

# The Enchanted Rock

## [Michele Vacchiano](#)

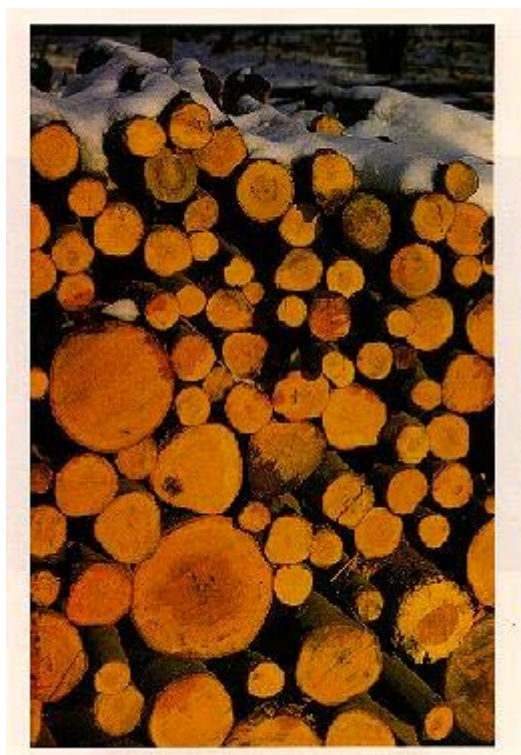


Michele Vacchiano uses his [Graflex Super Graphic](#) to photograph the land, nature, and the people of the Italian western Alps. In *La roccia incantata* ("The Enchanted Rock", 1992) he photographs and writes about Grand Paradiso National Park.

Michele is the author of several other [books](#) on photography, including a guide to photo trekking, and a technical treatise on photographic reproduction of documents and artwork. See his [home page](#) and brief [list of books](#), which are available in the United States through the author.

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## A selection of photographs and text from *La roccia incantata*



*A woodpile in the first snow of winter. (p.122)*

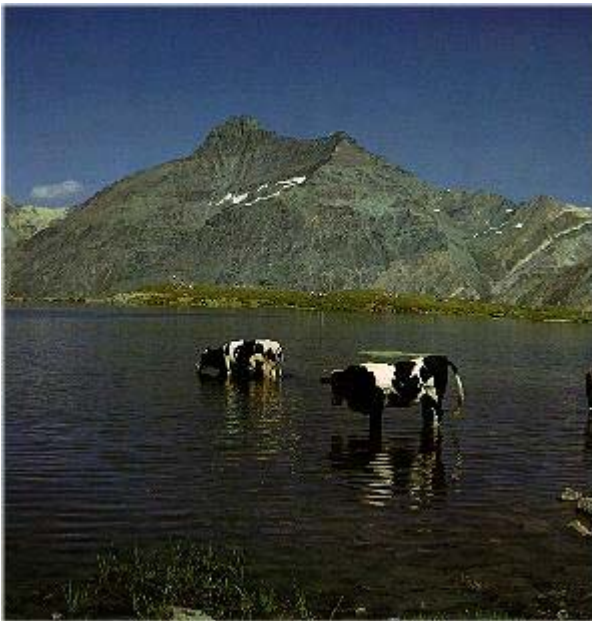
This book is not a tourist guide, at least not in the traditional sense. Readers will not find here information on paths, routes or itineraries of various difficulty.

Nevertheless they will find some suggestions regarding special routes. Throughout the various chapters - and especially through the photographs - they will be invited to perceive the evokativeness of a territory that is among the greatest and wildest of the western Alps, an area which, despite the assault of an inexhaustable economical exploitation, is still able to offer scenes of primordial beauty.

Credit for this is due certainly to the Grand Paradiso National Park, that despite management difficulties and various opposition (overt and covert) has prevented the area from being transformed into a huge leisure park, complete of ski-lifts, roads and luxury multi-story buildings: the sort of things which delight tour operators and local administrators, perhaps the only categories that are still investing energies and hopes in incrementing

mass-tourism.

