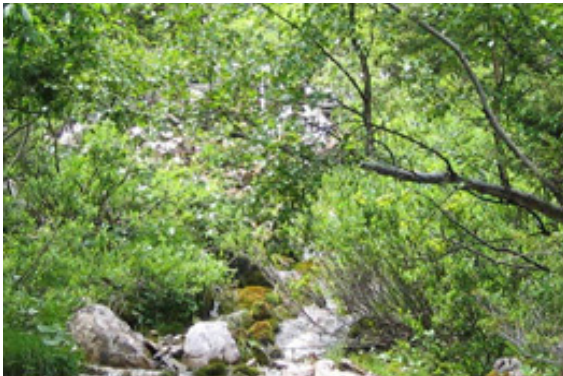




## Introduction: Nature



Friuli Venezia Giulia is a mosaic of habitats in which thousands of botanical and faunal species live, some of which are extremely rare.

This is due to the unique geographical position of this region, that Ippolito Nievo did not hesitate to describe as "a small compendium of the universe": framed by mountains and overlooking the sea, offers a natural wealth with unique characteristics, beautifully mixed to history and art of all villages, churches, villas and castles.

Most of these diverse environments are not far from each other:

- The austere and wild mountains where the eagles fly, and where chamois and deers ride along the woods, and climb the bare rocks from which you can enjoy breathtaking sceneries;
- The rolling, barely marked, hills covered with meadows and vineyards and dominated by castles of austere beauty, between whose walls story of The Little Country was made and lived;
- The karst area, with thousands of caves entering the heart of the earth, where still re-emerge, in the splendid halls adorned with stalactites and stalagmites, the traces of prehistoric human settlement;
- The plain, marked by the laborious work of men, includes gravel roads and narrow streets that, entering in cultivated fields and silent clearings, lead to picturesque villages curled up around their ancient churches;
- Restless, majestic rivers and streams pass through it, creating pools, lakes, ravines and springs, and then open up to the sea, into the lagoons that seem to be made of light, air and sunsets.



Between the mountains and the sea you can discover this amazing piece of land that contains, in its pristine beauty, the history and the proud character of Friulan people.

## The route: the province of Pordenone

### Lowland forest of Torrate

Coordinates: 45.89298, 12.800564

In the town of San Vito al Tagliamento (that borders with Chions), there is the small plain wood of Torrate (Boscat) which, with its many trees, is one of the forest's few remnants of medieval origin that covered in past centuries much of the territory located between Livenza and Tagliamento. The forest (which was declared natural beauty in 1939), extends for seven acres and is bordered to the east by the Canal del Molino and is surrounded by intensive crops.



Inside, in addition to oaks and common hornbeams, we find other trees and shrubs such as maples, narrow-leaved ashes, elms, wild cherries, hawthorns, blackthorns and hazels.

Very interesting is the herbaceous flora such as the snowdrop or the spring bell, but here also grow some real rarities such as the Turk's cap lily, the yellow lily and certain types of orchid.

From the wildlife point of view, the forest is a kind of reserve: there are, in fact, in addition to the usual

animals like squirrels, lizards, toads and frogs, even the skunks and the voracious vipers (now very difficult to find in lowland areas, that are largely urbanized and intensively cultivated) that prey on all smaller mammals in the area, which are, moreover, glutton preys for the hawks that are often seen flying over the woods.

The limited size and the possibility to visit it only along the outer perimeter along the white roads, which partly surround it, detract nothing from this place charm, that represents an untouched corner of the Middle Ages. A large mantle of forests and lands, crossed by cultivated clearings, more or less fertile. For a very long time, the medieval West remained a set of domains mansions, castles and cities arose in the midst of uncultivated and uninhabited expanses.

The forest was a desert, there burrowed the voluntary or involuntary followers of the "fuga mundi": hermits, lovers, knights, bandits, outlaws.

Place of refuge and of real or imaginary dangers, the forest, however, had its attractions: to the knights, it was the world of hunting and adventure, for peasants the forest was an income source.

There, in fact they went to pasture their flocks, there the wood to build houses and tools and objects; and there they plucked wild fruits, oaks' barks for tanning, the resin for torches and candles and the honey of the wild swarms.

