



COMUNE DI FOLIGNO



FOLIGNO

*A journey
to the center of the world
amidst nature, art, traditions and gastronomy.*

4

COLFIORITO PARK



***A journey to the center of the world
amidst nature, art, traditions
and gastronomy.***

Foligno is a blend of art, history, nature, gastronomy, quaint villages, unique paths and atmospheres.

This brochure guide leads you to the discovery of the wonders of our territory.

Texts, photos, and videos come together to provide an unforgettable experience.

Bon voyage!

Photo on the cover: Colfiorito

FOLIGNO

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Colfiorito - Aerial photo of the swamp



Colfiorito Park

COLFIORITO PARK



Introduction

The Regional Park of Colfiorito, the smallest among the protected areas of Umbria, is located within the territory of the Municipality of Foligno.

The Colfiorito area and its **natural park**, with an **altitude of 760 meters**, have always been considered by the people of Foligno as the preferred place for relaxation and a mandatory stop for those heading towards the sea, specifically Civitanova Marche.

Colfiorito can be reached by either following the old SS77 road of Val di Chienti and passing through the towns of Colle San Lorenzo, Pale, Ponte Santa Lucia, Scopoli, and Casenove (where the junction for Rasiglia is located), or by taking the new shortcut that shortens the route by 9 kilometers. This new route, after a series of tunnels, reaches the Colfiorito plateau near the regional border.

The Park's area encompasses a marsh, some semi-flat areas for agricultural purposes, and the elevation of Mount Orve, reaching an altitude of 926 meters.

The Park is renowned for its **high-altitude marsh**, declared an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar Convention and situated within a significant mountain ecosystem. This area is a treasure trove of biodiversity, showcasing the ancient harmony between agricultural activities and the natural environment. Across the expansive plateaus with gentle undulations, one can find wetlands, forests, pastures, and cultivated fields.

The Colfiorito Park boasts significant environmental values, complemented by cultural and historical significance. The territory documents millennia of human presence, from ancient fortifications to the protourban center of Mount Orve, Roman artifacts in Plestia, the agricultural landscape echoing ancient patterns, to evidence of Lombard and medieval eras seen in abbeys, villages, towers, and castles.

For further information on the Colfiorito Park

www.parks.it/parco.colfiorito/Eindex.php



PLESTINIAN PLAINS

Collecroce, Piano di Annifo, Piano di Arvello, Piano di Colfiorito or del Casone, Palude di Colfiorito, Piano di Ricciano, Piano di Popola e Cesi.

The plateaus of Colfiorito (or Plestinian plains) are part of the Umbro-Marchigian Apennines and are enclosed by a ring of limestone ridges with a rugged and steep appearance. The contrast between these ridges and the hilly profile of the plateaus is one of the most visually captivating features.

The **seven Plestinian plateaus** form a system of karstic depressions, endoreic in nature, representing the bottom of ancient naturally drained or reclaimed lake basins.

During the winter season, some of them become submerged again, and the Colfiorito marsh is currently the only permanent body of water.

The presence of **swallow** holes is noteworthy: these are circular ground fissures, sometimes several meters in diameter, through which water descends into the subsoil, replenishing the water table.

Despite being subject, in one way or another, to human exploitation, including through agriculture capable of producing excellent crops, they are ecosystems of great importance, protected in various cases by European Union legislation as Special Conservation Zones (SCZ) under the “Habitat Directive.”



Colfiorito

The **Piano di Colfiorito** is the largest in the area and is also known as the *Piano del Casone*. Formerly covered with water and called *Lacus Plestinus*, it was drained by the Varano family from Camerino in the 15th century through a significant hydraulic engineering project: the *Botte dei Varano*, an artificial channel that allows water to flow into the Chienti River. After the seismic events of '97, a similar, parallel conduit of Roman origin was discovered.

The **Piano of the Colfiorito** marsh is the only area where water, despite significant seasonal level variations, remains throughout the year. The marsh (**ZSC IT 5210072**) is the heart of the Park and is identified as a Special Conservation Zone (SCZ) as well as a Special Protection Area (SPA) by the European Community due to the conservation importance of the bird community present, which builds nests, reproduces, and

feeds within the reed beds.

For this reason, in 1995, the Umbria Region decided to protect it by establishing a regional park. It is also included in the Ramsar Convention, emphasizing its international importance for naturalistic aspects.

On the northern edge, near a large karstic swallow hole, an ancient mill utilized water from the marsh.

The Colfiorito marsh represents the most important naturalistic system of the park, and its rich fauna is often “captured” by the lenses of many nature photographers and the binoculars of birdwatchers.

The **Piano di Collecroce** is located at the foot of Mount Pennino and is the only area not affected by a wet environment, as the floor is covered with groundwater debris. Elements of naturalistic interest include the hedges lining the country roads of the plateau. The floor is cultivated with red potatoes, spelt, and lentils. It is the only Plestinian plateau that extends into the municipal territory of Nocera Umbra and is adjacent to the Piano di Annifo.

The **Piano di Annifo (ZSC IT 5210032)** and, with it, that of Arvello, were included in the list of Sites of Community Importance (now SCZ) in the '90s. It is a tectonic-karstic plateau that remains partially covered with water during periods of heavy rain, while it is completely dry in summer. Floodwater drainage mainly occurs through a large swallow hole connected to a long ditch, bordered by rows of trees and shrubs, dividing the plateau in half and, secondarily, through a channel that directs water to the Colfiorito marsh.

The **Piano di Arvello (ZSC IT 5210032)** is the smallest of the seven plateaus and is partly cultivated with potatoes and cereals and partly composed of wet meadows. In the eastern part of the plateau, the main swallow hole is present, draining the basin's waters. An Umbrian settlement from ancient times is visible on the eastern margins, offering a panoramic view of the entire extent of the plateau and the Colfiorito marsh.

The **Piano di Ricciano (ZSC IT 5210036)** is situated at over 700 meters above sea level and exhibits numerous karstic phenomena. It is drained by a swallow hole where the short stream that crosses the plateau disappears but dries up completely during the summer. The plateau's floor is occupied by permanent meadows, while the marginal areas are regularly plowed and cultivated. This plateau has significant geobotanical relevance, including an excellent example, in terms of extension, floral richness, and conservation status, of wet meadows with velvet buttercup, a typical endemic species of the Apennine karstic plateaus.

The **Piano di Popola e Cesi** is a karstic plateau located to the south of the Park and characterized by the presence of herbaceous crops, sedges, mowable wet meadows alternating with hedges and groves. Agriculture is not particularly intensive, featuring potatoes, cereals, wheat, barley, and lentils.

Unfortunately, it is contrasted by an intensive industrial livestock farming approach, certainly unsuitable for the mountainous context.



NATURE

Vegetation and habitat

The territory of the Colfiorito Park is characterized by diverse and articulated vegetation, significantly influenced by the presence of the wetland, a rare environment with different habitats. The marsh, spanning about a hundred hectares, represents the most important naturalistic system.

In the Colfiorito wetland, the distribution of plant communities is closely linked to the presence of water, considering two fundamental parameters: depth and permanence over time. The habitats of the marsh are stratified in concentric zones, starting from the deeper and more enduring waters to the shallower and ephemeral ones. The park area includes, in addition to the wetland, semi-flat areas designated for agriculture with crops such as cereals, potatoes, lentils, and forage. The elevation of Mount Orve (926 m) is covered by woods of black hornbeam, turkey oak, hop hornbeam, maple, reforestation with conifers, and extensive secondary meadows dotted with juniper, cyst, and fragrant broom.



