

Walks from Casa Miralago

Below are described four short walks in the area, 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 (or from Stanfords, 12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LH). *Note that Walk 2 from earlier editions has been discontinued for the time being, as it is impassable.* The numbers in brackets (1), (2) etc refer to the numbers in circles on the sketch maps. The house is marked ML on the first map. Do pass any comments on these walks back to William Schwitzer.

Walk 1 Orta San Giulio and its peninsula, via footpath 'Prisciola'

Start from: The house (ML), *finish at:* the house (ML)
Time: Descent about 40 minutes, ascent 1 hour (*Note that this climb can be hard work on a hot day in July/August, particularly after a full lunch (!) in Orta S.G.*)
Altitude: 180 metres descent, 180 metres ascent
Suitability for children: Restrain toddlers when walking right on the lake front.

Description of the Walk

Turn right out of the gate, and descend the curves of the asphalted road. You come out on a more-or-less level asphalted footpath at point (5A) opposite a short length of motorway crash barrier. Turn right on this road, which is the footpath 'Prisciola' (pronounced 'PRIsholla'), which is supposed to be a corruption of the Latin for the Great Tit bird.

Continue to descend with the lake below on your left. At the bottom, when you are on the level with the railway line, pass the *Hotel Villa San Francesco*, then at (6) take a turning on your left (signposted "Prisciola") that passes under the railway (7). Then bear left (signposted "Passeggiata"), passing the playing field 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 (8).

Cross over the *Strada Regionale 229* (road 229) at the roundabout (9). Bear left (10) following the Arabic-style wall of the Villa Crespi, a top class hotel in this magnificent palace inspired by a rich man's travels in the Middle East. You may prefer to follow the cobbled road (11) down to the waters edge and the path along the lake front (there are a few places to have a dip here) or just follow the road round the peninsula. Following the road, you round a bend and the island is suddenly straight ahead!

Walk through Orta San Giulio (12), taking a diversion up the Sacro Monte (32) and down again if you wish [*not included in time estimates above*]. Walk past the Hotel San Rocco, as close to the lake shore as possible. The perspective of the lake and island changes as you round the corner (13) with the rushes growing at the edge of the lake.

Keep walking as far along the shore as you can. When the path turns straight inland (14) - it is now more of a ditch - you can go no further (don't walk through the private garden in front of you) and have to climb back up to the road (15).

Return the way you came, over the cross roads (9), back up the *mulattiera* (8), under the bridge (7), climbing up through the woods (6), and at (5A) turn left up the curves of the asphalted road to the house (ML).

Variations and Notes

The walk also takes you most of the way to the nearest railway station, Orta-Miasino (33). To reach the station, go straight on at (6), so as to remain on the east side of the railway line. This is about 25 minutes brisk walk from the house.

You can also explore Corconio, by turning left at (5A) when you come out on Prisciola, then bearing right at fork (5). You can go right through Corconio on asphalted roads (but very narrow, don't take the car - most won't fit) to reach Miami beach (31).

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 we have 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!

Start from: Coiromonte (34), *finish at:* Coiromonte (34)

Time: About 2 hours

Altitude: Climb from 800 metres to 1080 metres, and back again.

Suitability for children: Good - almost entirely off the road.

Other: 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*, and the view of Lake Maggiore will be much less impressive.

By Car to Coiromonte

From Vacciago, drive towards Miasino and turn right at the cross roads. As the road curves round to the left (41) you will see straight ahead three rounded peaks on the skyline [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").

Turn left (44) so as to enter Armeno, and in the main square (45) go straight on then right following signs to Coiromonte. Pass over a brook (46), and after a careful climb up the never-ending hairpin bends (47) you enter the quiet village of Coiromonte (34). 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, turn up the fork (now on your right) and climb up through the orchards (35) on a long right bend.

At the highest point (36), the road bends to the right. Follow the track on your left (signposted to *Le Tre Montagnette*) to the right of a house.