(45.89298 - 12.800564)

The feeling of being in an era very far from our own, is increased by the presence, in the village of Torrate, of a lonely and mighty tower, the only surviving element of an ancient castle built between the eleventh and twelfth century that belonged to the noble and proud family of the Sbrojavacca.

This rich and powerful family has enjoyed a high prestige in Friuli and, over time, had feuds and investitures by the Patriarch of Aquileia, the Counts of Gorizia, the Abbot of Sesto and by the Bishop of Concordia.



The castle probably originated over an ancient fortification, built around the year one thousand, following the invasions of the Hungarians, on the ancient road that connected San Vito al Tagliamento and Motta di Livenza. It was looted and damaged in 1511 by Leonardo Prodolone, who rebelled against the Serenissima, archenemy of Sbrojavacca and supporter of Emperor Maximilian.

In the nineteenth century assumed the guise of a residential building, as a result of a radical restructuring and, in 1820, it was partially demolished, preserving a single square five-floor tower.

(45.887579 - 12.802632)

## Natural Reserve of the Cellina's Gorge

Coordinates: 46.185327, 12.605181

Between the wide prealpine valley of Barcis and the high plain of Montereale, the Cellina river, in its age-old race to the valley, has slowly carved the limestone layers around which an exceptional microcosm had created: the Natural Reserve of the Cellina's Gorge (established in 1996 with an area of 304 hectares) includes its most significant part.

The geomorphological appearance is typical of a great canyon, the largest in the region and one of the most spectacular in Italy, with vertical walls and impressive phenomena of river erosion.

One of the most characteristic aspects of the reserve, and more generally of the stretch of valley between Barcis and Montereale, is undoubtedly the "old road", whose impressive track passes through the whole reserve, allowing visitors to observe the impressive erosion forms that the torrent has slowly shaped, cutting the narrow gorge between Mount Fara and Pala d' Altei.

This route was used until 1992 and today is only accessible by bike or on foot.

In 1903, on the right bank of river Cellina, it was begun the building of a highway that would allow to reach the places concerned in the Barcis dam's construction.

Intuiting its importance, the towns of Montereale, Aviano, Pordenone and Barcis concurred in the expenses, taking the opportunity to provide a gateway to the entire area.

Until then, in fact, the Valcellina, was completely isolated and characterized by a "wild" environment in which human activities were rather small and of sustenance.

Communications and social relations, among the various villages and the plain area, were covered by a dense network of trails that connected the valley that, now have partly disappeared or can be traced in the thick trees and shrubs.

Along the stretch that goes down to the Val of Sant'Antonio, where rocks emerge, you can still see the ruts caused by the slides' skids that were once used (and drawn by hand or by mules or oxen) as a means of transport for heavy loads



that plunge into the stream, creating fantastic light play and shadows on the emerald waters; the fantastic "potholes", broad, shallow rocks corroded by water swirl that overlook the street for dozens of meters; the impressive systems of the old dam on which you pass to reach the left bank of the valley. Here, on the steep walls and rocky slopes, vegetation has slowly started to root and you can see some examples of tufted horned rampion, mountain cowslip and carnian campanula, that cling insinuating their roots in tiny and invisible cracks.

In humidified places, due to water's dripping, you can see the unmistakable foliar rosettes of carnivorous butterworts.

Within the reserve, the hop hornbeam woods are particularly interesting. In the gorge are also present: yews and gilded lilies. As to witness the harsh local microclimate, they're really easy to find, even at the slopes' base, heather and rhododendron bushes that normally occupy higher positions.

As for the fauna, there are many species: badgers, foxes, martens, squirrels and dormouses are easy prey for the numerous birds that nest in the area such as the peregrine falcon, golden eagle, buzzard





and the kestrel.

In the crystalline waters of the Cellina lives and reproduces the brown trout, while the common toad, the salamander and various species of frogs inhabit the more humid places. In the gorge also lives the common water snake and, on the screes, is possible to observe the horned viper, the green lizard and the common viper.

