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10 Photos





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20/12/AlfioTommasini_ViaLactea-
02-2.jpg)
Reading Time: 2 minutes

Shot over four winters, the photobook *Via Lactea* documents the lives of both cattle and farmers amid the harsh climate of the Swiss Alps

Approximately 7,500 years ago, central Europeans began to retain the enzyme necessary to metabolise milk after infancy. With cows, agricultural development, and a knowledge of the landscape, humans have been able to survive the cold and harsh winters of the Swiss mountains. The photographic series *Via Lactea* (translating to 'Milky Way') by Alfio Tommasini documents the topographical relationship between humans and the animals they have lived with over the last 7,500 years.



(https://www.1854.photography/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AlfioTommasini_ViaLactea-03-1024x820.jpg).

From Via Lactea, © Alfio Tommasini.

Born and raised in Lodano, a small village south of the Alps, Tommasini comes from a family of farmers. Leaving Lodano to pursue photography, he found himself returning to the Alps to further understand what binds the locals to the unforgiving landscape, and the animals they farm. "I had lived in cities in other countries for years, so I wanted to rediscover the mountains and territory," he explains. Shot over four winters, a mix of snowy landscapes, local portraits and documentary tableaus compose the resulting project, which pieces together a story of industry, humanity, and the animals who make it all possible.

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"The project is about winter," Tommasini explains. "It's a cliché of Switzerland, the cows and the mountains. I wanted to play with the cliché and represent it in different ways." *Via Lactea* is explorative, employing a myriad of images to tell a story from multiple perspectives. Tommasini doesn't follow a singular farm or village, but attempts to create a universal narrative between the farming communities by highlighting their commonalities and shared landscape.



(https://www.1854.photography/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AlfioTommasini_ViaLactea-06-802x1024.jpg).

From Via Lactea, © Alfio Tommasini.

Through the long winters, Tommasini spent time with various farmers and their cows, taking part in their daily lives. These farms hold up to 70 cows each, a far cry from the large-scale dairy farms found elsewhere across Europe. The generations of dairy farmers in the Swiss Alps are deeply proud of their history; they play classical music for the cows, and each one is named and known by the locals. "I like to interpret the psychology of the cows, knowing their routes in the mountains; cows are very calm, and sometimes the farmer almost takes the same expression," says Tommasini.

Despite the dreamy winter landscapes of the Swiss Alps, *Via Lactea* does not depict the dairy industry as some fairytale. Old barns and calloused hands are juxtaposed by clinical and state-of-the-art technologies, as villages attempt to modernise. Dairy farming on this localised scale is becoming rarer each year, as farmers struggle to compete with large scale production. *Via Lactea* illustrates the history of cattle farming, while never allowing for a romanticised image to interfere with the pursuits of [documentary \(https://www.1854.photography/collection/for-the-record/?utm_source=bjp-online&utm_medium=content_promo&utm_campaign=gdr284~bjp_editorial~bjp_online_editorial~online~content_promo~~\)](https://www.1854.photography/collection/for-the-record/?utm_source=bjp-online&utm_medium=content_promo&utm_campaign=gdr284~bjp_editorial~bjp_online_editorial~online~content_promo~~). Tommasini provides the information, but it is up to the viewer to decide what their perspective on it is. Aside from images and their titles, Tommasini leaves the book blank, aside from a text by a farmer, instead of his own essay. "I saw a real passion and attachment to the territory, I didn't want to make a judgement. It's part of their culture."