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

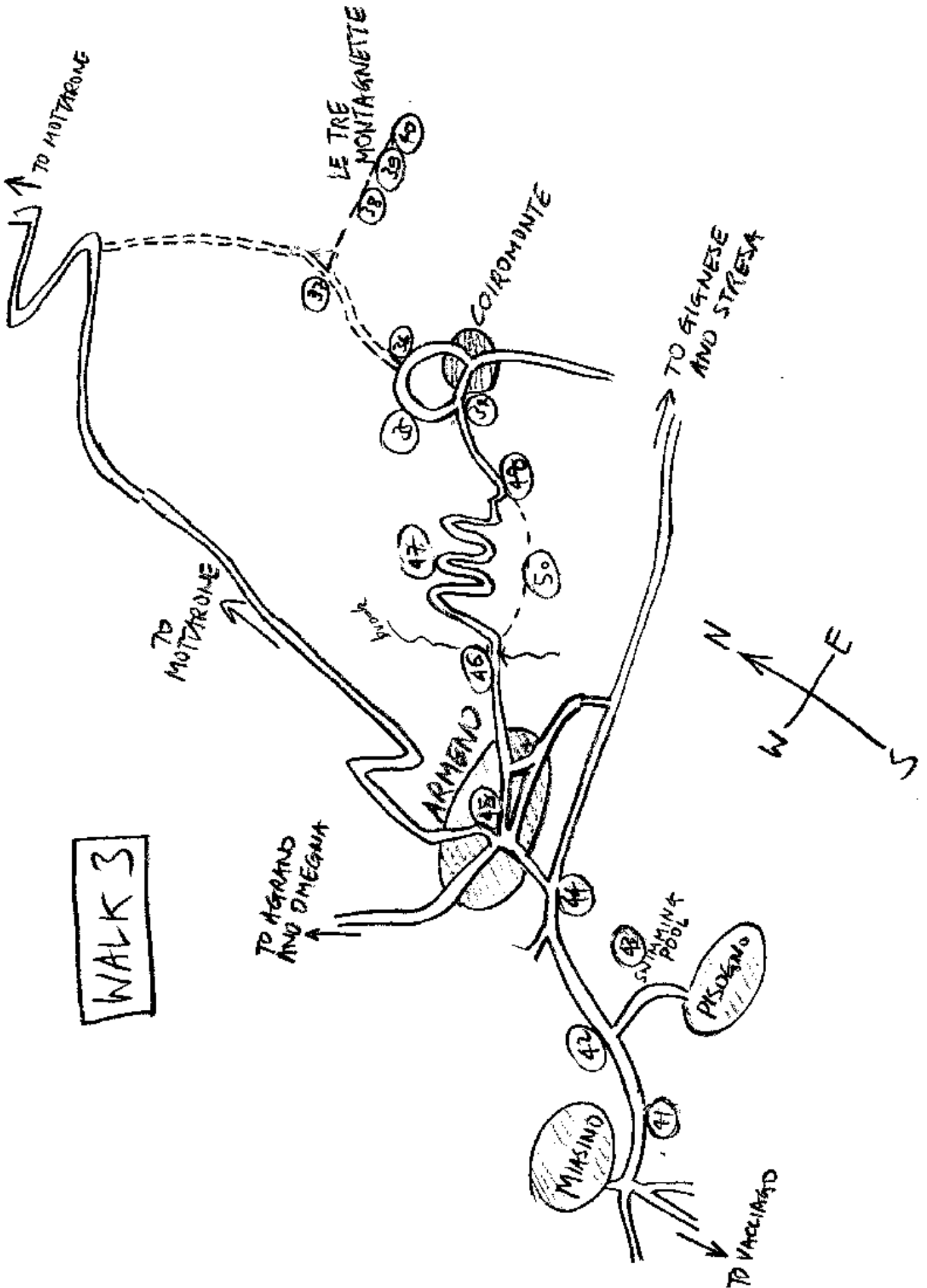
Follow this track for some distance. At the highest point (37) of the track, turn right up the grass and climb straight up the first mountain (38). Although the second (39) is the highest, the keenest will want to go the whole hog for the best view of *Lago Maggiore* from the third (40)!

