



IAB Makes Decision about Which Chestnuts to Import

We received news from Deborah Golino, Director of FPS (Foundation Plant Services) at UC Davis a few weeks ago. She stated that the IAB (the Fruit Tree, Nut Tree and Grapevine Improvement Advisory Board) has made a decision about which chestnuts it will be importing with its funds. IAB funding is available at this time to bring in 15 cultivars (\$1,000 per selection). The group has decided to leave 3 openings for future imports. Twelve cultivars have been included: Campbell NC-8, Da Di Qing, DeCoppi Marone, Eaton, Luvall's Monster, Marron Comballe, Marron de Goujanac, Marrone di Chusa Pesio, Marrone di Marradi, Qing, Sleeping Giant, and Yeli Cang.

Ms. Golino has provided us with more information on FPMS in the following article she wrote.

Chestnuts Are On Their Way to FPMS

by Deborah Golino

FPMS has been approached by chestnut enthusiasts including researchers, nurseries, growers, and breeders who have asked us to develop a new program for the importation of chestnuts. As a result, I have applied for and received an importation permit for chestnut from USDA-APHIS. We expect to fund the expenses of importation, observation, and testing by charging fees to cover our expenses. This year, the IAB (the Fruit Tree, Nut Tree and Grapevine Improvement

See FPMS, p. 6

Nominating Committee Provides Proposed Slate for July 2004 Election

by Harvey Correia

In accordance with association bylaws, President Chris Foster recently appointed Harvey Correia to chair the Nominating Committee along non-board members Doug Bedinger and Carolyn Young. On December 6, 2003, an e-mail was sent to the WCGA membership requesting members provide the committee with names of potential candidates. The Nominating Committee received a total of 17 names as potential candidates, including one member who declined to run and three individuals who were not members.

The committee selected the following slate to present to the membership for consideration:

President: Harvey Correia
Vice President Lee Williams
Secretary/Treasurer.. Ray Young
Director: Sandy Bole
Director: Chris Foster
Director: Lucienne Grunder
Director: Ken Hunt

Key factors considered by the nominating committee were (1) eligibility, (2) present

involvement in the chestnut industry, (3) past contributions to the WCGA, (4) potential for contributions to the WCGA during the upcoming term, and (5) geographic representation of the membership. According to the bylaws Article XIII Nominations:

"Members may nominate their own candidate(s) by submitting a written petition to the Secretary at his regular address, prior to the election and including the following:

a) A written acceptance by each nominee to serve the association for the next year.

b) A request to place the proposed candidate(s) on the ballot with a clear description of the office being challenged, signed by at least 10 per cent of the eligible voting members listed in the most recent membership directory.

3. Nominations may not be made at the annual meeting or in any manner other than as provided in this Section.

4. If no valid written petitions are received by the Secretary prior to March 1st, the Nominating Committee's slate shall be considered to have been elected unanimously and no balloting shall be necessary."

July Date Set for 2004 Annual Meeting and Orchard Tour in Stockton, CA

by Harvey Correia

Association bylaws Article IV – Meetings, requires that the association hold an annual membership meeting in June or July each year. Harvey Correia has agreed to head up the organization of the 2004 annual meeting and orchard tour. Please mark your calendars and save the dates of July 16th and July 17th, 2004. The venue is very preliminary at this time, but a meeting location has been reserved for Friday morning in Stockton, California. Some meeting topics and tour stops have tentatively been scheduled, but please contact Harvey with any particular meeting topics or tour stops you would like to have considered. You may e-mail Harvey at harvey@chestnuts.us or telephone him at (916) 777-4152.

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NNGA/NAFEX Meeting -- Call for Speakers

The combined NNGA/NAFEX meeting will be in Columbia, Missouri, next summer during the third week of August. Organizer, Ken Hunt, is looking for people who would like to be speakers on Monday, Aug. 16, or Wednesday, Aug. 18. Please let Ken know as soon as possible if you're interested and/or willing. He can be reached by email at huntk@missouri.edu.