(46.185327 - 12.605181)



From the old dam, after passing a short series of tunnels, you will come out in the wide valley of Barcis with its artificial lake and emerald green water. It was created in 1953 for hydroelectric purposes, damming the river Cellina. For the implementation of this project were submerged: 24 houses, 2 mills and four stalls. They were rebuilt further upstream without creating architectural imbalances since the village of Barcis had already been almost completely rebuilt following a fire that had devastated the valley in 1944. A convenient tourist trail that winds along the banks, allows you to enjoy the lake view, while, in the village, is of considerable interest Palazzo Centi, a seventeenth-century simple building of great beauty and elegance, that on the ground



floor features a portico with lowered arches, while the second loggia has round arches.

The palace was built in stone and a compound that in Friulan is called "tof", and is used for columns, arches, jambs and decorative elements. The facade is enlivened by masks.

(46.190824 - 12.56027)

In the surroundings of the village you can still see numerous examples of typical Barcis houses; small buildings developed vertically, with the kitchen and the

stable on the ground floor, bedrooms on the first floor and, in the attic, the barn or granary; outside, between the walls, there is a small balcony. The main feature of these houses is, no doubt, that in the past the sloping roof was covered with straw or tiles, the walls are of stone, which were taken from the river and transported laboriously with baskets.

## Biotope of the magredi of San Quirino

Coordinates: 46.031147, 12.722211

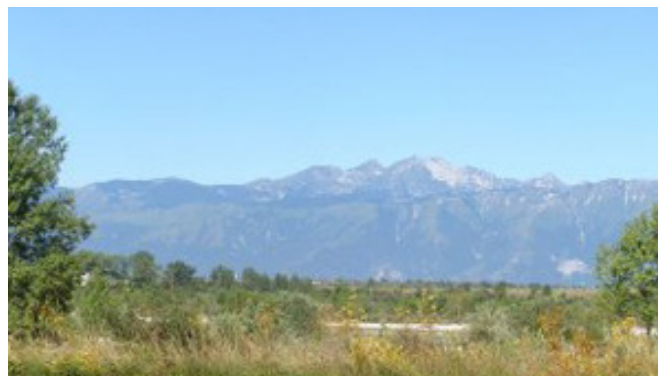
The biotope of the magredi of San Quirino is a protected natural zone of Friuli -Venezia Giulia, established in 1997, that occupies an area of about 20 hectares in the province of Pordenone.

It consists predominantly of dry meadows and gravel banks which have maintained, within an entirely transformed area by agriculture, natural features that were typical of a very large part of the high plain of Pordenone.

The territory of the magredi ("the poor meadows") consists of a vast gravel expanse created during the

last glaciations in the plain, at the mouth of mountain rivers Cellina in the west and Meduna to east.

Due to the primitive conditions of the soil, the vegetation is struggling to grow and therefore has a slender look not very lush, with a cover of wild herbs and shrubs with a few water requirements fitted to live on an arid soil. The land is in fact composed of pebbles, gravels and coarse sands, therefore very



permeable to streams water, that filters and slides under the cloak of gravel, only to emerge in the form of springs.

The magredi consist of 3 zones:

- The Cellina gravel bed, composed to the 80% by stones (called "grave"), where bushes also grow; in the spring, between the stones, you can also find some flower;
- The primitive Magredo, located on the river's edge, which is also composed of stones, but with much more abundant vegetation (flowers and grass);
- The evolved Magredo, ie the outermost zone, rich in vegetation.



In the magredi there are many endemic species, ie plants that live on small territories. Among them, in addition to Friulan cabbage (a plant that lives exclusively on stony soils along rivers Meduna and Cellina, that was chosen as biotope symbol of the) are the alpine hoary stock, the magredi's yellow cornflower and the Carnic euphorbia.

From early spring to late autumn multicolored flowers bloom. The climax is reached in May- June, while in July, you can see the farmers mowing the meadows where once grazed sheep flocks.

In late May the vision is stunning: the high white flowers of the field's queen, the dorpwort, and especially the sea of silver ears of the *Stipa veneta*, which is also called "fairy flax" or "witch's hair".

The ancient tales, in fact, say that the fairies came in the magredi to collect these plants with which they wove their silver robes, that allowed them to shine in the night.

