

## The Story of Rifugio Il Robbio

IN THE INITIAL PHASE OF IL ROBBIO, in the early 1980's there had not yet been a lift to transport building material up to the hut. Host Mauro Tavoni remembers the human chain well that carried up 300 bags of cement from the principal road 300 meters of altitude below the hut. Apart from cement, roof battens, metal door frames, doors, tubes, tools and much more material made their way up to the solitary meadows of Puntato through the hands of volunteers.

IN 1987 IL ROBBIO OPENED AS MOUNTAIN REFUGE for the public. Smaller extensions transformed the former farm house more and more into a homelike place.

TOWARDS THE END OF THE 1990's operating the refuge became more and more professional: In 1998 the association installed a photovoltaic plant cofinanced by the European Union on the roof of the dining area erected in 1993/94. The hut has electric light this time and can even operate electric devices. In 2001 the association rented the BAITA CAMPI next to Rifugio LA QUIETE to be its third accommodation structure. In 2007 it added the small BAITA AUSILIO next to the church to its portfolio. The four buildings provide 42 beds.

PARALLEL TO IMPROVING ITS ACCOMODATION facilities, IL SENTIERO also fostered its actions to be recognised as a biologic farm. In 2000 it gained the title of AZIENDA AGRICOLA BIOLOGICA, a biological farm. The association created a fruit orchard partly consisting of historic species from the Garfagnana valley. It adopted a flock of wild cows living on the meadows of Puntato, started to hold horses and to make its own honey. Since the last shepherd did not return to Puntato in summer 2008, Mauro Tavoni is the only person that carries out agricultural activities in Puntato.

## Il Robbio today

2.000 VISITORS PER YEAR PASS IL ROBBIO or stay here for the night. The supporting association of IL SENTIERO manages another refuge in the Apennine Mountains and consisted of 13,000 members in 2008, all supporting the idea of ecologic tourism in Puntato.

IL SENTIERO MAINLY ATTRACTS Italian youth and student groups with a large variety of environmental education programmes. This comprises getting to know local flora and fauna, hikes to the neighboring summits, campfires and nightly sky observation. This educational work is essential for IL SENTIERO's continuity: Participants experience how vulnerable and precious the alpine cultural landscape is and simultaneously fund its maintenance.

GUEST FROM ABROAD MOSTLY VISIT IL ROBBIO with travel groups, during holiday working programmes (WWOOF) or as individual backpackers. The guests start to love the place at the latest if the call "A tavola!" draws the attention of all guests to the dining area and Mauro Tavoni presents his delicious dishes that he prepares on log fire. In this moment and when the crickets start their nocturnal song, Puntato becomes a part of home.

Today, Il Robbio conveys basic knowledge of ecologic farming to its guests. Bees, horses, mules, cows, rabbits and the refuge's gardens turn IL ROBBIO into a living schoolbook. The photovoltaic plant, a solar thermal system, a small hydroelectric plant, a biomass energy plant and the meteorological station serve as interesting objects for visitors interested in technology and innovation. For hikers the refuge is an ideal place to stay while on a hike on the crest of the Apuan Alps for several days or as base camp for day hikes to the Pania group and other neighbouring summits.

*Stefan Peters*

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History of

## Rifugio Il Robbio

with its adjacent huts Ciampi, Quiete, Ausilio as well as its supporting association Il Sentiero and the mountain pasture of Puntato

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## Mountain Pasture of Puntato

PUNTATO IS A SEASONAL MOUNTAIN PASTURE for the villages of Terrinca and Levigliani in Versilia. Between 1640 and World War II a multitude of families lived in up to 70 huts during the summer months. After World War II less and less farmers came up to Puntato due to war time destructions and more attractive working conditions in industry. In the 1970's mountain pasture use died off completely. Nowadays the successors of former mountain pasture farmers discover their interest in Puntato again, thus turning their fathers' farm houses into weekend homes. Despite this mountain pasture renaissance IL ROBBIO is the only building in Puntato that is inhabited the whole year around.