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As another season winds down and with the end of my term as President in sight, I contemplate the current status and future of US chestnut growers in marketing the fresh product. What's going on and where are we headed? To what degree can growers shape the future and what should that look like?

For the most part, I think the fresh market has been idling along for the past decade without any appreciable change. As compared with other produce, the chestnut market continues to be disorganized and disbursed. Not always by choice, most growers are still marketers too. Production is expanding, but most are still selling all they produce and at a fairly stable, reasonable price. There are

threats on the horizon, particularly rapidly expanding imports from China, but no immediate disasters looming.

There is still ample opportunity to capture at least part of what has historically been an important market in many parts of the US. Not much of the domestic trade is going to brokers, there are no big packing facilities yet, nor are there USDA quality standards. While there have been well-intended efforts to change the status quo and follow well-used models set by others in the produce industry, they seem to have yet to materialize. While some see failure on the organizational front, I question whether the net effect has been negative. The opportunity to help alter the all too common model or future is still open to us. That's good.

The all too common future has meant farmers losing control of what they produce and having it lowered to generic status with a downward spiral in prices as the supply and market grows. But in the last decade, there are pockets of change. The chant of many other farmers today is "de-commodify or die". I don't think chestnuts will become a commodity to the extent other items are but still, I worry that historically, farm groups may have taken steps contributing to their members' own demise. Other farmers are now beginning to take back their own marketing, often achieving triple the price they get at the packing plant door. It's been making the difference between success and failure. Whether domestic chestnut production eventually grows to "industry" status or not, we need to carefully examine moves which could push the market in ways contributing toward the plight other groups have experienced.

High on my list for scrutiny is the recent attempt by some to quickly adopt traditional looking USDA standards. The USDA says that the decisions on standards are up to the growers. Will the models of the past help, hurt or make any difference? There are obvious disagreements. While this effort is idling along now too, its bound to come up again. While some farm groups are busy trying to undo past damage and dig themselves out of a hole, we may have yet taken the steps that contribute to it. I'm not arguing anarchy and or suggesting that we sit on our hands. There are obviously many factors beyond our control, but when an idea comes along to give things a nudge, we should think twice about what we are doing and be open to new ideas.

Christopher H. Foster

EDITOR'S NOTES

Having now celebrated our first-ever National Chestnut Week, I think all of us who participated by having or supporting some kind of event during that week understand that it's a great marketing tool. The Cadillac Chestnut Festival took place during that week and the article included in this issue describes the successes those folks in Michigan have had. The U of MO also had a chestnut festival that drew over 900 people.

Mark and Kim Beam do an open house at their orchard in conjunction with some of the "Fruit Loop" activities that take place in the Hood River area of Oregon. They tell us that it's been very profitable for them. We did an open house here at our orchard and contacted the editor of the local newspaper's food section. She did a great article early in the week before the event and we had 300 people show up. We felt it was far more profitable than our participation in the local farmers' market.

One of the things we liked about it was that it drew sales into the early part of the season. Many of those customers came back for more later on. If you didn't do something special this year, consider it for next year. It really works!

Carolyn

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NOTICE

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POSTMASTER

Send Address changes to WCGA, c/o PO Box 841, Ridgefield, WA 98642.

ADVERTISING RATES

Full page, camera ready (w/1 photo)	\$20.00
Half page, camera ready (w/1 photo)	15.00
Quarter page	10.00
Business card (4 issues)	15.00

One classified ad per member per year is free (max 6 lines, \$2.50 ea add'l 6 lines). Ad space may be reserved with full payment but must meet established deadlines. If ad is cancelled, money may be refunded if space is resold. Make checks payable to Western Chestnut Growers Assn., Inc.

All ads and other copy preferred in PC format on disk or email to Carolyn@ChestnutsOnline.com. Ads must adhere to published ad sizes for space purchased. Call for specifics. Otherwise for best results, submit original photographs. Layout of ads will not be done until payment is received. Send materials to P.O. Box 841, Ridgefield, WA 98642, or Fedex/Express Mail to 29112 NW 41st Ave., Ridgefield, WA 98642. Call for further info.