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.

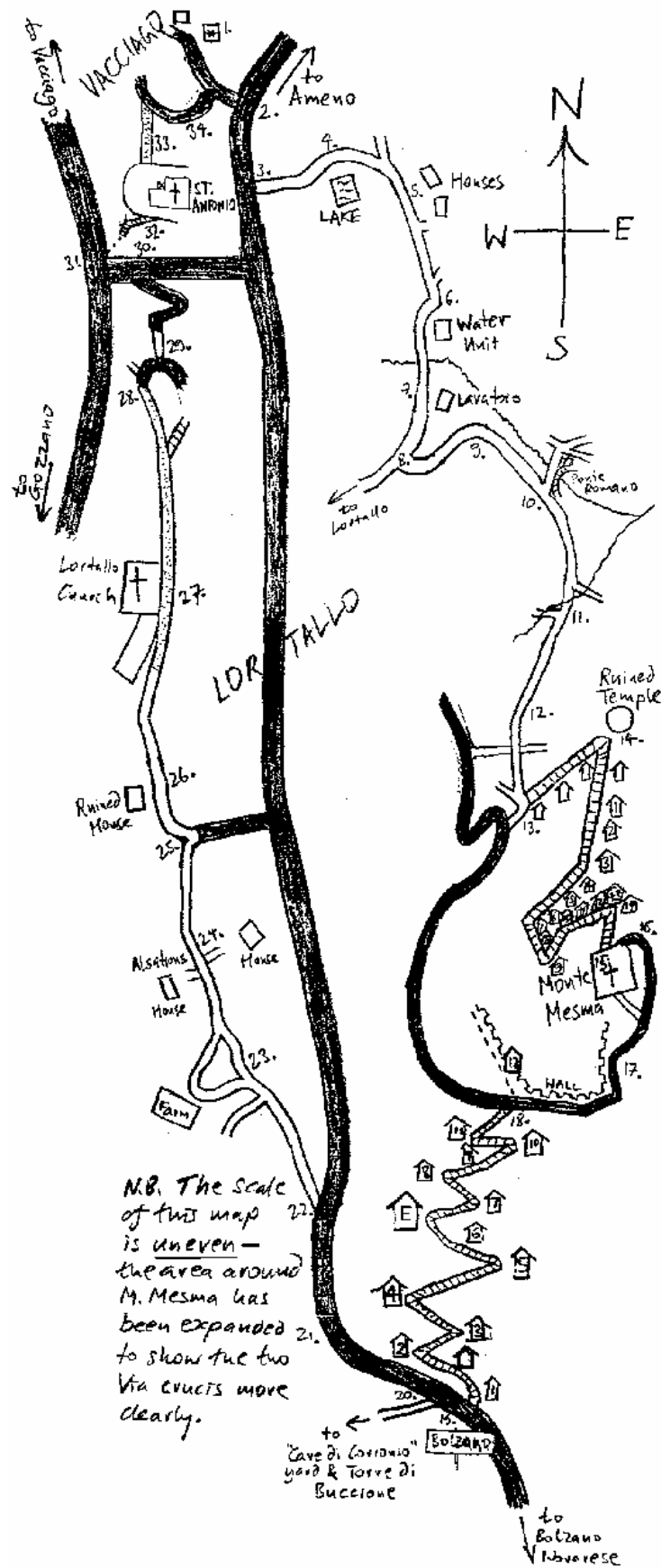
Return the way you came.

Other Notes

If you want to make this walk longer (or if you don't fancy driving up those hairpins!), you could park at the bridge over the brook (46) and take the short cut (50), a mule track (deeply rutted, full of leaves) which starts behind a house at the edge of the field in the valley, in at least one direction.



