

REMINESENCES OF THE LICHENOLOGICAL FIELD TRIP TO ZINGARO, NORTHWESTERN SICILY

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Going on a field trip in foreign countries, under the guidance of local colleagues, is always an exciting experience and a chance of visiting areas which are usually off the beaten tracks of the normal tourist. I was therefore very happy to join the friends and colleagues of the Italian Lichenological Society on their excursion in northwestern Sicily on the 10th of december 1995.

We were supposed to meet at 8.30 in front of the Botanical Institute of the University of palermo. I was anxious not be late since I didn't want to miss this unique occasion. When I arrived at the via Archirafi at 8.20 the bus was already there, with running engine and ready to take us off. More and more colleaugues showed up at 8.30 the group was almost complete. Missing was, however, Professor Domenico (Mimmo) Ottonello, the organizer and guide of this tour. At 8.50 the bus driver switched the engine off.

It must be said that mimmo had a busy day before. He had invited a large group of lichenologists to his home where we were all cordially welcomed by his charming wife Ninni and their children Salvatore and Claudia, and by Domenico Puntillo, the calabrian lichenologist, his amiable wife Mariella and their daughter Mara who are all very good friends of the Ottonello family. The kids had a good time, admiring Christmas decorations and playng while we were served a lucullic meal, starting with innumerable, excellent *antipasti* followed by a wide range of delicious warm dishes (oh, thi *risotto ai funghi* and these phantastic, crisp *panelle!*), diverse tasty desserts, fruits, brandies and espressi. Mimmo Insulare (Ottonello) and Mimmo Peninsulare (Puntillo) were continuously transporting all these delicacies from the kitchen where they had been prepared and carefully arranged by their wives, to the living room and generously dispersed them among the guests. There was plenty of very tasty wine. My dish was filled innumerable times and I started to feel like a ripe fruit of *Ecballium elaterium* immediately before "take off". After this oppolent meal mimmo showed a video tape which he had taken on a field trip to the islands of Lampedusa and Linosa. We could see and hear a very happy and relaxed, singing and yodelling Josef Poelt. How much must he have enjoyed this excursion and the warm hospitality of his italian friends and colleagues who all remember him with deep affection. At midnight Mimmo did not allow us to take a taxi but insisted on bringing Paolo and Stefania Modenesi and myself back to our hotels, not without making detours

in order to show us some of the architectural treasures of palermo's rich cultural heritage. On this occasion I learned that the Opera of Paris is just the ticketeria of the huge, famous Opera di Palermo! - So, Mimmo had good reasons to be a little late this morning.

At 9 he arrived and off we went. The bus drove along plantations of orange and mandarine trees full of beautiful fruits. Mimmo explained geographical, floristic and cultural peculiarities of this part of northwestern Sicily which was unknown to most of the participants. The bus headed for the peninsula north of Trapani, a calcareous spur into the mediterranean sea, and dropped us at the northern entrance of the nature reserve of Lo Zingaro. Friendly rangers handed us a quite detailed map of the area, with addresses and phone numbers which should prove most useful later that day. The reserve is very well taken care of. I admired the neat, hand-made baskets which were positioned along the coastal path and served as dustbins, and the carefully protected plantations of young trees. We were slowly ascending the mountainside with plenty of *Chamaerops humilis* to the little pass of portello san Giovanni at approximately 650 m altitude where we had a beautiful view on the western and eastern coast of the peninsula. Mimmo kept telling us the names of many wildflowers (most abundant: *Micromeria fruticosa*, *Arisarum vulgare*, *Asparagus albus*, *Atractilis gummifera* etc.) and especially of endemic plants such as *Brassica drepanensis*. A particular eyecatch was *Iris planifolia* which was very abundant in pastures. What a beautiful view when it opened its deep blue, delicate flowers between calcareous rocks that were covered by golden *Xanthorias* and by various white crustose species (*Acarospora* spp., *Pertusaria* spp. and the very pretty *Caloplaca subochracea* with its rust-red apothecia). Some colleagues were busy collecting epi- and endolithic lichens as well as crustose and few foliose taxa from the scarce trees (e. g., *Crataegus* and *Pyrus* spp.; for lichenological details please contact the experts in Palermo and Trieste!). In the late afternoon we were slowly descending over pastures which were grazed by very elegant, black bovines down to the rocky coast. Coming from very cold and continuously grey Zürich I immensely enjoyed this beautiful mediterranean landscape and flora, took pictures of lovely *Cyclamen neapolitanum* which was booming in rock crevices, and watched birds and insects. Behind me were the highly active lichen gatherers around Pier Luigi Nimis, and in front of me was the rest of the party.