But the real rarity of these arid and endless prairies, is the *Crambe Tataria*, the endemic plant that, in Italy, lives only in the magredi, where it was discovered in 1928 by the Friulan naturalist Silvia Zenari.

The "Tartars mustard", a species originary of the steppe of Central and Eastern Europe, has globular shape and is almost a meter high. It is cloaked by a remarkable white bloom which makes it very easy to see.

The Hungarians, barbarian tribes that in the dark ages of our history (IX -X century) began to move



westward, probably brought with them some seeds of *Crambe tataria*, perhaps stuck under the horses' hooves, or held under the saddles, together with the meat that were hanged there.

The magredi, which at first glance may seem like an inhospitable environment for fauna, are an ideal refuge for birds that nest above the mountains such as the peregrine marsh falcon, the merlin, and even the golden eagle; the kestrel and the Eurasian hobby, nest in the magredi, while the shrubs form an ideal area for breeding passerine birds.

The most common mammal is the hare, strongly linked to the prairies, which is hunted from above by the ubiquitous buzzards or nosed right into the lair by the wily fox.

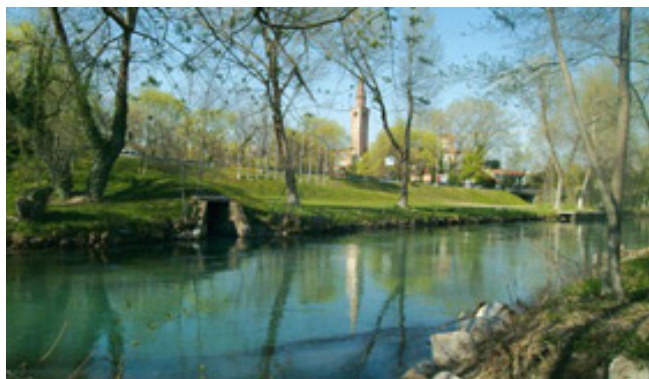
The warm and dry meadows are especially suited for reptiles, especially lizards, but the only amphibian that can survive in these grasslands is the brave emerald green toad with white patches embellished with reddish dots.

This boundless space, this endless expanse of stones bordered by the Alps, at first gaze looks like a flat and monotonous prairie, but just hop on one of the observation towers that are located on the sides of the road between the villages of Vivaro and San Foca, to realize that you are confronted with a unique and spectacular natural environment: the last steppe landscape in Northern Italy.



## River Park of Noncello

Coordinates: 45.955222, 12.66508



The River Park of Noncello is an integral part of the historic center of Pordenone and also the city's name has deep bond with this river: the river port on the Noncello was in fact called Portus Naonis.

The Noncello is a typical spring water course, with constant flow and temperature throughout the year, except in the presence of atmospheric events in spring when, for phenomena of regurgitation of the waters of the Meduna, the river level increases of several meters.

For centuries, local people have lived on the river and

with all it has produced. It has been a vehicle of contacts and economic, as well as cultural and social, exchanges; since the Middle Ages, together with the goods transport along the waterway between Pordenone and Venice it was also crucial for carrying passengers.

The river traffic became more and more intense, until the end of the eighteenth century, when it was conquered by the Republic of Venice, and the waters of Noncello began to spin the blades of the mills and of paper factories. When, in the second half of the twentieth century, the ancient system of river transport was supplanted by roads and railways, the river became an oasis of peace and beauty in the city center. Today it is still used for recreational boating, and you can navigate to the sea following the waterway that continues along the rivers Meduna and Livenza. The park is filled by many walking trails with appropriate and specific structures to cross the river. The most famous bridge is popularly called "Adam's and Eve's", even though the two statues, placed on high stone pillars, and donated to the city by the Venetian outpost of Udine, depict Jupiter and Juno. The current artifact has a single arch (originally there were three) that was replaced in the eighteenth century by Bartolomeo Feracina, a famous builder from Bassano, that designed it to let transportation boats pass to the new river port (that has never been realized).



