CASTELSANTANGELO SUL NERA

Altitude: 780 m
Population: 400

Location
Situated along the upper stretches of the River Nera, close to the valley bottom

Origins of the name
It is a name that in around 1300, the local population, ever more exposed to the dangers of raids and incursions and uniting in the search of defence and freedom, gave to the great castle (Castrum Sancti Angeli) which they founded and put under the protection of the Arcangelo Michele.

Historical Interest
The first groups to populate this valley came from the Umbrian population and the Villanoviana civilization, even if the first historical references to the town were in 1300 when the Lords of the Castle of Nocria was built to submit to the more dominant Lords of Visso. Castelsantangelo sul Nera thus became governed as Guaita Montanea (of the mountain), under the dominium of Visso, even though it maintained an independent administration and a special Statute. Today the medieval structure of the village is still visible: il Castrum, built in the XIII century at the same time as that of Visso, is triangular in shape with a square tower (turris capitis) at the top and, at the bottom, is the rivercourse and long sections of wall. Also present were six entrance gates of which four remain. The ecclesiastical aspect of the castle was concentrated at three focal points, the only three open spaces of the fortification which coincided with the churches of S. Stefano, from the XIII century, modified in the 1700s, of S. Martino dei Gualdalesi, which still retains its romanesque character, and that of the monastery of San Liberatore.

Itinerary
Setting off from the piazza del Ponte (1), focal point of the life of the town, we find the church of San Sebastiano (2), built in stone in 1576; it is reached by recently restored travertine steps; on the central door is an inscription reading Societas Misericordiae MDLXXX, evidence that this was the home to a group of the brotherhood of the Misericordia, which, apart from offering spiritual and material assistance to the poor and ill, also gave them burial.
This church is linked to the story of an epic battle, as told in the poem by poet and shepherd, Berrettaccia di Vallinfante, fought on 22 July 1522, against the Nursini by the Castellani, Ussitani and Vissani who were victorious. Leaving the church, the route proceeds along via S. Angelo and then flanks the old castle walls, arriving at the castle entrance (3), a fascinating and imposing stone doorway, rich in history and perfectly conserved. Having passed through it, the route rises and soon turns to the right to arrive at the Romanesque style church of San Martino dei Gualdesi (4) built in stone and crafted by the inhabitants of Gualdo in 1300.
The columned doorway was finely crafted, as was the mullioned belltower. Originally there was also a spire which was demolished around 1870 after becoming unsafe. Inside is a single nave rich with frescos. The main altar, made of carved stone, is found under

elegant arched columns, held up by two elegant slender little columns with fine capitals which rest on the backs of two lions. The work dates from the 1300s.

The numerous frescos are of the umbrian school, some attributed to Paolo Bontulli of Percanestro. Continuing along to the right the route reaches the S. Angelo Gate (5). From here steps lead to the church of S.Stefano (6) (1300), found in the piazza of the same name, with its solemn belltower.

Shortly afterwards the route arrives at the Nocrina Gate (7), with its characteristic double arch which at one time was overlooked by a defensive tower. Head up to the asphalt road and then turn right to the monastery of San Liberatore (8), surrounded by impressive walls which originally enclosed the old castle. Within is a mixture of vaulted ceilings and narrow corridors, where the splendour of the living stone stands out. Also of great value is the chapel, with paintings from the Umbrian School from the 1400-1500s, and numerous frescos, the majority attributed to Paolo of Visso. From the monastery head back to the Nocrina Gate and taking the via del Castello, leave the ancient set of buildings and return to the departure point.