

### Getting to the Anzasca Valley

Turning off the main SS33 route through the Ossola valley, head for the signs to Valle Anzasca and Macugnaga (pronounced MA-KOO-NIAGA). The Anzasca valley begins from the aptly named Piedimulera (piedi means foot in Italian) at just 248m and leads you up, via the typically twisting but well maintained mountain road, to Macugnaga and the eastern face of Monte Rosa, the largest of all the Alps in terms of both width and height (over 4,360m).

Piedimulera has buildings dating back to the fourteenth century, and further along is Calasca (known for its military dating back to 1641) and Castiglione, considered to be amongst the prettiest of villages amongst stone-built Ossola.

### Stopping off for fuel

Incidentally, as you come in towards Piedimulera you will see a modern petrol station on your right just beyond a small roundabout. If your tank is getting low then it's recommended you top up here, although there is at least one other petrol station on the main route further up the valley.

### Pontegrande

As you come into Pontegrande (526m) about half way along the valley, a road takes you left, over a bridge towards the twin towns of Bannio and Anzino (669m), which can trace their origins back to the first century. This is the ancient crossing point between the Valle Anzasca and Valsesia. Bannio Anzino was once the capital of the valley. From Bannio the road continues up above Fontane, where we have our apartments, and on to Soi (999m) with its small but beautiful church and very authentic mountain restaurant (thoroughly recommended but check opening times, especially if you visit out of peak season).

Continuing straight on at Pontegrande and you pass through the very quaint village of Vanzone con S. Carlo with its cobble stoned road. You need to drive through with care as the road blends into the village square and the locals tend to treat it as a quiet walkway between the shops on both sides. But even in peak season there is seldom a traffic problem, apart from the coaches and that's generally just a short wait while they creep through the tighter parts of the route if a lorry or coach happens to come the other way at the same time! Be ready if you hear the loud twin horn - it will probably be the regular bus service and you'll need to give way!

### Gold country

Follow on through Ceppo Morelli (750m), Campioli and Pestarena (1,035m). This is known as the "paese dell'oro" (gold country). Gold mining was carried on here until 1961.

Within the "gold country" comes Borca (1,195m), with the Quarazza valley off to its left, a valley famed for its enchanting Lago delle Fate (Fairy Lake). From there, after about half an hour's walk, you can reach "la citta morta" (the dead city), with what remains of a miners' village. At Borca itself, it is still possible to visit down into the mines at the Miniera d'oro della Guia (see Places to Visit).

### **Macugnaga**

Macugnaga is made up of four "frazioni" (hamlets or villages). These include Pestarena and Borca, but you will sense as having arrived in Macugnaga when you pass the sign Staffa. You then pass the various restaurants and shops leading to the central square. There is parking here on the square, or you can continue along the road, over the small bridge, to the cablecar station car park a few hundred meters ahead

On route you will notice several hotels - Macugnaga is not a large resort but it is the main tourist spot in the Ossola valleys and offers the most selection in terms of places to stay and eat. Further on still and you reach the last of the principal hamlets, Pecetto. Again you will find hotels and other accomodation, including Alpine style cabins built around 2004.

If you have a campervan it may be handy to know that there is dedicated parking for such vehicles in the car park at the very end of the route, beyond the chairlift station.

At Pecetto you can take the chair-lift up to the glacier for some of the finest summer mountain walks anywhere in the world. This is a popular destination for hikers in the summer. The chair-lift ride is itself well worth doing, being both relaxing and aweinspiring... especially on the way down. But I won't spoil the surprise.

The cablecar has two runs climbing Monte Moro, which sits to the right of Monte Rosa and to the north of Macugnaga. From the cablecar station at the top you can take a walk up to the gold "Madonna della Neve" (Madonna of the Snow) pictured above. The final part of the walk is up a

smooth rock face but there is a metal hand rail and grab-chains set into the rock, and steps cut in along parts of it - it sounds daunting but if my wife Jayne and I can do it, you'll very probably make it too! It's not crazily steep or far to climb and you certainly don't need to be a climber in any real sporting sense, just not too unfit. Monte Moro in Ossola, Piemonte, Italy It's worth it, believe me. From here, at almost 3000m, the views are stupendous, across a high reservoir and the peaks across the border in Switzerland (pictured here to the right but you need to be there and do a 360 degree turn - it's truly spectacular).

### **Local food and drink**

When you decide to take a break, whether at the end of the chairlift, cablecar run or just walking or shopping in Macugnaga, do try the local pasta, risotto or polenta dishes, or just a glass of warming grappa or the locally produced Genepy or Genzianella. I can recommend the hot chocolate in the bar-restaurant on Monte Moro as you look out of the window and see nothing but peaks, snow and sky!

### **Skiing**

In the winter months, Macugnaga transforms into the valley's only ski resort after the one at Bannio Anzino was closed some 30 years ago when the changing climate restricted the snowfall on the lower slopes of the Alpe Provaccio. Macugnaga caters well for skiers at all levels, with two ski schools and good facilities. There is more on the sporting facilities and Macugnaga on the "Monte Rosa & Macugnaga" page.