of buildings which are not totally abandoned, a recently restored *Oratory dedicated to S. Carlo Borromeo*. Along the bankside road we are getting close to **Stienta** and we meet a restaurant, whereas on the main bank there is a riding school that organizes horse excursions along the Po, we therefore recommend a pleasant stop here. Our itinerary continues with *Villa Camerini-Bertelè*, now *Bonfiglioli*, harmonic XVIII building inspired to the rules of the Emilia tradition, with turrets on the sides; at the back there is a beautiful cottage with airy arcades.

Further on, at the side of the river, there is a landing place, near the village which is dominated by the *parish church*. Its façade is

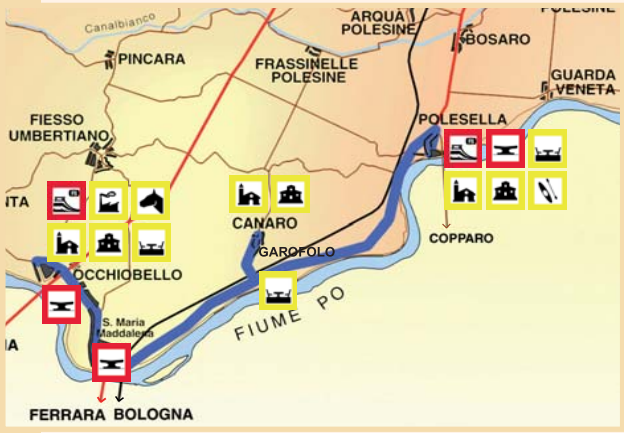


Top: oratory dedicated to C. Borromeo in the flood plain in Gaiba



Left: Villa Camerini Bertelè - Stienta

oriented towards the river, and dates back to the end of the XVIII century but it has been partly restored - as the tower bell - after the damage suffered after a Second World War air raid. In the presbytery there are XX century frescoes by the Bolognese painter *Antonio Maria Nardi* and a *Chapel dedicated to S. Rita from Cascia*. Finally it is worth mentioning the XVII century *Madonna di S. Genesio Oratory* built in the Stienta countryside near Zampine. Many people used go to this small sanctuary because it contained an miraculous image of the Virgin. The oratory belonged to a Benedictine farm, as some remains show.



Our itinerary proceeds in the direction of **Occhiobello**; the name of this town means "a good view for the eye" on the river Po, a panorama that many painters immortalized and highly appreciated by naturalists. Also in this case the first encounter is that with the flood plain, today silent companion of the river but enlivened by the various activities linked to the river in the past. This place inspired some pages of the world-famous book "The mill on the Po" by Riccardo Bacchelli, in which the local boat and mill builders are depicted. The mills, once scattered from Melara to the mouth of the river, exploited the locomotive power of the water and had a strategic economic function. Moreover they were the scenery of important episodes of history linked to Carlo Cavriani from Occhiobello, from the moment when the Po, after the Congress of Vienna, became the border between the Veneto region controlled by the Austrians and the Papal State, more permeable to patriotic ideas. Love and fear: these two feelings are interlaced in Occhiobello: on November 14th 1951 the leaks of the great flood that inundated Polesine originated in the villages Bosco and Malcantone. A

Itinerary n. 5 Occhiobello, Canaro, Polesella

monument commemorates the tragedy which took place more than half a century ago, thus witnessing the will to act with determination for the hydraulic safety of the whole Polesine. Let us leave the flood plain to reach the centre of the village dominated by the XVII century façade of the *S. Lorenzo Church*, by Vincenzo and Angelo Santini. The artistic confessionals and the choir inside have been ascribed to Brustolon, whereas the frescos and the bell-tower were severely damaged by a Second World War bombing. On the way towards Eridania we encounter *Villa Savonarola*, which in the past was the country residence of the famous family. Girolamo Savonarola, the upright friar who was sent to the stake after a political quarrel in Florence, probably lived here during his youth. Today the villa has become a beautiful hotel.



Right:
View of the Po river
and a monument
commemorating the
1951 flood

Left:
S. Lorenzo Church
in Occhiobello

Next to the villa there is the *S. Gaetano Oratory* in late baroque style; inside there is a tower englobed in a cottage. At the two sides of the road that connects Occhiobello to the village of S. Maria Maddalena, dozens of important businesses were set up and offer very different products and services. This was the result of the proximity to Ferrara which is just beyond the bridge on the Po. *S. M. Maddalena church* is quite modern, it was built in 1952 by architect G. B. Scarpari from Adria. The itinerary then follows the flow of the river; in this part the banks were reinforced in the past fifty years in order to prevent floods. The Po often flows along woodlands, whereas on



the left in the countryside, we can spot the linear profile of the XVI century *Casa Arioste*. For a few kilometres along the Polesine bank the countryside is the typical landscape we are getting used to, with some scattered houses, until we reach the **Paviole** hamlet in the Canaro village, where we find the harmonious and elegant *Villa Martelli Piccioli*. It is a XVIII century building with a