Crossing the bridge, is easily accessible on the left bank of the river, the sixteenth-century church of the Holy Trinity, while on the right side we find the lakeside promenade, also known as the "Riviera of Pordenone". A dock for small boats was also retained. It is supplemented by a launching and access ramp for motorized vehicles. The Holy Trinity was built in the sixteenth century, just outside the ancient "Furlana gate" that overlooked the river and the port, presumably on the foundations of a small earlier chapel. It is one of the most beautiful churches of Pordenone, a little gem that brings together the proof of deep faith of the ancient inhabitants of Pordenone. The refined architecture and the sumptuous frescoes are attributed to Giovanni Maria Zaffoni, called Calderari, a student of the school of Pordenone. The birth of this church is tied to the Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity, called "Reds" for the color of choir robes. The brotherhood was linked to the Trinitarians and was mainly devoted to the captives redemption in Turks hands, as well as welfare works.



The park is characterize by a pleasant and calm environment. Along the green banks swim many waterfowl species such as mallards, kingfishers, moorhens, gulls, cormorants and small waders. More and more swans enrich the park with their elegance this park's charm. All along the river, but in particular from the "Adam and Eve" bridge, it is possible to observe

trouts, pikes, tenches, rudds, eels and graylings, as well as crayfishes, which testify the purity of the Noncello waters. Among the amphibians, beside the crested newt and the Lataste frog, there is also the very rare brown toad. The vegetation of the banks is mainly composed of hydric plants, such as the different varieties of willows, poplars, birches and alders. Other plants line the river shores creating a beautiful green oasis: the viburnum, the elder, hawthorn and acacia, which all bloom in late spring at the same time with their white flowers, creating a picturesque natural scenery.

## Park of San Floriano

Coordinates: 46.025903, 12.500854

The territory of Polcenigo is very attractive both in terms of natural environments and historical evidences.

On the hills of S. Floriano and of the Mori, in the protected area, which includes the springs and the Livenza river, is located the only example of existing rural and natural park in Italy:

the Park of San Floriano, managed by the Provincial Administration of Pordenone, since 1998 is part of Europarc Federation, the international organization that protects and enhances the parks of Europe. It was established in 1975, with the goal of creating a park, that combined recovery and environmental protection with a quality agricultural production.

The peculiarity of the park (which covers approximately 65 hectares) is represented by the so-called "field catalog" that collect a fruit heritage consisting of 122 varieties of apple, 37 of pear and 14 of plum, a sort of 'genes' bank of the native fruit assets that improves the crops and raise the fruit of the mountain and foothill areas. Different varieties of berries are also planted such as: raspberries, blackberries, currants, blueberries with whom excellent jams are made.

Another section is dedicated to the production of those vegetables, that were once cultivated behind each house, which were an integral part of the rural classes' supply: lentils, chickpeas, beans (the traditional farmer food), onions, cabbage, turnips and chicory.

The section dedicated to medicinal plants is also historically interesting as it allows to know the many herbs once used in pharmacology.

In ancient times, in fact, the women drew from the earth and nature the raw materials to treat humans' and animals' diseases, to eliminate wheat's pests and to mitigate the field sterility.



They knew the right day, hour and moon phase to gather roots and rare herbs in the woods, in swamps and in the gardens.

These herbarie, that were processed by the Inquisition and burned at the stake as witches, had acquired a particular expertise in the collection and use of medicinal herbs which, after being carefully blended with minerals, earth, parts of animals, human blood and urine, were essential ingredients in potions, ointments, balms and infusions, according to ancient recipes handed down orally from mother to daughter.

Among these plants, that risk to disappear because of the spontaneous gathering and the intensive cultivation, there are: chives, artemisia, some varieties of mint and thyme, lemon balm, oregano, rue, and the pulmonary.

The forests consists of several native trees such as oaks, hornbeams, cherries, flowering ashes and maples, among which hid squirrels, roe deer, badgers, foxes, dormice and some characteristic birds as the goldfinch, the robin and the buzzard.

The permanent pastures are used during the growing season for hay and to freely graze the animals





reared in the park.

In this protected area was also introduced the breeding of indigenous animal species (that were likely to shrink, or even to disappear, due to the priority given to more specialized breeds imported from different areas) and minor races at risk of extinction.

