



Field Trip Guide Book - P25

Florence - Italy
August 20-28, 2004

Volume n° 4 - from P14 to P36

**32nd INTERNATIONAL
GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS**

**TRAVERTINES OF TUSCANY
AND LATIUM
(CENTRAL ITALY)**



Leaders: A. Minissale, N.C. Sturchio

Post-Congress

P25

The scientific content of this guide is under the total responsibility of the Authors

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Front Cover:
Rome, view of the Colosseum (2nd century)

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1 - Introduction

Brief outline of the geography and history of the region between Florence and Rome

This field trip starts from the “floral” city of Florence (in Tuscany) and ends in the “eternal” city of Rome (in Latium), for a three day journey in one of the most famous environments in the world (Fig. 1). We will

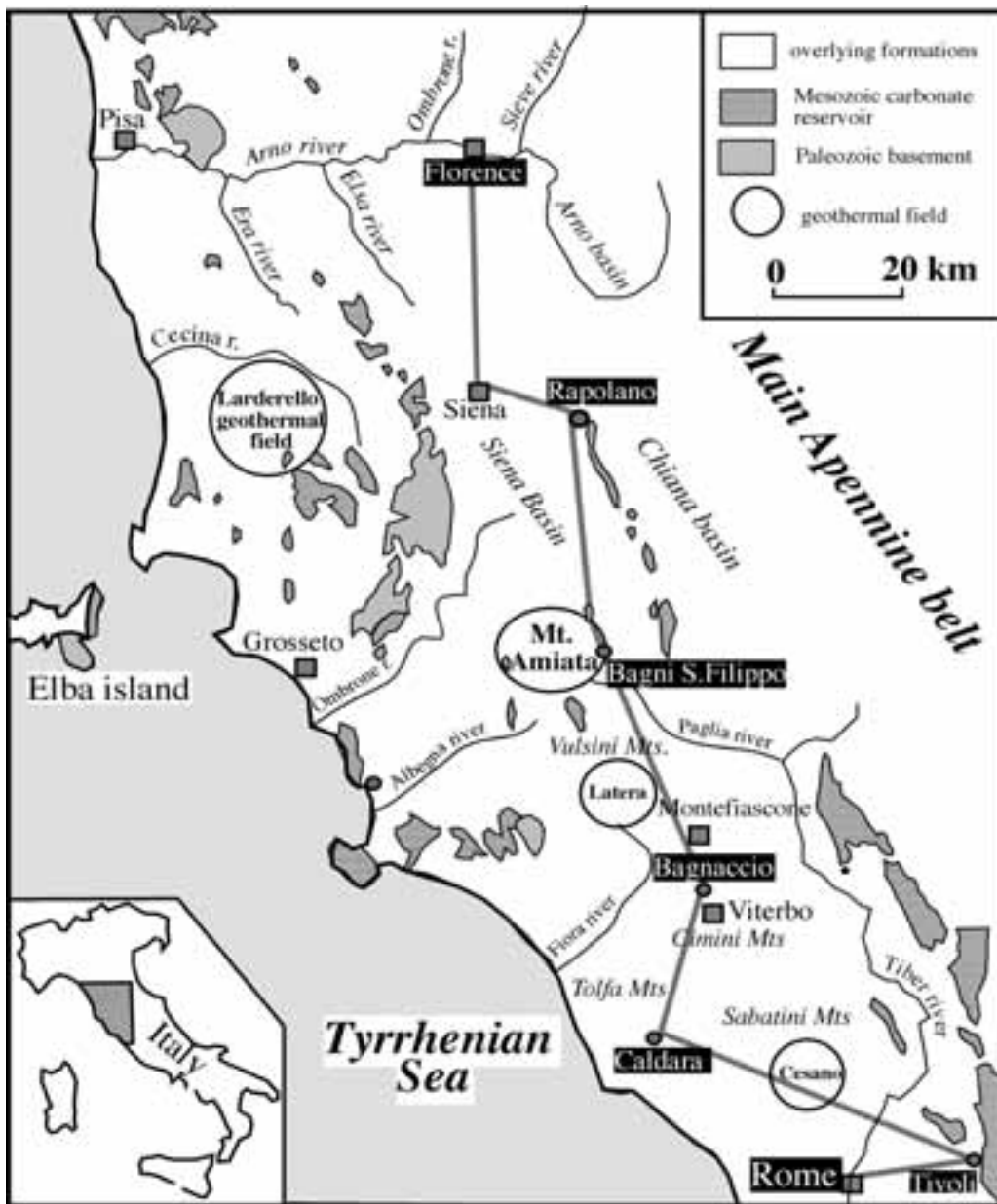


Figure 1 - Schematic map of Tuscany and northern Latium, with location of sites (in black) that will be visited.

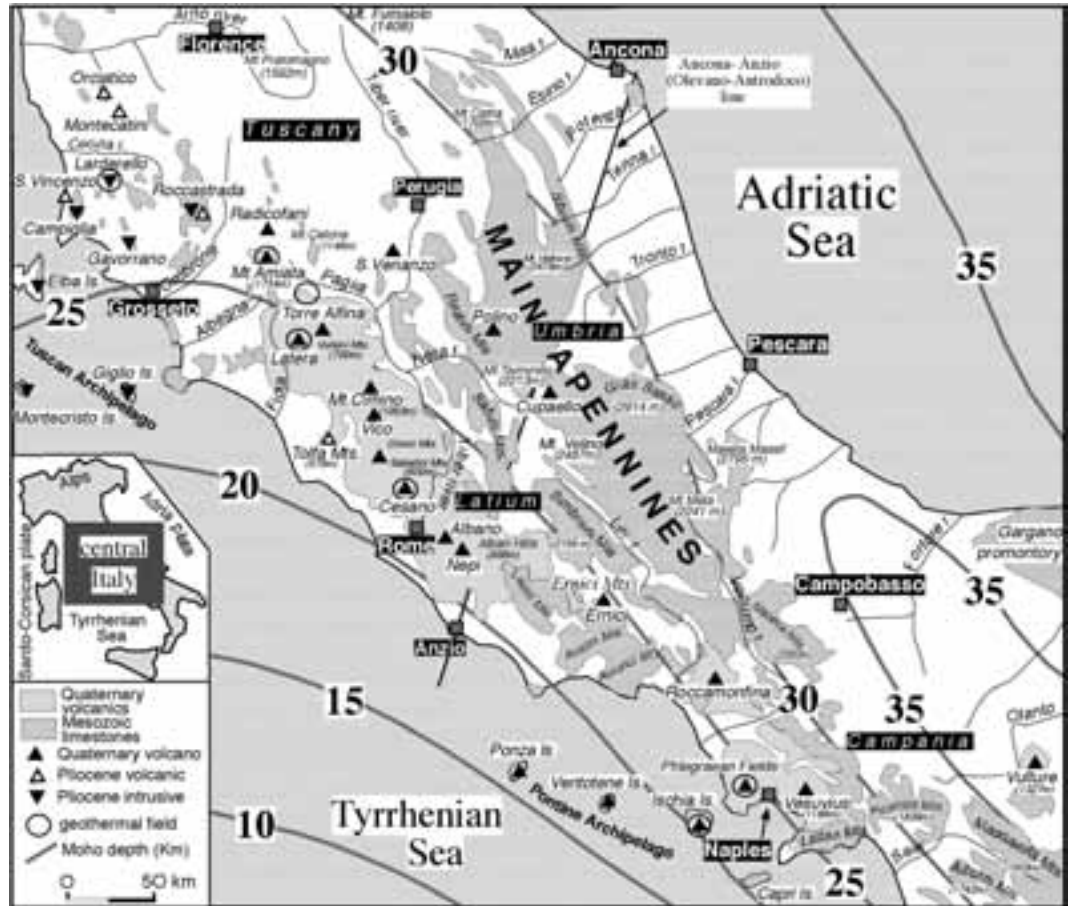


Figure 2 - Geological sketch map of central Italy.

travel through a spectacular countryside, where the cultivation of vineyards and olive trees is more an art than an agricultural activity, and where cooking and eating are characterized by strong and somewhat wild tastes.