On the side:
Villa Morosini -
Polesella

central body embellished with triple lancet windows. Making a little deflection we can reach the centre of **Canaro** pointing at the Tower Bell near *S. Sofia Parish Church* built at the end of the XVII century. The church has a curved tympanum and is particularly famous for the sculpture "*The last supper*" on an altar-paliotto in Carrara marble. The closest path to reach the bankside road is to cut through the village of **Garofolo**, famous because the painter Benvenuto Tisi known as "*Il Garofalo*" was born here. He was one of the most appreciated artists of the Ferrara school and was called also indicated as the Ferrara Raffaello. Proceeding along the bank we are attracted by some buildings in the countryside below. One of them, *Villa Breda*, is of great pleasure. Recently restored, It is also known as "*Il Palazzo*". Probably It used to be a Benedictine court, the interior was made with the most modern equipment to record and listen to music. Now it hosts the famous "*Umbi Club*" used by the famous pop star Zucchero for rehearsals and recordings and also for entertaining moments along the Po.

The next stop is **Polesella**, a village that was particularly thriving at the end of the XV century after the passage from the Estensi to the Serenissima domination after the Salt war (1482-84). Venice made it also an important river port, as it was strategic due to the presence of the river Fossa, that started from the Po and reached the Canabianco allowing people to get to inland

places sailing up rivers, one of these place is Fratta, situated on the river Scortico. The anti-flood measures here are vital for the life of these villages; here the river undergoes a dangerous loop: the so-called "*Sette Moli*" that is seven dykes to slack off the waters. The "*Sostegno della Fossa*" is another important containment created at the beginning of the XVI century by the Ferrara architect Biagio Rossetti to control the flow of the waters of the system Po - Fossa. Unfortunately all these efforts belong to the past as in the 1950s the river Fossa was silted up to create a large road and green spaces.

The Venetian presence in Polesella is still very visible in the beautiful villas that very built from the XVI century onwards by the Serenissima's noble families: first of all *Villa Morosini*, on the



Top:
Villa Martelli
Piccioli in
Paviole,
Canaro



On the side:
Villa Selmi
in Polesella

On the
side: one
of the
seven
docks in
Polesella



Po, doge Francesco Morosini's marvellous scenographic country residence ascribed to the architect Scamozzi built at the end of the XVI century near Borgo S. Maura, near the flood plain; then *Villa Rosetta-Chierighin* built along the Fossa at the end of the XVII century: two wide double porticos are at each side of the central body, the chapel is ascribed to architect Longhena; on the opposite side we encounter the XVIII century *Villa Armellini*, also known as "Sette Teste" due to the seven masks placed in the arches of the portals; just outside the village there stands *Villa Selmi-Serafini*, XVIII century building, partially renovated at the beginning of the XIX century, together with the park ascribed to Jappelli, now converted into a restaurant. Along the track of the Fossa there is also the *Parish Church* inaugurated in 1735. The recent renovation works sponsored by the Municipal Authorities allowed to restore the original architectural physiognomy of the ancient apse in the church of the Augustinians, the rest was destroyed by a hurricane together with the XVI century *Palazzo Grimani*. The building now is now open to the public as Civic Hall.



Our itinerary goes on in the direction of **Guarda Veneta**, situated in front of Guarda Ferrarese. In the Middle Ages these two places were under the same parish, leading people to think that it was a single village, until the Po, after the Ficarolo flood excavated its new bed. When the Serenissima took possession of the village on the left side of the Po, simultaneously with Polesella (Salt war 1482-84), Guarda Veneta became an important point of reference, troops with sentries alternated four times a day to ward enemies from the river. The toponym *Quarti* comes from here, it is the name of the hamlet, now almost uninhabited, situated in the flood plain before entering the core of the village: here it is still possibile admire what's left of *Villa Libanovo*, elegant XVIII century building as the



Top: ruins of Villa Libanovo - Guarda V. - in Quarti

On the side: Parish Church in Guarda Veneta



Itinerary n. 6

Guarda Veneta, Crespino

two elaborated portals demonstrate. Fishing and ship building used to be the two prevailing activities in Guarda, the sturgeon is greatly valued here. Today it is still possible to listen to the story-teller Giulietto Bernardinello, the last survivor of times that seem very distant nowadays, fascinating stories about the strong relationship between people and the river. Times have rapidly changed, however in Guarda one of the most traditional feasts is still celebrated every here: it takes place the "*di d'la Sensa*" (Ascension day), and its climax is the blessing of the waters of the river in the Moia hamlet, a toponym meaning "wet", because it was frequently flooded by the Po.

