

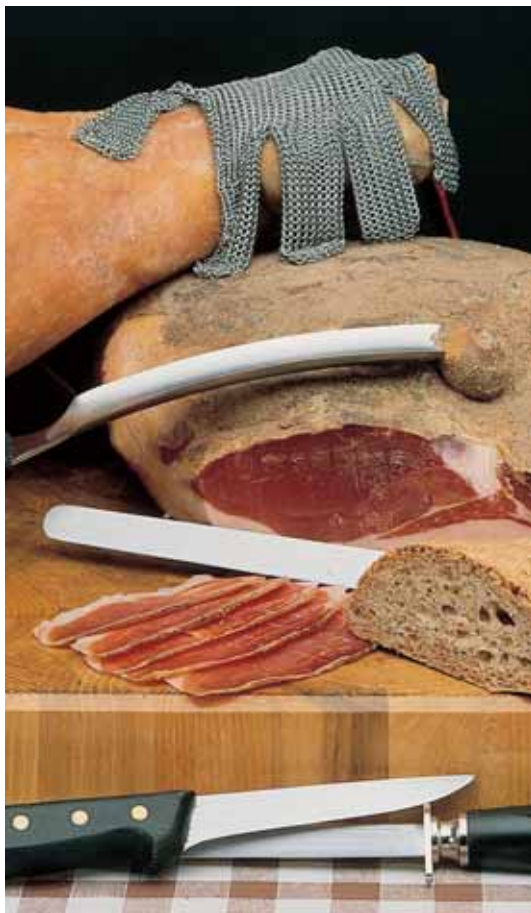
AN EMOTIONAL AND SENSORY ROUTE

DISCOVERING THE TYPICAL PRODUCTS OF THE VALLEY

by Rossana Farini

In following the trail of 'flavours', the valley takes on a particular fascination. The culture of food in this area is the culture of living well. The products derive from a deep set passion for those things that the land, the sky and the woods can give us. In the simplicity of certain tastes, it is possible to reveal the history of a people who decided to re-examine what was available and to elaborate on that with inventive and interest, making the food good to eat and delightful to the eye.

From Corezzo – We begin our journey from Corezzo in the vicinity of the small religious community where St. Francis received the Stigmata. The first stop is the small restaurant Corazzesi, a simple, warm ambience with drifting aromas of an old-style kitchen; of tastes and smells which hail from the nearby woods. Their particular dish, which is an open book on the history of the people, is the **'tortello alla lastra'** (a tortello - no egg ingredient - cooked on a type of griddle pan.) A genuine appetising dish created with that unique capacity of mountain people to know how to diversify and amalgamate the





Cooking the Tortello alla lastra

few edible items available. The name originates from the word 'lastra' - the rough slab of sandstone on which the tortelli were laid to be cooked.

From Corezzo we go in the direction of **Badia Prataglia**, the most populated town in the National Park.

A 'must' is to visit the agricultural farm Canvecchio which seems to be in the middle of nowhere. Here you can purchase very good quality **sheep's cheese** and fresh, soft cheese like **ravaggiolo**.

Before continuing on our journey, it is worth while to

A RECIPE FOR TORTELLI DI PATATE

According to the traditional recipe you need: 1 kg. of white, floury potatoes grown on the mountainsides; six or seven sausages; four ounces of tasty, well seasoned 'pancetta Italiana' (bacon); a good fistful of parsley; five cloves of garlic; a touch of tomato purée; salt and pepper. Boil the potatoes – more or less the same size – with their skins; but don't over-



cook. Peel them and pass them through the vegetable mill before they become cold. Fry the 'pancetta' and sausage gently and chop them finely. In a separate pan brown the cloves of garlic - pressed in the palm of your hand - pass them through the vegetable mill and add them to the sausages. At the last moment, add the parsley and the tomato purée. Taste and, if necessary, correct for salt and pepper. The more 'sophisticated' like a dash of hot chilli or, as our ancestors used to say, of 'ginger' and half a clove of raw garlic. Mix the fried ingredients with the potatoes adding an egg if the mixture doesn't amalgamate well. Taste again and prepare the mixture putting it inside a 'sfoglia' to create the tortelli.

From: 'A Tavola in Casentino' by Mario da Monte.

CHESTNUT HONEY AND FIR TREE HONEYDEW

In Casentino types of chestnut honey are the most produced and, to a lesser degree, fir honeydew. The bee hives positioned at the outer rim of the woods permit the bees to look for pollen in areas where there is no pollution – an environment which lends quality to the product.

