



Access to the Sacred Mount is free of charge

**HOW TO GET THERE**

**By car:** from Turin, motorway A4 exit Santhià direction Biella from Milan, A4 exit Carisio direction Biella from Aosta, A5 exit Santhià direction Biella; from Biella, SS 144  
**By train:** connections with Santhià-Turin and Novara-Milan - www.trenitalia.com  
**By bus:** urban line n. 2 Biella-Oropa, info: ATAP tel 800912716 - www.atapspa.it  
**Info: Local public transportation:** PRONTO TPL - tel 800333444  
 The TPL ready service is being reorganized  
<http://prontotpl.5t.torino.it/>

**INFORMATION**

**Ente di gestione dei Sacri Monti Riserva Speciale Sacro Monte di Oropa (I)**  
 Via Santuario di Oropa, 480 - 13900 Biella - Oropa (BI)  
 tel +39 015 25551200 - fax 015 25551219  
[info@santuariodioropa.it](mailto:info@santuariodioropa.it) - <https://www.sacrimonti.org/en/sacro-monte-di-oropa>

**SERVICES**

**Ufficio Accoglienza e Ospitalità** - tel +39 015 25551200  
[info@santuariodioropa.it](mailto:info@santuariodioropa.it) - [www.santuariodioropa.it](http://www.santuariodioropa.it)  
**Sanctuary Canonico Rettore** - tel +39 015 25551220  
**Ufficio Offerte e SS. Messe** - tel +39 015 25551223  
**Restaurants**  
[www.santuariodioropa.it/ristoranti](http://www.santuariodioropa.it/ristoranti)  
**Conference Hall (D)**  
 info: tel +39 015 25551200 - [info@santuariodioropa.it](mailto:info@santuariodioropa.it)  
**Area Camper**  
 info: tel +39 015 25551200 - [info@santuariodioropa.it](mailto:info@santuariodioropa.it) - [www.santuariodioropa.it](http://www.santuariodioropa.it)  
**Guided Tours**  
 info: tel +39 015 25551200 - [info@santuariodioropa.it](mailto:info@santuariodioropa.it)  
**Tourist Office**  
 Piazza V. Veneto, 3 - 13900 Biella  
 tel +39 015 351128 - fax +39 015 34612 - [info@atl.biella.it](mailto:info@atl.biella.it) - [www.atl.biella.it](http://www.atl.biella.it)

**MUST SEE**

**Cableways and Adventure Park** - info: tel +39 015 2455929  
[info@funivieoropa.it](mailto:info@funivieoropa.it) - [orsettopao@gmail.com](mailto:orsettopao@gmail.com) - [www.funivieoropa.it](http://www.funivieoropa.it)  
**Botanical Garden (A)**  
 info: tel +39 015 2523058 - [info@gboropa.it](mailto:info@gboropa.it) - [www.gboropa.it](http://www.gboropa.it)  
**Museo dei Tesori di Oropa (E)** - tel +39 015 25551200  
**Osservatorio Meteosismico**  
 tel +39 015 25551307 - [osservatoriodioropa@tiscali.it](mailto:osservatoriodioropa@tiscali.it) - [www.osservatoriodioropa.it](http://www.osservatoriodioropa.it)  
**Museo del Territorio Biellese** - tel +39 015 2529345 - fax +39 015 2432791  
[museo@comune.biella.it](mailto:museo@comune.biella.it) - [www.museodelterritorio.biella.it](http://www.museodelterritorio.biella.it)  
**Riserva Naturale Speciale Parco Burcina "F. Piacenza"** - Pollone (BI)  
 tel +39 015 2563007 - Sito web off-line

**LINKS**

**Comune di Biella** - [www.comune.biella.it](http://www.comune.biella.it)  
**Unesco Italia** - [www.unesco.it](http://www.unesco.it)  
**Regione Piemonte turismo** - [www.visitpiemonte.com](http://www.visitpiemonte.com)



**Ente di gestione dei Sacri Monti (legal seat)**  
 Documentation Centre of the European Sacred Mounts, Calvaries and Devotional Complexes  
 Cascina Valperone, 1 - 15020 Ponzano Monferrato (AL)  
 tel +39 0141 927120 - fax +39 0141 927800  
[info@sacri-monti.com](mailto:info@sacri-monti.com) - <https://www.sacrimonti.org/>

