

Walks from Villa Gelsomina

Here are five great local walks, which should be undertaken in conjunction with a map (please do not rely solely on the sketch-maps included here) such as Kompass 1:50,000 Number 97 entitled *Omegna-Varallo Lago d'Orta* on sale in e.g. the newsagent in the main square in Orta San Giulio. Numbers (1), (2), etc refer to points on the sketch maps. *Please pass any comments on these walks to William Schwitzer.*

Points of interest

To walk to the nearest restaurant, the Vecchio Circolo: do **Walk 2** as far as (4). Look out for the steep steps on your right, and descend these, which lead to the Vecchio Circolo. *5 minutes.*

To walk to the nearest food shop, La Bottega, in Vacciago: do **Walk 2** as far as (5), but go straight on staying on the level. Descend the bends (25) and come out on the road (26) where you turn left. At (27) turn right and after a very few metres take the path on your right across the grass towards to church. Climb the steps up to the terrace (28) of the 15th century church of *Sant'Antonio*, with its superb view. Walk up the cobbles and join (29) the asphalted road into Vacciago and La Bottega (30). *15 minutes.*

To walk to the nearest bar, Bar Iris, in Vacciago: as for La Bottega above, but keep walking right through Vacciago, and Bar Iris is on your right. *20 minutes.*

To walk to the Fondazione Calderara in Vacciago (modern art collection): as for La Bottega above, you pass the Fondazione Calderara. *15 minutes.*

To walk to the nearest railway station, Orta-Miasino: do **Walk 2** as far as (11), then go straight on for another two hundred metres. *45 minutes.*

To do a circuit through the delightful village of Corconio: do **Walk 1** as far as (16) then follow the track next to the railway. Follow the road into Corconio, and when you get there, climb up through the village (this can be done in several ways, but you can't really go wrong). Find the beautiful little church, and take the cobbled track behind the church. Cross over the railway bridge, and soon you come out at (8) on Walk 2, which provides a route back to the house through Lortallo. *70 minutes.*

To go down to Miami Beach and up through Corconio: do **Walk 1** down, then at (20) turn right and walk along the outside of the curve along the main road for 50 yards (please walk outside of the crash barrier!). After the hotel, turn steep right up the road to Corconio. Once in the village, turn right up through the villas (this can be done in several ways, but you can't really go wrong). Find the beautiful little church, and take the cobbled track behind the church. Cross over the railway bridge, and soon you come out at (8) on Walk 2, which provides a route back to the house through Lortallo. *80 minutes.*

Walk 1 Miami Beach

This walk takes you down to the nearest beach at Miami.

Start & finish:

Villa Gelsomina

Time: Descent 25 minutes, ascent 35 minutes (*the climb is hard work on a hot summer's day!*)

Suitability for children:

Restrain toddlers when walking along the short section of road.