Plateaus of Colfiorito

Perennial Waters

The water here is deeper and present throughout the year, reaching a height of over three meters in some seasons. Along the channels and so-called “clear” areas, we find the protected habitat of “eutrophic natural lakes.” This environment is characterized by floating hydrophytes, water lentils, and water milfoil.

Intermittent Waters

Stagnant, shallow waters characterized by seasonal level changes host extensive reed beds with marsh reed, alternating with areas of sedges.

Reed Beds and Wet Meadows

On drier soils, flooded only after heavy rains, wet meadows develop, mainly characterized by velvet buttercup and perennial barley. Where water persists for several months, the soil can dry out in the summer. The vegetation of helophytes disappears, and the formation of reed beds comes into play. This is an intermediate zone between the lake and the peat bog. Wet meadows for mowing succeed marshy meadows.

Hygrophilous Trees and Shrubs

At the edges of the marsh, in areas where the soil is more compact and less frequently covered with water, typical hygrophilous tree formations are found. These are characterized, in particular, by the presence of willows of various species and solitary or grouped poplars. The presence of trees is crucial for the overall balance of the marsh environment as a refuge for birdlife.



Path around the swamp

Elofite

They are very similar to normal perennial herbaceous plants but require strong humidity and the presence of muddy and water-rich soil. One of the most characteristic species in this zone is the common reed, a plant that can reach over four meters in height and, together with other helophytes, forms a crucial environment for many birds that find food and shelter here.

Peat Bog

Characteristic of marshy areas, peat is the result of fossilization processes that have affected the vegetation at the edges and on the bottom of the water mirror. Active until the second half of the 20th century, the peat bog has been exhausted due to anthropic interventions that have altered its regeneration conditions. Preliminary restoration interventions for this particular habitat are underway as part of the “Life Imagine” project, with the participation of the Colfiorito Agrarian Community, the Umbria Region, and the University of Perugia.

Fauna

The diversified environments, ranging from wetlands to forests and cultivated areas, make the fauna of the Plestine Plateaus rich and varied depending on the habitat and, in the case of migratory birds, also on the season.

Birdlife

Birds, with their vibrancy and a wide range of forms, colors, and songs, constitute the faunal component with the greatest aesthetic and emotional impact.

The Plestine Plateaus area lies along the migratory route where thousands of ducks, geese, waders, ducks, cranes, cormorants, herons, starlings, hawks, and small passerines travel each year. They come from breeding areas in central and northern Europe, driven by the need to reach more or less distant lands favorable for climatic and food conditions. The extraordinary charm of this event also lies in the fact that the migration of each species has peculiar characteristics: different destinations, periods of passage, hours of movement, degree of gregariousness, and geometries of formations, flight altitude, and orientation techniques. However, almost all migratory birds must make stops, and the marsh, with its unique habitat, represents the ideal place.

In the Park, a total of **197 species** have been observed, 92 of which nest regularly. Among these, 56 are SPEC species (with conservation issues). Thirteen species are listed in the Birds Directive 79/409 and subsequent modifications, as well as in the recent national Red List. There are 82 regular migratory species and 24 irregular ones.



Ardea purpurea Adult male purple heron courting

During the breeding season, the Plestine Plateaus area hosts rare and threatened species such as the Red heron, Little bittern, Spotted crane, Lesser kestrel, Skylark, Corn bunting, Sedge warbler, and Ortolan bunting.

Throughout most of the year, observable species include Mallard, Coot, Common moorhen, Water rail, Great white egret, Grey heron, Eurasian penduline tit, Marsh harrier, Buzzard, and Kestrel.

A significant colony of Herons is constituted by the bittern, Great white egret, Red heron, Night heron, Little bittern, and Spotted crane. The Grey heron, which breeds in the Reed bed of the marsh, stands out for its numerosity.

Numerous raptors are also present, including the Marsh harrier, Royal harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Hobby, and Golden eagle,

*Circus pygargus adult male*

which has been nesting in the Umbria-Marche Apennines for some years.

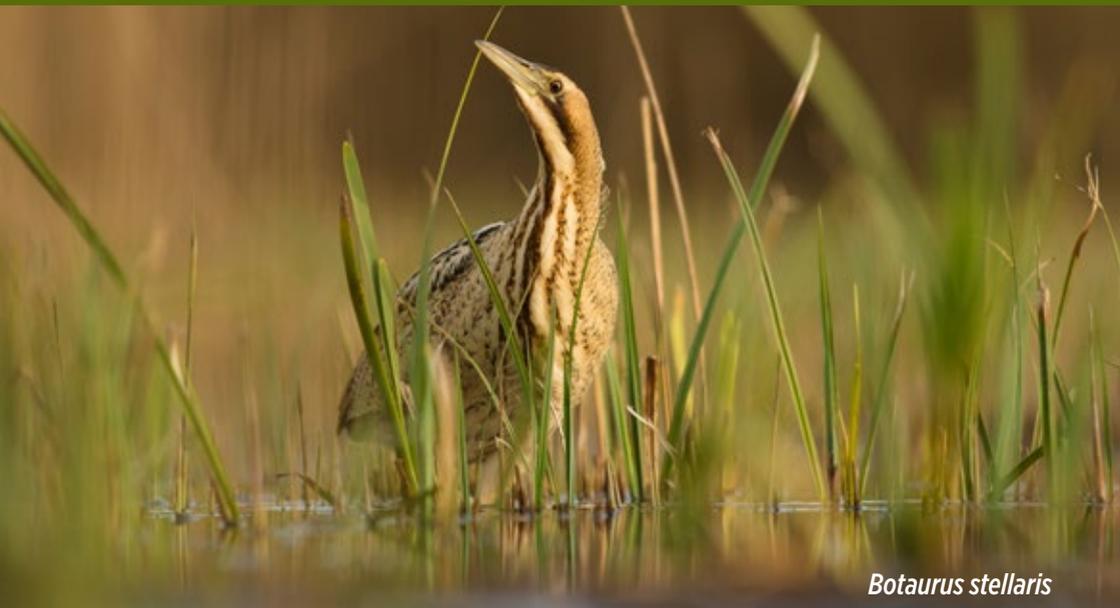
The secondary meadows of the Colfiorito plains also host the *lesser kestrel* with 1-2 breeding pairs. The presence of the osprey, booted eagle, and marsh owl during migration periods has been reported. The presence of nocturnal raptors is extensive and representative.

The recommended period for *birdwatching* is throughout the year, especially from March to September. For this purpose, the **observation point downstream of the Forcatura locality**, which extends into the marsh through a wooden walkway, can be used.



Photo by Alfiero Pepponi

Basettino Panurus biarmicus adult male and female

*Botaurus stellaris*

The Bittern (Tarabuso)

The bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), a shy and elusive heron, was long considered the symbol of the Park. In sharp decline in Europe and endangered, it found the ideal habitat to live and reproduce in the dense and old reed bed of the marsh at Colfiorito.

The latest data indicate that this heron no longer nests in the marsh, but its presence is confirmed by frequent sightings by birdwatchers and nature photographers who contribute data to the Regional Fauna Observatory every year.