Sacri Monti - Official #sacrimontisocial sacrimontidelpiemonte

SACRI MONTI OF PIEDMONT AND LOMBARDY

# Sacro Monte of Oropa



Photo A. Langhi

**HISTORY**

The Sacro Monte of Oropa is embraced by a spectacular alpine scenario at 1,200 metres above sea level, just a short distance from the city of Biella. The Sanctuary and Sacro Monte complex is considered the most important place of Marian worship of the alpine area. The Sacro Monte was built between 1617 and 1620 by initiative of the Capuchin Friar, Father Fedele da San Germano. Its construction coincided with extensive transformation interventions promoted by the Savoia Family on the buildings of the vast monumental complex dedicated to the Black Madonna. As opposed to other cases, where the noble families financed the construction of the religious complexes, it was the parish communities and the districts of the city of Biella, along with the Duke of Savoia, that funded the construction of the chapels. The Sacro Monte is composed by twelve chapels dedicated to the Virgin's life. The original project provided for a series of twenty chapels widely recounting significant episodes of Mary's life, known thanks to the Sacred Scriptures and the Apocryphal Gospels. The aediculae feature various types of layouts: central circular, rectangular, oval or cross-shaped. The chapels are set out in two parallel rows and aligned along a zigzag-pattern path. The Sacro Monte was built in three main construction phases: in the first decades of the XVII century, with the activity of the Valsesia modellers of the d'Enrico team, in late XVII century and early XVIII century with Bartolomeo Termine and Agostino Silva, and then with modellers Carlo Francesco and Giuseppe Auregio and the painter Giovanni Gallari.

**SACRO MONTE OF OROPA**  
 Surface Area: 1500 hectares  
 Elevation: 750 - 2388 metres  
 Environment: Mountain  
 Property: Sanctuary of Oropa

**PROTECTED AREA**

The valley of Oropa represents the striking environmental and scenic setting housing the devotional complex of the Sanctuary and the Sacro Monte di Oropa. From an environmental standpoint, it hosts the richest carabidological wildlife of Piedmont, both for its endemic and variety of species and for the size of its populations. The Reserve extends within the Conca di Oropa in a 1500-hectares territory between 750-2388 metres above sea level. The area of the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte is surrounded by woods, mostly formed by beeches, sometimes pure, but more frequently mixed with mountain maples and ashes at lower altitudes, and with laburnums and mountain ashes at higher elevations. Locally, between 1600 and 1700 metres, are areas with mugo pines of anthropic origin. Recent floral research has enabled establish a list of at least 800 species *Conca di Oropa*, a very high number justified by the variety of environments present in the area. The wildlife is typical of the alpine environment: marmots, ermines, alpine hares, white partridges, black grouses, roes, squirrels, beech-martens, weasels and foxes inhabit these mountains. Also present are eagles, black woodpeckers, red partridges, tree-climbing wood-peckers, alpine choughs and imperial crows. The valley features a series of interesting floristic elements, such as the *Polygonum Alpinum*, the *Campanula Incisa* and the *Pedicularis Cenisia*, while rocky areas are house to the rare *Achillea Moschata*. The Oropa Valley has glacial origins, modelled by alpine glaciers which during the Pleistocene age, between 10,000 and 70,000 years ago, were more widespread compared to today and reached up to the upper Po Plain. The steady and unceasing movement of the glacier made the original valley progressively grow, up to the current U-shape, typical of valleys shaped by glaciers. The Sacro Monte di Oropa is a protected area of Regione Piemonte (2005) and since 2012 it has been part of Ente di Gestione dei Sacri Monti.

**TRACKS AND WALKS**

The park territory offers many opportunities to those willing to take a walk in the enchanting Oropa valley: the mountains embracing the area of the Sanctuary and Sacro Monte are offer a striking view over the plain and from the opposite side, one can enjoy views of the Val d'Aosta peaks which can be reach taking the cableway connecting the Sanctuary to Monte Camino.

The 15 heterogeneous tracks satisfy every need: from peaceful and relaxing strolls to the via ferratas for the more adventurous.