Description of the Walk

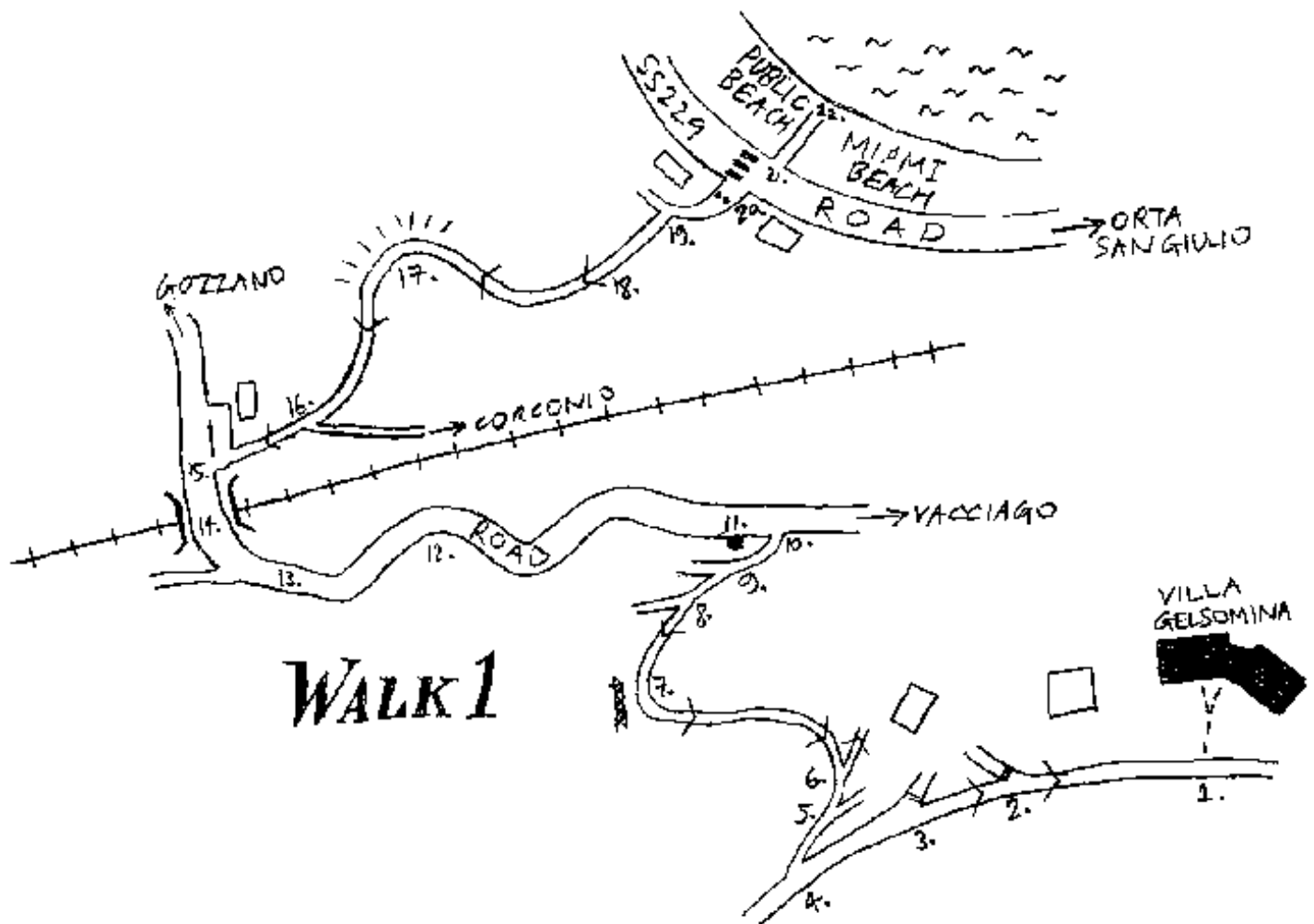
Follow the sketch map below. From the house (1), turn right out of the gate. As you start to descend, ignore the turnings (2) and (3) with wooden gates to a farm. At (4) turn sharply back to your right, and follow the path round to your left, ignoring the tracks to your right at (5) and (6). Pass at (7) a rusty pylon, follow the track round a right bend, and descend through the woods, with the 12th century *Torre di Buccione* now straight ahead.

Ignore the tracks that join from the left at (8) and (9). Soon (10) you come out on the road, where you turn left. Take note of the milestone (11), which serves as a marker for when you return! Take great care along the road (watch where you cross!), descend the bends in the road, passing at the bottom (13) on your left a builders yard.

Follow the road over the railway bridge (14), and immediately (15) turn right, and descend the track. Ignore the track off to your right at (16) (which hugs the railway all the way to Corconio). Continue descending the overgrown asphalted track, following the big curve (17) under the cliff on which the *Torre di Buccione* is situated.

After some distance (18) you come out at (19) where you turn right. Step through the bollards (20) and cross the busy main lake-side road at the zebra (21) taking great care (don't expect drivers to stop for you!). Opposite is a track leading to (22) the great little pay beach on your right, with umbrellas, deckchairs, lifeguard, sunloungers, bar, food, loos, pedalos etc, or the free public beach on your left.

Return the way you came.



Walk 2 Orta San Giulio and the Orta peninsula

This walk takes you down to the little gem of a town that is Orta San Giulio. Enjoy great views of the lake!

Start & finish: Villa Gelsomina

Time: About 2 hours 15 minutes (*NB: the climb is hard work on a hot day, particularly after a full lunch (!) in Orta San Giulio*)

Suitability for children: Restrain toddlers when walking right on the lake front.

Description of the walk

Follow the sketch map on the next page.

