Castle of Brina

Location: The castle of Brina is located on the left slope of a hill in the lower Val di Magra, along the ridge between Falcinello and Ponzano Superiore, within the district of Sarzana and on the border with Santo Stefano di Magra.
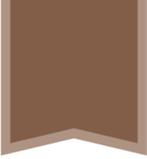
Type of castle: Fortified castle

Construction period: The original part of the castle could date back to the 11th century.

First appearance in historical sources: Brina, the name of the place, was mentioned for the first time in a sales contract on May 25, 1055. The houses, the lands and the castle's walls were mentioned in a sales document on June 14, 1078, in which Pellegrino de Bruciore sold all his belongings and the lands outside the walls of the defensive fortification of Brina to the bishop of Luni.

Strategic role: It had the task of controlling and protecting the viability of the road known as Francigena Alta.

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Further use: During the 14th century, the castle was torn down, not by war, but as a result of a systematic destruction. This is confirmed by the ruins of the buildings, which show signs of having been destroyed using picks. The tower was torn down through the mining technique, that is to say by substituting a line of rocks at the base of the building with wood and setting it on fire.

Current condition: The castle is in ruins but it has been made safe and strengthened after a recent restoration. Records of the excavation are exhibited in a specific room in the fort of Sarzanello.

Viewing: The archaeological site has a path that enables the visitors to admire the ruins in a safe way. Explanatory signs give further information for the visit. The maintenance of the access path and the monitoring of the preservation status of the area is entrusted to the CAI (Italian Alpine Club), responsible for the promotion of the castle.

History: The hill of Brina has been inhabited since the end of 5th-4th century BC and this is proved by the bottom of a hut, which was probably part of a built-up area controlled by the Ligurian tribe of the Apuani. After being abandoned during the Roman Age, at the beginning of the Middle Ages the site was repopulated by a hut village at the top of the hill and, around the year 1000, it was fortified with a wooden fence. After a while, the fort was rebuilt with stones by the family de Brucione.

Structure: The remains of the round tower are the main part of the archaeological site. The tower is torn down on one side, built it has small blocks of limestone and sandstone, proof of the existence of the defensive walls of the 11th century. It is not easy to figure out the form of the fort, but between the 11th and 12th century, probably before the enlargement made by the bishop during the 13th century, it must have been quadrangular. When the castrum was restored, the bridge house was divided into two compartments and a larger part of the curtain walls was added southwards. The defensive tower (20 m high and 5 m large) was built in the same period.

Many common objects of different worth, like silver coins, ceramics and animal remains useful for the reconstruction of eating habits of that time, were found inside the fortification.