The topography of the region we are going to explore is characterized by hills and small mountains (maximum elevation, at the Mt Amiata volcano, is about 1700 m). We will move from prevalently clayey formations, extending from Florence to the Mt. Amiata area, to prevalently volcanoclastic deposits, from south of Mt Amiata to the city of Rome.

This area underwent at least three long periods of strong cultural development. The first of these periods goes back to the Etruscan civilization. The Etruscans lived in this area, coming from somewhere (their origin is still uncertain) in the Middle East, before Roman times. This population knew perfectly the art of making iron given the several iron deposits

in southern Tuscany (i.e. Elba Island), as well as the places where their foundries were located, in many well known coastal Tuscany localities (Benvenuti et al., 2000). Like the Egyptians, they used to have an obsession with the afterlife, so the entire territory between Florence and Rome has a huge number of tombs, as well as several necropoli (if you have a chance, take time to visit the Tarquinia or Cerveteri necropoli, northwest of Rome). Their life is, nonetheless, still a mystery because their written language is still in part unintelligible, but we know that they were well civilized (in their towns they used to have an efficient sewerage system). During the first period of the Roman territorial expansion they were completely assimilated by the Roman population. In fact, the last three kings of the first seven kings (including Romulus, the founder of Rome), were actually Etruscan kings (from the Tarquini dynasty). The second period of civilization of Tuscany and

Latium coincides with the Roman expansion, and the period of the Roman empire. Romans founded many towns in their period of supremacy in Italy, among which Florence is an example. Among their engineering accomplishments were an efficient system of paved trans-European roads reaching the more barbaric areas of central Europe, aqueducts that are still being used in the city of Rome, and public spas in areas rich in thermal springs such as Tuscany and Latium. Rome was the center of the world in Roman times, and it attracted the prophets and paleo-Christians coming from Palestine (such as Saint Paul) and, for this reason, it became the center of Christianity. The ritualism perpetuated many aspects of the Roman and Greek civilizations, that survived the barbarian invasions during the Dark Ages. The Greco-Roman culture survived in the Benedictine monasteries, feudal castles and small towns and villages of Italy. These towns were the first in Europe to flourish (when the barbarian brutality was “assimilated”) a new period of economic and cultural expansion that peaked in the Renaissance period. Both Rome and Florence, as well as a large number of towns in the area where this field trip goes through, still have mostly Medieval and Renaissance structures, at least in the historical central areas. A few of these places will be visited briefly during the field trip.

2 - Regional geological setting

The Apennines in central Italy (**Fig. 2**) is a NW-SE longitudinal mountain range characterized by a central elevated ridge (up to 2913 m at Gran Sasso Massif), made up of Mesozoic carbonate-rich formations and/or carbonate platforms. Precipitation over the highest peaks of the Apennine ridge may exceed 2,000 mm/a and the water easily infiltrates, because of high secondary permeability of limestones. Consequently, regional karstic groundwater circulation is well developed inside the limestone formations and a huge number of seasonal and permanent springs discharge at lower elevations, during motion of this groundwater toward the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Adriatic Sea.

In the western peri-Tyrrhenian sector of the Apennines there are several well-known thermal areas, including the famous Larderello geothermal area in southern Tuscany, as well as Quaternary volcanic activity. Such magmatic and hydrothermal activity is considered to be related to extension that occurred after the formation of the Apennines in the Miocene (Tortonian) and the rise of mantle-derived magmas, highly contaminated by crustal material (K-rich volcanics of the Roman Comagmatic Province).

Large fluxes of mantle CO₂ are released in geothermal and volcanic areas, which causes large scale carbonate dissolution when it reaches the limestone formations. For this reason the many thermal springs that emerge in central-southern Italy near the margins of the carbonate formations are CaCO₃-oversaturated; many of them have CO₂ effervescence and several of them precipitate travertine.