Turn left out of the house (1), and continue into the narrower section (2). At the junction (3) keep left, and climb up to the old part of Lortallo (4). Where (5) the road starts to bend round to the right, take the **first** left down a steep track. Ignore two turnings to the left. Soon it is just a path; descend the steps (6) to come out on the road.

Turn left and walk 25 metres down the road to the junction (7) signposted 'Passegiata'. Turn right into a road (initially surfaced), with a yellow house on your left, and a superb view of the lake. This is the footpath 'Prisciola' (pronounced 'PRIsholla'), which is supposed to be a corruption of the Latin for the Great Tit bird.

Descend the track, with the lake below on your left. At (8) ignore the path joining on your left from Corconio. Pass at (9) a short length of crash barrier on your left (ignore the very steep turning on your right up to Vacciago). Follow the road down through the woods – a section of the road is surfaced. Watch out for glimpses of the island. At the bottom you are level with the railway line. Pass (10) the Villa San Francesco Hotel on your left.

Take a turning (11) on your left signposted "Prisciola" that passes under the railway (12). Then bear left (signposted "Passeggiata"), passing the football pitch on your right (at this point there is a nice view of the *Mottarone* with its characteristic antennae between wooded hills), and descend the old *mulattiera* (mule track) that comes out by the Hotel San Caterina (13). *The smooth stone track down this path can be slippery in the wet!*

Cross over the *Strada Regionale 229* at the roundabout (14). Bear left (15) following the Arabic-style wall of the Villa Crespi, an exclusive hotel in this magnificent palace inspired by a rich man's travels in the Middle East.

At (16) follow the cobbled road (next to the new glass and stone "H₂Otel") down to the waters edge and tiny beach (17) that is Ortello, and take the path (18) along the lake front (there are a few places to have a dip here). Alternatively, from (16) you may prefer to just stay on the road round the peninsular; rounding a bend, the island is suddenly straight ahead! At (19) the lakeside path rejoins the road. Walk through Orta San Giulio (20).

(If you wish, make a little diversion, by walking up the cobbled/stepped track from the *Piazza Motta* [main square] and taking the cobbled track to the right of the yellow church. Then walk up and take a left hairpin bend, and climb the tree-lined avenue up to the Sacro Monte. Do visit the chapels; there is also a good restaurant at the top. Return to the main square the way you came up – *NB this diversion is not included in time estimates above*).

From the main square, continue through *Piazza Ragoni* and walk past the Hotel San Rocco (21). Stay as close to the lake shore as possible; the views of the lake and island change as you round corner (22), with rushes growing at the water's edge.

Keep walking as far along the shore as you can. When the path turns straight inland (23) - it is now more of a ditch - you can go no further (don't walk through the private garden in front of you); climb back up to the road (24).

Return the way you came: over the roundabout (14), up the *mulattiera* (13), under the bridge (12), up through the woods bearing left at fork (8), out on the road (7), up the steps (6), through Lortallo (4), back to the house (1).

Walk 3 The Three Little Mountains and a View of Lake Maggiore

This is one of the most beautiful walks we know of in the area, and one that can be done in every season. On a clear day you have views of *Monte Rosa* and other Alpine peaks throughout much of the walk, and the view of Lago Maggiore along its length into Switzerland is perhaps more dramatic than from the Mottarone, because you are so close to it. And, unlike the *Mottarone*, you may well have the place to yourselves!

Choose a good clear day (e.g. after it has rained), otherwise if it's hazy you won't be able to see *Monte Rosa* at all, and the view of Lake Maggiore will be less impressive.

<i>Start & finish:</i>	Coiromonte
<i>Time:</i>	About 2 hours walk, plus stops
<i>Altitude:</i>	Climb from 800 metres to 1080 metres, and back again.
<i>Suitability for children:</i>	Excellent: entirely off the road.

By Car to Coiromonte

From the Villa Gelsomina, turn left when you come out on the road next to the chapel. Pass through Lortallo, and ignore the left turn to Vacciago. Bear left to Miasino, climb the steep hill. The road from Ameno joins on your right. Descend the hill to the junction at the lower right of the sketch map on the next page, where 6 roads meet. Turn right taking the Miasino bypass, to Armeno. From a certain point on this road, you can see straight ahead the three rounded peaks on the skyline, just to the right of the *Mottarone* (which is the highest peak with all the antennae). This is your destination, *Le Tre Montagnette*, ('3 Little Mountains'), marked on maps as *Monte del Falò* ("Bonfire Mountain").