Chestnut honey has a rather liquid consistency, is of a dark, brilliant brown, rather bitter and pungent with an underlying smell of the woods. It is excellent with soft ricotta or sheep's cheese (pecorino).

Fir tree honeydew it has a liquid consistency, is dark in colour, a balsamic type of taste and is less sweet than the nectar honeys. The smell is slightly resinous similar to that of caramelized sugar. This type of honey is widely requested and highly valued, especially as only a limited quantity is produced. It is ideal with ricotta cheese or as a dessert to finish off a meal.

pause at Badia Prataglia and pop into the local shops where you can fill your shopping bags with so many products



which come from the woods, among these there is fir tree honeydew or manna.

RAVIGGIOLO (Soft cheese)

This is a very soft and delicate white cheese smelling typically of milk and with a slightly acid taste. It is made with full cream sheep's milk (there is a variety made with cows' milk) which is heated to 37° C, allowed to coagulate and then put into containers. After some hours it is salted and is ready to eat. It is a traditional custom to decorate it with **fern leaves** which leave their design imprinted on the cheese.



PRODUCERS OF HONEY IN CASENTINO

• Apicoltura Andreani di Andreani Daniele

Via Falterona, Ponte a Poppi
Tel: 0575.550228

• Apicoltura Casentinese

Via dell'Artigiano, Bibbiena
Tel: 0575.536494

• Apicoltura Gualdani Ivo di Gualdani Enrico

Loc. Calbenzano, Subbiano
Tel: 0575.487026

• Apicoltura Vallesanta di Roberto Ciabatti

Via Nazionale, Soci di Bibbiena

Tel: 348.7476768

• Apicoltura Vangelisti

Via Roma, 82, Stia
Tel: 0575.504504

• Azienda Agricola Il Bugno di Giannini Marco

Via dell'Alpe, loc. Faltona-Talla
Tel: 0575.512829

Az. Agricola Zuccari di Zuccari Roberto

• Apicoltura Biologica
Via dei Ciliegi, Poppi
Tel 0575.520267:

• Ciabini Massimo

Via Roma, Ponte a Poppi
Tel: 0575.520091

• Gualdani Mario

Via Calbenzano, Subbiano
Tel: 0575.487024

SHEEP'S CHEESE

Whether the pecorino is produced fresh or seasoned, the system of preparing the cheese remains the same. Towards the end of the preparation, the whole surface of the cheese is covered with coarse salt or immersed in brine. After the salting process, the **fresh cheese** is ready to be eaten while the seasoned variety is kept in a refrigerator or in cool cellars for about **120 days**,



during which time the cheese is turned over several times.

Continuing beyond **Camaldoli** we pass the cross roads for the Benedictine Monastery in an area of poetic memory – the **Orfici meadows**. On the Agritourism farm Casale Camalda - a stopping place for excursions and guided visits in the National Park of the Casentino Forests – 'flavours' are cultivated! The old style **cultivar** of Casentino are preserved (apples, pears, cherries...) with which exquisite jams are made.

Poppi is not only the centre of cultural, medieval and historical Casentino but also an area where you can relax, enjoy shopping sprees, make interesting purchases – and not only for the palate. On the premises of the ‘Vinaio’ (wine-merchant) at **Ponte a Poppi** there is the good taste – and the tastes – of Casentino. You can find all the typical, traditional products of the valley: jams, honey, chestnuts; the renowned ‘zolfini’ round-shaped yellow-



“Baldino” or “castagnaccio”. A cake made with chestnut flour, pine nuts, walnuts, rosemary and currants

ish, haricot beans; the famous red potatoes of Cetica; excellent local wine and traditional cakes.

The culinary symbol of good living in Casentino is the **Parma-style seasoned ham**. It is round, longish and rather flat in shape and weighs between 8 and 15 kg. When cut, the bright red of the meat contrasts appetizingly with the white strip of delicious fat. The smell is intense and penetrating and the taste delicate. A very popular smoked variety adds a snap of extra flavour.

It has to be tried cut by hand and accompanied by a slice of

THE ‘NESTA’ APPLE

This type of apple is of antique origin and comes from plants which are not normally pruned or thinned out. The dominant colour is yellow, turning to a red shade when mature. The apple pulp is hard, crunchy and slightly acid. It is a late variety and the fruit keeps well into Spring. The plant is very rustic, resistant to all the main apple diseases and there is no need for chemical intervention.

In Casentino it is found chiefly on the hillsides and on the slopes of Pratomagno.



unsalted bread made in the local ovens and washed down with a glass of good red Tuscan wine. To understand where these products come from is almost a duty in order to appre-

ciate them more. Good advice is to pay a visit to the fine Agricultural farm of Claudio Orlandi, near Poppi, a well-known pig breeder of the **Grigio del Casentino**.

