



**PROJECT REPORT
CINQUE TERRE VOLUNTEER TRIP
OCTOBER 4-12, 2022**



Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized and led a volunteer trip to Cinque Terre, Italy near the village of Riomaggiore. In 1997, UNESCO included the Cinque Terre in the World Heritage List as a **"cultural landscape"**. The eastern Italian Riviera of the Cinque Terre is a cultural landscape of extraordinary value, and it represents the harmonious interaction between man and nature established to realize a place of outstanding quality. Thirteen volunteers, traveling from the United States, including Trip Leaders Carol Clark and Mark Hardgrove, met in Florence, Italy to begin the journey. Giorgia Carraffa, a Guide with our partner Mandala Tour, joined the group for the orientation meeting and stayed throughout the trip.

The main project focus was in the village of Riomaggiore and the work projects were to restore or rebuild the ancient dry-stone walls that are iconic in this area, and which illustrate the heritage of humanity, traditional land uses, and landscape design. These terraces, some of which have been dated back to 1000, do not contain imported stones and are maintained by

hand. When these stone walls fail it can cause erosion, landslides, loss of plants and animals, and human livelihoods. Our work site on this trip was at Azienda Agricola Possa (Possa). The farm and winery are located within the Cinque Terre National Heritage Designation and belong to Samuele Heydi Bonanini (Heydi, as he prefers), encompassing approximately 6.18 acres and perched high above the Ligurian sea. Heydi has brought back the production of ancient wine and maintains the ancient dry stonewall terraces preventing erosion loss on these steep seaside cliffs.

In all, approximately 410 volunteer work hours were performed in the clearing of brush and competing plants from approximately 812 linear feet of terrace walls and vineyard rows and in removing rocks and in repairing or rebuilding approximately 68 linear feet of dry-stone wall in two locations.

Detailed Trip Report

On the first day volunteers met in the late afternoon in Florence, Italy for introductions, orientation and work briefings presented by the trip leaders and guide. Afterwards the group stretched their legs by taking a short walk through the historic Piazza di Santa Maria Novella to a restaurant where the first of many authentic Italian meals was enjoyed.

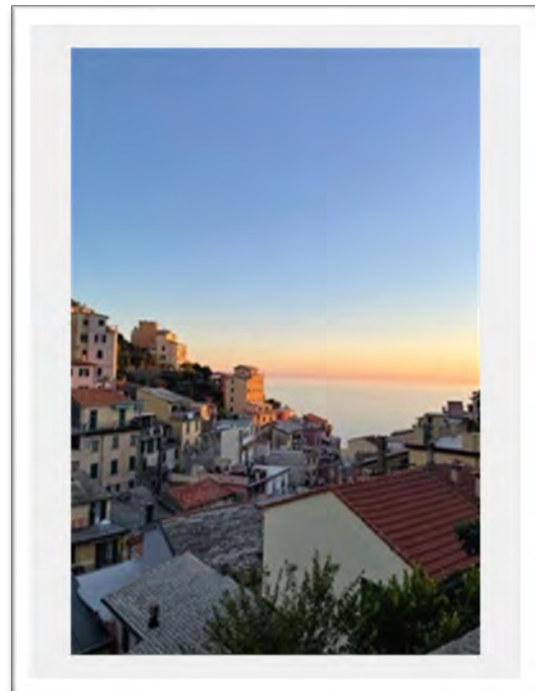
The following day, after the morning safety briefing, breakfast and checking out, everyone boarded the ground transportation to Riomaggiore. Along the way we stopped in the ancient walled city of Lucca to rest, eat lunch and to examine the stone walled city. Meeting with local guide, Linda, the group learned of the history of the city and the fortifications. Some contribute the birth of this city to the Etruscans, and it is documented that Lucca was founded by Romans in 180 AD. These defensive walls were built between the middle of the 16th and 17th century and are made of red bricks with a series of curtains and bastions. From these fortifications to the church of San Michele in Foro dating back to 795 A.D. to Giacomo Puccini's house, museum and statue the group took in thousands of years of history in this small city center.



Lucca

Arriving in Riomaggiore in the afternoon and after settling in at the host hotel, the team discussed the following days' work projects and logistics. Then the group walked through the church square,

watched a beautiful sunset, then made their way to the village to get their bearings and understand the complex system of steps and alleys before enjoying dinner.



SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



The following day the weather was nothing but blue skies and sunshine. After breakfast and a short drive uphill to the Possa worksite the volunteers were introduced to the work site. Heydi, with Giorgia translating, described the wine farm and explained the day's projects.