More than 100 travertine outcrops are present in central Italy (**Fig. 3**). Some of them are actively forming or are associated with thermal spring emergences (even if not travertine-precipitating) or CO₂ emission in the area, but many more are fossil. They have clear thermogenic characteristics along the Tyrrhenian coast whereas they have a more meteogenic character in the internal eastern intramontane areas (**Minissale et al., 2002**).

All dated travertines in central Italy are younger than 400 ka with ages clustering around 60, 90, 120 and 220 ka. In some places, especially around the active geothermal areas, travertine precipitation is still active. Detailed descriptions of depositional facies and genesis of Italian travertines at Rapolano and Tivoli have been published (e.g., **Guo and Riding, 1998; Pentecost and Tortora, 1989**).

Apart from travertines and thermal springs, central Italy has numerous CO₂ emissions (**Fig. 3**), often associated with cold springs or with water carried to the surface by the gas phase. Others occur as dry gaseous emissions (mofettes). In some geothermal areas, such as the Mt. Amiata geothermal area, CO₂-rich-CaCO₃-oversaturated thermal springs and dry gas emissions are located close each other, suggesting a near surface exsolution of the gas phase from the liquid phase (**Duchi et al., 1987**).

The circulation of thermal waters and gas phases, as well as the deposition of travertine in central-southern Italy, are clearly interconnected and their interrelations with tectonics, structure, and climate have been recently reviewed (**Minissale 2003 in press**). Travertine has been widely used as a building stone. The Romans used it for both structural and decorative material for buildings (including the Colosseum) and bridges. In general, small Medieval villages and towns were built near travertine outcrops with travertine as the principal building material (for example, Rapolano and Massa Marittima in Tuscany). The reason why they used travertine is that it can be cut easily, and the thermogenic travertines (such as the famous Tivoli deposit near Rome) are also very good construction stones, sometimes better than sandstones.

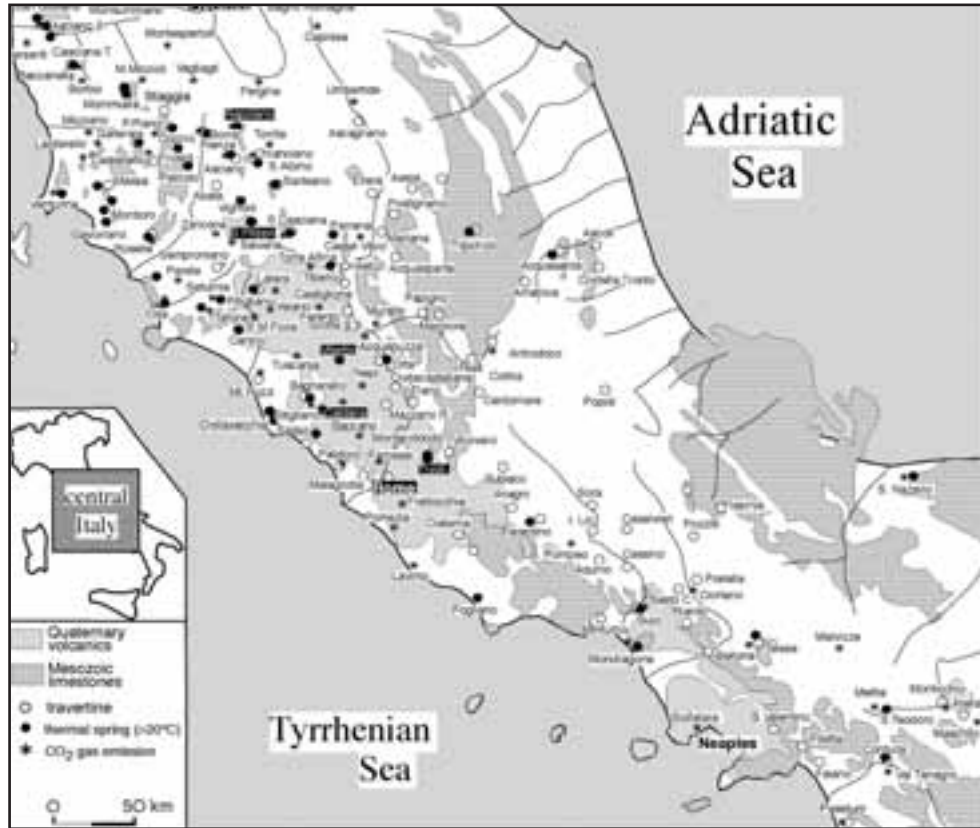


Figure 3 - Travertine, thermal springs and CO₂ gas vents of central Italy.