Due to its remarkable mimetic abilities, attributed to the color of its plumage and the vertical position it assumes, with an elongated neck and beak pointing upwards, it is difficult to see, despite its diurnal habits. It builds the nest at ground level, in the thick of the reed bed, usually laying 5-6 eggs. The male is polygamous and attracts females to his territory with a characteristic call, similar to a moo. It feeds in marginal areas, where the water is shallower, moving slowly and circumspectly, hunting for amphibians and small fish.

In the winter season, it adapts to unfavorable climates, which can even

freeze the marsh water, by hunting mice and other small prey in the surrounding fields.

Mammals

Although birds make up the most well-known and visible fauna in the Park, the presence of mammals is also significant, especially in recent years, due to environmental protection measures and the progressive renaturation process affecting mountainous areas in our country.

Among carnivores, some of the most representative are the Apennine wolf, European badger, wildcat, fox, beech marten, and weasel. They sometimes venture into the marsh or frequent dry stretches. Ungulates like roe deer and the omnipresent wild boar are also present.

Among insectivores, there are the European hedgehog, Roman mole, water shrew, common shrew, and the red-toothed shrew. Rodents include the crested porcupine, wood mouse, Savi's vole, and common squirrel. Finally, nine species of bats are present.

Reptiles, Fish, and Amphibians

Wetland systems represent the pinnacle of floristic and faunistic biodiversity. The constant presence of water throughout the year guarantees the life of fish, amphibians, and reptiles, which constitute the main food source for aquatic birds.

Reptiles present include the European pond turtle, adder, European green lizard, wall lizard, and sand lizard; among the colubrids: aesculapian snake, European grass snake, and dice snake.

Among amphibians: European green frog, marbled newt, common newt, and agile frog.

The fish population seems quite rich in species, although they are mainly characterized by species from other geographical regions: Goldfish, Common carp, Eastern mosquitofish, Chub, Tench, Common dace, and Stone loach.

Insects: Butterflies

A targeted study for the realization of the Colfiorito Park butterfly guide identified 54 species within the Park area. Of these, five are considered uncommon at the national and/or regional level, and two, *Zerynthia polyxena* and *Euphydryas aurinia*, are of particular conservation value as they are listed in the directive “Habitat 92/43 CEE and protected by the Bern Convention (1979).

Insects: Dragonflies

Fascinating and mysterious insects, dragonflies populate the marsh significantly. Odonata, the scientific name of the order to which all dragonflies belong, are widespread wherever there is a watercourse or water mirror.

The formidable flying power and extraordinary vision make dragonflies unparalleled winged hunters.

The larvae live in various types of water, preferably calm water with abundant vegetation and muddy bottoms. In the Colfiorito Park and the waters of the marsh, 18 species have been observed, ranging from the overwintering adult *Sympecma fusca* to the largest dragonfly in Europe, *Anax imperator*.

This is a precious faunal heritage that plays a fundamental role in local ecological balances. With their sensitivity to habitat and climate changes, dragonflies are recognized as environmental barometers that help us assess the well-being of ecosystems through their presence.



Photo by Emanuela Baccellini

Zerynthia cassandra



Photo by Gianandrea La Porta

Dragonfly quadrimaculata



CULTURE

The village of Colfiorito

Situated on the outskirts of the marsh, Colfiorito is the main center of the plateaus. The present trim of the village of Colfiorito unfolds along the transit routes of the SS77, at the base of the settlement on the high ground where the Umbrian people of the Plestini moved from the plains in the medieval period. This high ground is locally called “Pizzale.”

A castle once stood on this hill, now reduced to almost nothing, except for Via Rocca dei Trinci, reminiscent of the ancient fortification built by the Trinci family that reigned here in medieval times.

Further down, at the center of the current settlement, is the parish church of Maria Santissima Assunta, documented since 1269. The church was originally located inside the castle, later abandoned and replaced by the new structure built between 1819 and 1831.

Adjacent to the parish house is a welcoming place for the hospitality of

numerous travelers and pilgrims on the path to Loreto, occupying the site of the ancient *Hospital of San Pietro*, already active in 1291. Along the Via Lauretana, there is still an inn, Locanda Emmaus.

The “xenodochio” was a support structure for travelers during the Middle Ages, serving as a free hostel for pilgrims and strangers, usually located on the route of a pilgrimage and managed by monks who provided accommodation and food. In Colfiorito, such a structure is still active.

LARGO XENODOCHIO SAN PIETRO

L'Ospizio per Pellegrini fondato nel 1295 da Fra Ranuccio di Francesco, terziario francescano, è divenuto nel 1448 sede canonica del Terzo Ordine Regolare di S. Francesco

I cittadini di Colfiorito e i frati del Terzo Ordine Regolare di San Francesco posero in memoria.

Colfiorito 19 Agosto 2011

ANCIENT ROUTES

The plateaus of Colfiorito have been, since prehistoric times, a connecting link between the Apennine itineraries, as evidenced by the necropolises and the numerous hill forts. Their strategic function solidified in Roman times when some of the main arteries of the Umbria-Marche region converged in this area. The road layouts established in the protohistoric era followed the paths of transhumance. In Roman times, they became connecting arteries between colonies. In the medieval period, they also became the routes for pilgrims heading to Assisi.

Via Flaminia: The most important of the Roman roads passed through Forum Flaminii, crossed the Topino River, and, after crossing Pontecentesimo, reached Pieve Fanonica. From here, the Via Plestina branched off, crossing the plateaus and skirting the marsh in the upper stretch until reaching Plestia.

Via Nucerina: Starting from Plestia, it passed between Mount Orve and Col Falcone, reaching Nocera Umbra.

Via Lauretana: Originally coinciding with the Via Plestina in this stretch, in the second half of the 16th century, the valley route along the old path of SS 77 was preferred. Substantial sections of it still remain, traversable with hiking itineraries, where the structures (arches) of the ancient road can be observed.

Ancient Roads: **The Bocchetta della Scurosa** and **Val Sant'Angelo** roads are also ancient, both starting from Plestia; the former heading north, the latter east.

Via della Spina: Starting from Plestia, it passed at the foot of Mount Trella and reached Spoleto, crossing the entire upper Val Menotre and the Sellano area. Of ancient origin, a stretch cut into the rock near Mount Trella can still be recognized.



Molinaccio sinkhole



Path around the swamp

ARCHAEOLOGY

Through the centuries, the plateaus of Colfiorito have been a mandatory passage along the transit routes crossing the central Apennine passes; consequently, the place has been frequented since prehistoric times. The first findings are lithic artifacts dating back to the Upper Paleolithic.

The plateaus were inhabited in the Bronze Age and, more permanently, from the Iron Age (10th-9th century BC) by the Italic people of the **Plestini**, as evidenced by discoveries including numerous necropolises and many hill forts. Subsequently, after the Roman conquest of Umbria in 295 BC, the populations left the fortified settlements on the hills, reclaimed the marsh, and founded the city of **Plestia**, which had significant development and became an important Municipium.

The Plestini

The Italic people are mentioned in ancient sources, recalled by Pliny (N.H., III, 114), Appian, Polybius, Cornelius Nepos and are documented by findings near **the sanctuary of the goddess Cupra**.

The Plestini, constituting a homogeneous social complex, settled in an area between Sasso di Pale to the west, the Menotre valley to the south, the Camerte territory to the east, and Mount Pennino and the territory of Nocera to the north.

Their development was determined by the exploitation of natural resources: the abundance of water, mountain pastures, and forests allowed for a flourishing agricultural and silvo-pastoral economy. Hunting, fishing, and grazing, besides representing the basis for the sustenance of local populations, also facilitated the emergence of commercial exchanges with neighboring populations.