Sheep farming has still another tenacious representative: Rodolfo Colò, every day this man takes his 150-sheep flock to crop grass along the banks of the Po; below which there is a village gathered around the Town Hall and the *Parish Church*. This latter has ancient origins but it was completely restored in the mid-XVIII century, it

was embellished by *frescoes* ascribed to the magic brush of the Venetian landscaper G. B. Canal, another evidence of the tight relation between the village and the Serenissima. Following our itinerary we reach **Crespino**, a village that like Villa Marchesana and Papozze, never fell under the Venetian dominion, remaining in the political control of Ferrara until Napoleonic times. The beautiful *Parish Church* is an evidence of this aspect: it was built by the Ferrara architect Angelo Santini, like the one in Occhiobello. The façade is particularly elaborated, it is intersected by semi-columns, embellished by niches that host statues of saints and completed by a curved gable on the top of which there is a cross with pinnacles in different shapes. The three-aisle has a solemn presbytery with remarkable paintings, among which there is a beautiful XVI century altarpiece by Benvenuto Tisi from Garofolo depicting the *Virgin in throne with the baby, S. Francis and S. Maria Magdalena*.

The wide square in front has a XIX century portico on the right side, where there is the *Town Hall*. It was dedicated to Fetonte, the son of the God of Sun that, according to Greek mythology, fell on the bank of the Po hit by one of Zeus's lightnings while he was incautiously riding his father's solar cart.

The dock built in this flood plain is dedicated to Fetonte. It had been in a state of neglect for

Villa Sarti Savonarola in Crespino



years, but It was recently regenerated thanks to the valorization of autochtonal plants and the creation of an equipped area with wooden benches and table, stone fireplaces for picnics. In the past his area had a key role in the economic and social life of Crespino. At the beginning of the XIX century, the historic archives record episodes of rebellion against foreign invaders and severe repressive measures such as the beheading of Giovanni Albieri, a fisherman, in 1806. This episode is remembered by a plaque in XX September square. This death and the deprivation of the right of citizenship to the whole Crespino community was the harsh punishment to the anti-Napoleonic rebellion; in 1819



Top: "Virgin in throne with the Baby, S. Francis, and S. Maria Magdalena" painting by - Benvenuto Tisi from Garofolo, Crespino

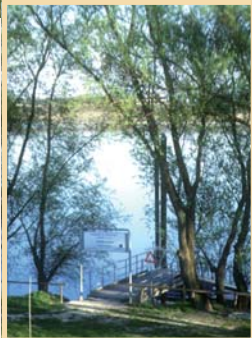
On the side: Parish church in Crespino



Eleuterio Felice Foresti, praetor and an activist in the Polesine Carboneria, was sent by the Austrains to the Spielberg prison, then he was exiled to America. Near the Po, beneath the embankment, we find S. *Antony Oratory*, the local religious community is strongly linked to this church, on June 13th the feast of Padua's saint is celebrated by a long procession along the bank of the rivers. Very close there is one of the most valuable buildings from an architectural point of view: the *Palace of Pio - Falcò princes*, (Savoia's relatives), built in the XVII century and later enlarged and constantly renovated in the neoclassical period. The residential corpus has two overlapping arcades with a windowless penthouse and has rear wings on the sides. The park hosts many secular plants and there is a road that connects the villa to the Po embankment beyond which there used to be a private dock. Another interesting building beyond the square is *Villa Marzolla*, especially famous for the *monumental XIX century stable*, on three floors and with three portals, at the sides and in the centre, culminating with a tympanum.



Along the Po flood plains it is possibile to meet many oasis and nautical docks, as in Crespino



Villa Marzolla Crespino



Going out of the centre, our attention is drawn by due neighbouring buildings very valuable from an architectural point of view: the XVII century *Villa Sarti Savonarola, Tisi*, with a clean linear façade with portholes in the attic ; and *Villa Sarti Savonarola, Giancesini*, XIX century building with a beautiful park hosting secular trees. Returning to Feronte square to get back to the bank, we notice some interesting buildings, like the peculiar *House of the Two Towers*: in the XIX century Vincenzo Caravieri, one of the Carbonari, condemned to prison by the Austrains, lived here.



The next step is in the district of Villanova Marchesana in **Canal Novo**, a village that rose on the "new channel" that is a new stream that was originated by the terrible 1152 flood that led to the destruction of Gavello abbey. Trying to escape from the destructive waters, some Benedictine monks found shelter in the new hamlet, thus creating a new court in *S.Lorenzo Oratory*. This church was restored many times and it became *parish church* only in 1956, the tower bell was built ten years later. North of the church, beyond the provincial road, there stand *Villa Casaucchio - Drago*. On the side of it there is a big "barchessa" - an additional building used as stable or warehouse - with twelve semicircular arcades, some of which have been closed. However the village is famous mainly for its wide flood plain which stretches over 30 hectares. In it there are two *furnaces*, that have been active for a long time. Now they have been abandoned but are considered interesting examples of industrial archaeology waiting to be restored and valorized. The recent intervention that made a part on the flood plain exploitable as a river berth and