Walk 4 Monte Mesma and the two *Via Crucis*



Start and finish: At the house
Time: About 2 hours leisurely walk
Altitude: Climb less than 100 metres
Suitability for children: Good, mostly off the road

Description of the Walk

Turn left out of the gate, and walk up the hill. Turn right on the main road, and walk down to the junction (31). Take the foot path on your left through the grass up to the church; climb up the steps (32.) to Sant'Antonio (fine view of Lake Orta). Take the cobbled path (33.), turn right along (34.) road which bends to the left next to a crash barrier, and turn right along the last few metres of Via Frey down to the junction (2.), where you should turn right onto the main road.

After a few yards (3.) turn left into the woods and walk past the *laghetto* (little lake, used for fishing competitions) at (4.). Follow the path round to the right, past some houses (5.) and past the water unit (6.). Just after the *lavatoio* (wash shelter) at (7.), turn hard left (8.) and follow the path as it straightens out on a gentle descent. Soon the brook on your left is next to the path. Note the ancient bridge (10.) (known to the locals as the *Ponte Romano*, though I'm not sure if it really is Roman), and start to climb up through the woods (11.), (12.).

Soon (13.) 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 round ruins (14.) covered in ivy, and follow the chapels up to the convent.

The terrace of Monte Mesma (15.) affords fine views. The marking on the wall, "ASM 576 m", *Altezza Sul Mare* 576 metres, is the height above sea level. For comparison, Vaccigno is at about 500 metres.

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 past some 13 or so chapels.

At the bottom (19.) turn right and walk 200 yards along the road, bearing left (22.) into the woods.

Turn up right (23.) past the farm, the house with alsatians (24.), and one of our other holiday homes (Villa Gelsomina) on the left. Turn left at (25.), climb up (26.), passing Lortallo church (27.) (have a glimpse through the adjacent gate!). Where the road, now surfaced (28.) does a right hairpin, go straight on (29.) and descend to the main road at (30.), turning left.

At junction (31.) turn right, walk up to the last 50 metres to the turning on your left signposted 'Legro', and take the left turn down to the Casa Miralago.

Walk 5 – Ameno and the Agogna Valley

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

<i>Start and finish from:</i>	The Casa Miralago
<i>Time:</i>	90 minutes leisurely walk (without diversions).
<i>Change in altitude:</i>	Climb to Ameno (+40 metres), descend to the Agogna valley (-90 metres), then climb back up to Vacciago (+50 metres)
<i>Suitability for young 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

From the house, marked (ML) on the map, turn left out of the gate and walk up to the main road (1) and turn right. Turn left at junction (2). Turn left again at junction (3). As soon as you pass the old wash shelter (*lavatoio*) on your left, turn left at (4) up Via Frey. Bear immediately right, up the hill (5), and turn right at (6), now walking more or less on the level with walls of some grand villas on your left. Go straight on when the path joins on the left from the village (7).

Alternative beginning going through the village

Turn left out of the gate and walk up to the main road (1) and turn left. Turn right in front of La Bottega, and then turn left along the cobbled street. Take first right (*Via Vincenzo Strambio*) and follow the path between the houses of Vacciago, bending right, passing under an arch, and then bending left, to come out at (7) where you should turn left.

