

## Man and the mountain

# Mount Baldo Pastures



With rare exceptions, pastures on Mount Baldo are not natural but created by farmers and shepherds. In the past, forests used to be a lot more widespread (as the mountain's name itself suggests, since the word "Baldo" probably derives from the German "Wald", that means forest), but over the centuries, man worked on plants and soil to remove the original woods in order to use the areas cleared of forest vegetation for grazing.

Breeders attempt to maintain forage production in pastureland by holding back the expansion of the forest that tends to recover the surfaces which were artificially converted to pastureland. The traditional practice of free grazing, however, contributes to the degradation of pasture areas, since by feeding freely on the best grasses and trampling the soil with their hooves animals exert a selective pressure on the soil that promotes an increasingly widespread diffusion of plant species that are less appealing to livestock.

The number of animals that are carried out to pasture today is less than in the past. The most potentially productive surfaces are watershed areas, which are cooler and have deeper and more fertile soils. However, these areas are frequently invaded by weeds and herbaceous shrubs that reduce their actual productivity. Areas located on the steeper slopes and on the ridges often have a low productive capacity because of the shallowness of the soil and the presence of rocky outcrops. The areas of greater incline or rockiness, that are difficult for cattle to access, are where sheep graze.

