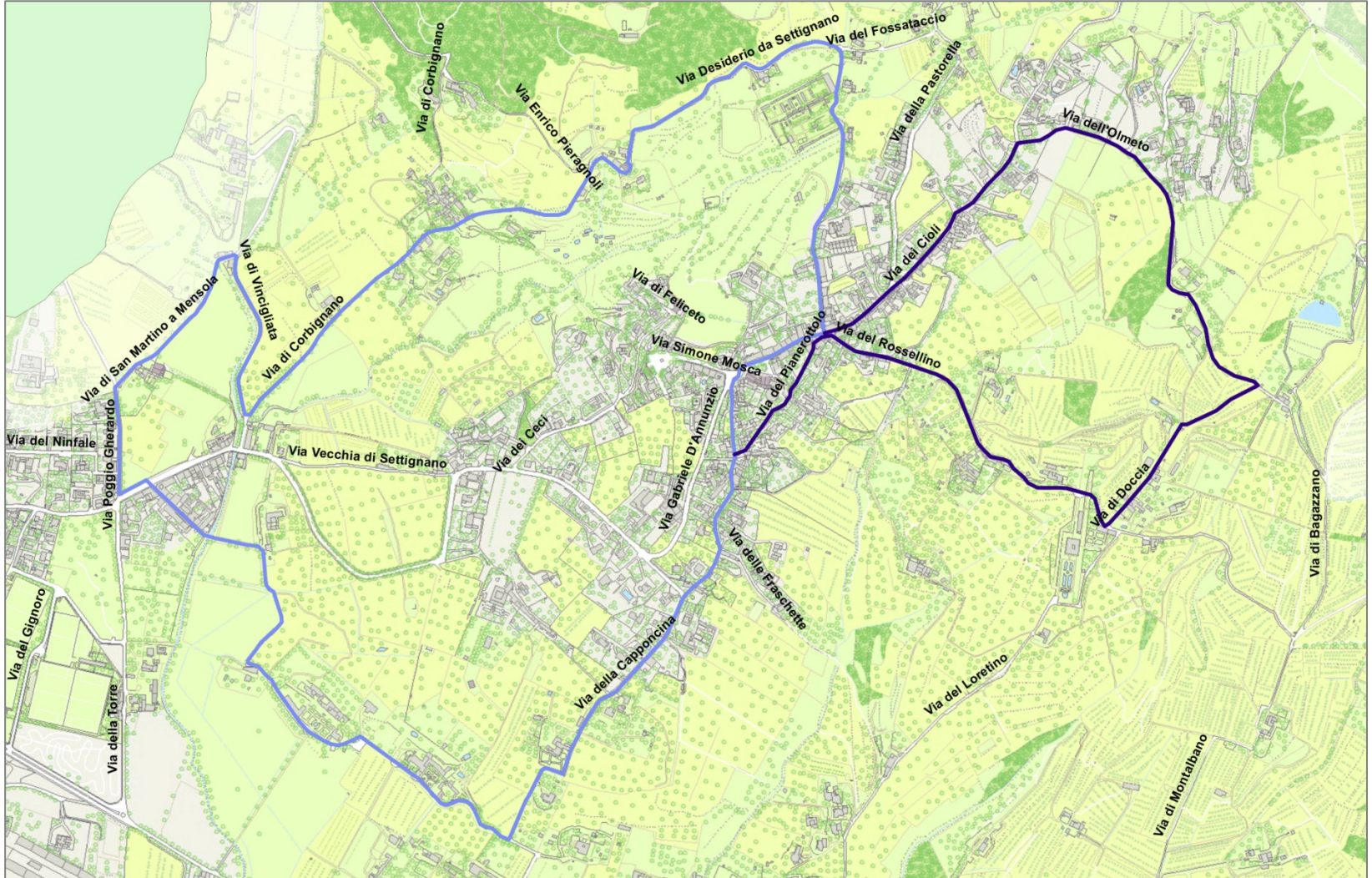


**TO THE NORTH-EAST
THROUGH THE MENSOLA VALLEY AND THE SETTIGNANO HILLS**



The map



The region around our trail



Settignano



The Gardens of Villa Gamberaia



The Tatti Mill

This trail is packed full of beautiful nature, landscapes, historic monuments and stunning panoramas. It offers a diverse snapshot of one of the most beautiful (and much-vaunted) regions in Florence's surrounding area to the north-east. It includes the Mensola valley (named after the river that originates in Fiesole and flows into the Arno near to Rovezzano) and the Settignano hills. Most of the region is classified as a Protected Nature Area of Local Interest (ANPIL), featuring the typical Tuscan landscape where forests of broad-leaved trees and conifers alternate with riverbank or hedgerow vegetation, parks, gardens and agricultural areas. These areas are dominated by vines, olive trees, cypresses, pines and oaks. Along this trail we find beautiful historical villas surrounded by majestic gardens (including the stunning Gardens of Villa di Gamberaia, one of the most beautiful parks in Italy), ancient country houses, parish churches and oratories, the small village of Corbignano, and Settignano which dominates the hillside. Many great Italian and foreign artists were born, lived or came on holiday in this area, in particular the Renaissance sculptors and architects: Desiderio da Settignano, Bernardo and Antonio Rossellino, Luca Fancelli, Bartolomeo Ammannati and Michelangelo (the nearby 'pietra serena' sandstone quarries at Maiano and Trassinaia are one of the main reasons for this popularity). But there have also been many poets, writers and intellectuals from Italy, England, America and many other countries: Boccaccio, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Niccolò Tommaseo, Leigh Hunt, Mark Twain, Charles Armitage Brown and Bernard Berenson (who lived at Villa I Tatti which is now the location of Harvard's prestigious Center for Italian Renaissance Studies). They were attracted by the region's charming landscape, peace, beauty, the unique otium, and its intellectual climate and inspiration.