One group of four began removing 45 feet of fallen rock on a damaged terrace area. The soil here requires a different technique to build the dry-stone walls and allow for the water to drain. It requires a very specific skill that is hard to master and improves with experience. The team started with easy steps. Rocks were sorted by size and pulled away from the terrace wall.



The other group climbed onto the different levels of terraces and began clearing 450 linear feet of terrace walls and vines.



Day 4 began much as the previous day. There was not a cloud in the sky. Arriving at Posso and receiving work directions, everyone fell into place along the terrace rows. One group worked on a 23-foot length of dry-stone wall replacing and firming up fallen rocks while the other continued moving up the terraces.

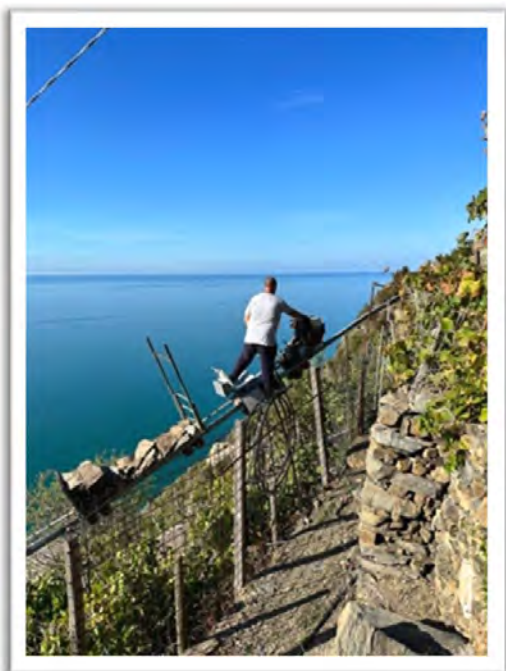


On this day everyone was treated to a lesson on making pesto. It is a sauce made from basil, cheese, pine nuts, oil, and sea salt. Basil is grown all over Cinque Terre and it is particularly famous in Riomaggiore.

Luca, a local Chef, provided the ingredients and large mortar and pestles at the site and put the group to work making their lunch. Testaroli, the Italian pancake pasta, and pesto. Back at work after this hearty lunch volunteers cleared approximately 187 linear feet of rows and terrace walls.



Day 5 continued with the heavy workload of clearing brush and fallen stone walls. Heydi uses a type of monorail mechanical system to move the harvested grapes and large stones up the terrace sides and the grapes down to boats below. Work became harder as some moved up the slopes onto narrower terraces. 23 feet of stone terrace wall was repaired and the team cleared approximately 175 linear feet of terrace walls and vine rows.



Heydi using the monorail to move heavy stones

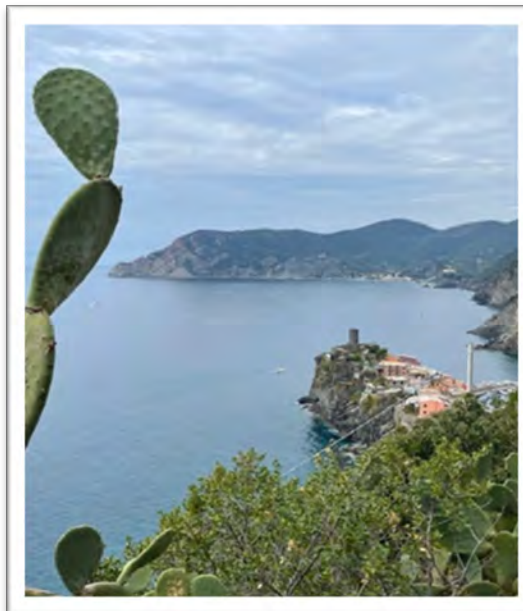


Work completed on one terrace wall

Afterwards everyone hiked for 30 minutes up a steep challenging stone trail to the Sanctuary of Our Lady at the Church of Nostra Signora di Montenero. This sacred site atop Riomaggiore and where the Cinque Terre trail splits to the long hike to Porto Venere, is only accessible by foot. With three naves, it was noted for the first time in 1335 and the appearance of the church today is the result of renovations completed in the 19th century. Views from this 1,115-foot peak are stunning! The hike down took about an hour and was along a shaded, well established and sometimes slippery stone path, lined with a few beautiful residences perched just above the path.



