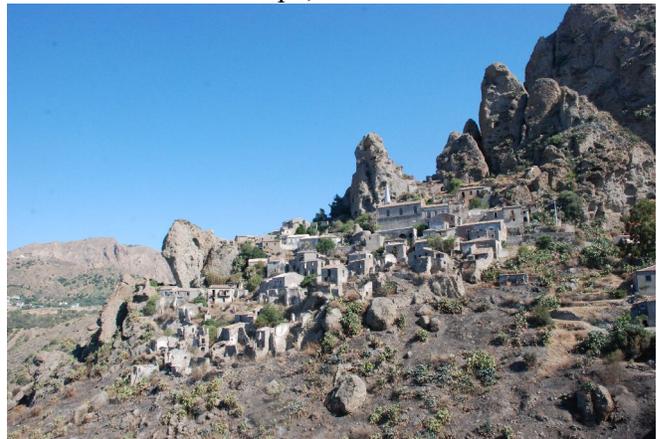


REPORTS OF THE CALABRIA TRIP, SEPTEMBER 7-22, 2011:



September 8 - Ghost town of Pentadatilillo. Pentadatilillo is located at the base of Aspromonte mountain range, at about 250m high above sea level. The name of the town is from the Greek word meaning five fingers but given the ravages of time, with earthquakes and landslides sculpting the land, we could barely see the shape of the five fingers. During its glory days, Pentadatilillo had a castle, a church, and several buildings and homes to serve

its vibrant community but the last earthquake in 1908 was its undoing. In recent times there has been some revival and rebuilding. As we walked through the deserted streets, we saw crumbling walls and collapsing rooftops like those of the ancient castle, just a collection of rundown brick walls. We also saw some buildings which have been recently restored and turned into shops, art studios and a bed and breakfast. The restoration work on the Church of Santi Pietro and Paolo was quite impressive. The hillside of the village was covered with bergamot citrus, figs, prickly pears, grapes and olives trees. As we walked our way towards the Church, Diego, our guide from CAI Aspromonte, picked a few ripe prickly pears to share with us. The trip back to Reggio took us to Palazzo Campanella where the two Bronze Statues from Riace are currently being restored. These statues were discovered by a scuba diver in 1972 and considered the pride of Reggio di Calabria and their discovery brought to light the importance of this region to the Greeks in ancient times. We met with the museum guide, Antonio, who explained the history and discovery of the statues. The statues were in a glass walled room, laid on their backs so we could not see the full bodies and unfortunately no photographs were allowed. Historians believed that the ship carrying them was sunk off the coast of Riace and buried under the sea for more than 2000 years. As the statues were found lying side by side, historians believe that they are just part of a larger group of bronze statues that have yet to be discovered. That evening, after a fine dinner, we headed to the CAI Aspromonte headquarters, about two blocks away from the hotel, and were greeted by almost 40 local members. The local club's president exchanged remarks, gifts, books and brochures with Francesco and ended the party with a toast of bergomotto and lemoncello. There were a variety of local cakes and cookies to share, my favorite was the bergomotto cake, which is a sponge cake drenched in a liquor made with Bergamot citrus. By Norizan Paterra



September 9 - Aspromonte National Park. We left the Hotel Albanuona in Reggio Calabria and 1 ½ hours later we arrived for our first night in the Rifugio Biancospina, Piani di Carmelia inside the Aspromonte National Park. Antonio and Teresa were our hosts there along with their wonderful dogs, Achilles and Diana. It was “ranch styled” Refugio with horses and a wonderful garden. We hiked with Antonio and Diana the dog to the top of Monte Fistocchio which is about a 1,000 ft elevation gain ending at 5150 feet. We saw the remnants of a guard area on top and could see the Mediterranean and Ionian Sea in the distance. A dinner of chicken in tomatoes, eggplant, fried zucchini, cabbage and melon for dessert was a wonderful meal after a day of hiking. By Linda Blevins



September 10 – Peak of Aspromonte and Biancospino. The morning after our first night in the Rifugio, we were treated to a typical Calabrian breakfast of bread, toast and cookies. The group’s demand for morning coffee overwhelmed the supply and I think took the hosts Teresa and Antonio a little by surprise. A lunch of sandwich and fruit was provided for the day’s adventure. The hike for the day was the summit of Montalto, the highest point in the Aspromonte National Park and an elevation gain of 686m/2250ft. Antonio led the hike which started from the Rifugio. We followed the pavement for a short distance then onto a dirt road that was quite dusty from the logging activity in the area. We made our way through the forest to an ancient route traveled by locals crossing the Aspromonte region from Delianuova in the west to San Luca in the east or Bova in the south. The dense forest of deciduous and pine trees kept us shaded from the sun for the first part of the hike, but soon gave way to open areas of scrub oak, rock and grass. Upon reaching the summit, we were greeted by a bronze statue of the Holy Redeemer, created by sculptor Michael Reggio of Raco. The anticipated ocean views from the top were somewhat obscured by haze in the low lands, but spectacular nonetheless. By Kevin Day