PUBLICATION AND DEADLINES

Fall issue	deadline 9/10	mailed 10/1
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Spring issue	deadline 3/10	mailed 4/1
Summer issue	deadline 6/10	mailed 7/1

EDITORIAL OPINION

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Irrigation Decisions and How They Affect Chestnuts

Are you making irrigation decisions from the seat of your tractor, according to the calendar, or with knowledge of actual soil moisture conditions?

by John Ireland
Fowler Nurseries, Inc.

We, at Fowler Nurseries, are submitting this article to share our recent experiences, hoping growers will find them helpful. Summer irrigation is critical to the health of Chestnut trees. Too much water can severely reduce the growth or perhaps lead to tree death. Too little water can stress the trees leading to sun burning and borer infestation. However, in the winter, Chestnut trees will tolerate a surprising amount of excess soil moisture.

In our nursery, chestnuts have proven to be the most sensitive trees to excess irrigation. Traditionally, we would schedule our irrigations according to soil cores taken with a Thompson tube and according to the calendar. The Thompson tube could sample deep into the soil. But as the soil dried, it became impenetrable with the Thompson tube. So the tube was best used to check effectiveness of a recent irrigation; and the calendar became the real scheduling tool. Using the calendar gave unreliable results and did not compensate for the variations of soil moisture conditions naturally occurring within our fields. A 'better way' to manage our irrigation had to be developed, in order to have more predictable tree growth.

Finding a 'better way' started with locating a soil measuring system which would give reliable readings in relatively dry soil. The system also needed to be relatively easy to use, maintain, and inexpensive to purchase. We settled on the Watermark Soil Moisture Sensor from Irrometer Company, Inc. The system has been used for 2 seasons with very good results. The Watermark system uses a sensor buried in the soil with wires leading to the surface. To take readings, the meter is connected to the wires with alligator clips. The meter readings are not stored in the meter, but are recorded on paper. The picture shows the meter and clipboard recorder.

At each measurement site we have sensors installed at two different depths. The depths were chosen by determining the average maximum depth of rooting. The deepest sensor was placed at 75% and the shallow was placed at 25% of the average maximum root depth. So, if the root depth was four feet, then the deep sensor was placed at three feet and the shallow sensor at one foot deep. Sensors were placed in areas of the field that would likely have different irrigation requirements. So, sites were placed in wet areas, dry areas and moderate moisture areas. We correlated the numerical value on the meter with our traditional method of determining soil moisture, namely the 'feel' of the soil (the original 'digital' system) extracted with a Thompson tube. After the first few readings with the sensors, a pattern emerged as to where wet and dry areas were located, which lead to the redesign of the irrigation system and relocation of some sensor sites.

Irrigation was initiated when the readings at both depths were close to stress levels without entering stress levels. This strategy was chosen to discourage Phytophthora infections, yet still maintain good vegetative growth. A more moist strategy yields taller trees, with wider space between internodes, and trunk calipers identical to trees under a dry strategy. Trees grown under a dry strategy are shorter and stout with less 'rank' growth. It is important to avoid stress, since bark sun burning and increased borer activity result. It is important to note the effects of this dry strategy on nut quality are not known. We have initiated trials in our

orchard to determine how to use these sensors in a producing orchard. The sensors have also provided information on the effectiveness of an irrigation.

Sometimes the sensors show the shallow soil is excessively dry while the deep soil is very moist. In this case, an irrigation is applied to only wet the shallow soil without adding more moisture to the deep soil.



This scenario is common in spring and early summer in our location.

We farm rolling hills which provide stark differences in moisture levels. After decades of farming these hills, we thought we knew our wet and dry areas. The sensors have shown us the inaccuracy of our long held perceptions. Also, the moisture sensing system is not resulting in less frequent irrigation, but is changing where, when and how we irrigate. We anticipated irrigation would be less frequent with use of the sensors. Instead the sensors are identifying areas that need more frequent or less frequent irrigation, and identifying how to tailor each irrigation to fit the moisture profile.

There are other soil moisture measuring devices on the market, which can be effective. Be sure the device used is sensitive and reliable in the region of wilt point, since the wilt point is approached if a dry strategy is employed.