Photo A. Langhi



Photo A. Langhi

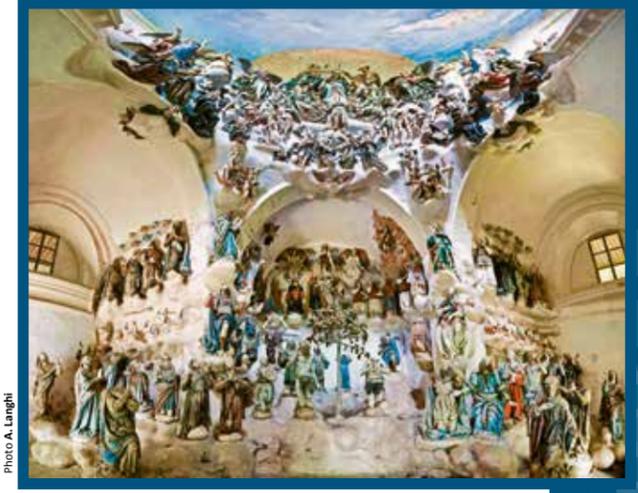


Photo A. Langhi

**SACRI MONTI UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE**

"The nine *Sacri Monti* of Northern Italy are groups of chapels and other architectural handmade works built between the XVI and XVII century dedicated to different aspects of the Christian faith. Besides their symbolic and spiritual meaning, they feature notable characteristics of beauty, virtue and charm as they blend in with natural and scenic environments of hills, woods and lakes. They also contain very important artistic remains (frescoes and statues)". This is the motivation according to which in 2003 UNESCO included the "Sacri Monti di Piemonte e Lombardia" site in its World Heritage List. This prestigious acknowledgement confers universal value to seven *Sacri Monti* of Piedmont (Belmonte, Crea, Domodossola, Giffa, Oropa, Orta and Varallo) and two of Lombardy (Ossuccio and Varese), highlighting the extraordinary richness, qualities and values of these historical, artistic and nature gems. The chapels series depicts episodes and mysteries of sacred life through statues, paintings and frescos while blending in with the embracing environment and contributing in defining the features of each monumental complex. *Valuable examples of landscape architecture, the Sacri Monti represent an important meeting point for believers and lovers of art.* First arising on the western Alps, where this phenomenon originated more than five hundred years ago, the *Sacri Monti* then inspired similar models in many parts of Catholic Europe. The seven *Sacri Monti* of Piedmont are part of the protected area system of Regione Piemonte which provides for historical and artistic preservation, maintenance and protection of the surrounding environment.

**ON FOOT AMONG THE SACRI MONTI - UNESCO**  
**The Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy, a path where to meet art, landscape and spirituality**

The Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy are connected by an articulated pedestrian path that intersects and overlaps the ancient Italian and European devotional paths. The complete route of the **Devoto cammino dei Sacri Monti** is being updated but it can be largely downloaded from the website [www.sacrimonti.org](http://www.sacrimonti.org)



Cartography by University of Genoa - Polytechnic School - D.S.A. Department

## THE CHAPELS

**Chapel 1 - Immacolata concezione (The Immaculate Conception)**  
Commissioned by some districts of the town of Biella, it is surrounded by a nice colonnade supported by 22 columns made with local stone. The internal scene is dominated by a large dragon, symbol of the original sin, placed between Mary's parents: St. Joachim and St. Anne. The cornice depicts the Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit descending on child Mary and the symbols of Passion.

**Chapel 2 - Natività di Maria (Mary's Nativity)**  
By will of the Community from the Bioglio district, this chapel was built in the second half of the XVII century. The scene, featuring statues of Auregio and perspectives painted by Galliari, it depicts the child's birth in a domestic environment: St. Anne in bed and assisted by two women, is surrounded by two angels and the midwife showing Mary to St. Joachim. The statues were damaged during a robbery in 2003.

**Chapel 3 - Presentazione di Maria al Tempio (Presentation of Mary to the Temple)**  
Commissioned by the Community of Mongrando, the internal scene depicts the Supreme Priest waving to little Mary who dashes up the steps, assisted by her parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne. The statues were realized by the Auregio brothers in the first half of the XVIII century.