WHAT STRIKES MOST WHEN VISITING PUNTATO TODAY are its terraced meadows, its huts, its chapel, its box tree and beech tree hedges and its marble quarries.

THE TERRACED MEADOWS ARE THE OLDEST witnesses of the mountain pasture's human use. They have been created on the meadows and in the forest in the 16. Century in order to protect seeds and chestnuts from erosion. At no time have they been fortified by stones. The sward itself keeps the hillside together.

THE MOUNTAIN HUTS AND STABLES were traditionally built from local stones without use of adhesives such as cement. Typical farm houses consisted of two rooms located above each other. The lower room hosted the cattle. It was considered the most important room of the building as the cattle and their products were essential to survive on the mountain pasture. Cattle was held in the stable during the whole season in order to be able to grow grass on the pasture meadows as the cattle's feed in winter. The upper room hosted the farmer's family. Looking at rifugio IL ROBBIO, this division of rooms can still be recognised. Smaller huts with only one room served as additional stables or for storing material but never for human accommodation.

IN 1666 CONSTRUCTION WORKS STARTED for the chapel of the Holy Trinity in a central place of the mountain pasture (completed before 1680). After most farmers had left Puntato the chapel decayed quickly. It was defiled by vandals and was later used as a sheep stable. In the early 1990's former mountain pasture farmers restored it. Today it is only open for special festivities a few times a year.

ADJACENT PARTS OF PATHS AND HOUSES are shaped by Box wood hedges and beech tree alleys in order to protect both against contamination from cattle and wild animals.

WORKS IN THE MARBLE QUARRIES STARTED during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a paved marble road from the village of Terrinca at 800m asl up to the quarry next to Passo Fociomboli since the 1970's. Today this quarry is not mined anymore.

## Scout Hut La Quiete

ALBERTO BONDIELLI, A YOUNG ARCHITECT from Massa and subsequent provincial president, loved nature, the mountains and also the educational aims of the scout movement. Therefore he erected the scout hut LA QUIETE in the 1920's on the meadows of Puntato that from then on served as a hostel for scout groups. He made it over to the curia of Massa that let it for rent to the uncle of today's host of IL ROBBIO, Mauro Tavoni. In 1992 the association IL SENTIERO rented the hut from the curia.

Mauro Tavoni came to know LA QUIETE and to love Puntato in the 1980's when he was a teenager while seeing his uncle for the weekend and during holidays. This was when Tavoni and his friends also discovered the formerly derelict farm house of IL ROBBIO. The group reconstructed it in order to use it as their personal weekend home.

## Association Il Sentiero

1987 MARKS AN IMPORTANT TURNING POINT in the development of the mountain pasture of Puntato as well in the life of Mauro Tavoni and his friends. It was the start of an illegal road construction project from Passo Fociomboli down to the meadows of Puntato that challenged them. They founded the association IL SENTIERO (The Footpath) in order to stop the construction project. They knew that an association is more powerful than a group of private citizens. Their strategy delivered an instant success: Supported by the Apuan Alps Nature Parks and by a huge collection of signatures they were able to stop the construction works within the short term.

IL SENTIERO DID NOT REDUCE ITS EFFORTS after reaching its most important goal. It continued its strive for its vision of a car-free life in Puntato. The association's aim is to maintain Puntato's landscape style of a mountain pasture. Puntato is thought to be a counterbalance to urban life, to give rest and silence in harmony with nature in contrast to the speed of the city. According to its articles, the association aims at "protecting the environment against natural and manmade impacts capable of disturbing its natural order and to restore disturbed fields of the environment looking at their conditions before the disturbance." Moreover, the association wants to organise hiking events, to maintain footpaths and to inform the public on environmental and natural issues.

STILL IN 1987, MAURO TAVONI OPENED IL ROBBIO as mountain refuge to the public and became the first all-season inhabitant of Puntato. Since then, the refuge has become more professional. The original idea to implement car-free simple life and to allow environmental education however has not been changed since then.