As an alternative hike to Montalto, some of us explored a 6 miles forested loop near the Biancospino. Diana, one of the three dogs from the Refugio, was our ambassador. Everybody recognized and greeted her, acknowledging that we were the new neighbors who had to be rescued the day before when could not find the right gate home. We had a leisurely lunch at the only bar, and the manager opened for us the little church of Madonna della Salute. Curious goats were watching us. When we reached Panorama Point we had a breath-taking view of the valleys of Aspromonte. It was hot, and the doggy showed us how to freshen up. Overall, the day was a welcome pause to catch up with the jet lag, nurse our heat blisters and get to know better each other. By Sandra Bordin

September 11 – Coastal Hike. Our morning began with hysterical laughter. The resident rooster at Refugio Biancospino seemed to think his message was not getting across so he continued to deliver his thing: “cock-a-doodle-doo” over and over again until he sounded in desperate need of a throat lozenger. Anyways, thanks to my roomies(Sandra, Ida and Caterina) we had some great times. The morning bus ride took us to Sant’Elia di Palmi, where the best olive oil in all of Italy is made. An amazing hike took us along the cliffs over the purple coast with members of CAI RC. Afterwards we met in the park for a wonderful picnic of prickly pears, sweet figs, cheese, wine and plenty of song and dance. We then went on to visit the historical ruins of Taureana of Palmi that overlooks the coast and is located at the northern entrance of the strategic strait area. Excavators confirmed that this city stood alive until the IV Century A.D. Not far from this location we visited the site of Pietre Nere, the church S.Fantino located in Scina. Beneath this newer church excavators found the ruins of what is believed to be the oldest church ever found dating before the year 500 B.C. We were allowed to visit the crypt senopio buried

deep in the ground, unbelievable medieval church. The finale: Dinner with beautiful friends (old and new) was our final evening at Refugio Biancospino. Update: My cowbell survived customs!! Ciao, By Mary Lou Johnson

September 12 – Cosenza and local CAI. Today was probably the most anticipated day of the hiking trip for one man, our leader, Francesco Greco. After months of planning this hike he would be coming home, to Cosenza. For us, his friends, watching his increasing enthusiasm, listening to his excited voice when introducing his old buddies, was one of the many real joys of this trip to Calabria. Yes we saw his impressive high school building, visited the CAI headquarters, inspected a castle and museums, but the real treasure of this day's events, was Francesco's shining face, loving every second of it. And that's worth remembering. By Caterina Murone Wartes

September 13 - Mt. Botte Donato. This day started out to be another "horrible, no good, very bad day" as the dogs continued to bark and keep people from sleeping well. It was better than yesterday as the dog in heat had been removed from the area. Juliano, the President of CAI-Cosenza and who has a villa in this area, heard our complaint and as we would know the next day, put the powers-that-be into action to get rid of the overabundance of stray dogs - by poison if necessary. We rode the bus to the summit of Mt. Botte Donato, 6325', and hiked from there on up to another peak. We learned about the local Lorici, a unique pine, whose straight trunks were used by the Romans for masts while the sap as a sealant. Back down to the bus and some of the group opted for a ride down while the rest of us followed Juliano straight down the mountain. By Cam Bradley



September 14 - Santa Severina and Fiori. We drove east into Magna Grecia territory and up to a small hill town, Santa Severina. A Norman fortress commands the hill, but it was built over a Byzantine church of the 10th-11th Centuries. Partial walls, frescoes, and a burial ground can be seen. Norman conquest produced the castle, which was converted to a stately palace in



later centuries. Most evident are ceiling and wall paintings of the 18th Century. The 13th Century cathedral across the bright piazza drew some of us in for an all too quick look. After lunch in a pine grove we moved to San Giovanni in Fiori, where we visited a large but simple Cistercian Abbey and then the Museo Demologico (daily life), with tools, textiles, furniture, and a photo gallery showing families and other groups in period dress. En