At (4) you pass Pisgono cemetery on your right. At (5) turn left, so as to enter Armeno, and in the main square (6) go straight on, then right following signs (7) to Coiromonte. Pass over a brook (8), the *Ondella*, and after a careful climb up the never-ending hairpin bends (9) you pass a chapel (10) and enter the quiet village of Coiromonte (11). In the village, as the road curves to the right, there is a small parking area on your right. Park here.

Description of the Walk

Start walking back from where you came, and after 50 metres, at (11), turn up the fork (now on your right), and climb up through the orchards (12) on a long right bend.

At the highest point (13), the road bends to the right. Follow the track on your left (signposted to *Le Tre Montagnette*) to the right of a house (14).

The track curves to the right and starts to climb up through the pine woods (15) for some distance. Ignore tracks which descend to your left. Eventually (16) you come out through the yellow broom onto open ground, with pleasant views of Lake Orta and the mountains. Follow this track for some distance.

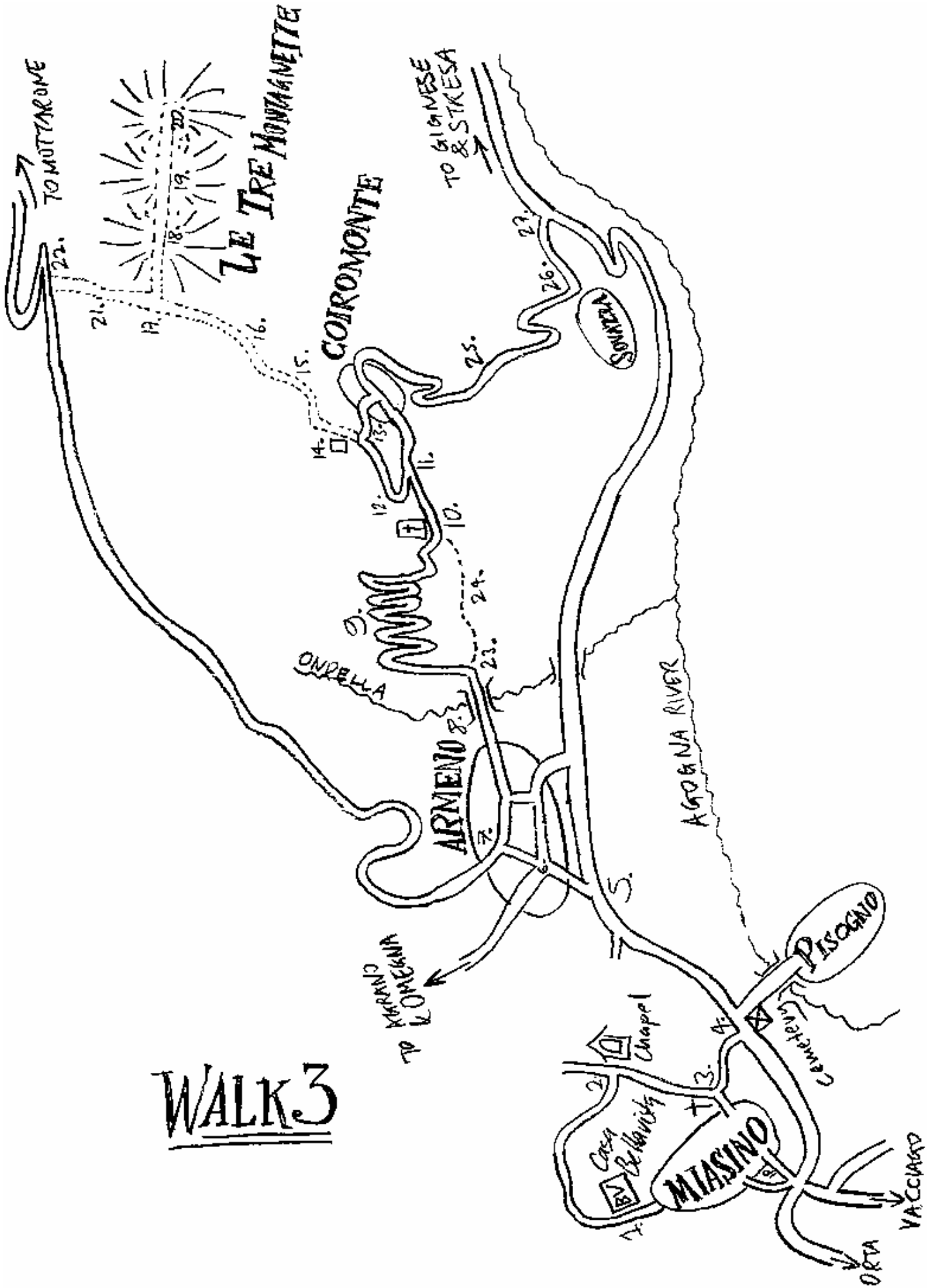
At the highest point (17) of the track, turn right up the grass and climb straight up the first mountain (18). Although the second (19) is the highest, the keenest will want to go the whole hog for the best view of *Lago Maggiore* from the third (20)!