Plestia

Plestia was a flourishing city developed along the important road axis that connected the two sides of the Apennines. The plateau residents established an urban settlement as early as the 2nd century BC. An ally of Rome, it became a Municipium in the 1st century BC. From the 5th century, it was elected as a bishopric seat.

In the 10th century, it was probably abandoned following the Barbarian invasions; the locals likely reoccupied the more secure hill forts in the vicinity. However, even at the end of the century, Emperor Otto III held court there and signed measures.

The archaeological area has been identified in the locality of Pistia, near the church of Santa Maria di Plestia.

Archaeological excavations have unearthed some remains of the

ancient city, including the area of the forum, identified near the Basilica. Nearby, traces of late-Republican buildings can be identified. Under the Roman structures, the remains of an Iron Age village dating back to the 9th-7th centuries BC are present. These settlements appear as scattered nuclei composed of almost circular huts, paved and structured around a hearth.

Plestinian Necropolises

The plateaus' area is occupied by several necropolises from the 10th century BC to the 2nd century BC. Four phases can be recognized: the first, dating back to the early Iron Age, presents simple burials (pots, jewelry, razors); the second is the Orientalizing phase of the 7th-6th century, with richer burials containing numerous bronze ornaments and pots with complex decorations. The third phase of the Archaic period (6th-5th century BC), corresponding to a more complex social structure of the Plestini people, features precious imported objects. In this period, the sanctuary of the goddess Cupra and the center of Monte Orve were established. In the fourth phase (4th-3rd century BC), immediately before and contemporary with entering the Roman orbit, there is a slow impoverishment of creativity and the quantity of materials found.

Plestinian Hill Forts

The hill forts are fortified settlements built from the late 7th century BC to control the Apennine passes. They have variable shapes, mostly circular or ellipsoidal, surrounded by embankments or walls with a single entrance and a ditch. At their feet lay the necropolises. In the Colfiorito plans, there is a significant number of them, mostly located on the heights, along the primary and secondary roads and near the territory's borders. Some of these became sites of therapeutic shrines and pilgrimage destinations in the medieval period.

The Temple of the Goddess Cupra

The remains of the temple were identified along the Via Nucerina, near the southern shore of the lake that occupied the Piano del Casone. It was a step sanctuary dedicated to the goddess of fertility and water, considered the “mother of the Plestini,” as seen in the plates found at the site, along with many ceramic materials and votive bronzes.

THERAPEUTIC SANCTUARIES

In the plateaus of Colfiorito and the surrounding areas of the Foligno mountains and the Apennine system, a large number of border sanctuaries can be found. These are defined as such because they are located in a territory that, through the centuries, has been a point of connection for different geographical areas and communities. These are places of worship—churches, chapels, hermitages, shrines—that have become destinations for annual pilgrimages and, as a result, are considered therapeutic sanctuaries.

One of the most significant destinations of popular devotion is the **Sanctuary of Santa Maria Giacobbe**, near Sasso di Pale. It is believed to be constructed where tradition holds that the Saint withdrew for prayer and penance. The cult, spread from Foligno to the Colfiorito plains, was likely introduced by Eastern monks. It is noteworthy that this sacred place constituted a true border sanctuary between the religious communities of Foligno and the Plestini area.

In the Menotre Valley, in Scopoli, two therapeutic sanctuaries are the destinations of devotional processions. One, in honor of the **Madonna delle Grazie**, reaches the small center of Rasiglia, while the other heads to the shrine dedicated to **Madonna del Sasso**.

In Verchiano, another important devotional procession takes place. On Ascension Day, the procession reaches the church of San Salvatore, where there is a sarcophagus identified in ecclesiastical documents as the tomb of Blessed Paoluccio Trinci.

From Verchiano, other pilgrimages take place towards San Lazzaro, which was once a leper hospital and where a venerated statue of Madonna dating back to the 14th century is located, and to Sant'Eurosia, the protector from storms.

Along the Chienti Valley, on the border between Umbria and Marche, the sanctuaries of Madonna di Valleverde (near Cesi), Madonna del Sasso (near San Martino), and Madonna di Mevale (in Mevale) are situated.

In the territory of Dignano, there are two other therapeutic sanctuaries: the church of San Lorenzo, where the Crucifix on the altar is an object of great popular devotion, and the church of Santa Maria di Plestia, located exactly on the border between the two regions.

The community of Annifo is linked to two sanctuaries: San Pietro and Madonna del Piano.

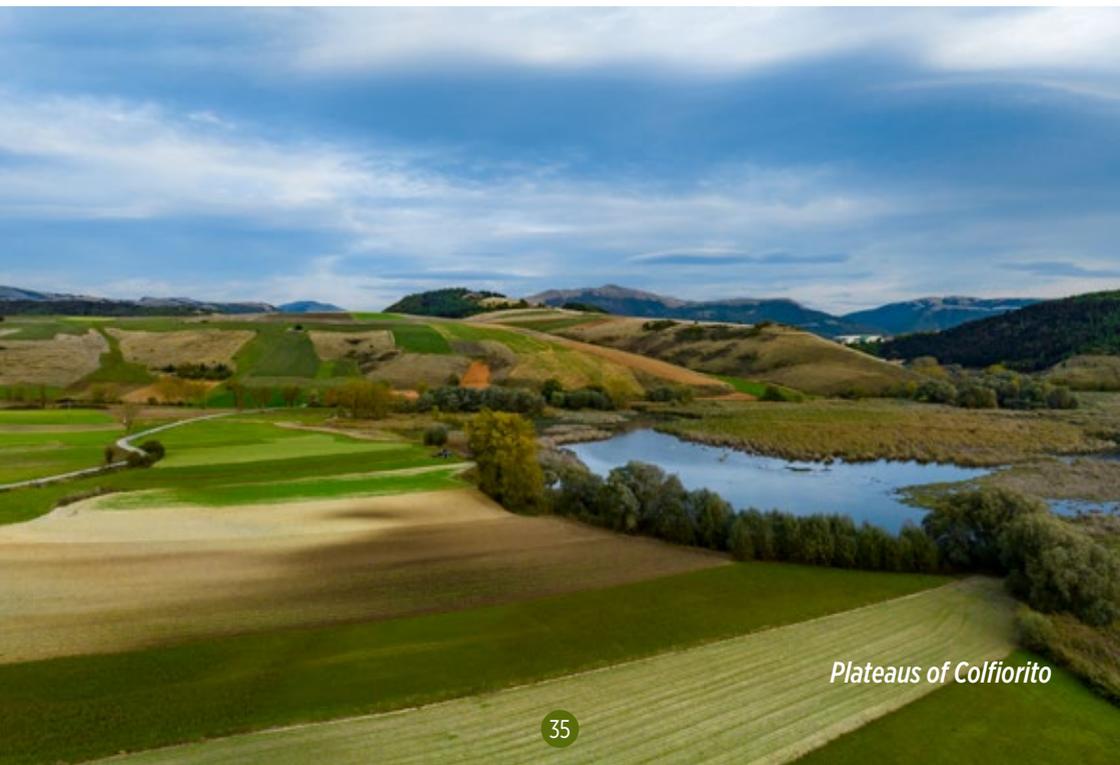
AGRICULTURE OF THE PLATEAUS

The plateaus of Colfiorito are not only a treasure trove of natural biodiversity but also a privileged place for the cultivation of numerous agricultural specialties.