3 - Field trip itinerary

DAY 1

Stop 1:

Rapolano Terme and Serre di Rapolano

Although not as famous as the “classic white” Tivoli deposit, Rapolano is one of the most exploited travertine deposits in Italy. It has been used for the McDonalds restaurant facades, all over the world, if the owner chooses this type of facade among the ones allowed by the McDonalds franchising rules. Together with Tivoli, near Rome, and Angel Terrace in Yellowstone National Park, the Rapolano deposit is one of the most well-studied travertine deposits of the world (Barazzuoli et al. 1988; Brogi 2002; Carrara et al. 1998; Cipriani et al. 1972; Gandin et al. 2002; Guo and Riding 1998 and 1999; Guo et al. 1996; Lazzarotto et al. 1988; Minissale et al. 2002).

From a geological point of view (Fig. 4) the deposit is located at the boundary of an outcrop, in a tectonic window, of Mesozoic limestones along a NW-SE fault system bordering the eastern side of a post-orogenic basin (the Siena graben). The basin exposes impermeable Pliocene clay-rich formations.

Several CO₂-rich thermal spring emergences are present in the Rapolano area, as well as some CO₂ mofettes (Minissale et al., 2002). The highest temperature spring is about 38°C (the San Giovanni spring) and is located in an area of active travertine deposition. Nowadays, the spring has been tapped by a well drilled by the local spa, and the original ridge from which travertine used to precipitate is inactive. In spite of this human manipulation of a natural phenomenon, Rapolano is the only example of ridge-forming travertine in central Italy.

The CO₂ associated with the precipitation of the Rapolano travertine has two peculiar features. In a regional panorama it has one of the lower δ¹³C values of CO₂ in Tuscany. There is also a gradient of δ¹³C, from the spring vent to the peripheral lower temperature areas, such that δ¹³C of CO₂ decreases