The soil moisture sensing system is helping us provide a better, more reliable nursery product; and it can help the Chestnut industry reduce the loss of trees in orchards. Tree loss in a producing orchard is economically devastating. A way to reduce tree losses should have immediate payback of time and expense.

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A membership renewal form is included with this issue. Your dues are DUE NOW. Please enclose your check in the envelope provided and mail to:

Ray Young, WCGA Secretary/Treasurer

PO Box 841

Ridgefield, WA 98642

On the back side of the membership renewal form is an application for the growers' directory. Take advantage of this advertising opportunity.

Benefits of membership include:

- ✓ *Quarterly newsletter with updates on what's going on in the chestnut world*
- ✓ *Free classified ad once each calendar year*
- ✓ *Annual meetings and orchard tours*
- ✓ *Low-cost advertising opportunity on the association's website*
- ✓ *Contact with other growers*
- ✓ *Free use of the association logo on your products*
- ✓ *Association clothing to identify you as a member*

Cadillac is one of many cities to promote chestnuts

By Mardi Suhs, News Correspondent
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CADILLAC - There is a mysterious phenomenon known as "simultaneous inventions" where great ideas occur at the exact same time in different places.

- Newton and Leibnitz independently and simultaneously discovered calculus.
- Darwin and Wallace arrived at identical theories of evolution
- Graham Bell and Elisha Grey applied for the telephone patent on the same day
- Nylon was developed in New York and London at the same time - NY-Lon
- Chestnut Festivals appear across the United States

Although the tradition of chestnut festivals is common in Italy and France, where the grape and chestnut harvest coincide, chestnut festivals in the United States have been initiated in Michigan, New York, Illinois, Oregon and Missouri in the last two to three years.

Two chestnut festival 'scouts' recently visited Cadillac's version of the event. Their mission was to observe, participate and take ideas back to their own Missouri Chestnut Roast.

"I'm up here to get ideas," confessed Julie L. Rhoads of the University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry. The first annual Missouri Chestnut Roast was held October 4. Their goal was to introduce the public to Missouri-grown chestnuts, pecans and black walnuts.

Kenneth L. Hunt, also with the University of Missouri - Tree Improvement Program, said that he was helping to develop the chestnut industry in Missouri. "We are a few years behind Michigan," he stated, "but we're thinking in similar terms. Our theme is to find what cultivars of Chinese chestnuts will grow in Missouri and result in quality nuts with a high yield."

"We don't have American chestnuts," Rhoads explained. "We're doing oriental varieties strictly for production as an agricultural product."

Julie Rhoads pointed out that the two festivals are different. "The venue for the Cadillac festival is very different from that of the Missouri Chestnut Roast; the Missouri event is held on a 700-acre horticulture and agroforestry research farm."

She explained that their event focused on tours of the orchards and roasting chestnuts. Their festival did not interface with nearby towns.

"I really liked your children's activities and plan to duplicate them at our event next year," she said.

Other ideas from Cadillac that she will take back include local chef and restaurant participation, and providing chestnut food samples for the public.

One thing both festivals have in common

Watching the struggling tree farmers, Fulbright recognized the potential for a chestnut industry. He realized that the commercial chestnut groves would need to be started from grafted trees to ensure proper genetics. He planted experimental chestnut varieties at Leelanau County's horticultural research station and dedicated his time to help the small industry flourish.

The interest in this fledgling industry is simultaneously occurring across the United States. Now there are chestnut grower co-operatives and associations in Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia and California. Research being done by scientists like Fulbright at university agricultural centers is making this possible due to the new, blight-resistant strains of the chestnut. By combining the American chestnut with the less-vulnerable-to-blight Chinese chestnut, the possibility of

