

## Watercourses in the Caffarella Valley

The Caffarella Valley is criss-crossed by a network of ditches and irrigation canals (*marrane*), which are in turn intersected by many smaller drainage channels. The main body of water is the Almone river, flanked on both sides by two irrigation canals. The Almone river originates at the foot of the Alban Hills, while the two irrigation canals have their source near Via dell'Almone and are fed by two small springs which flow at the foot of the valley's hills. Over the centuries, the Almone river was diverted and canalised countless times, mainly for the purpose of irrigating the fields of the fertile Caffarella valley, which has been farmed since time immemorial. Nowadays, its course reaches upstream as far as Ciampino Airport, near the Sacred Water (Acqua Santa) spring along the Appia Nuova, where the waters of the Patatona and Acqua Mariana ditches flow into it; downstream, the river crosses the Via Cristoforo Colombo, and is eventually channelled into the South Rome Sewer. The Aeneid relates that the name of the river derives from the Trojan hero bearing the same name, Almone, son of Tyrrus, keeper of the Trojan army's herd, who died in the war between the Trojans and the Latins which preceded Rome's foundation.

## The Park Authority's projects

On the occasion of the year 2000 Jubilee, the entire valley was improved. The Park Authority has recently promoted a number of initiatives aimed at fostering the environmental and hydraulic upgrading of the Almone River and the irrigation canals (*marrane*). These initiatives focus on restoring the pre-existing farming environment, as well as on protecting, strengthening and maintaining the valley-plain and river-bank vegetation. The project has already established a new wetland, the poplar-grove pond. Further objectives are the restoration and re-activation of the Vaccareccia Farmstead's drinking trough, and the planting of a vegetable garden and a fruit-orchard for educational and scientific purposes.

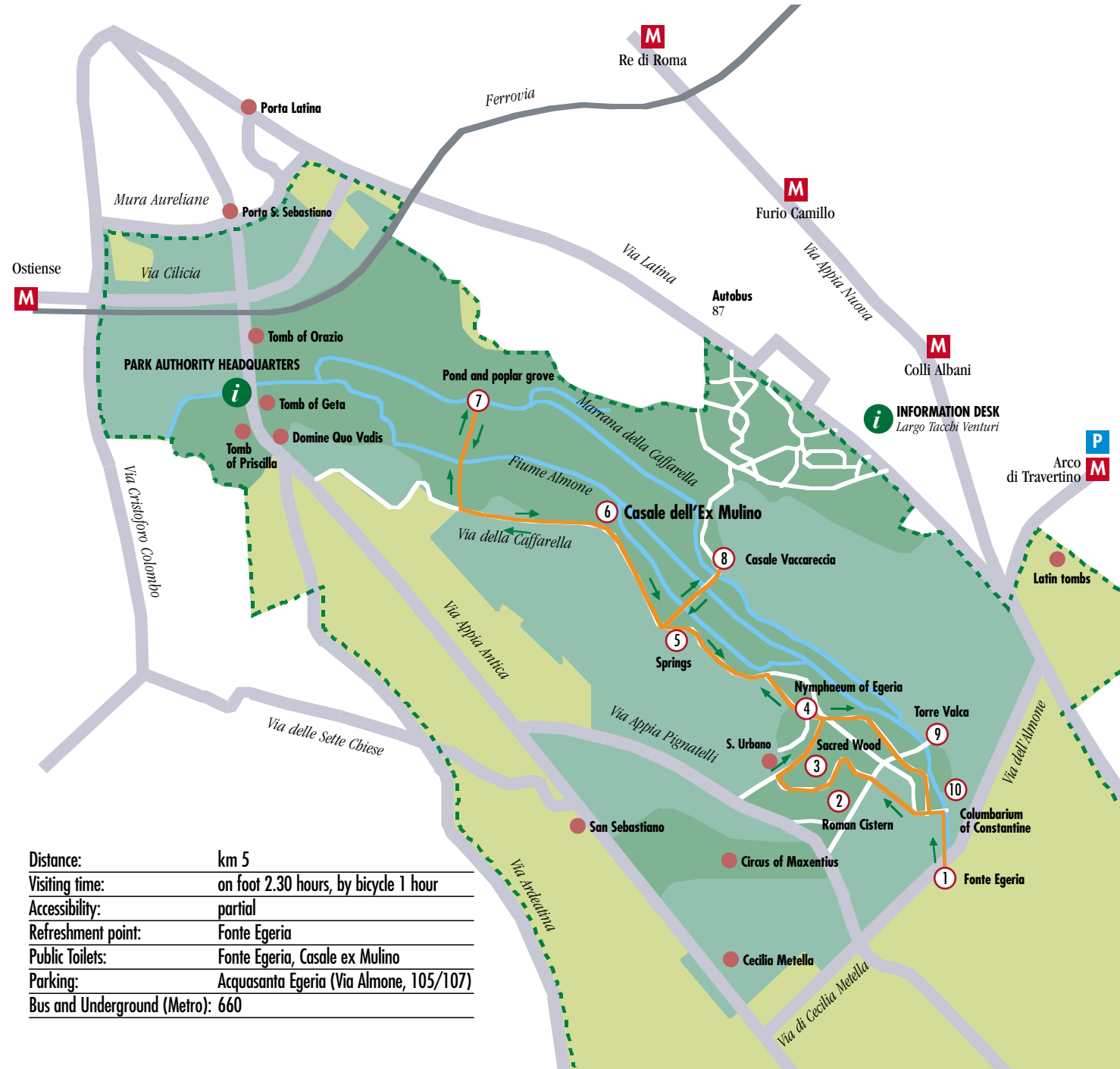
### INFORMATION:

MONDAY-FRIDAY:  
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SUNDAYS:  
Information desk Acquasanta Egeria (also providing bicycle rental services)  
Casale ex Mulino



# The Water Trail

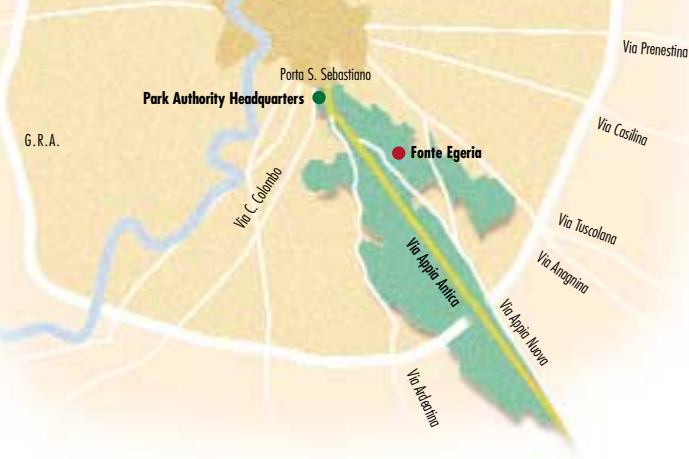


Distance:	km 5
Visiting time:	on foot 2.30 hours, by bicycle 1 hour
Accessibility:	partial
Refreshment point:	Fonte Egeria
Public Toilets:	Fonte Egeria, Casale ex Mulino
Parking:	Acquasanta Egeria (Via Almone, 105/107)
Bus and Underground (Metro):	660



# THE WATER TRAIL





On foot or by bicycle, explore the Caffarella Valley, located in a corner of the Roman countryside traversed by the Almone River, in a site where water has always played a leading role. Setting off from the Egeria Spring (Fonte Egeria), through the remains of the Sacred Wood (Bosco Sacro) and the Nymphaeum, reach the springs, the irrigation canals (Marrane) and the poplar-grove pond (Laghetto del Pioppeto).

### 1<sup>ST</sup> STOP

#### Egeria Sacred Water Spring (Fonte Acquasanta Egeria)

The water from the Egeria Spring – whose name derives from an ancient legend – has been famous since antiquity for its curative properties. In the sixteenth century it regained popularity after a long period of neglect thanks to Pope Gregory VII's physician and to the Abbot Tommaso della Valle, who described it enthusiastically in his *Guida all'Acqua Santa* (Guide to the Sacred Water). In the seventeenth century, the first chemical tests were performed on the water, and the spring was linked to the city by means of two carriage roads.

During all the first half of the twentieth century, the spring continued to be one of the favourite destinations of the people of Rome. For the past fifty years, the Egeria Spring water has been managed by the *Società Acqua Santa di Roma*. This mineral water is rich in mineral salts such as calcium, magnesium, potassium and fluorine.

### 2<sup>ND</sup> STOP

#### The Roman Cistern (Cisterna Romana)

If you stand with your back to the remains of the cistern and look slightly to the right, you will see that you find yourself on the rim of the hills belonging to the volcanic complex of the Alban Hills. The Caffarella

Valley, traversed by the Almone river, is clearly visible. This is one of the few spots where it is still possible to see the oldest rocks resulting from the activity of the Alban Hill volcano, in particular the pozzolanas with their characteristic red colouring, and the tuff from Villa Semmi. The Cistern, probably built around 100 AD, was originally situated underground and was used to collect rain water, which was then employed for irrigating farmland. Subsequently, during the construction of the Circus of Maxentius, it became level with the surface when earth was removed around it in order to build the circus' track. For further information on the volcano and the morphology of the valley, we recommend you refer to the photographic panel which you will find at the next stop.

### 3<sup>RD</sup> STOP

#### The Sacred Wood (Bosco Sacro)

The three extant hollies are the only surviving trees from a wood planted in the eighteenth century on the same spot where Herodes Atticus, the first landed proprietor in the history of the Caffarella, had ordered a Sacred Wood to be planted. And the tradition continues to this day. Nowadays, from the acorns produced by these three trees, a new tree is planted for each child born in the area (as you can see in the small enclosed space to your right).