Observing the landscape, it's easy to notice the fields with their colors transforming throughout the year: bright green in spring, vivid reds and yellows during flowering, soft pastel hues before harvest. In the agricultural areas surrounding the marsh, **legumes** are cultivated, including **lentils**, well-known and appreciated, along with **chickpeas**, **beans**, and **peas**.

There are also numerous cereal crops such as **wheat**, barley, and especially **spelt**.

The plateaus are also rich in pastures that favor livestock farming. The production of excellent **meat**, **milk**, and related products completes the panorama of a rich and varied agri-food offering.



Plateaus of Colfiorito

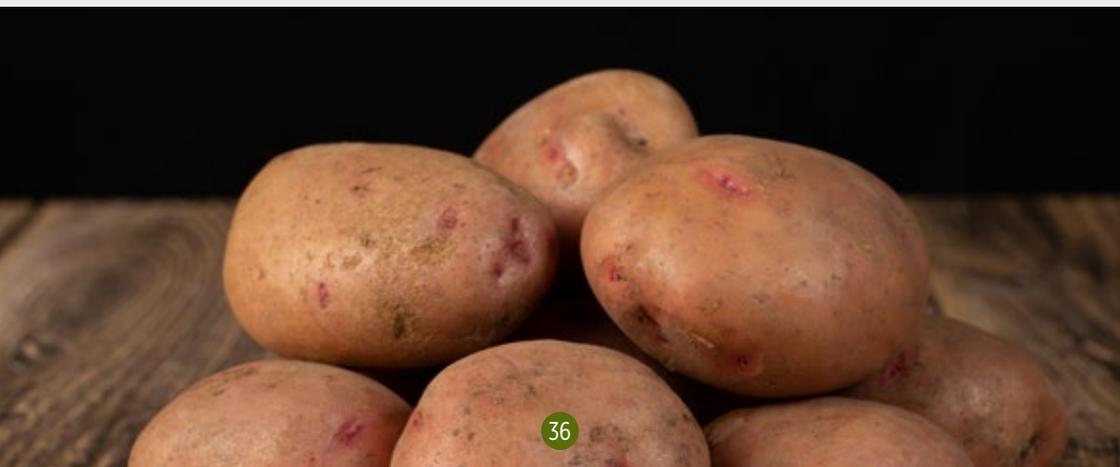
FOCUS: Red Potato of Colfiorito

One highly appreciated typical production, which has also received European recognition with the IGP (Protected Geographical Indication), is the **Red Potato of Colfiorito**—an excellent product of the region that takes center stage in August during the **Red Potato Fair and Festival**. The Red Potato of Colfiorito IGP refers to the mature tuber, with red skin and yellowish-white flesh, of the species *Solanum Tuberosum* L. It is characterized by an intact external appearance, completely peeled, without spots and damage caused by frost, with an oval, elongated, and irregular shape; the red, opaque skin is thin and rough, and the flesh is firm and straw-yellow.

The first evidence of the cultivation of red potatoes in the Colfiorito plateaus dates back to the second half of the 18th century. The area was a mandatory stop for armies heading to the Marche, and the potato was likely brought by imperial troops during their passage through the Papal State and the subsequent French occupation in the Napoleonic period; armies consumed potatoes extensively as a food source.

To preserve its characteristics, it must be stored away from light and at low temperatures. It is used in a variety of recipes, with the most typical being gnocchi with lamb sauce.

It is also excellent when boiled, roasted, fried, or grilled. A highly appreciated preparation is sweet red potato donuts, made during the annual festival in August in Colfiorito.



NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF COLFIORITO PARK

If you want to deepen your scientific and environmental knowledge of the area, the Natural History Museum offers this opportunity. Located next to the Park's Tourist Infopoint, it is housed in a structure that also recalls a part of our country's recent history—the “ex-Casermette,” warehouses built in 1882 for military storage, which from 1939 to September 1943 became an internment camp for Albanian internees, Italian political prisoners, and Montenegrin civilians.

The educational and documentary material in the Natural History Museum is collected and organized in panels that narrate the geomorphological evolution of the Umbrian-Marche Apennines, fossil findings, and the botanical, vegetational, and faunistic characteristics of the Plestini plateaus.

Naturalistic Collections

In addition to scientific information, the Museum preserves and exhibits **a collection of insects, herbarium, and a collection of stuffed birds and mammals representative of the Park area (Piscini Collection).**

Photographic exhibitions and temporary displays are set up every year to delve into various aspects: scientific, naturalistic, historical, and cultural aspects of the area.

This territory tells of how water has influenced human presence over time and how humans have tried to adapt the presence of water to their needs.

“The man will never protect something he ignores and does not fully understand” (Jean Dorst)

The Museum is also an important scientific, cultural, and exhibition outpost for the multiple naturalistic and historical riches of the territory. In addition to preserving and displaying significant ornithological,

botanical, and entomological collections, it keeps alive and updated contact with the territory through the **collection and dissemination of environmental and landscape data in the Colfiorito Park area** and the Plestini plateaus resulting from continuous monitoring and scientific research.

Among these activities, the bird ringing of migratory passerines carried out by the Umbria Region in collaboration with the Italian League for Bird Protection (LIPU) is noteworthy.



MAC ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF COLFIORITO

The Colfiorito Archaeological Museum, inaugurated in 2011, is articulated on three levels, collecting artifacts unearthed during excavations in the plateaus' territory. The visit offers an opportunity to understand the cultural development dynamics of this part of the Apennine Umbria, frequented by humans since prehistory and stably occupied from the archaic era by the Umbrian people of the Plestini.

About 1450 artifacts attest to Plestine civilization from its origins to Romanization, demonstrating Plestia's integration into the broad fabric of cultural exchanges between Etruria and Greece. Materials from the archaic era, especially those from the sanctuaries, religious and commercial centers scattered throughout the territory, are noteworthy. The most important is undoubtedly the **Sanctuary of the goddess Cupra** (6th century BC), from which a rich votive offering and four bronze plates from the 4th century BC with a dedication to the goddess in the Umbrian language originated.

The Romanization of the Plestini territory (second half of the 4th-3rd century BC) sees the consolidation of the Plestia settlement downstream and the birth of rustic villas (Annifo, Ricciano, and Franca plains).



