



**PROJECT REPORT
CINQUE TERRE VOLUNTEER TRIP
May 12-20, 2023**



Executive Summary

Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) organized a volunteer trip to Cinque Terre, Italy, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized for its cultural landscape. Thirteen volunteers, including trip leaders Carol Clark and Mark Hardgrove, traveled from the United States to Italy where they were joined by local guide Furio Sabatini from Mandala Tour. The primary focus of the project was to restore and rebuild ancient dry-stone walls in the village of Riomaggiore. The walls are significant to the area's heritage of humanity, traditional land uses, and landscape design. Dating back to 1000 A.D., the walls

contain only locally sourced stones and are maintained by hand. Protecting these walls is essential to prevent erosion, landslides, loss of plants and animals, and to safeguard human livelihoods. The group volunteered primarily at Azienda Agricola Possa (Possa), a farm and winery owned by Samuele "Heydi" Bonanini that encompasses around 6.18 acres within the Cinque Terre National Heritage Designation. The property sits on steep seaside cliffs above the Ligurian sea, where Heydi has revived the production of ancient wine and used dry-stone wall terraces to prevent erosion.

In total, volunteers donated approximately 444 volunteer hours to clearing brush and competing plants from around 2160 linear feet of terrace walls, 20 vineyard rows, and 100 feet of rock steps leading down to lower terraces. They also volunteered on a section of wall that had collapsed, which was approximately 20 feet long and 12 feet high.

Detailed Trip Report

On the first day of the volunteer trip, the group gathered in Florence, Italy in the late afternoon for introductions, orientation, and briefings delivered by the trip leaders. Unfortunately, the group encountered unexpected heavy rain and hailstorm during the meeting time, but the weather cleared up in time for them to walk to the dinner site. The following day, after receiving a safety briefing and having breakfast, the group checked out and boarded ground transportation to Riomaggiore. Along the way, they took a break in Lucca, an ancient walled city, to have lunch and explore the city's stone walls. Joined by a local guide, Linda, the group learned about the city's history and fortifications, some of which date back to the Etruscans and were built between the 16th and 17th centuries using red bricks and a series of curtain walls and bastions. The group visited several notable places in the city, including the church of San Michele in Foro, which dates to 795 A.D., Giacomo Puccini's house, museum, and statue, and took in thousands of years of history in the small city center.



Lucca

After arriving in Riomaggiore in the afternoon and settling in at the host hotel, the team held discussions about the next day's volunteer projects and logistics. Following that, the group proceeded to walk through the church square, making their way to the village to get a sense of direction and to understand the intricate system of steps and alleys before having dinner.

*Riomaggiore**Church of San Giovanni Battista of Riomaggiore**Overlook at Possa Terrace*

After breakfast the next day, the group took a short drive uphill to the Possa site and the volunteers were introduced to the volunteer projects. Heydi described the wine farm and explained the projects that we would volunteer on along with vineyard workers, Moussa and Mamadou.

Volunteer Projects: Two major projects were identified for volunteers to work on throughout the week.

Project 1: The dry-stone wall terraces in this location are important because they are a traditional form of agriculture that has been practiced in the area for centuries. These terraces are built by hand, without the use of cement or mortar, they are used to cultivate crops such as grapes, olives, and lemons. Furthermore, the terraces play an important role in preventing soil erosion and preserving the ecological balance of the area. On this trip one group began



removing fallen rock on a damaged terrace area. Heavy rains contributed to a tough year for terraces in the Cinque Terre region. Throughout the region, including the Possa site, helicopters had to be used to bring in new stones to replace some of the old rock that had been crushed or used too often on the walls. The soil here requires a different technique to build the dry-stone wall and allow for water to drain. It requires a specific skill that is hard to master and improves with experience. The team started by removing soil. Rocks were removed by buckets, sorted by size, and pulled away from the excavation site. The tasks were difficult and tedious, located in

a small area by a slightly wider path over the lower terraces. This section of wall was about 20 feet long and 12 feet high and though the group volunteered on it every day it still needed more work after we left.

Project 2: The second project involved a variety of tasks, including clearing vineyard walls and rows, staking vines, and clearing and stabilizing stone stairways. Heydi, the owner of the vineyard, is dedicated to sustainable agricultural practices, using only organic methods in the vineyards to produce a variety of wines that reflect the area's unique territory and microclimates. Heydi uses traditional winemaking methods, such as hand-harvesting and spontaneous fermentation, to create distinct wines that are highly desirable to wine enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike. Over the years, he has won numerous awards for his Cinque Terre DOC white wine, Sclachetrá dessert wine, and Vermentino and Pigato wines.