On a clear day *Monte Rosa*, at over 4600 metres the second highest Alpine Peak, will have been visible for much of this walk. It is to the North West, and appears as the highest and most massive peak with a jagged top.

Return the way you came.

Variations

- If you want to make this walk shorter, park at the highest point of the road (13).
- If you want to make this walk longer (or if you don't fancy driving up those hairpins!), park at the bridge (8) over the *Ondella* brook, and take (at least in one direction) the short cut (23), (24), (10) - a mule track (deeply rutted, full of leaves) which starts behind the house at the edge of the field in the valley.
- An extension to this walk, is to continue from point (17) on the track, over the 'saddle' (21), to come out on the road to the *Mottarone* at (22). Alternatively start from point (22) and come the other way. (NB – it's further than appears on this sketch map).
- An alternative way to drive down from Coiromonte (avoiding the hairpins!), is to continue through Coiromonte and descend by the road (25) that leads to Sovazza (26) and comes out on the main Orta-Stresa road along the Agogna valley at (27).
- Coiromonte has many Swiss residents – you'll see the fraternity's wheel symbol painted on some of the houses.



WALK 3

Walk 4 Monte Mesma and the two Via Crucis

<i>Start & finish:</i>	Villa Gelsomina
<i>Time:</i>	About 1 hour 15 minutes
<i>Altitude:</i>	Climb less than 100 metres
<i>Suitability for children:</i>	Good, mostly off the road

Description of the Walk

Turn left out of the Villa Gelsomina (1), and walk along the road (2). Keep left at the junction (3), and climb up to the old part of Lortallo. At (4) descend the steep steps on your right, and follow the path to the Vecchio Circolo. Cross over the road, taking the track (6) on the other side down into the woods. At (7) bear right, and follow the path round to the right.

Soon the brook on your left is next to the path. Pass the ancient bridge (9) is known to locals as the *Ponte Romano*, though I'm not sure if it really is Roman, and start (10) to climb up through the woods.