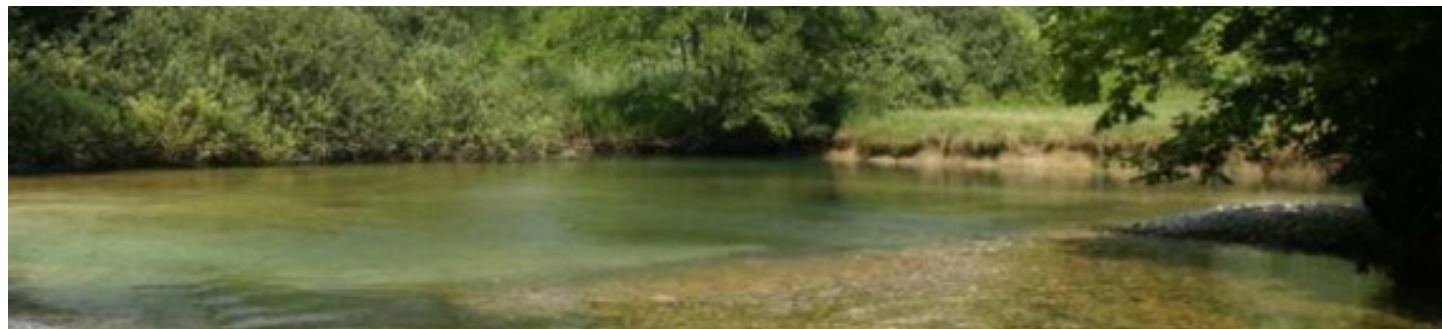
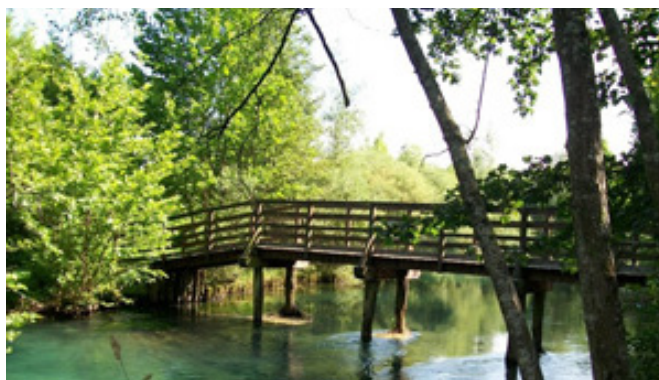
Among the various races are: Friulian Simmental, Bardigiano horses, Alpagota, Carsolina and Finnish sheeps, Cinta Senese and Mora Romagnola pigs, Robusta Lionata, Robusta Tarnished, Rhode Island and Sicilian chickens, Common Bronzed and Ermellino of Rovigo turkeys and Goose Romagna geese.

The breeding of bees occupies a significant position, both for the production of honey and the important role they play in the pollination of many wild and cultivated plants in the park. Another rural area of considerable environmental importance, is constituted by the "rotten" zones, in which the ancient technique, used in the past to increase the production of fodder, is maintained. The formation of rots (the name comes from the ancient habit of leaving the last winter cut to "rot" in the irrigation lawn) is made possible by the presence of springs, whose waters have the important characteristic of having a constant temperature, of approximately 10 degrees, throughout the year. The water of the Livenza, coming from the opening of the gates that feed the channels within the Park's plots, keeps the soil temperature around 8-10 degrees and enables the growth of grass and forage during cold periods.

The lawns, covered with last year's mowed grass, are drowned by fountain water. The mowed grass becomes fertilizer and the fountain water's temperature protects the meadows from frost and snow. This allows an early growth of the grass and the ability to obtain up to ten harvests a year.

The water meadows are an important environment even from a naturalistic point of view: during the winter months they are a staging area and a feeding source for many animals, especially birds such as herons, coots and moorhens.

This cultivation technique, characteristic of the Po Valley, was introduced and spread by French monks, especially Cistercians, in the fifteenth century. Nowadays it is almost completely disappeared, and the park of S. Floriano preserves one of the few testimonies.