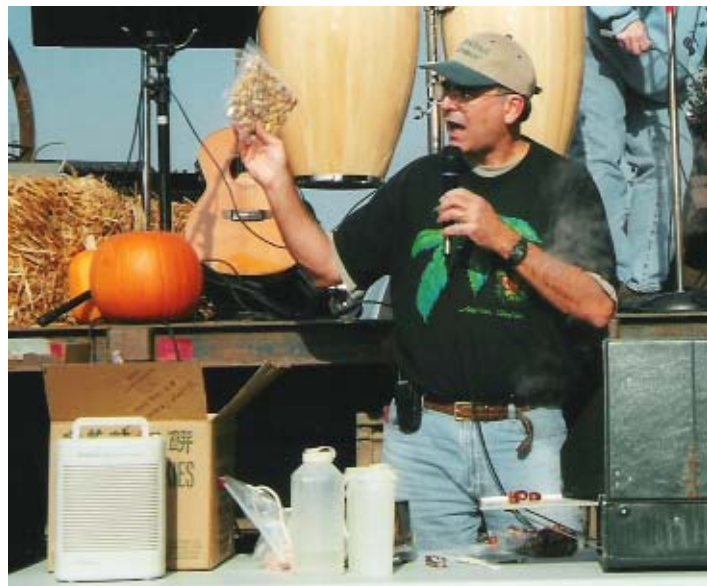


is the advice and expertise of Dr. Dennis Fulbright, a scientist from Michigan State University's Department of Plant Pathology. He is one of the nation's leading researchers on chestnuts. Fulbright has worked to re-create chestnut groves in the US and introduce chestnuts into the culinary mainstream.

"I was one of the scientists working on American chestnuts in the forest and saw the farmers in Michigan struggling to grow their chestnuts. I basically gave up my forest research program (not all of it) and started working with the growers to help them grow better trees with better nuts."

profitable crops is giving birth to a whole new agricultural industry.

"Once this new generation of scientists and non-scientists (farmers, food connoisseurs and entrepreneurs) re-discovered the chestnut, they started looking for any species of chestnut that would grow, even if chestnut blight was present. Many knew that the Chinese chestnut would grow in the face of blight but that better yields and better nuts were based on European chestnuts. We have planted them and hope our research combating blight with biological control will work," Fulbright explained.



“The festival is part of our overall plan of introducing Americans to the chestnut,” he reasoned. Chestnut festivals provide a fun place for tasting the chestnut and also serve as an educational forum.

Cadillac’s festival, he said, was a great success. He pointed out that 30 percent more chestnuts were sold at this year’s festival and that 1,800 bags of roasted chestnuts were given away, which represents 200 pounds of chestnuts. In addition, more than 1,000 cups of soup were handed out, which represents 60 pounds of chestnuts. That’s a lot of chestnut tasting going on.

“We are trying to introduce chestnuts to the majority of Americans who have not tried them before to help make it a more common food.”



There is also renewed interest in the chestnut in Australia, Chile and Argentina. Even Europe is experiencing the resurgence.

Fulbright said that at the last international chestnut symposium in Bordeaux, the French talked about declining interest in chestnuts. The older generation had let their orchards go downhill because of the blight threat. But the young generation has re-discovered their parents’ and grandparents’ orchards and are working to revive them with the help of the French Horticulture Society.

As the MSU faculty advisor to the Midwest Nut Producers Council, Fulbright works tirelessly to promote the region’s nut industry.

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Advisory Board, a nursery funding group) has provided \$10,000 in funds to get this work off to a good start.

Because California has a very strict state quarantine for *Castanea* (the genus that included both cultivated and forest species of chestnut), it is difficult for our industry to obtain diverse *Castanea* germplasm from either foreign sources or from the rest of the country. Only limited chestnut germplasm exists at present in California. However, California nurseries are an important source of chestnut trees for the rest of the country; new varieties and germplasm which clear quarantine in California should be easy to distribute to other states since it is relatively pest free. This will allow increased access to this important genus which is of particular interest as both a nut and lumber tree. Since our country imports large amounts of Chestnut as a food crop each year, it does seem that there is potential to better establish this genus as a domestic crop if better varieties can be introduced to our growers. Further, the American Chestnut Foundation is working to breed cultivars with the resistance of the Chinese chestnut, *Castanea mollissima*, while retaining the characteristic sweet tasting nut and straight timber of the American tree. New imports are expected to facilitate that work as well.