The volunteers on this trip climbed up to various levels of terraces and started clearing between the vine rows, removing competing vegetation along with fallen rocks. The terrain was steeper and more remote than it may appear in the photos, making the tasks more difficult. Volunteers crawled along the rows on their hands and knees and often were walking up and down steep, uneven stone steps to reach the different rows. However, the light rains made the

rocky soil softer, making it easier to remove the competing shrubs and grasses.





This group was able to accomplish an astounding amount.

While resting from the challenging tasks, the group enjoyed some of the natural and cultural wonders of the Cinque Terre area. On the fourth day of the volunteer trip, Luca, a local chef, taught everyone how to make pesto, which is a sauce consisting of basil, cheese, pine nuts, oil, and sea salt. Basil is widely grown throughout Cinque Terre, with Riomaggiore being particularly famous for it. Luca supplied the ingredients and large mortar and pestles for the group to use in Heydi's "cave," where they made Testaroli, a type of Italian pancake pasta, and fresh pesto for their lunch.

Following this hearty meal, the volunteers returned to Posso, climbing steep terrace steps and clearing vegetation around lemon trees while using it as mulch around the base of the

trees. The cultivation of lemon trees on the terraces is an ancient tradition in the Cinque Terre region.



Making Pesto

On the group's rest day, volunteers were offered various options: they could either stay and rest at the hotel, explore the other Cinque Terre villages, or join a guided hike with Mandala Tour's guide, Furio Sabatini. Despite the morning rain and crowded trains, several volunteers decided to go with Furio to visit Corniglia and then hike up to Volastra. Once they reached Volastra,

two volunteers bravely continued hiking back to Riomaggiore while the others hiked down to the Manarola train and took the train back to Riomaggiore.

Following the volunteer tasks on day five, some in the group chose to walk the road back to the hotel and others took the long way back and hiked up more steep rock steps to the Madonna di Montenero and then back down a well-paved trail, past some well-hidden homes and lovely flowers to the hotel.

On the eighth and final volunteer day, the group packed up their gear from the Riomaggiore hotel and after breakfast boarded the ground transportation back to Florence stopping in Porto Venere. Porto Venere, a picturesque fishing village situated in the Gulf of Poets, offers stunning views of the sea and the surrounding hills. The village is renowned for its colorful houses, ancient castle, and the 13th-century Church of St. Peter, which overlooks the sea.

Arriving in the late afternoon back in Florence, the group checked in and then joined in a celebration toasting the incredible achievements of their hard labor, as well as new friendships, fine dining and hiking opportunities that this Cinque Terre trip had to offer.

Accomplishments:

Throughout the trip, approximately 444 volunteer hours were donated by the group. They cleared brush and competing plants from around 2160 linear feet of terrace walls, 20 vineyard rows, and 100 feet of rock steps leading down to lower terraces. They also



Hiking along the Cinque Terre Trail

volunteered on a section of wall that had collapsed, which was approximately 20 feet long and 12 feet high. To rebuild it, the group moved around 11 cubic yards of earth and 2.2 cubic yards of fallen terrace rock to excavate a new foundation. New rocks which were delivered by helicopter were placed on a lower terrace for later use. The group completed two additional side projects: stabilizing 24 lemon trees by pulling competing vegetation and using it as natural mulch around the base of each tree and tending to some vines along a steep dry stone wall area located closer to the town area. For a few hours on a rainy morning, two volunteers even assisted with planting seedlings along a small agricultural site near the river.

Grazie Mille!

Thank you so much to all the volunteers who joined ConservationVIP® on the Cinque Terre Volunteer Trip. We appreciate your willingness to participate and your valuable recommendations and thoughts throughout the trip. We are grateful for your patience as we made changes to the itinerary and navigated through the logistics. Your dedication and expertise played a significant role in making this trip a success and are crucial to our organization's achievements.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Furio Sabatini from Mandala Tour for guiding us through this beautiful region of Italy. Furio was not just a trail guide but also provided logistical help with meals, vehicles, and activities. He brought us local treats such as focaccia, fresh tomatoes, cheese, and olives for our lunches that made the trip even more enjoyable. His contribution to the trip's success cannot be overstated.

Special thanks to Heydi's workers, Moussa and Mamadou, who set the pace and instructed the group on the procedures. Volunteering alongside them, we could not have accomplished so much without their guidance and support.

Lastly, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Samuele (Heydi) Bonanini for taking a risk and allowing us, a group of strangers, to volunteer at Possa, restoring the historic vineyards and dry-stone walls for which he is the guardian. Thank you for trusting us and for giving us the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of this beautiful region's cultural heritage.