Day 6 was a beautiful, sunny, blue-sky Sunday and was a well-deserved rest day. The group had the option of resting and relaxing in Riomaggiore, visiting the other villages, or joining in a hike on one of the official Cinque Terre National Park trails starting in Corniglia and ending in Vernazza or continuing to Monterosso al Mare. It was no surprise that everyone opted to do the hike. After a short train ride from Riomaggiore to Corniglia we met our trail guide and began the hike through parts of the village and onto Vernazza where some decided to keep hiking on to Monterosso and others chose to stop and enjoy a relaxing lunch and then take the train to Monterosso and Manarola hitting all Cinque Terre villages!



Hiking along the Cinque Terre Trail from Corniglia to Vernazza

Overnight the area experienced an incredible thunder and lightning storm that lit up the village and welcomed the morning with heavy rains. The vineyard, terraces and trails were soaked and prohibited us from heading up the cliffsides to the project work. Rains lasted into the early afternoon hitting on and off, but we made the best of the day by continuing the work with Heydi in the village. The last workday became one of connecting the final steps of caring for ancient dry-stone walls, vineyard terraces, and soil conservation to the production and sale of wines located in one of the world's most iconic and important regions. Just a few buildings down from the host hotel is Heydi's small production plant.



Inviting everyone to get in out of the rain and squeeze into the entryway of his plant, he explained how he will produce 26,000 bottles of wine this harvest season. He is an artisan producer of natural wines, never using pesticides throughout farm or vineyard. He recovered different autochthonous varieties of grapes that were nearly extinct. His small plant contains stainless steel barrels that are masterfully stacked to make use of the small space. One large wooden barrel stands off to the side. We also learned that his farm is involved in a small beekeeping effort, plus there is a small plantation of lemon trees used for limoncello and jams.



After this event, while still too wet to go to the terraces, the group had a good opportunity to meet back at the hotel to discuss this first trip to Cinque Terre. Volunteers were open with their evaluations and ideas, good feedback on the trip itinerary, location and logistics which will assist trip leaders as they plan for the next trips. To complete the day, Heydi invited all of us to his private wine tasting room not far from the hotel. What better way to close this part of the trip than to taste the wines produced from the vineyard this team had labored in.



Volunteers were able to continue asking questions about Cinque Terre, the dry-stone walls and the vines as Heydi talked about the products. His continuing hard work includes safeguarding local ancient products that do not have a famous name, such as the Sciacchetrá (pronounced “Sha-Che-Traah”) wine. The Sciacchetrá is made with the old-style method of using dried grapes that are shelled by hand, one by one, before being manually pressed (sometimes by foot) and aged. The result of Heydi's production is an award-winning sweet wine, best served with cheese or a light pastry.

This winetasting made for the perfect time to toast each other and thank Heydi for allowing ConservationVIP® and all the volunteers to work in this very special place.

On day 11 everyone packed up their gear, said goodbye and thank you to all those at our host hotel for the terrific service and wonderful breakfasts before boarding the private transportation vans to begin the journey back to the big city of Florence. Along the way we stopped in Porto Venere, another UNESCO World Heritage Site which has hosted many poets and artists through the years. The group stretched their legs by wandering up to The Church of St. Peter, looking through the portals overlooking the Bay of Poets and strolling through the main street full of busy shops, restaurants, and gelaterias before settling into another amazing lunch.

Returning to Florence was filled with mixed emotions. Sad to leave the small, family villages of Cinque Terre but at the same time excited to be back in such an historic city with so much more to see. The farewell dinner was filled with fine local food, laughter, and rounds of cheers. Returning to the hotel volunteers and trip leaders tearfully thanked Giorgia for her stellar leadership and friendship, hugged each other and then slowly drifted off to prepare for their journey home or to other destinations in the morning.

Thank you to all the volunteers willing to join ConservationVIP® on the first Cinque Terre Volunteer Trip. Thank you for your insight, suggestions, and patience as we worked through the details and switched gears when we needed to work around changes. You are all the best of the best and are the mortar of this organization!

Grazie mille to Mandala Tour for sharing Giorgia Carraffa to guide us through this wonderful region of Italy. Giorgia not only guided us, but she also worked right alongside us on the terraces! This trip would not have been as successful without her.

Moussa and Mamadou, Heydi's workers, were more than patient with us as we learned.

A special thank you to Samuele (Heydi) Bonanini for taking a chance on a bunch of unknown people who wanted to work at Possa on the historic vineyards and on the dry-stone walls of which he is the guardian of. È stato un enorme piacere!

See you later!
Ci vediamo !