**Chapel 4 - Dimora di Maria al Tempio (Life of Mary in the Temple)**  
Commissioned by the Community of Pralungo and realized between 1662 and the first half of 1700s. The scene is considered exceptional for the dynamicity by which a group of young girls is represented inside the Temple of Jerusalem and performing their domestic chores: Holy Mary, sitting at her working table, is surrounded by little angels while the right hand apsis shows a curious quarrel between the two young girls. The statues were realized by P. G. Auregio, while the wall paintings are by Galliari who inserted architectural element perspectives.



PHOTO A. LANGHI

**Chapel 5 - Sposalizio di Maria (Mary's Wedding)**  
Commissioned by the Communities of Chiavazza, Ronco and Zumaglia, it was built between c.1620 and 1640. The scene portrays Holy Mary and Saint Joseph, holding the flowered staff, before the Supreme Priest; in the lower side is a group of young girls on the left and their woovers on the right, in the act of breaking their staff. The statues were realized by G. d'Enrico and restored by P. G. Auregio.

**Chapel 6 - Annunciazione (The Annunciation)**  
Built by will of the Community of Candelo with the support of the town of Cossato, this chapel is extremely simple: Holy Mary is kneeling and, on the right, archangel Gabriel is sitting on a cluster of clouds. The statues are by P. G. Auregio.

**Chapel 7 - La Visitazione (The Visitation)**  
Completed by the Community of Occhieppo Superiore, it features an octagonal layout on the outside and elliptical on the inside, where Mary and her cousin Elizabeth meet. The sculpture group, by P.A. Auregio, revolves around the two embracing women while St. Joseph (on the right) and St. Zachary (on the left) gaze at them discretely.

**Chapel 8 - Natività di Gesù (The Nativity of Jesus)**  
Built by the shepherds of the Oropa Valley who chose this mystery connected to the rural world. Duke Charles Emmanuel II funded its construction which houses an extraordinary real dimension crib, one of the most ancient of the area. The statues were realized by P. G. Auregio starting from 1716, the background wall paintings are by G. Galliari. Its construction lasted for about a century.

**Chapel 9 - Purificazione di Maria (Mary's Purification)**  
Commissioned by the communities of Vigliano and Valdengo, it was built in mid XVII century. The building with a hexagonal layout houses the statuary complex by B. Termine (later restored by his nephew P. G. Auregio) with the Madonna and the Child, the Supreme Priest, Anne the Prophet on the left and other characters.

**Chapel 10 - Nozze di Cana (The Wedding at Cana)**  
Built during the first half of the XVII century by the Community of Lessona, who chose this theme for its relation with the legal activity connected to their vineyards, depicts a wedding banquet of the time which liveliness is faithfully depicted by the sculptor Giovanni d'Enrico. At the centre, Jesu, Virgin Mary, the old fellow guest who turns towards the cupbearer to admire the miracle of water transformed into wine, and, in the upper side, a group of musicians entertaining the feats.

**Chapel 11 - Assunzione di Maria (The Assumption of Mary)**  
Commissioned by the Community of the district of Mosso, it features a typical circular layout. It testimonies the intention to build other intermediate chapels as it is located at a greater distance compared to the previous chapels. The statuary group depicting the apostles standing around the sepulchre and Mary assumed in heaven was the work of Agostino Silva of Como and completed by the Auregios.

**Chapel 12 - Incoronazione di Maria (The Crowning of Mary)**  
Constructed by will of the town of Biella, it was the first chapel built of the Sacro Monte complex. The architectural complex, designed by architect Conti, houses the crowning scene, among a numerous formation of angels, saints and on the bottom Adam and Eve. The statues, more than 150, were modelled by Giovanni d'Enrico and Giacomo Ferro, and their artistic value largely exceed all those of the other chapels. The statues were damaged during a robbery in 2003.

**THE OTHER CHAPELS**  
Considered part of the Sacro Monte are not only the 12 chapels dedicated to the story of Mary's life, commissioned by the Communities of Biella, but also those dedicated to the tradition of the Sanctuary and Saint: the chapel of the Trasporto (Transport), Saint Luke, the Roc, Saint Firmus, Magdalene. The chapels of Saint Joseph and Saint Eusebius, built in late XIX century, follow instead very different architectural style.