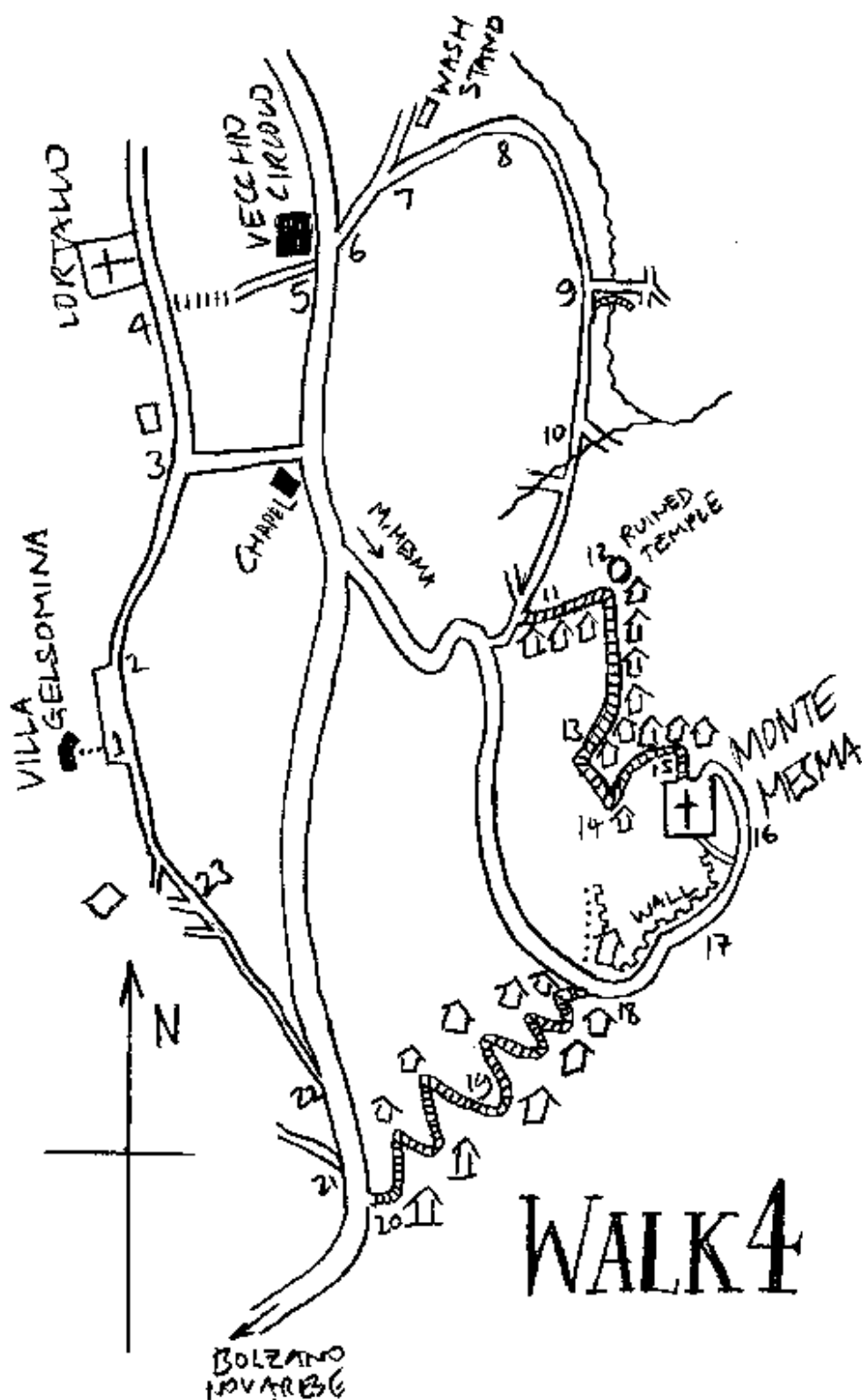
Soon (11) you can see the crumbling chapels of the cobbled *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross); turn left up the steps. There are more than 12 chapels; the first 4 are numberless, even so the *Stazioni* go up to 14. Several frescos are well preserved; remnants of text are visible ("*Gesù è caduto...*" - Jesus fell, "*Gesù cade la seconda volta...*" - Jesus falls for the second time, *etc, etc*).

Pass the ruined round temple (12) covered in ivy, and follow (13), (14) the chapels up to the convent.

The terrace of Monte Mesma (15) affords fine views. The somewhat faded marking on the wall, "*ASM 576 m*", *Altezza Sul Mare* 576 metres, is the height above sea level.

From the terrace, take the path (16) round the side of the Convent and continue on the road (17) outside the wall. Soon (18) another *Via Crucis* appears on your left. Descend the cobbled steps (19) past some 13 or so chapels.

At the bottom (20) turn right and walk 200 metres along the road, bearing left (22) down the unmarked track into the woods (do **not** take the fenced off turning (21) opposite the *Via Crucis*). At (23) keep to your right and climb back up to the Villa Gelsomina (1).



Walk 5 – Vacciago, Ameno and the Agogna Valley

This great little walk will familiarise you with several local places, passing through the nearby villages of Vacciago and Ameno, and descending into the very tranquil valley of the Agogna river.

<i>Start & finish:</i>	Villa Gelsomina
<i>Time:</i>	Approx 2 hours
<i>Change in altitude:</i>	Climb about 50 metres to Vacciago, climb to Ameno (+40 metres), then descend to the Agogna valley (-90 metres).
<i>Suitability for children:</i>	The walk crosses several roads, however the walk itself is almost entirely away from traffic. The wide tracks are good for mountain bikes too!

