



INSIDE THE VOLCANO: THE EXHIBITION (The Caves of Etna)

Vulcanospeleology, i.e. the study of volcanic caves, has an ideal investigational field on Mt. Etna. This mountain, in fact, is an actual crucible of fire and caves, due to its recurrent and mainly effusive activity, with mainly fluid lavas on rather steep slopes. The cave formation is therefore recurrent, and hundreds of caves characterise the flanks of the volcano. Every other eruption supplies new caves, often burying the older ones. Tommaso Fazello, a XVI century scholar, defined «*Etna cavernosa*» the huge, thumping body that generates lava and caves, viz the deep labyrinthic bowels acting as breathing conduits of the volcano, that inhaled «*ventos extraneos*» and exhaled «*exhalationes*».

The exhibition «INSIDE THE VOLCANO» is an excellent introduction to the various faces (vulcanological, archaeological, legendary) of the caves on our volcano. These faces are often fascinating, though rather unknown. Yet their reality is very close to those living in the volcano's shadow, because men's fantasy always gambled with underground mysteries. Furthermore the lava tube formation is also the relentless mechanism by which Mother Nature governs the lava effusions and makes them flow.

The exhibition is segmented into six sections:

- *The Caves of Etna* – an itinerary around the volcano, through a selection of eruption and cave pictures from the archives of Centro Speleologico Etneo.
- *The Prehistory* – a survey organised and arranged by the Superintendence of the Cultural and Environmental Estates (Archaeological Department) of the Province of Catania. The section deals with the exploitation of caves by prehistoric men, from the Neolithic period onwards, for residential, worship and, mainly, burial purposes. The topic is introduced by a scheme of the subsequent prehistoric cultures in the caves of Sicily and of Etna, then a chronicle of the various discoveries is presented, split into phases and areas, as well as an excursus through the most archaeologically significant caves. Special attention is given to «*Grotta Petralia*», discovered a few years ago and holding remarkable traces of its worship and burial exploitation.
- *The Cave of Fingal* – a collection of about forty ancient prints and engravings (kindly lent by the proprietor Società Speleologica Italiana) illustrating a marine volcanic cave in the Scottish island of Staffa, celebrated by writers and musicians. “*The eternal human imaginifiquie transformed this place into one of the most famous places on Earth*”.
- *Travellers* – a trip through memories, supported by the «Riccobono collection» of ancient prints and volumes. The romantic travellers of the XVIII century witnessed, by drawings and reports, their adventurous rove to the top of Etna.
- *Myths and legends* – The section illustrates the fantastic world of local underground myths and legends.
- *The Grotta del Gelo (Cave of Frost) and the Park of Etna* – the last section illustrates the environmental monitoring jointly performed by the Park of Etna and Centro Speleologico Etneo inside the Grotta del Gelo, the outstanding “sick cave” that lost a huge percentage of its ice content in the last decade, for climatic reasons; then an exhaustive portrait of the Park (purposes, boundaries, organisation and activity) is given. In addition some significant crystalline minerals are exhibited, derived from fractioned crystallisation processes inside still hot caves, and some examples of secondary mineralisations (geodes) formed inside small lava hollows.

(English text elaborated by Giuseppe M. Licitra)