The pests of quarantine concern for *Castanea* are the pathogens *Cryphonectria parasitica* and *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and the gall wasp *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*. There is excellent

expertise at the Davis campus to monitor for these pests. Dr. Neal Van Alfen, the Department of Plant Pathology, UC Davis, has extensive experience working with the blight fungus, *C. parasitica*, and other pathogens of trees; his research group first proposed this effort. Dr. David Rizzo, also a faculty member of the Department of Plant Pathology, UC Davis has agreed to participate in this project; he is an international expert in *Phytophthora* pathogens of trees, recently discovering the cause of Sudden Oak Death of oak trees, *Phytophthora ramorum*. In addition, Dr. Lynn Kimsey, director of the UC Davis Bohart Insect Museum, has agreed to provide assistance with monitoring for the gall wasp.

I am hoping to import *Castanea* selections which will eventually pass through quarantine here at FPMS to be established in the USDA-ARS National Germplasm Repository at Davis and be distributed to nurseries and growers in California and the rest of the country. This is an excellent fit with the needs of the chestnut community and the mission of the National Germplasm System. Dr. Charles Simon, curator of the Davis Repository, has already received permission to include chestnuts in the Davis repository. As a first step towards an established collection, our FPMS staff and the staff of the repository are re-propagating the existing chestnut collection in the Pomology Department which will be moved to a permanent location at Wolfskill.



More Chestnut Adventures with the Caseys

by Jane Casey

Jane Casey and her husband Brian, well known chestnut growers in Australia, spent 3 months touring the chestnut areas of Europe a year ago. In our Winter, 2003 issue we published a part of her trip's diary. Here, with Jane's permission, we publish another portion which we feel will be of particular interest to growers.

Tuscany

We Spent an interesting week in Castelnuovo di Garfagnana in northern Tuscany. The region has a festival featuring local food called Ponti nel Tempo which runs for a week. It kicks off Sunday evening with the presentation of the new season's chestnut flour and they celebrate by making a giant chestnut polenta with "Farina di Neccio della Garfagnana".

The polenta is made using chestnut flour and water cooked in a large pan until it turns into a very fine kind of porridge. Then



The chestnut polenta is poured down the inclined table. It cools and is served with a cheese similar to ricotta.

it's poured onto a table that is set up on a slope at the base of the wall around the city. It runs down the table and cools and then is served with a fresh cheese similar to ricotta.

The locals were all wolfing it down but it was not to my taste at all so we went into the village and tried the vin brulee (hot mulled wine) and roasted nuts. Both of these were very good. There were also chestnut crepes and castagnaccio with different flavourings such as orange, walnut and pine nut and many other small cakes. It seemed the whole town came out for the festival and there were few outsiders such as ourselves. It is an underlying feeling with most of the festivals we've been to -- they are very community based and not really tourist events. We stayed at an agriturismo accommodation of which the concept is to cater to those tourists wishing to stay in a rural setting away from the normal tourist areas. The owner was well connected with local chestnut producers and took us to visit a flour mill.

The mill was stone (shown at right), quite unlike the one we had seen near Mourjou, and was very traditional. The flour from this mill was good but we are learning there is a great variation in chestnut flours. Good flour starts with the variety and quality of the fresh chestnut and then the method and time taken to dry the nuts followed by the care of grading the dried nuts.

We also had the pleasure of a tour of the Museo del Castagno at the very small village of Colognora di Pescaglia near Lucca by the curator Angelo Frati. This is one of the most interesting museums we've visited and the town selected because of a letter that was found written from the Priest of Colognora that mentions the chestnut trees of the surrounding forests. This letter dates back to 828 AD. The museum is made up of three main sections, one focuses on the chestnut as a wood source, the other chestnut flour and the final one on the alimentation or ways to cook chestnuts.