Colfiorito Archaeological Museum

THEE MEMORIAL OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP OF COLFIORITO

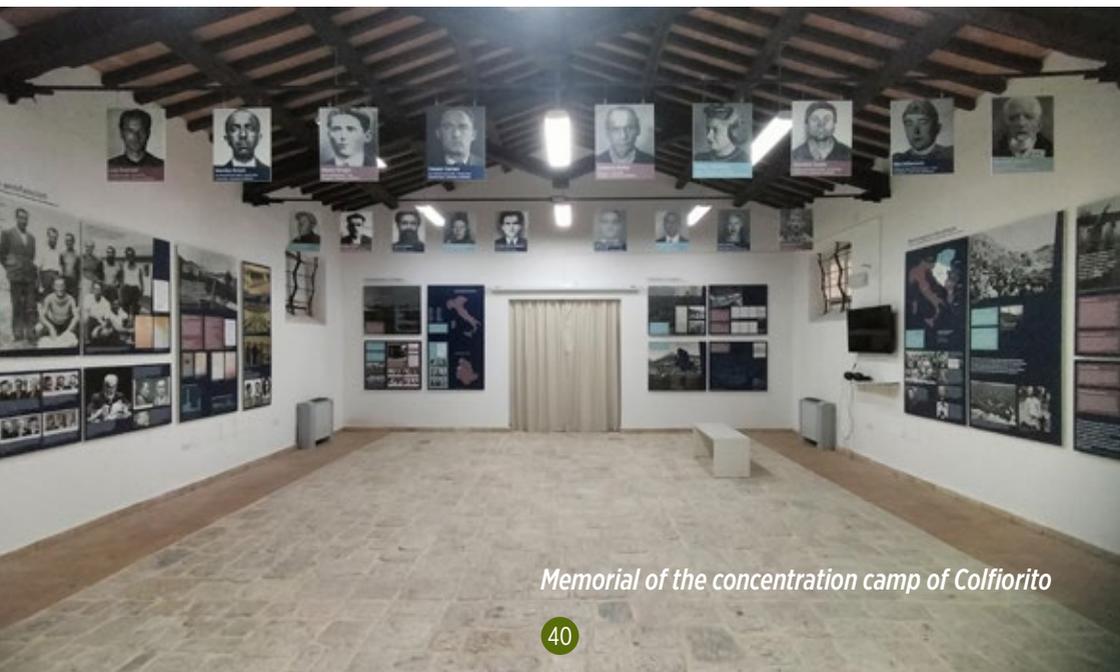
Center for the Study of Internment and Deportation “Olga Lucchi”

The Colfiorito Memorial commemorates the events of the fascist concentration camp active in this location from 1939 to 1944.

Set up in one of the renovated “casermette” it houses a photo-documentary exhibition and video testimonials from those who were interned by the regime.

Through photographs, documents, and the architecture of the Memorial, visitors have the opportunity to discover and delve into a less-known aspect of World War II history.

The educational path, enriched with informative materials, provides meaningful learning experiences especially for school groups.



Memorial of the concentration camp of Colfiorito

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER (CEA)

The Colfiorito Park service, accredited in the INFEA Regional Network, is available for activities related to sustainability culture and environmental education. The Colfiorito Park aims to promote, through scientific dissemination, respect and love for the territory, starting from direct observation and active knowledge.

The CEA organizes **guided tours and educational itineraries for schools of all levels and organized groups upon request.**

The activities involve the study of the ecosystems of the protected area and the interaction between humans and the environment.

The territory is used as a place of teaching and learning, encouraging observation and reflection on natural phenomena and environmental and anthropic transformations. A propaedeutic part of the didactic activity takes place inside the Natural History Museum, with in-depth studies on the geomorphological evolution of the Umbria-Marche Apennines and the close observation of insects and naturalistic collections.

To request information about these activities, please contact the structure at the following email:

parco.colfiorito@comune.foligno.pg.it

For additional information, visit the official website of the Colfiorito Archaeological Museum (MAC).



Environmental Education Center (CEA)



Environmental Education Center (CEA)

EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

The Red Potato Exhibition Market and Festival, organized by the Pro Loco Colfiorito, has been held annually in Colfiorito since 1977, taking place in August. It serves as a significant promotional platform for typical mountain products and provides an opportunity to discuss and delve into the cultural and economic aspects of the plateau.

Seven Days in the Mountains and the **Lentil Festival** occur every August in Annifo since 1981. Organized by the Pro Loco Annifo, these events aim to highlight the gastronomic and cultural traditions of the area.

A celebration rooted in the Middle Ages or even earlier, drawing inhabitants from all over the plateau, is the traditional **Plestia Fair** held in Colfiorito from May to September. It occurs on the Monday morning following the first Sunday of the month and could be described as a “border market,” as it takes place in the strip of land where the territory of Foligno meets that of Serravalle di Chienti—an ancient crossroads of roads where the ancient city of Plestia once stood, a meeting and trading place from ancient times.

The fair also offers an opportunity for a stroll in the splendid scenery of the Colfiorito Plain, discovering its natural and historical-artistic beauties.

THE HIKING NETWORK OF THE PLATEAUS

The collaborative effort of various associations dedicated to hiking, mountain biking, and cycle touring has resulted in the creation of the **soft mobility map of the Plestini plateaus**. Coordinated by the Colfiorito Park Service and funded by the Municipality of Foligno, the product is a 1:25,000 map in the 76x116 format, displaying hiking, cycling, and mountain biking trails along with indications of bus and train stations connecting mountainous areas to the urban centers of Foligno and Nocera Umbra.



The hiking network of the Colfiorito plateaus consists mainly of **circular trails of varying lengths**, allowing visitors to explore the natural, historical, archaeological, and cultural highlights of the area, often retracing ancient roads and transhumance routes. The park is also crossed by long-distance trails: the Via Lauretana (VL), the Franciscan Way of the Marches (CFM), the Europe 1 Trail (E1), and the Italian Alpine Club Trail (SI).

DOWNLOAD THE MAP >

The plains and mountainous reliefs that characterize the Plestino territory lend themselves to sports and recreational activities centered around **hiking on foot, mountain biking, horseback riding, Nordic walking, and winter snowshoeing**.

The area is also suitable for nature observation and **birdwatching**, i.e., binocular observation of birds. This activity is practiced by birdwatching enthusiasts and outdoor enthusiasts, contributing important data to the regional faunal observatory that monitors the presence of various wildlife species in the area. Furthermore, those who practice this sport usually do so with full respect for the environment: speaking in a low tone and adjusting their clothing to the surrounding landscape, thus favoring wildlife sightings.

ON FOOT IN THE PARK

Route 308: Castelliere Trail

Accessibility: On foot

Interests: Flora, fauna, panorama, archaeology, photography

Starting point: Colfiorito, Park headquarters (Via della Rinascita)

Average duration: 1 hour and 10 minutes

Difficulty: TE (Touristic/Excursionist)

Length: 3.5 km

Elevation gain: 130 m

Ground: Asphalt, dirt, natural

The route starts from the Park headquarters and forms a loop returning to the starting point. It can be walked in both directions, but an **anti-clockwise** direction is recommended.

From the Park headquarters, follow a dirt path ascending the slopes of Mount Orve. With a short detour, reach the summit, the site of the most important “castelliere” in the area.

Returning and resuming the main trail, reach a fork. Turning left, descend on a dirt road to the Colfiorito Marsh. A brief deviation is suggested to visit the Cassicchio Castelliere, whose embankment is still perfectly identifiable.

Then, taking the asphalt road to the left, return to the Park headquarters, crossing the Colfiorito village.

By taking the detour to the summit of Mount Orve, where the remains of an ancient building, probably a temple, are located, an additional 0.3 km and 38 m of elevation gain are added.

Route 305: Marsh Trail

Accessibility: On foot

Interests: Flora, birdwatching, geology, panorama, history, photography

Starting point: Colfiorito, Loc. “Fagiolaro” (junction for Forcatura)

Average duration: 2 hours

Difficulty: TE (Touristic/Excursionist)

Length: 5.3 km

Elevation gain: 40 m

Ground: Asphalt, dirt, natural

The route starts from the green area of Fagiolaro, at the junction between Colfiorito and Forcatura, forming a loop returning to the starting point. It can be walked in both directions, with an **anti-clockwise** direction recommended.