According to the map there was a considerable distance to go on the coastal path to the southern entrance where the bus was supposed to wait for us. Much to my surprise was the front group not taking the coastal path but started to ascend the mountain side again. I thought that there must probably be some interesting lichens or plants to look at and followed them. After a while I started to wonder: 1) where this path would lead us (according to the map not to the bus stop); 2) where the people were who had been walking behind me, and 3) how we would be able to find our bus in the darkness since clouds came up and it was anyway getting dark after 5 p.m. Eventually I met the front group and asked: "Is this the way we are supposed to go?" - "We don't know!" was the answer. According to Mimmo it was just a question of going a little further

and we would soon arrive at the bus stop. However, no one could see a road in the mountain side where a bus would be able to drive. The group decided to go back to the north entrance of the park which could be seen from our location rather than to try to find the south entrance which must have been at a considerable distance. First of all those people had to be convinced to redescend who were exploring the mountain side for the best path. I would never have expected Rosanna Piervittori to be able to shout so loudly: "Scendete!" As everyone knows Rosanna is a strong and hardworking woman and the very heart of the Italian Lichenological Society. But she is always so discreet that I was really impressed by her shouting towards the rocks with such immense strength. And then, oh miracle, a member of the group took a functioning mobile phone out of his backback! I must admit that I have always considered these new toys for adults as largely unnecessary, but in our momentary situation it was really a big help. With the telephone numbers on the map the park rangers could be informed about our situation. Even more miraculous was the appearance of a small light which was soon moving from the north entrance of the park towards us. The whereabouts of our group were indicated with flashlights of a camera, and the little light kept steadily moving towards us. It was Mr. Paolo Alfano from Castelluzzo, a very friendly ranger, who guided us back to the north entrance of the park and made sure that no one stumbled on the rocky path. Mimmo obviously felt so well in his presence that he started to sing. At the ranger station the bus driver was informed who had been waiting for us for many hours at the south entrance. He had to drive around the peninsula and pick us up where he had left us in the morning. So we had about 40 minutes to admire the sparkling stars, the innumerable lights of the villages around the Golfo di Castellammare which were reflected at the sea surface. Cicadas were singing and the waves were gently caressing this harmony: where was the rest of our group, those people who had been walking behind me and were not seen anymore? How could they find their way without mobile phone and without the friendly help of a ranger? When staring at the black inflaming one of these inevitable cigarettes? No, it must have been either a glow-worm or, more probably, an illusion! Knowing that Mauro Tretiach was in possession of almost an entire issue of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (for bagging lichens, of course) I told myself that the group would be able to make a fire and themselves traceable should they have major problems.

In due time our bus came round the corner. And it contained, very much to our relief, not only the driver but also the missing members who, instead of reascending the mountain side, had been following the coastal path until they reached the south entrance after a good hour of steady walking. Now everything was o.k. We thanked our helpful guide and were safely brought back to Palermo. Thus ended what we called *Mimmo Adventure Tours*. Later that evening Pier Luigi realized that he had left his *portafoglio* with all his money, cards, ID's etc. in the bus. Our friendly bus driver is likely to pray to God that he shall send him in future just normal tourists and not another bunch of lichenologist.

Like all other participants of this excursion I will always happily and gratefully remember this most interesting tour to Lo Zingaro. The palermitan kindness and hospitality and the sicilian sunshine have been warming my heart. Mille grazie a tutti, e a presto!

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