route back to Lorica, we enjoyed beer in an old railroad car café. By Karyl Winn

September 16 – Zarella and Museum. From Zarella a three mile walk dropped gently through woodland to a large reservoir where we had our lunch sitting at beautifully sited picnic tables. After lunch we visited an interesting display of pictures and the spanking new, luxurious museum (EU funding?), which, though still light on content, did give some interesting insights into the Park. Back in the bus we passed through the mountains to Longobucco a town built it seemed on the vertical cliff side. We made a series of visits to tiny houses up narrow alleys. They were a rather sad reminder of a way of life which if not dead is certainly moribund. There was a house with several rooms full of little-used hand-looms, a room where some ladies were busy making wine on an exceedingly small scale and

a shoe repair shop which would not have been out of place in a museum. It was all a bit voyeuristic, but as we were cheerfully received throughout I am probably being over sensitive. We arrived back at the hotel rather late, but not too late to celebrate Miwako's birthday. By Peter Barrow

September 17- Lorica and Local CAI. At 10am we left for a one way hike in the local hills of Lorica. It was a short hike because the Lorica section of CAI was hosting us at their headquarters to show us their rescue equipment, used mainly in winter. This was followed by wine and antipasti di funghi and rosa marina (a tiny fish) and tomatoes, sliced onions, tomatoes, and basil. The main course was pasta fagioli with bacon and onion and red sauce, as distinguished from the green sauce of the pasta fagioli of Biancospino. Then cascio cavallo with sausage and green figs so sweet you would swear honey had been placed in their centers. And, of course, bread, fabulous bread, and then there was more---melon! Added to all this was much singing and some dancing. Giuliano was the hero who brought Marylou the cowbell she had been longing for. We left, reluctantly, for our next lodging the Rifugio Biaggio Longo and dinner at the agroturismo La Vecchia Fienile. Dinner began with prosciuto, soprasato, and Italian bacon, and zucchini in oil and vinegar. Followed by cavatelli, spare ribs and potatoes, nectarines, coffee. Back to the rifugio to prepare for the next day's 7:30am departure. Please feel free to edit as you see fit. By Gini Harmon



September 18 – Serra Dolcedorme. The day after we moved into CAI refugio Biaggio Longo in the Parco Nazionale del Pollino, very early in the morning, we joined a group of CAI Castrovillari members for the hike to the massif Serra Dolcedorme. The hike was not as sweet as its sounding name. The summit was very rocky and steep. It reached 7450ft. with a 2100 el. gain. On the way up we encountered the ancient tree “Pino Loricato” with his

contoured trunk shaped by wind and storms the relic of the last glaciations. We finally reached the top where lunch was welcome. As we were resting, slowly but surely, Cam appeared all bundled up due to high wind that we did not recognized her. We thought we had lost her back on the trail. On the way back we encountered a herd of white cows right on our trail, they would not badge until we clear out of their way. This was by far the most fatiguing hike but the most satisfying. By Ida Caldognetto



September 19 - Morano Calabro and Civita. Thunder and rain dispirited Antonio, our driver, but he got us to the town of Morano Calabro, where his aunt arranged for the 11th Century church to be opened. We admired faded but lovely frescoes. By the time we reached the Norman castle ruin, originally a Roman fortification, weather was clearing. On to Civita, where our chosen restaurant was closed. We drove outside town to another, where we enjoyed a lunch of soup, salad, and wonderful tiramisu. Back in Civita, an Albanian town with signs in both Alberesch

and Italian, we toured 2 museums, one featuring tools and other objects of agricultural life and the other devoted to Albanian-Italian culture. Albanians fled across the Ionian Sea to Southern Italy after being attacked by Turks in the 15th to 18th centuries. We also looked into a fine orthodox church and strolled through narrow streets. People were friendly, the wine we bought was good, and views over the Raganello Valley with its gorge were splendid. By Karyl Winn

September 21 – Timpa di San Lorenzo and Sanctuary. After our minimalist breakfast, we travelled up what must be one of the most winding roads in Italy above the Ionian Sea to San Lorenzo Bellizi. We wandered the narrow picturesque lanes in the village perched somehow above gorges and slabs of rock. Some of us made new friends in the coffee bar and bought dried heather from the friendly owners while Izzy met a learned gentleman of the town who was writing his memoirs. Next we toured the Santuario of Maria della Armi with Francesco's friend Lucca. This beautiful and ancient monastery of the Byzantine Period hangs above the plains of Magna Grecia. After lunch in Cerchiara some of us visited the Museum of Bread. A wonderful day that we will all remember! By Mike Smallwood