THE CHESTNUT

For many mountain communities the chestnut has, since medieval times, represented an essential resource, known also as ‘bread from the woods’. The four most common varieties in Casentino are: **Marrone Casentino**; **Pistolese**; **Raggiolana**; **Tirolese**. Typical dishes using chestnuts are **ballotte** or **baloci** (boiled chestnuts with just a pinch of salt); the **tigliate** (chestnuts peeled and boiled with a sprig of wild fennel); the **bruciate** or **brici** (also known as roast-chestnuts).

Dried chestnuts which are still produced by using the old drying-houses can be eaten whole or ground to use as flour.



SEASONED CASENTINO HAM (Parma-style)

The famous locally produced ham is made by interbreeding the 'cinta senese' or 'mora romagnola' with the breed 'landrace', all reared in the open. The haunches are trimmed, massaged and covered in salt, garlic and other spices (pepper, ground juniper berries and aromatic herbs). Tradition has it that in days of yore the hams were hung from the ceiling in kitchens for the drying-out process and the heat from the fire impregnated the meat with a light taste of smoke. The period of **seasoning** must not be less than **18 months**.



Let's move on now from the **Plain of Campaldino** in the direction of **Pratovecchio**. Even from the road it is possible to see, silhouetted against the sky,

LA FINOCCHIONA

A typical Tuscan 'salume', cylindrical in shape – similar to the salami – of a soft consistency, pink in colour, smelling and tasting strongly of **wild fennel**. The meat chosen is chopped finely and mixed with salt, ground pepper, peppercorns, garlic and fennel seeds. In some cases red wine, or vinsanto, and extra spices are added.

the battlements of the surviving towers of the majestic castle of Romena. The Parish Church



(the 'pieve', a one-time resting place for pilgrims) lies silently and peacefully in one of Nature's most beautiful landscapes. The passion and prayers of D'Annunzian fame and memory blend in this pastoral setting to become almost an impressionist painting.

A little further on we find ourselves - still in the National Park - and specifically in the small habitat of **Casalino** on the agri-

cultural farm of Goretti in order to taste the **Abbucciato aretino**. The name derives from the characteristic skin of the cheese which, as a result of the type of seasoning, develops a dark, strong, resistant rind. The smell is of aromatic herbs, mature fruit, sheep's cheese and even liquorice.

We can't leave the valley without tasting our own, local seasoned ham, a slice or two of **sanbudello** and a sampling of **finocchiona**, can we? Certainly not! And so we head for **Strada**



"Capaccia" or "capofreddo" a salami-style product made from the tongue, the head and the rind of the pig

in Casentino. There are so many possibilities here but we would like to mention the following: 'Alimentari Casentino da Ghega', the 'Bottega del San Budello' at **Prato di Strada** and the 'Casentino Salumi' of Pertichini at **Barbiano**. Our round trip closes with a visit to **Cetica**. The cultivation of the **red potato**, the 'Casa dei Saperi' the small shops typical of mountain villages, and the Ecomuseum of the Charcoal Burners are a just conclusion to a discovery-tour in the valley of the poets.

THE RED POTATO OF CETICA

We know for certain that the red potato has been produced in this area since the early 1900s. It is thought that it derives from



the Scottish variety Red King Edward. The peel is red and the potato pulp is white with pink veining. As a result of its organoleptic and sensory characteristics, it lends itself to the preparation of traditional dishes; queen of the filling for tortelli and ideal for gnocchi. It cooks well and has a pronounced but fine and delicate taste.

THE DIDACTIC FARMS

For the real pleasure of children who most certainly enjoy close contact with animals and to satisfy the curiosity of adults, we suggest a visit to the **Didactic farms**.

Information: 0575.520511



TYPICAL DISHES NOT TO MISS

Black crostini (made with chicken or rabbit livers); black cabbage crostini; Acquacotta; ravioli filled with ricotta cheese and spinaci; ravioli 'gnudi'; maccheroni with hare sauce, Ribollita or Minestra di pane; Scottiglia. Game meat: wild boar, deer. Mushrooms: stewed, fried and Porcini caps roasted in the oven. Large, ring-shaped cakes and Berlingozzi. These and other recipes can be found in the book "A Tavola in Casentino" by Mario da Monte on sale in all the bookshops.

It is possible to visualize the complete range of typical products on website: www.cm-casentino.toscana.it/agricoltura/tipici.