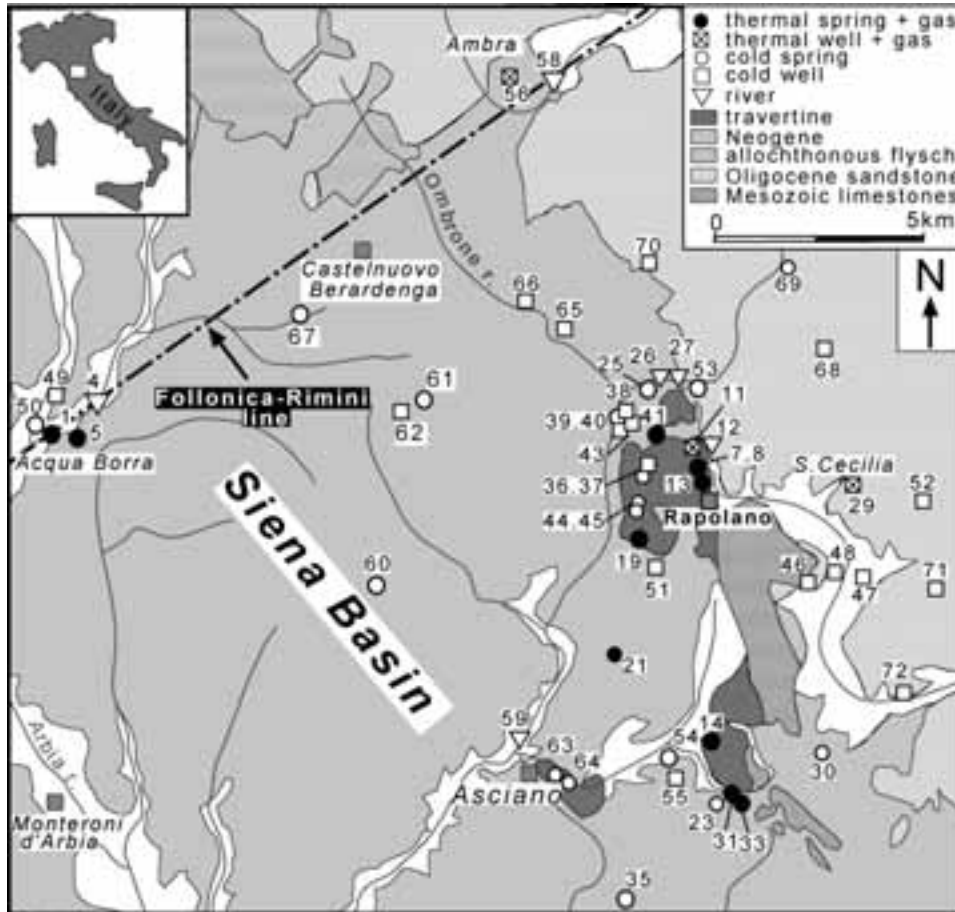


Figure 4 - Geology and thermal manifestations of the Rapolano area.

temperature areas, such that $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of CO_2 decreases with distance from the vent (Guo et al., 1996) instead of the usual increase found in other deposits of central Italy (Gonfiantini et al., 1968). The reason for this anomalous behavior is thought to be that the activity of bacteria, which consume ^{12}C preferentially, prevails over the inorganic degassing that usually causes the travertine to become isotopically heavier in distal areas (Fouke et al., 2000).

There are small inactive travertine quarries in Rapolano, whereas the large active quarries are located at Serre di Rapolano about 5 km SE of Rapolano. The "Travertino Toscano" quarry will be visited.

Stop 2:

Bagni di San Filippo

Bagni di San Filippo is located at the western border of

the Siena graben, quite close to the geothermal wells of the Mt. Amiata geothermal field (Fig. 2). Mt. Amiata is a Quaternary volcano (0.1-0.4 Ma) characterized by slightly alkaline (K) affinity that produced three lava flows. Its elevation is 1,713 m a.s.l. and several thermal springs are located at the periphery of the volcano (Duchi et al., 1987; Minissale et al., 1997). All thermal springs (Bagni San Filippo, Bagno Vignoni, Castelnuovo dell'Abate near Montalcino, San Casciana dei Bagni) have associated travertine deposits (of the thermogene type), quarried in the past as building stone. Nowadays, being tourism a better resource than travertine quarrying, the quarries have been abandoned.

The Bagni San Filippo spring emerges from the foundations of very ancient buildings located in the center of the village, of probable Medieval age. The spa that uses the spring for bathing purposes was also



Figure 5 - The Travertine waterfalls of Bagni San Filippo in the Mt. Amiata area (southern Tuscany).

used in the 18th century by the Granduke of Tuscany, during weekends and vacations. The spring, emerging at 52 °C, precipitates a large quantity of CaCO₃; in the swimming pool there are 3-5 cm of daily precipitation that need daily removal. After having served for the many spa activities, the water is discharged into a small creek where several white travertine falls (Fig. 5), still growing, are present.

The spring emergence is at an elevation of 525 m, and travertine precipitation starts at this elevation and continues downwards. In the area there is an older travertine deposit, at about 100 m higher elevation, that has been dated at 55 ka. So it is evident that the hydrological circuit of the thermal waters has changed over time. The rising of older travertine and/or the lowering of the emergence elevation of the thermal water can be due to several reasons, such as isostatic uplift, changes in the base level of the regional karstic circulation, and changes in the sea level. Uplift of the whole volcanic area is likely due to the intrusion of granite, which is also the likely origin of the heat for the geothermal field (Gianelli et al. 1988). Uplift of the entire Mt. Amiata area was already known in 1932 when Sestini (1932) discovered outcrops of marine Pliocene clayey sediments of the Siena basin, in some places, at 800 m elevation. Like at Rapolano, in Mt. Amiata as well, there are several, sometimes very dangerous, CO₂ emissions (total singular emission