From then on

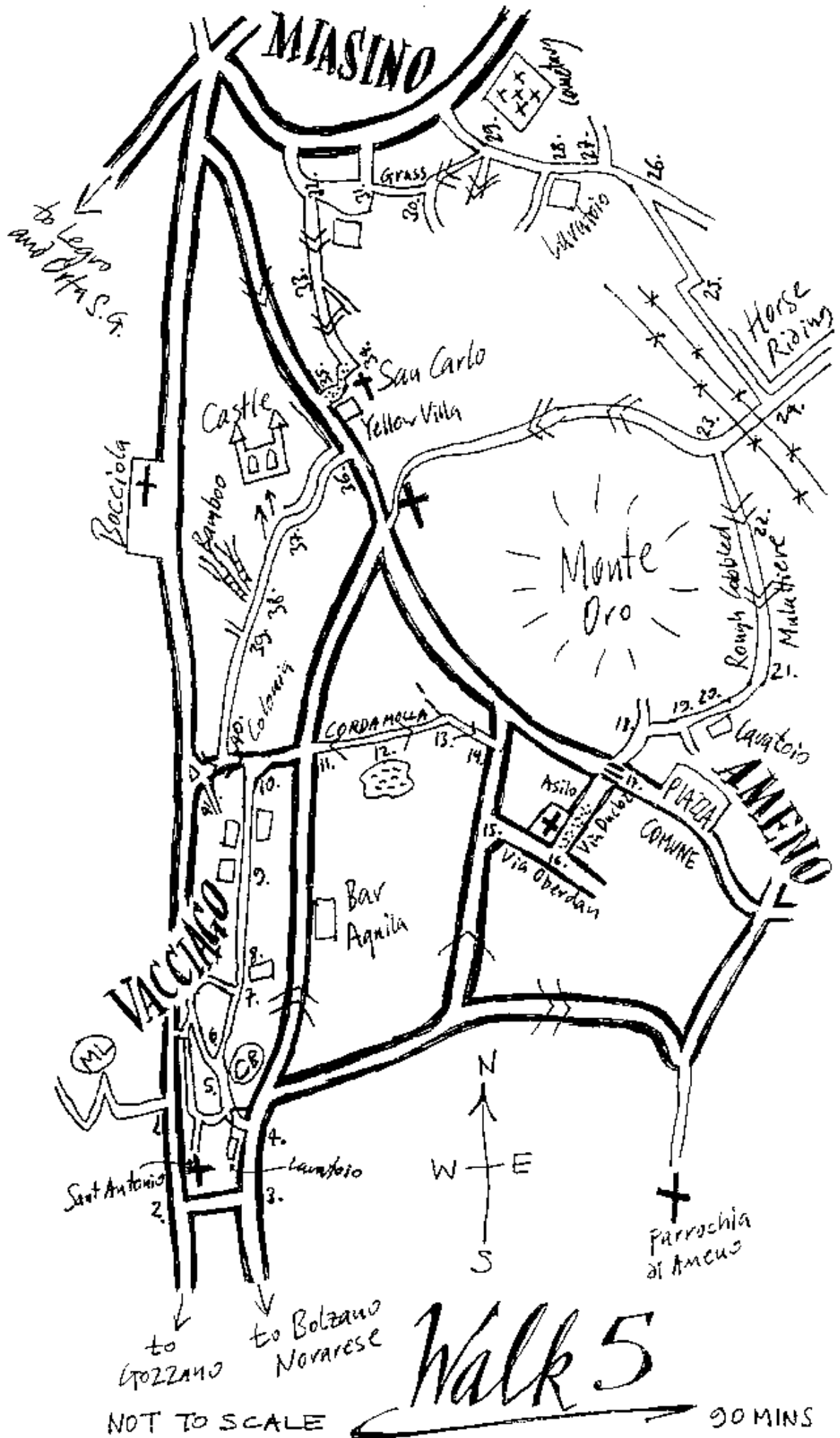
Continue from (7) on this path (the *Strada Comunale della Groppola*), and at (8) you pass a house with the typical long balconies on your right, after which you will see the Bar/Pizzeria Aquila across the field to your right. At (9) you pass some villas on your left and then on your right, and may catch 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 your 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 your left at (16), turn up the stone-cobbled road Via Ducloz on your 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.)

Crossing over the zebra at (17), continue on the road opposite (via C. Termignoni), bearing first right (18), and 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 at (21). You are in fact walking on a beautifully made stone *mulattiera* (=mule path) which has probably kept very much in this state for a hundred, if not hundreds, of years. Nearer the bottom, the stone retaining bank on the left seems to have kept remarkably well too. 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 you 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 another *lavatoio* in the corner of the field. Ignore the left turning just afterwards to the farm on the hill.

At (29), you will see the main road in front of you, but the walk stays a short distance away from it at all times. 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 seems to grow fairly 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. (*Note that this track allows you to walk from the holiday homes to the Boccia and the Hotel Britain - where there is a bar and restaurant - almost entirely off the road.*)

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.