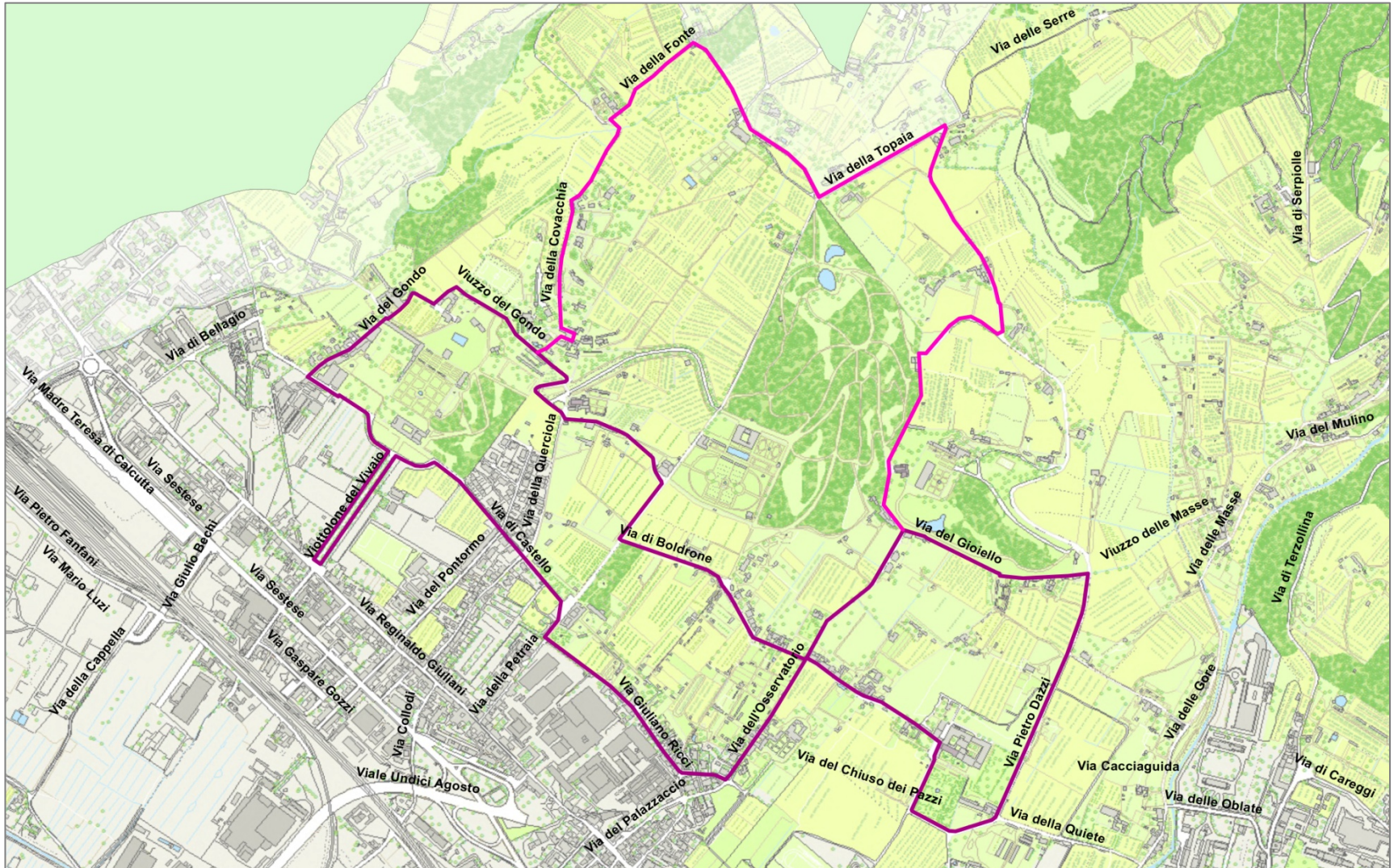


**TO THE NORTH-WEST
THROUGH THE PLAINS AND THE HILLS: THE CASTELLO AND THE MEDICI VILLAS**



The map



The region around our trail



Villa di Castello: the Grotto of Animals



View of Villa della Petraia



Villa Corsini: the Antiquarium

This trail is packed full of history, art and beautiful landscapes, featuring many suburban holiday villas that are renowned for their beauty, historical importance and grandeur: the Medici Villas of Castello and Petraia, with their magnificent Italian gardens (not just in terms of their geometric perspectives, but as metaphors and symbolism for the power and prestige of the Prince) as well as the Villas that used to belong to the Medici, such as Villa Corsini and Villa La Quiete alle Montalve, where the Electress Palatine, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, lived from 1724, the last descendant of the family. This area, partly extending up Quarto hill, gets its name from the ancient Etruscan and Roman village (Castellum, meaning a cistern, or a water tank) which contained part of the aqueduct built by Senator Marcus Opellius Macrinus (164-218) that was used to send water towards Florence. The Medici chose this region for their 'otium' and other delights; it was the scene of many key events in the family's history. Even though the area downstream has been overrun by urban development, it still maintains the exact same extraordinary history, which has also been created through the walled roads and alleys enclosing parts of the countryside, ancient farmhouses, olive groves and farmsteads. These features bear witness to the region's agricultural past that was based on a sharecropping system, proof of which is found all around us with its distinctly rural network.