Description of the walk

Follow the sketch map for Walk 2

Do **Walk 2** as far as point (5), but go straight on staying on the level. Descend the bends at (25) and come out on the road (26) where you turn left. At the junction (27) turn right and immediately take the path on your right across the grass towards the church. Climb the steps up to the terrace (28) of *Sant'Antonio*, with its superb view. Walk up the cobbles and at the end of the cobbles turn right at (29) along the asphalted road, which brings you to Via Frey, which is point (5) on the sketch map on the next page. Turn left up Via Frey.

From Vacciago

Follow the sketch map on the next page

Walk up Via Frey and turn first right at (6) above the newish condominium, with walls of some grand villas on your left. Go straight on when the path joins on the left from the village (7). Continue on this path, and at (8) you see the Bar/Pizzeria Aquila across the field to you right. At (9) you pass through some villas, and may catch glimpses of the lake and Monte Rosa to the left through the white railings. At (10), turn right round the corner with ornate grey railings onto a short piece of surfaced road which brings you out to (11) where you need to cross the *circonvallazione* (bypass) road (NB traffic can be fast). Cross straight over; the path the other side has the shape of a hanging rope, hence the local name *corda molla* (= loose cord). In the dip (12) you can see a little lake in the garden to you right. Climbing, the first (yellow) houses of Ameno are high above you in front. At (13) a footpath joins from the left, and you bear right up a steep surfaced road on the edge of the village of Ameno (which derives from the latin for for pleasant/peaceful).

At the T-junction (14) turn right, then left at the T-junction (15) into Via Oberdan. Immediately after passing a church with high façade on you left at (16), turn up the stone-cobbled road Via Ducloz on you left. You will pass the *Asilo* (nursery school) of Ameno on your left. You come out on the 'main' road through the village at (17), just along from the main *piazza* and *Comune* (town hall) if you wish to make a brief diversion. (There is also a bar on the right just after the *piazza* if you are in need of refreshment already.)

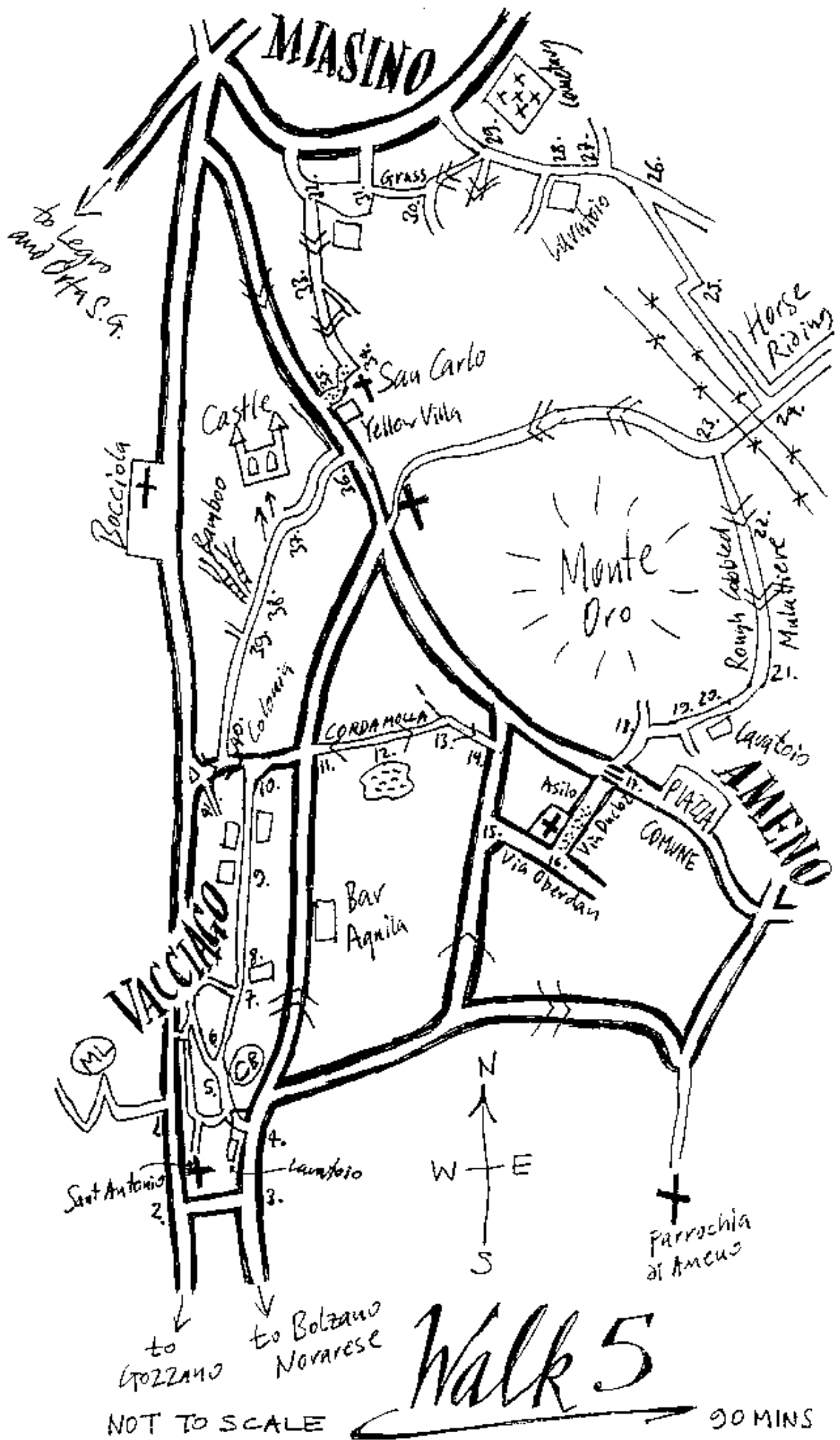
Cross over the zebra (17), and continue on the road opposite (via C. Termignoni), bearing first right (18), then ignoring the right turn (19) so as to pass to the left of the *lavatoio* (wash shelter) at (20). The road turns to the left, and, now unsurfaced, starts to descend (21). You are in fact walking on a beautifully made stone *mulattiera* (mule track) which has probably kept very much in this state for a hundred, if not hundreds, of years. Near the bottom, the stone retaining wall on the left seems to have kept remarkably well. They don't make them like this any more!