Itinerariy n.7 Canal novo, Villanova Marchesana, Papozze

recreational area was easier to make. The flood plain has a particularly lush vegetation, it is an important landmark for the rich fauna and is the ideal place for various species of birds. Meanwhile we have reached **Villanova Marchesana**, a place that took this name from the ancient Villanova Burgellorum (Burgelli's), after it became a possession of the marquis Nicolo III d'Este at the beginning of the XV century. The *parish church* is located by the embankment. It was rebuilt at the end of the XVIII century in the Estensi's style; the tower bell was built in the mid-XVII century. Going along the bankside road we encounter the 4-storey *Daclon palace*, built in 1834 by a French official of the Napoleonic army. He fell in love with a beautiful girl of the village to whom he Furnaces in a flood plain in Canal Novo



Parish Church
in Villanova
Marchesana



dedicated the building. Then we can admire the monumental *Villa Luisa's Stable* made up of seven semicircular arcades, unfortunately no trace is left of the neighbouring owner's house that had to be knocked down to allow the reinforcement of the river bank. After that we find the XVIII century *Villa Camerini*, now *Brogiato*, which was built where once there used to be a Carthusian's friars Monastery; the Oratory has survived and is placed next to the villa. Along the bank in Santi, neighbouring with Papozze, we notice the ramp to *ferryboat* (the last one that has remained in the Polesine area where the Po flows) that connects the Veneto side to the Emilia side.

Heading to **Papozze**, the village where the Park of the Po Delta starts. This place-name derives from Teobaldino Papucius, the first owner of the territory that in the XIII century sold this vast area to Querini brothers from Venezia. Soon the place returned under the influence of Ferrara obtaining from the Estensi privileges that remained in force until the Congress of Vienna with the arrival of the Austrians. However the recent history of Papozze is linked to the 1952 flood, after which the local authorities decided to rebuild the main core of the village beyond the

embankment, that formerly was in the flood plain. Dozens of exquisite buildings were knocked down in this way Papozze lost his historical heritage. The *Parish Church* was saved because it already was placed beyond the bank in front of the river. The present building dates back to the mid-XIX century, from a project of the Venetian architect G. B. Meduna. It is embellished by many works of art, among which the Madonna del Rosario, ascribed to Scarsellino and a painting depicting S. Philip and S. James, probably by Garofolo. Beyond the flood plain, in front of the church, there is the verdant *Mezzano Island*, now undisputed kingdom of nature. Until the beginning of last century some people lived on it, an evidence is the presence of XVIII century *Villa Zotti*, known as *Ca' Mezzano*, which is unfortunately in a state of severe degradation. This villa is famous for its *Chapel* dedicated to S. Carlo Borromeo, that was said to

Ferry boat in Santi



Villa Lardi
Zangirolami in
Panarella

Meanwhile we have reached the village of **Panarella**, whose past is linked more to the one of Adria that to the one of Papozze, in fact this village was under the Serenissima's influence in the XVI century. Next to Panarella's Parish Church there is the XVI century's residence of the noble family *Villa Lardi*, now *Zangirolami*. Its façade is traversed by two chimneys and enriched by a colonnaded pronao which was added later. According to traditional stories, in 1782 Pio VI stopped at the villa and was greeted enthusiastically by the local population.

Today the village is also famous for its *flood plain*, which is very interesting from an environmental point of view: it is a W.W.F - managed natural oasis, with a wood hosting mainly the white willow and a paludal area with common reeds, reed-maces and aquatic mint. Here we also find many kinds of frogs and birds,

have slept here in the night between February the 7th and the 8th 1580, during a trip from Milan to Venice along the Po river. Proceeding on the Po, in the village of Ca' Matte we find an *equipped dock* with haulage facilities used by sportfishers especially for European catfish; and an important point of departure for nautical excursions in the Delta that here starts with the southward detachment of the Po of Goro from the Po of Venice.



Avifauna species like the purple heron and flora like the yellow Iris giallo are among the most widespread species in the flood plain areas of the Po.



Foto di L. Bottaro

Bottom: Palazzo Daclon in Villanova Marchesana

such as *the Bittern*, *the Little Grebe*, *the Grey Heron*, *the Night heron*, *the Duck-Hawk*, *the Goldfinch* and others that chose this place as their permanent shelter.

It is easy to understand how is such a fascinating and stimulating environment the original idea by Professor Luigi Salvini developed in the 1950s. It is the so called "*Bosgattia Republic*" a project that lasted several years and involved people of culture from all over Europe based on open air free life.

An anticipation to the natural and landscape ideals searched by those, more and more numerous who are about to appreciate the itineraries along this great Italian river.