can exceed 10-20 T/day; Rogie et al. 2000). CO₂ is not the only gas emitted in the area. In fact, the Mt. Amiata area has been, in the past two centuries, a very important European mining area for mercury, production of which peaked during the 1st World War (it was about 25% of the entire world production at that time). For ecological reasons the production of mercury was terminated in 1972. Nowadays, the old mines are localities where children discover the old traditions of the area, but the natural discharge of mercury from underground has not stopped. It is not uncommon, around the mines and around the areas where cinnabar was processed, to see small droplets of mercury in the soil.

The Roman Comagmatic Province

After leaving the Mt. Amiata area we enter the so called “Roman Comagmatic Province”, defined for the first time by the petrologist Washington in 1906 (Washington, 1906). This volcanic province, extending from south of the Mt. Amiata area to south of Rome, consists of four different Quaternary volcanic areas: i) the Vulsini Mts., ii) the Cimini Mts., iii) the Sabatini Mts. and iv) the Alban Hills (Fig. 1). Washington defined this province as a K-rich undersaturated province, where leucite is a frequent phenocryst in both pyroclastic formations and lavas. Volcanism started about 0.9 Ma in the northern Vulsini Mts. area, whereas the last volcanic episode is as young as 0.036 Ma in the Alban Hills south of Rome.

Stop 3:

Bagnaccio (Viterbo)

This place, located in the Cimini Mts, with a typical onomatopoeic name, suggests that something bubbling from the ground is there present. The Bullicame is a quite large, spectacular area of multiple thermal spring emergences and travertine precipitation. It is one of the several thermal spring emergence areas present inside and around the town of Viterbo (Fig. 6, after Duchi et al., 1985). Viterbo is a very interesting historical town, one of the so-called “Papal” towns, meaning that in the past the Pope used to reside there instead of in Rome.

From a geological point of view, Viterbo is located on a plain bounded at the north by the southernmost volcanics of the Vulsini mountains and, at the south, by the Cimino (m 1054) and the Vico volcanoes. In the ‘80s the area was investigated for its geothermal potential (Chiocchini et al., 2001), and a couple of deep wells were drilled. The Mesozoic limestone is

Stop 5:**Tivoli****General outline**

After a one hour drive from the site of the Caldara we will reach the small town of Tivoli, about 20 km east of Rome. This small town is important for travertine because the name travertine seems to derive from the Latin name (“*lapis tiburtinum*”) of the stone (“*lapis*”) quarried in this area (“*Tiburtnum*”).

From a geological point of view the entire area and the deposit has really been well studied (Cortesi and Leoni, 1958; De Filippis and Massoli-Novelli, 1998; De Rita et al., 1992; Faccenna et al., 1994; Pentecost and Tortora, 1989) and data are scattered in a large quantity of published papers (i.e: Chafetz and Folk, 1984; Manfra et al., 1976; Panichi and Tongiorgi, 1976; Ford and Pedley, 1996; Minissale et al., 2002). Tivoli is located in the foothills of the Sabini Mts. (Fig. 2) and the deposit spreads over a flat area (or at least presently flat), bounded on its SW part by the volcanic apparatus of the Alban Hills (the Albano and Nepi calderas). The Alban Hills host the most recent volcanism of the entire Roman Comagmatic Province, the last eruption being dated at 0.036 Ma (Fornaseri, 1985).

The peculiar characteristic of the Tivoli travertine is its fine stratification, its white color, and its hardness.

Travertine still precipitates from a couple of springs named “*Acque Albulae*” (“*albulum*” means white in Latin) that emerge from a natural lake (“*Lago della Regina*”) at 23 °C near the Bagni di Tivoli village, 3-4 km SE of Tivoli. Precipitation does not occur at the emergence. The water is used in a local spa for balneology and thermal care, after which the flow is channeled and drained into the Aniene river. The channel is obviously coated by a travertine layer that steadily grows, as a consequence of the precipitation. There are a large number of active quarries in the Tivoli area (Fig. 7) which are extracting travertine up to a depth of about 35 m from the road level. Thickness varies from 0 to more than 85 m, but all quarries have their bottom at 35 m because to go further would require a lot of water pumping. The travertine from Tivoli is exported all over the world, as well as being sold to other travertine manufacturers (such as Rapolano in Tuscany) to be worked and sold.

