

The “Uso di Sotto” refuge and the summer camps for lads

One of the most important and challenging activities undertaken in last years is undoubtedly the direct management of the “Uso di Sotto” excursionist refuge in convention with Pescia’s municipality. The structure has been reopened in february 2000 after a very tough session of work which has brought remarkable changes to the building inside.

In years, the refuge has become an important reference point for many of the association’s activities. We want to point out, among the others, the movie shows under the stars, the courses for recognizing herbs and the night excursions with star observation.

Finally, it hasn’t to be forgotten that every year, usually in august, the “Uso di Sotto” refuge accommodates one or more summer thematic camps, reserved to lads between the ages of eight and twelve, where very various activities take place, all inspired to the same common theme. Among the latter, there has been, for example, “Water” and “Mars Opposition”.

With the careful guide of competent association staff, the lads construct things, have walks and make tournaments, set an outdoor camp, do a full immersion in the life and the colours of the wood...

...and so they become a part of that magical world called nature.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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“I MONTAGNARDI” ASSOCIATION

Brief story of an idea



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

From the group to the association: the environmental workcamps

The “I Montagnardi” association was legally formed in October 1997 by the will of a group of persons who had been operating together for about four years mainly – but not exclusively – in the mountain area of Pescia's commune, known also with the appellation of “Svizzera Pesciatina” (“Pescia's Switzerland”).

Indeed, at the end of 1993, some youths belonging to various associations (Legambiente, International Civil Service, ARCI Civil Service) formed a special work group, moved by the common aim of defending and increasing the value of Pescia's Mountain in all its manifold aspects.

At the beginning, the activities of the group turned towards the recovery of some footpaths in the area between Stiappa and Pontito villages, which were their ancient ways of communication, and brought to a series of week-ends devoted to path selection and identification and to a first, coarse cleaning of them.

Parallely, the tie with International Civil Service (SCI) was becoming stronger and stronger and led to accommodate a series of study meetings and to organize an International Workcamp during which the work of footpath reopening was completed with the help of a group of foreign volunteers.

From the group to the association: the “Way of the Watermills” and the “Watermill of Stiappa”

At the end of this first phase of the work, we concentrated upon the four disused watermills – among them the Watermill of Stiappa – we found out between Pontito and Stiappa during path identification; indeed, there immediately rose the idea to create a new path along the brook linking all the mills and in fact this was fulfilled with a new workcamp during which we opened what was named “The Way of the Watermills”.

The activities in Pescia's Mountain came to a sudden stop in June 1996, when we decided to move the planned workcamp to Fornovolasco (Lucca), in Garfagnana, for helping the population recently struck by a flood. It was a very hard experience, but the work group became more numerous and in the long rest of the following months there were put the bases for the birth of the association.

One of the first deeds of the new subject was the drawing up of an articulate maintenance program for the “Watermill of Stiappa”, to which “I Montagnardi” has always been tied up, having devoted to it a considerable part of their energies.

Through not less than five workcamps, three of which were international, we first rebuilt the roof of the mill, then we consolidated its external walls and some of the pertinences, like the millpond and the channel (that we call “botaccio” and “gora”) so that the mill is already performing its very important function of witnessing the past ways of living.

The social activities and the environmental education

Even if we keep on considering nature and mountain as fundamental references, in time the activities of the association have become to a noticeable differentiation, often assuming a social value as well.

We have certainly to include in this last group our four years collaboration with Asl (Local Health Department) Service for Drug Addicts during which we have provided, within our limits, a contribution to the difficult recovery of these youths.

From its very beginnings, the “I Montagnardi” association has always had a special consideration for lads and children, well aware that, for saving the environment we live in and keeping the historical memory of ancient traditions, it is necessary to work constantly upon their education.

Just for this purpose, by now we have been doing didactic interventions in Pescia's schools for many years – often linked to what we call “the chestnut cycle” – which usually are composed of one or two lessons inside the classroom and a guided visit either to the Watermill of Stiappa or to other significant areas of Pescia's Mountain.