The number of old artifacts and photos was amazing and Angelo has been supported in his efforts by the locals with many donating the old things that abound in the compact building. The website for the Museo del Castagno is www.museodelcastagno.it

As part of the festival the restaurants of Castelnuovo feature selected local specialties on their menus. We went to Ristorante il Cuile at the recommendation of our host and were not disappointed. The set menu was Tagliatelle di castagne su letto di noci (chestnut tagliatelle with walnut cream sauce), Bollito di prosciutto e fagioli (char-grilled lamb and beans) and Chestnut flour wafers with ricotta cheese - these were done at our table with a mixture similar to a crepe batter put into a waffle iron. The resultant thin wafers were removed from the iron, the ricotta placed on top and wrapped up quickly before the wafer sets. To finish we tried the ice cream made with chestnut flour -- interesting and okay but not as tasty as the marrons glace ice cream we tasted in Florence the day before.

Walking the streets of Castelnuovo you get a feel for how important the chestnut is to the people here. Chestnuts are eaten roasted, the flour is used in many dishes and the burrs and leaves are used as decoration in many shops. Our flour miller told us about the history of the chestnuts in the region and how they were eaten by the poor as a primary source of food - it's a constant theme wherever we've gone. It seems that as people's standard of living improved they did not want the chestnut, as chestnuts are synonymous with being poor. However, we are feeling there is currently a revival of traditional foods as people fight against



The mill was stone, and very traditional. The flour produced here was very good, but we learned that there is a great variation.

globalisation and the loss of their heritage. Good news for chestnut growers!

We are now in Corsica for the chestnut festival at Bocognano on the weekend. Will tell you all about it next time...

Corsica

About our week in Corsica. Wow! What a secret this place is just waiting to be found. Corsica is the third largest island in the Mediterranean and is close to both Italy and France being just south of the Cote d'Azur.

We travelled here with our car by ferry from Livorno to Bastia on the East coast and it took 4 hours; however coming back we travelled from the capital Ajaccio to Marseille and that was an overnight trip. We had all been looking forward to cruising the Mediterranean, however, it was very rough and the kids all ended up being seasick which took the shine off the trip somewhat. Corsica is very compact and boasts mountains with a ski resort (of sorts) and in summer some of the best hiking in Europe. Add to this fantastic beaches, great diving spots and lots of yachts...you're getting the picture?? It's just magic. The water is so clear we could see fish swimming at the bottom of the harbour from the jetty and it was at least 20' deep. Only downside is the narrow windy roads and the mad drivers!

Back to chestnuts. Our first visit of the week was to Patricia Cesari of the Cambre d'Agriculture in Bastia. She was particularly helpful with information generally and specifically providing us with the names and contact details of producers who were happy to receive us. It would have been a difficult week without her.

It is estimated that Corsica produces around 15,000 tons of chestnuts of which only 1500 tons of chestnuts (about the same volume as the whole of Australia) are actually harvested. The nuts that are left on the ground are eaten by pigs that roam around the forest floor. These pigs are not wild as such but rather free range and they say that chestnut-fed pork makes the very best charcuterie



Free range pigs are a common sight in Corsica and they say that the chestnut-fed pigs make the very best charcuterie.

(preserved meats, eg. salami). We went for a drive in the Castagniccia region and found some pigs foraging for chestnuts. They are a very common sight in Corsica and create many problems for drivers. In fact on our trip along the main highway in Corsica from Ajaccio to Bastia we saw pigs on the side of the road.

There is an interesting history of chestnuts here with the Genoese who controlled the island at the time, organising the systematic planting of precious tree species particularly chestnut around 1584. The trees are like forests but when you look closely at them you can see they were originally planted in rows. Then in 1784 Louis XVI demanded that the chestnuts be cut down as he felt they made the Corsican people lazy - they take little time to look after, are harvested and turned into flour easily and then can be a source of food for the whole year. Luckily most were saved and there has been here, like in most places we've been to a resurgence of interest in this nut as a traditional and tasty food.

Ninety percent of the harvested chestnuts are transformed into chestnut flour. During the week we visited a flour producer who took us through his whole process from harvest to end product. It is still done in the traditional way with the fresh nuts being placed on a floor made of wooden slats above a fire. The producer we met has a chimney for the fire so the smoke does not infuse the chestnuts with a smoky flavour - I'll fill you in about the taste testing later.