Begin on a pedestrian path parallel to the road to Forcatura, reaching the Mollaro house near the swallow hole, renovated after the 1997 earthquake along with the “Molinaccio,” an ancient structure utilizing excess water from the Marsh. Continue on the road to the first hairpin turn. Take the dirt road that, after passing the Fontaccia spring, descends to the Marsh near the nature observatory.

Continuing to the right along the edge of the Marsh, encounter the heronry and then the LIPU ornithological station for ringing.

The trail then continues toward the main road, following it along and returning to Fagiolaro. The last stretch, between the observatory and Fagiolaro, might be impassable at certain times of the year due to seasonal and terrain conditions.

POINTS OF INTEREST MAP



POINTS OF INTEREST

Park Headquarters and Tourist Infopoint

Via Della Rinascita (Former Barracks Area) 06034 Colfiorito (PG)

tel. +39 0742 681011 - parcocolfiorito@comune.foligno.pg.it

At the Colfiorito Park headquarters on Via della Rinascita (former barracks area) is the Infopoint for all tourist information related to the Park and surrounding areas. Adjacent to the Infopoint is the Naturalistic Museum.

Camper Service Area

The camper service area is located in the ex-Casermette area, in the heart of Colfiorito Park, just a stone's throw away from its marsh, a wetland rich in vegetation where rare animal species can be encountered. The camper area offers numerous amenities nearby, including a bar, supermarket, ATM, post office, pharmacy, restaurants, and nighttime medical services. Access to the area is subject to a fee, which includes electricity and water services (water supply is interrupted during the winter due to harsh weather conditions). The area is accessible year-round, at any time of day or night, and parking fees can be paid at the designated parking meter or at the Colfiorito Park office, which also serves as a tourist information point.

As this is a protected area, respecting both people and wildlife, animals are allowed but must be kept on a leash.

Accessible Pedestrian Path (1)

From the junction to Forcatura to the Molinaccio green area, there is an accessible pedestrian path approximately 800 meters long. A wooden fence separates it from the municipal road, and it is equipped with tables and benches for a refreshing stop by the marsh.

Molinaccio – Casa del Mollaro – Sinkhole (2)

The Molinaccio green area is located on the edge of the Colfiorito marsh. Its name comes from the presence of an ancient and unique mill powered by the marsh waters, built by the Jacobilli family of Foligno and operational until the 1940s.

The toponym is derived from a tragic event in the early 20th century: Silvia Cinti, the miller's daughter, was crushed by the millstone, leading to the nickname "Molinaccio."

In 1652 (or 1654), the mill was built for grinding wheat, utilizing the water flow from the collecting basin to the sinkhole. **The Casa del Mollaro** (miller's house) is a medieval building constructed with a mixed stonework of Mesozoic limestone from the Central Apennines ("pink from Subasio"). Unfortunately, the structure is currently not visitable due to damage from the 2016 earthquake.

A sinkhole is a point on a karst surface where water enters or sinks into the subsoil. **The Molinaccio sinkhole** is the largest and most significant in the area, situated at the base of Mount Orve, with a width ranging from 10 to 20 meters, a depth of about 5 meters, and a water discharge of 20 liters per minute.

Fontaccia Spring (3)

The fountain known as "Fontaccia" was possibly built in the early 1900s near the old route of the Colfiorito-Forcatura road. It served as a wash fountain, utilizing water flowing from a small upstream spring, channeled into a collection tank adjacent to the fountain.

Located along the path along the marsh, it offers a privileged stopping point, especially during summer sunsets.



Source Fontaccia

Nature Observatory (4)

For birdwatching and nature photography enthusiasts, there is a observatory cabin situated in the center of the western marsh bank, along the path circling the marsh. Access is free, but visitors are encouraged to use it civilly and discreetly to avoid disturbing wildlife.

LIPU Ringing Station (5)

On the southern side of the marsh, there is a cabin dedicated to scientific ringing operations, managed by the Umbria Region in collaboration with the Italian League for Bird Protection (LIPU). Ringing involves individually marking birds with a ring, providing valuable data for studying bird biology, ecology, behavior, movements, population productivity, and demography.

Le Pratarelle Green Area (6)

To the west of Colfiorito and not far from the marsh is the semi-urban park equipped with a playground, gym, and multipurpose track known as Le Pratarelle. The vegetation is hygrophilous, featuring two noteworthy willow specimens. Part of the area remains green and is characterized by a small spring following the marsh's regime.

Monte Orve Fortified Settlement (7)

Monte Orve holds significant importance as a protourban center among the hilltop settlements. Starting from the 5th century BCE, the fortified settlement was surrounded by 1.3 km of large polygonal walls made of roughly squared limestone blocks held together without cement

Terracing for the settlement was evident, with the remains of a building, possibly a temple, on the acropolis.

The area was occupied in Roman times and later in the medieval period when the Santa Maria in Orve canonry was built. The site is associated with tragedy and legends.



Ringing station



Orve Mountain



The large willow of the Le Pratarelle green area



Colfiorito pine forest - Mount path

Colfiorito Pine Forest (8)

The Colfiorito Pine Forest on Mount Colfiorito is a typical example of reforestation with black pine, red fir, Scots pine, and larch, carried out between the 1950s and 1970s to counteract forest degradation in the Apennines. The pine forest is traversed by a hiking trail, also suitable for biking and horseback riding, connecting Colfiorito to the Fraia and Cesi hamlets and the homonymous plateau.

Santa Maria di Plestia Church (9)

The Church of Santa Maria di Plestia (or “Pistia”) stands on the site of the ancient cathedral, incorporating its remains.

It is a church in protoromanesque style and a “border” sanctuary, located on the Colfiorito plateau, at the border between Umbria and Marche, in the municipality of Serravalle di Chienti, and adjacent to the settlement of Colfiorito, in the municipality of Foligno. It is situated at a significant road junction, historically important until the early Middle Ages, in the area of the ancient city of Plestia, which disappeared in the 10th century, originally probably the meeting point of the cardinal and decumanus.

According to legend, the apostles Peter and Paul, in their early years of preaching, sought refuge in the city of Plestia on a cold and rainy night. No one helped them except for a young and solitary woman, from whom the two apostles, out of respect, accepted only bread and not accommodation. They then ascended towards Mount Trella, following the road called Via della Spina, which connected Plestia to the Umbrian Valley. When they were far enough away, God’s wrath descended upon the city with a tremendous earthquake and a violent downpour that caused the destruction and flooding of the city and the death of its inhabitants. In the morning, the apostles, looking down from the mountain, saw only a large lake instead of buildings. They descended to preach God’s punishment to the few survivors, among



Church of Santa Maria di Plestia

whom they encountered the young woman. A Christian church was then built on the ruins.

In truth, about 300 meters from the church, on the road to Val Vaccagna (Via Nocerina) that departs from the square in front, there is a temple frequented from the late 6th century B.C. and now completely buried, dedicated to Cupra, the goddess of the Umbrian religion venerated as the “mother of the Plestians” according to four bronze plates from the 4th century B.C. found in the area in 1962.