Whilst descending into the wide valley of the Agogna (pronounced AH-GON-YA), you get a great view of the *Mottarone* in front of you, the mountain with the TV masts (which at 1491m is the highest point between Lake Orta and Lake Maggiore). At the bottom turn right when you join the surfaced road at (23). Pass under the power lines, and turn left at (24) before the *Molino Alto* horse riding school.

(If you want to see the Agogna river itself, make a short diversion by instead going straight on at (24), across the wide, flat valley. After a few minutes the road crosses the Agogna on a hump back bridge. You might find a nice spot for a picnic around here. The Agogna flows south from the Mottarone, between the two lakes but never into them, passing through Borgomanero and Novara, and eventually into the Po.)

From (24), continue next to the horse rising enclosures, around two corners at (25). A private road joins at (26) from some houses on your right. Ignore the right turn at (27).

On your left at (28) you see a covered public eating place with barbecue in the corner of the field, with tables and chairs. Ignore the left turning just afterwards to the farm on the hill.



At (29), you see the main road in front of you, but the walk keeps a short distance away from it. Bear left (but not hard left up the hill) on a surfaced road. At (30), take the grassy track to your right, which brings you out to a sort of car park (31) in what appears to be a builder's yard. Walk straight on as the car park narrows to a track. After a few yards in the woods, turn left at (32) up the long, straight, steep and stony track.

Eventually you reach the tiny church (34) of San Carlo at the top (take a well earned rest...). Bear right down the stone cobbled path with central slabs on to the main road at (35) and turn left. After 50 yards, at the end of the perimeter wall of the castle on the opposite side of the road, a track (36) leads off to the right. Crossing the road (watch the traffic around the corner!) follow this track into the woods.

Soon, at (37), as the path bends to the left, you may catch a glimpse of the castle above the gates on your right. Continue on this gently rising and falling path. At (38) you pass a clump of bamboo on your right, which grows readily in these parts. Ignore the narrow track (39) leading down between fences to the road near the beautiful *Santuario della Boccia*, the baroque church with the *piazzale* and view (make a diversion if desired!).

When you come out to the junction (40), turn left and a steep but short walk takes you to the junction (10) with the ornate grey railings where you should turn right. You are now retracing your steps from the beginning of the walk, and so can continue back the way you came through Vacciago and Lortallo.