The nuts take around 30 days to dry and then they are shelled using a locally-designed machine and milled using a stone mill. The most time consuming part of the process is the grading of the dried chestnuts as this particular producer was very quality conscious and rejected many of the nuts. He told us it takes around 11 tons of fresh nuts to produce 3 tons of flour.

We had tried chestnut flour in France and Italy but the flour we tasted that day fresh out of the mill was very different to anything we'd had before. It was so sweet and melted in our mouths. We had been told that you could eat Corsican chestnut flour by the spoonful and I can assure you it's true.

Another visit we arranged was with a maker of Marrons Glaces in Bastia. Like Jose Posada in Spain he lamented at the high rate of breakage of chestnuts during processing and the fickle nature of chestnuts from year to year that really makes this product very artisan. Marrons Glaces are not traditional in Corsica and have only been produced in the last 5 years when a group of 3 people from different areas in Corsica decided to create a network called Dolci Corse. They approached a retired maker of Marrons Glaces who was willing to share his knowledge and expertise to teach them how to produce Marrons Glace. Most of the produce is sold in Corsica in the lead up to Christmas for gifts.

Many years ago we were in a French restaurant in Saigon and the French chef came out at the end of our meal to talk to us. He told us that we must go to Corsica for the white pork and chestnuts and the chestnut beer. Brian, being a lover of beer, (he is Australian after all) decided then and there if we ever got to Corsica we would try this beer. Well we did a little better than that - we actually visited the brewery! (Brian was in heaven!) The beer is made using a mixture of dried chestnuts and malted barley. It is not chestnut flavoured but rather is a very nice full flavoured (6% alc) boutique beer. We think it would go really well with hot roasted chestnuts. Dominique the owner and brewer wanted to create a beer that was the essence of Corsica and chestnuts are so integral to the culture here they were a natural choice.

We had come to Corsica for the chestnut festival at Bocognano. The festival is set up more like a show really and took place in a marque about 5 kilometres south of Bocognano. It lacked the village atmosphere of the other festivals we've been to but the stalls were all of a very high standard and the produce excellent. Most stalls focused on chestnut flour but many also sold cakes and bis-

cuits made with the flour and there was one selling the most delicious chestnut honey I've had. On Saturday there was a cooking demonstration but it was difficult to get a seat. Not to be put off we returned on Sunday, earlier this time to see if we could talk to some of the stall holders when things were not so busy.

Luckily, we had the good fortune to run into Joseph Sanna. We had met him previously at Cuneo in October and given him a sample of our Australian chestnut flour but had been unable to contact him prior to our arrival. He invited us (on the spot) to the judging of the chestnut flour competition that was being held that morning. To our horror he had the sample of our flour (which is embarrassingly rough and bland in comparison to its Corsican counterpart), in his hand.



The flours were judged on sweetness, flavor, aroma, purity, fineness and color.

We went and after a wait in which the flours were numbered and the judges assembled the competition commenced. There were 14 judges and 22 different chestnut flours entered. Brian and I sat to one side and tasted and filled out the assessment sheet as if we were on the panel ourselves. The key characteristics that the flours are judged on, in order of importance, are: Sweetness, Flavour, Aroma, Purity, Fineness, and Colour.

The judges take the competition very seriously and there was little talking during the assessment. Some judges even had special magnifying glasses to see the flour at a greater definition.

After the top six were determined, the flours were tasted again to select the final winner.

Brian and I had the same results for second and third as the judging panel but thought another flour should have come first and the one the panel selected as the best we had coming in at number 4. It was great fun for us and very valuable in demonstrating the variation between the different producers. Some of the flours were dark brown and smoky flavoured with others being just off white with not even a hint of smoke.



Falculele, a chestnut cake, is baked with a chestnut leaf on the base.

One thing I must mention that I haven't seen anywhere else is the use of chestnut leaves as a kind of greaseproof paper for cakes. There is a special cake here called Falculele that is made with a chestnut leaf on the base. It's in all the bakeries and is very common and quite tasty.

That rounds up our travelogue. I hope you have enjoyed getting our newsletters.

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