1st stop in Tivoli:**Villa d’Este**

This is not the most logical first stop in Tivoli but this villa, having plenty of wonderful fountains and waterfalls, built using travertine as decorative material, is the perfect place to be visited during the middle of the day. The villa was built in the 16th century for one



Figure 7 - One of the several travertine quarries in Tivoli (note the water table at the floor of the quarry).

of the several rich and powerful cardinals living in Rome during the 16th and 17th centuries. The villa and its beautiful garden (competing with the “Generalife” garden in Granada for the most beautiful garden in the world) uses part of the water of the Aniene River for the many waterfalls there present. The “*Italian garden*” represents a perfect model of how travertine can be used as an artistic (more than decorative) building material. As a matter of fact, similar fountains in travertine stone were in fashion in the 17th century, and they can be found in many historical palaces of Italy (there is a very good example in the “*Boboli garden*”, the backyard of the “*Pitti Palace*” in Florence).

2nd stop in Tivoli:

Mr. Poggi's quarry

This is one of the several huge travertine quarries present in the Tivoli area. The quarries bound both sides of the Tiburtina National Road (S.S. N. 5) for a few km. The present maximum depth of extraction is about 30-35 m below the level of the Tiburtina National Road, and each quarry pumps out water from its floor on the order of 200-400 L/sec. The perfect stratification of the travertine is evident in the three types present: i) the “*Roman Classic*” (perfectly white), ii) the “*Classic striated*” (made of very fine black and white layers), and iii) the “*Testina*” facies, lying at the top of the deposit.

The Tivoli travertine was certainly precipitated in a lake, where the contribution of clastic material (at least during the deposition of the White Roman Classic) was minimal. The number of pores, quite typical of travertine, is small. The reason is probably due to the fact that the gas phase associated with the water, although being CO₂-dominated, has remarkable H₂S. The strong smell of H₂S is evident in the emergence area of the “*Acque Albulae*” at Bagni di Tivoli, and this probably rendered the bottom of the lake a reducing environment that was not conducive to aquatic vegetation.

Embedded in the deposit is evident the presence of at least two volcanic episodes, with greyish volcanic ash layers. Ash came from eruptions of the two nearby volcanoes: Albano and Nemi, belonging to the Alban Hills volcanic area.

The Tivoli travertine has been used for constructing many buildings, temples, and aqueducts in Rome, from the Roman Empire to the time of Mussolini in the last century. Nowadays, quarries in Tivoli remain active and travertine is exported to the USA, as well as to China and SE Asia. This stone is mostly used for

the internal and external decoration of buildings, as well as for paving stones and flooring.

Approaching the 2nd night

After the visit to the quarry, a short visit to *Villa Adriana* would be desirable. Adriano was Emperor after Trajan, during the maximum expansion period of Roman power. He was also a philosopher, and his Villa Adriana, at Tivoli, is the most spectacular vestige of his genius. We will have dinner and stay for the night in Tivoli.

DAY 3

Stop 6:

Rome

Being this field trip devoted to travertine, a short visit to some of the most spectacular Roman monuments in travertine is really necessary. Depending on the traffic (which at the end of August should not be too bad) we have planned to visit the following monuments:

- 1) The *Colosseum* (2nd Century)
- 2) *St Peter's square* (17th Century)
- 3) *The Trevi Fountain* (18th century)
- 4) The *EUR Palace* and EUR area (20th century)

Lunch time (sandwiches) will be in the park of the Celimontana Villa in the “*Fori Imperiali*” (Imperial Forum) area where the Building of the Italian Geographical Society is located.

The end of the Field trip will be in Rome for those who want to remain in Rome. The bus will return to Florence by about 11 p.m.

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