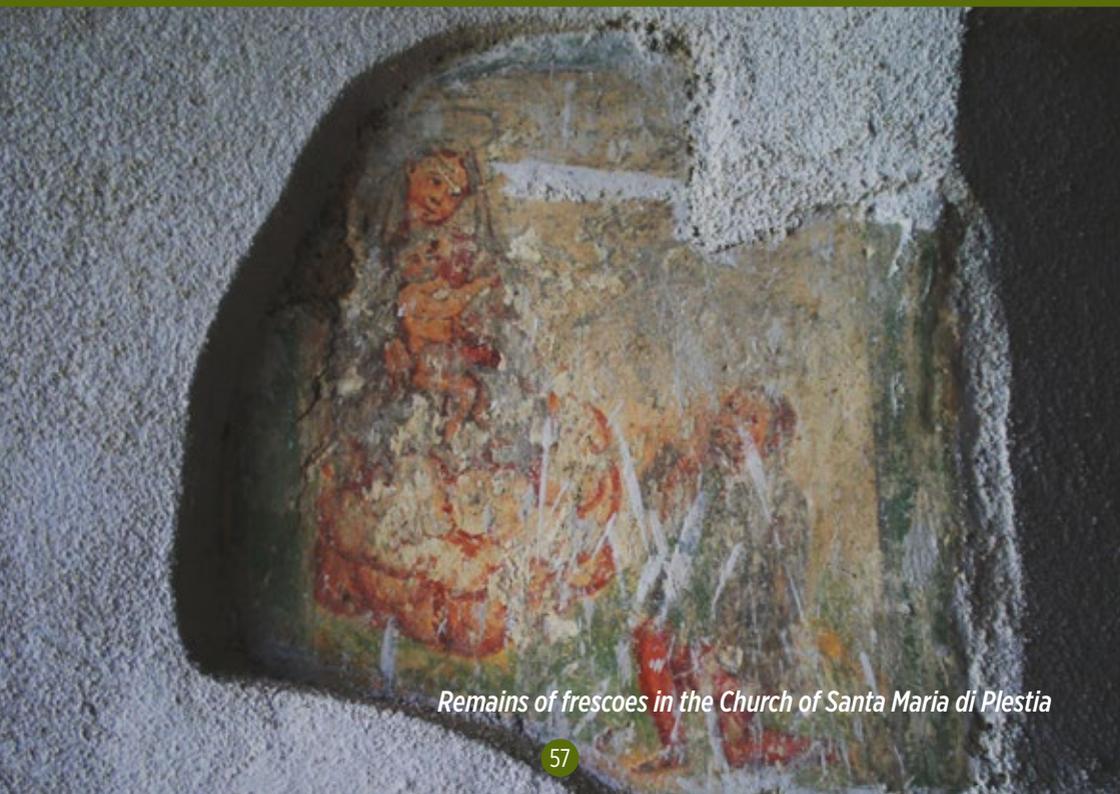
Under the church, there are remains of a public building dating back to the 1st century B.C., where an imperial cult was celebrated, as evidenced by a stele currently preserved in the church.

Around the church, at the level of the floor of its crypt, are the remains of a portico.

Its crypt, dating back to the 11th century, is divided into five small naves by a series of columns adorned with capitals: elements reused from the Roman era.



Cippo preserved in the church of Santa Maria di Plestia



Remains of frescoes in the Church of Santa Maria di Plestia

! FUN FACT

From an administrative-civil point of view, the body of the Basilica of Santa Maria di Plestia is owned by the seminary of Nocera Umbra and is in the territory of the municipality of Serravalle di Chienti, while the churchyard, with the corner column of the portico, is in the municipality of Foligno. From a canonical point of view, the church is exactly at the intersection of the boundaries of the dioceses of Foligno, Nocera Umbra, and Camerino. Currently, it is managed by the Archdiocese of Camerino by agreement, with the right of use by the Diocese of Foligno through the parish of Colfiorito.

During the 2016 earthquake in Central Italy the basilica was slightly damaged and, as a safety measure, is currently not open to visitors.

Cupigliolo Forest (ZSC IT 5210034) (10)

Located a few kilometers from the marsh, Cupigliolo Forest is characterized by extensive mixed woods of oak, beech, and hornbeam, offering an intact habitat suitable for solitary and shaded excursions.

ColFalcone Special Conservation Zone (ZSC IT 5210031) (11)

The Col Falcone Special Conservation Zone is characterized by the presence of oak, white hornbeam, yew, and holly. The latter represents one of the region's most extensive and significant populations, being one of the rare species in the wild.

Monte Frumentario (12)

Among the historically significant buildings in Annifo is the headquarters of Monte Frumentario, founded in 1492 to collect grain alms for redistributing seeds during times of famine. The ancient structure, dating back to the 13th century, has been transformed into a residence. The original 13th-century window in stone arch remains recognizable, incorporated into a largely renovated complex. The earthquake of 1997 rendered the building uninhabitable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Visiting Colfiorito Park is an opportunity for discovery, a unique experience, and to ensure this, we invite all visitors to follow simple principles of good manners and common sense.

Being in a **protected natural area**, respecting the environment and the nature surrounding us in this pristine corner of the territory is obligatory and expected. Therefore, **we suggest a few rules of conduct:**

- Carry back your waste for proper disposal
- Leave everything in its place, enjoy and photograph the flora and fauna
- Do not release domestic animals or foreign species
- Do not use drones without prior authorization
- Do not drive or park motorized vehicles outside designated areas or regular roads
- Follow the trails and do not deviate from the path
- Keep dogs on a leash and clean up after them
- Do not light fires and promptly report fires, dangerous situations, injured or distressed animals.

No specific clothing and footwear recommendations are provided for the accessible pedestrian path.

Please note that proper attire is necessary for hiking excursions.

Additionally, wear suitable mountain trail footwear with sculpted and non-slip soles. In summer, especially, bring an adequate water supply, head cover, and sunscreen. It is recommended to always wear long pants to avoid contact with plants, insects, and animals.

*“The more we will understand the wonders and realities
of the universe that surrounds us,
the less pleasure we will find in destroying it”*

(Rachel Carson)

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST IN THE SURROUNDING AREA

As the Plestini plateaus are situated on the border between the Umbrian and Marche Apennines, it is worth mentioning other places of particular interest that share similarities with the park's territory but fall within the boundaries of the neighboring Marche region.

Convent of San Bartolomeo di Brogliano

Located on the park's borders, the hermitage of San Bartolomeo di Brogliano originated in the second half of the 13th century. It was built by the inhabitants of Colfiorito in 1270, and with the passage of time, the hermitage took on the form of a convent, with imposing walls and a Gothic arch portal still standing today. The hermitage played a role in the Franciscan reform of Observance or Zoccolanti initiated by Fra Paoluccio Trinci in 1367-1368.

Santa Maria del Piano (Loc. Madonna del Piano, Cesi di Serravalle di Chienti)

Erected in the 16th century, it is a border sanctuary located in the Piano di Cesi. Adorned with magnificent devotional frescoes, it is the subject of processions involving various brotherhoods that gather on Easter Monday.

Botte dei Varano and Roman Aqueduct (Loc. Fonte delle Mattinate, Serravalle di Chienti)

The Colfiorito plain was once occupied by Lacus Plestinus, reclaimed over time through artificial canals that diverted water to the Chienti River. The Roman aqueduct dates back to the Augustan era (1st century BCE), while the Botte dei Varano was built in the second half of the 15th century. Both are examples of high hydraulic engineering contributing to the reclamation of the Colfiorito plain.

Paleontological Museum of Serravalle di Chienti (Mu.P.A.)

This museum exhibits fossil mammals such as hippos, mammoths, and rhinos found in the fossil deposits of Cesi and Collecorti, dating between 900,000 and 700,000 years ago.



COMUNE DI FOLIGNO



**Download PDF version of all the guides from
the website of the Municipality of Foligno**



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