

History of Monte Sole

On the eve of World War II, the area covered by the regional park of Monte Sole today shared common characteristics with the hills around Bologna. Beside the cultivation of the soil, another fundamental activity was cattle breeding.



Since 1943, the direct effect of the war started to be evident in the area. After the signing of the armistice between the Italian Government and the Allies, a partisan brigade was founded in order to fight against Germans and Fascists. It was named Stella Rossa (Red Star) and Mario Musolesi, so called "Il Lupo" was in charge.

As soon as Allies advanced, the interest of Germans towards the altipiano of Monte Sole started to rise. Until August (the liberation of Florence), the enemy was still far away, but after breaking through the defences along the Appennino Tosco Emiliano (in August-September 1944) the control of the ridge area Setta-Reno became of vital importance for the German army. The area of

Monte Sole was the last physical obstacle before reaching Bologna and the German army dreaded the prospect of being caught by the double attacks of Partisans and Allies. Due to the change of the strategic context, the Germans needed to get rid of any obstacles to the exercise of its authority in order to prepare a defence and a possible retreat.

Between the middle and end of September 1944, the commander of the 16 SS Guards Armoured Division decided to get involved in a military operation in order to "annihilate partisan groups and search the enemy's lands." This operation was put in the hands of Major Walter Reder and it took place between the 29th of September and the 5th of October. The whole area was surrounded by over 1000 soldiers, according to some reports, among them some Italians belonging to the Italian National Guard. The four squads of Nazis searched the whole area, from North to South from East to West. They burnt houses, killed animals and people. During the seven days of massacre there were 770 victims, among them 216 children, 142 over 60 and 316 women. The massacre took place in 115 different places: small villages, random houses and churches.

The massacre of Monte Sole does not represent a mere reprisal, it was a raid aimed at committing a massacre. It is part of a much broader strategy applied in '44 and in '45 by the Nazi army in Italy. This strategy aims at terrorizing civilians, in order to prevent any form of resistance or disperse resistance groups already formed.

The "Memoriale" trail passes through some of the locations where the massacre took place.