**Bibliography:** Paolo Strobino, Guida alle Cappelle del Sacro Monte di Oropa, 2000



PHOTO ARCHIVIO SANCTUARIO DI OROPA

## THE SANCTUARY

The Sacro Monte di Oropa has always played a secondary role compared to the Sanctuary which ancient origins are confirmed by documents dating back to early XIII century. The worship of the Black Madonna, established according to tradition by St. Eusebius in the IV century, had already gone way beyond the local borders at the time of the construction of the chapels, which were built between the first half of 1600s and 1700s, when the Sanctuary was growingly expanding.



PHOTO A. LANGHI

## TREASURE MUSEUM AND APARTMENTS OF THE HOUSE OF SAVOY (E)

The four halls of the Museo dei Tesori preserves the jewellery, liturgical paraments and documents which have marked the history of the Sanctuary along the centuries. The museum also houses archaeological finds dating back to II century B.C. discovered at Oropa. Well preserved is also the blade by the artist Bernardino Lanino (1522) depicting the Madonna on the Throne with Child and four saints, votive gift of the town of Biella, in as well as ancient votive paintings. From the museum, visitors can access the apartments of the House of Savoy, used up to the XVII century by the sovereigns paying devotional visits to the Sanctuary.



PHOTO EVENTI E PROGETTI

## HISTORICAL ARCHIVE AND LIBRARY

The history of the Sanctuary of Oropa is preserved inside its Historical Archive, documentary and iconographic testimonies of great cultural value. The Historical Archive of the Sanctuary of Oropa houses documents produced between the XVI and XXI century. More than one hundred linear metres of ancient documents, more than thirty thousand pictures and some short films documenting the life of Oropa both from a devotional standpoint and for all the administrative, economic and social aspects. **The Library** of the Sanctuary of Oropa was established starting from the XVII century with religious - theme volumes used and then left in Oropa by the collegiate priests active at the Sanctuary. In 1700s it acquired other book funds donated by religious and pious laymen, while in the XIX century it acquired a large part of the library of the Agostinian convent of Saint Peter of Biella, suppressed during the Napoleonic era. The Library of the Sanctuary of Oropa currently features more than 15000 volumes. The Historical Archive and the Library of Oropa are open for consultation on reservation by contacting the Sanctuary of Oropa Administration (tel. +39 015 25551200).

## MONUMENTAL CEMENTARY (F)

Surrounded by nature, west to the Sacred Mount, it was inaugurated in 1877 according to the planning by Ernesto Camusso and enlarged in various steps in 1888, 1934 and 1967. The Oropa cemetery is of great interest both for the buried characters and its work of sculpture, painting and architecture. Among its illustrious tombs is the pyramidal aedicule where the statesman Quintino Sella was interred.

## BOTANICAL GARDEN (A)

The Botanical Garden of Oropa has been held by WWF Italia Onlus since 1998, by order of the Commune of Biella. Inside the garden about 500 plant species and varieties are cultivated in a 20000 sq. m. green area. In addition to the natural beechwood, the Garden hosts environments typical of the Biellese mountains (spontaneous flora) such as highland peat bogs and some rock gardens where plants original from worldwide mountain ranges are cultivated (ornamental flora): this enables visitors to enjoy the vegetable diversification of the various mountain ranges of the world.

The spontaneous species are broken down by environment to easily observe a large part of the spontaneous flora of the natural Reserve of the Sacro Monte di Oropa within a restricted area. **Opening times (all-day opening):** May thru September from Tuesday to Sunday (every day in August) all-day opening from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Info: tel. +39 015 2523058 - [www.gboropa.it](http://www.gboropa.it).

Texts by Fabrizio Bottelli and Linda Angeli

## LEGEND

- (A) Botanical garden
- (B) Basilica Superiore
- (C) Ancient Basilica
- (D) Conference Hall
- (E) Museo dei Tesori of Oropa
- (F) Monumental Cemetery
- (G) Panoramica road of Traccolino

- Bar
- Information Point
- Toilet
- Arrival station cable car
- Picnic area
- Pedestrian path
- Viewpoint
- Parking
- Restaurant
- Carriage road