### 4<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### The Nymphaeum of Egeria (Il Ninfeo di Egeria)

According to the legend, the Nymph Egeria was one of the *Camēnae* (lesser goddesses, associated to waters and springs). In exchange for offerings of water and milk, the Camēnae granted a prophecy. They usually consorted with heroes or great personages. Thus, Egeria is linked to the origins of Rome itself by her marriage to Numa Pompilius, the Sabine king who succeeded Romulus. Legend has it that they met in this very place to talk and make love; here the Nymph inspired her bridegroom to design the laws and the basis of the religious system of ancient Rome.

The architectural structure of the building is today clearly discernible thanks to the restoration conducted in 1999. It consists of a large rectangular room, with a niche at the back, and three smaller niches on both side walls, built in *opus mixtum* (mixed technique) composed of lattice-work and bricks. It is this technique which enables us to date the building to the middle of the second century AD. The fountain's water springs from the niche at the back, which hosts a reclining statue of the god Almone. The water issues from an acidulous spring located under the Via Appia Pignatelli, which once flowed naturally into

the Almone River. Today, the Park Authority has built an artificial canal for the purpose of channelling these unpolluted waters into the left-hand irrigation canal, which has excellent environmental qualities. The nineteenth-century stone canal which skirts the metal foot-bridge was part of a longer canal whose waters were used to run the Mill that stands beside the Tomb of Annia Regilla.

### 5<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### The Springs

A great number of springs are present in the Caffarella Valley and in its immediate surroundings. This is due in the first place to its being a low-lying area, and secondly, to the fact that the impermeable substratum supporting the groundwater aquifers embedded in the volcanic rocks is very close to the surface. The interaction between the water tables contained in the volcanic rocks and the deeper water tables has enriched the springs with mineral salts. The oldest pyroclastic rocks, which form the slopes of the valley itself, come into contact with more recent sediments – consisting mainly of clay and silt - carried by the Almone river. Along this contact area at the base of the hills where soils having a great variety of permeability come together, the groundwater contained in the volcanic rocks accumulates thus giving rise to numerous mineral,

slightly acidulous springs, such as that of the Egeria Spring. Two of these are clearly visible. The first is on your right, beyond the metal handrail. The second spring is on the left, a few dozen metres further on, near the intersection with the path that leads to the Vaccareccia Farmhouse. Both springs flow into the left-hand irrigation canal.

### 6<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### Old Mill Farmstead (Casale dell'ex Mulino)

Restored in 2002, the Farmhouse is now open to the public. It is here that the Park Authority carries out its educational and cultural activities. The canal which you observed from the Nymphaeum of Egeria, and which in the Middle Ages activated the millstone located below the present eighteenth century farmhouse, ends here. The waters from the Almone River once flowed into the canal near the Valca Tower. The Tomb of Annia Regilla (second century AD), the central monument in Herodes Atticus' Triopius, is attached to the Farmstead.

### 7<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### The Pond (Laghetto)

This is one of the most recent enterprises carried out by the Park Authority. This wet-land has made it possible to improve the quality of the Caffarella Valley's ecosystem, providing migratory birds with an adequate resting site. In addition to this, it

plays an essential role in preserving the bio-diversity of the area. It has been created by diverting the waters of the right-hand irrigation canal, which flooded frequently thereby damaging the nearby farmlands. After wending its way through the pond, the water flows downstream into the irrigation canal's old bed. Water quality in this area is excellent, as is testified to by the presence of breams and sticklebacks, fish living only in pristine environments.

### 8<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### Vaccareccia Farmstead (Casale della Vaccareccia)

Before you rises the Vaccareccia Farmhouse. Built during the sixteenth century in what was then the Caffarelli estate, it is constructed around a thirteenth century tower made from tuff blocks and marble fragments. The upper portion of the tower protrudes from the farmstead's roof. The main block features a portico with arches resting on granite columns with marble Corinthian capitals. The drinking trough, on the left, was fed by the still extant springs which flow near the Farmstead, and was still in use until the 1930's. It was unearthed at the time of the improvement works carried out in the Caffarella Valley in occasion of the Jubilee. The Park Authority is planning to restore the drinking trough.

### 9<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### Valca Tower (Torre Valca)

On your left, near the Almone River, you can see a Medieval tower which was built to keep look out over a bridge whose remains are still visible. The building technique adopted – rectangular blocks of tuff – dates it to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. The tower, protected by a first defence wall and equipped with a drawbridge that led directly to the first floor, probably hosted a water-operated *valca* or fulling-mill, used for the manufacture and washing of woollen cloth.

### 10<sup>TH</sup> STOP

#### The Columbarium of Constantine (Colombario Costantiniano)

Easily visible from this spot, the Columbarium of Constantine is a temple-shaped tomb dating back to the second century AD. The monument has a two-storey rectangular plan, with a front portico of which the structural sections are built in yellow bricks, while red ones form the decorative parts. The lower floor hosted the funerary chamber. During the Middle Ages the building was converted into a mill. A canal, regulated by a lock system, entered the building and activated a horizontal millstone. The mill was fed by a spring located further upstream, whose waters have today been diverted into the Almone River to preserve the building's stability.