The damage suffered by the environment at the foot of Matterhorn, in the range of Mont Blanc and in Val d'Isere (in the very heart of the neighbouring Parc National de la Vanoise) is still unknown in this region.



*Cows are an essential part of the pastoral atmosphere of the Western Alps.*

Excursionists and skiers looking for real contact with nature, other than the mere practice of an athletic performance, can really find it here. Of course, we could debate at length about the timeliness of creating uncontaminated oases in a world that is galloping towards ecological catastrophe; one could argue that the existence of parks and natural reserves actually legitimise the destruction of the environment outside of them.

But until respect for nature becomes part of our way of viewing the world (until now dominated by a logic of depredation), parks alone are left to take care of the remaining "wilderness", in order that scholars and lovers of nature can observe and appreciate what we are relentlessly destroying in the rest of the world.



But if the National Park can protect the environment and preserve it intact for the future generations, it can do nothing to prevent the gradual but unrelenting destruction of the local culture. This

*An old male steinbock with its great horns and characteristic beard. It is dozing. I'm so close to it that I heard it snoring softly.*  
p. 115 "Paradise Lost"

degeneration has complex roots: it is a kind of cultural colonization that is difficult to identify and impossible to arrest. Seminars, conferences and debates cannot avoid the fact that every time that an old man dies he takes with him a past made of toil, hardship and daily struggle against an hostile environment (things that nobody wants to preserve) but also a past of knowledge, experience, faith and harmony with nature. The language, beliefs and traditions of the mountains are disappearing for ever. Neither can the clumsy and superficial attempts made by folk groups bring them back to life: a culture is not a collection of

dances, songs  
and proverbs  
but a way of  
understanding  
the world, an  
extremely  
complex  
semiological  
code that  
cannot be  
recalled  
approximately  
by one who is  
not a living  
part of it.

Perhaps this too  
is an  
ineluctable  
phenomenon,  
part of the  
world's  
evolution. Like  
many greater  
and better  
known past  
civilizations the  
mountain  
communities  
and their  
culture are also  
going to die  
out. But  
without too  
much ado about  
it: in silence,  
with discretion,  
as it is the  
custom here.

This book is by  
no means a  
nature guide:  
readers  
expecting a  
precise and  
systematic  
description of  
plants and  
animals will  
almost certainly  
be  
disappointed.  
But the beauty



*"Baite" (Alpine huts) for summer pasture. Grauson.*

and  
magnificence  
of these valleys  
and mountains,  
their evocation  
of a yet  
uncontaminated  
nature, the  
emotions  
stirred by their  
wildlife,  
transcend a  
purely  
descriptive  
dimension and  
go beyond an  
arid scientific  
exposition.  
This beauty,  
these emotions  
and suggestions  
are the core of  
this book.

Like a story teller called to animate an enjoyable evening around the fire I will retell - with words and images - the stories of the land I love. I hope the reader will forgive me, if in these stories I will also put a little bit of myself.

Not a tourist guide, nor a nature manual about the Park, even less yet another book on mountain photography. This book is simply a "love-song" dedicated by a nature photographer to "his" paradise, that invites to retrace with the author the places he dearly loves. It is an "invitation *au voyage*" through a personal experience, to discover not so much a territory, but the profound emotions that this land, with its animals and its people, can arouse. Emotions that are evoked by suggestive images and a photographic style that is grandiose in front of glaciers and peaks, tender and almost whispered when portraying the secret life of small animals, felt but not rethorical in describing man's daily labour.

The prose (evocative, poetical but also descriptive and scientific, and at times vehemently denouncing) leads the reader to the discovery of forgotten pockets of land, wild valleys, ancient stories that that the dominant culture has long swept away. Stories of men and mountains, millenary civilizations and animals. Stories of customs that endure through the centuries with the sacrality of rites; of docile animals that live in peace and from the beginning of time obey the eternal laws of nature. And all around, a world of wild beauty, on the surface hostile and rough, but brimming with life, where man and the land have lived in harmony for hundreds of generations: this is the world of the "Enchanted Rock".

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From *La roccia incantata*

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