Inside the park are practiced farming activities for demonstration and learning purposes, aimed at students, technicians and farmers, but it is a worthwhile destination for easy and relaxing walks in the midst of nature. (46.025903 - 12.500854)

In the territory of Polcenigo (at an altitude of about 50 meters above sea level and 1 km from the village) there are also the Gorgazzo's sources, a tributary of the Livenza River that historically marks the border between Friuli and Veneto. The site is of immeasurable natural value, the spring (locally called "el Buso") is fed by the waters that sink in the clefts on the Cansiglio plateau or Monte Cavallo, and reappears on the surface as wide and deep oval-shaped pool, hidden between trees and rocks, continuously fed by clear and icy waters taking a deep blue coloration with countless reflections.

This tiny lake takes its origin from the waterway called Gorgazzo. The source has been explored by many divers and the downhill credited to Luigi Casati, which in 2008 reached a total of - 212 meters to about 10 meters deep, where an evocative statue of Christ was placed.



The stream Gorgazzo, descends through a twisty path, full of small waterfalls, to Polcenigo, and ends its journey in the flowing river Livenza, whose source, fueled by copious springs, is visible in the Santissima locality, not far away from there.

The name comes from the ancient Sanctuary of the Holy Trinity, which is reflected in the small stretch of gurgling water.

According to legend, the church was built on the place where the Emperor Theodosius II in 346 witnessed an apparition of the Blessed Trinity, but the springs were also propitious scenarios of pagan rituals of fertility in even more ancient times, since the area was already populated in pre-Roman times. The building is characterized by a large porch placed before the facade, while on the inside it houses a magnificent wooden altar with a kiosk by Domenico da Tolmezzo, dated from 1496, a precious wooden choir, various altarpieces and frescoes. (46.021016 - 12.474804)

As evidence of the sacredness that from immemorial time accompanies the precious waters, a little further, following the river's course, stands a shrine dedicated to the Virgin at whose foot a small spring flows. Its water was considered miraculous both to protect the view, and to treat migraine. The waters also propitiate female fertility.

Tradition says it was built on the ruins of an ancient pagan temple and it is said that Our Lady has come to this place alone, down the mountain.

Of unquestionable charm is also the church of St. Florian, located inside the park that bears the same name, with a single nave with a semicircular apse, containing frescoes dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century attributable to the Vitale da Bologna and dated to late fourteenth or the early fifteenth century. It is dedicated to a brave Roman soldier who was martyred there in 304 AD.

The first document that nominates it, seems to be related to the quiet Lombard Emperor Liutprando, in 743 AD. Florian was a veteran of the Roman army and a secret proselyte of the Christian religion.

During the persecutions initiated by the Emperor Diocletian in 304, knowing that in Loricum (now Enns, is the oldest town in Austria) a group of forty his coreligionists had been arrested and sentenced to death, Florian decided to join them and share their fate. When he arrived in the city, he surrendered to a group of former comrades confessing his faith and, after being interrogated and tortured by the Dean Aquilino, he was thrown into the river Anesius with a millstone tied around his neck. S. Florian is the patron saint of Upper Austria and Poland, and is invoked against fire and flooding.

As a demonstration of how this area was considered favorable to human settlement since ancient times, at the foot of the hill of San Floriano, in the archaeological area of San Giovanni, were found many metal and ceramic artifacts, referring to a necropolis with wide chronological range, from the Iron Age to the late Roman period (fourth-fifth century AD).

Further evidence of the historical importance that territory had, is given by the discovery, on the banks of Livenza, in a place called "Palu", of the oldest dwelling settlement of Friuli Venezia Giulia and one of the most important in Italy.

It is a settlement populated since ancient Paleolithic (ca 4900 BC).

Excavations have revealed three different types of structures that testify a pile-dwelling settlement that goes back to the Neolithic period. Multiple materials were found: from everyday objects to stone and ceramic tools, now housed at the Archeological Museum of West Friuli del Friuli in the Municipality of Pordenone. This site has won in 2011 the enrollment in Unesco's lists for "Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps". (46.019183 - 12.480898)

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*Texts by Enza Chiara Lai (bibliographical references on [www.ciaoin.com](http://www.ciaoin.com))*

