

at the head of the sea inlet but all we could see from the road was a large brick building under which the river flowed over a low weir. In fact, when we queried that such a large river was flowing into the sea, the answer made it clear that the 'spring' was the exit from a large cave system from which the river ran into Croatia. These subterranean river systems are huge and while we are familiar with them in Britain, ours are on a much smaller scale.

From the plain scenery around Zagreb and on the way to the coast, the geology blossomed like the flowers. The vivid yellow Spanish broom was everywhere up the mountain sides. The small rocky fields, separated by rough donkey tracks, sprawling up the mountain sides were ablaze with all sorts and colours of spring flowers. So, when we had had our fill of the geology around us, we could take in the beauty of the trees and flowers and listen to the nightingales trilling, seemingly from every other tree and bush. Like the flowers and the birds, the rocks provided surprises and delights at almost every corner of the journey. Go – you will not be disappointed. When you have seen enough, just relax and take in the scenery. Visit the historic sites – the Palace of Emperor Diocletian at Split, the medieval port and city of Dubrovnik, the Venetian town of Zadar, the islands of Brac and Hvar. Maybe you will have a few moments to enjoy the sun on a pebbly beach and perchance, share it with some Nummulites.

All photos by Charles Hiscock unless indicated otherwise

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L to R: Elizabeth Devon, Fiona Newcombe, Isobel Geddes photo: L D-H
Sunday September 21st 2008 saw the official launch of the new WGG guide to the Vale of Pewsey at Milk Hill above Alton Barnes by Fiona Newcombe, Director for the North Wessex Downs AONB.

A VISIT TO ELBA

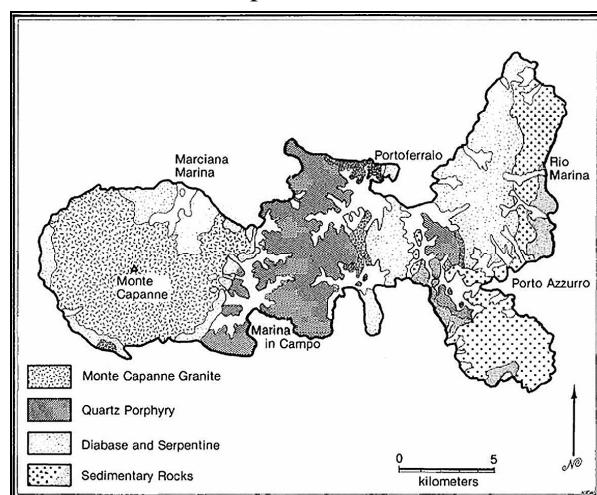
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David Burford

Elba lies off the Italian coast between the industrial town of Piombino on the mainland and the French island of Corsica. The local airport is at mainland Pisa from which you go by coach to Piombino. Ferries travel between Piombino and Ferrario on Elba.

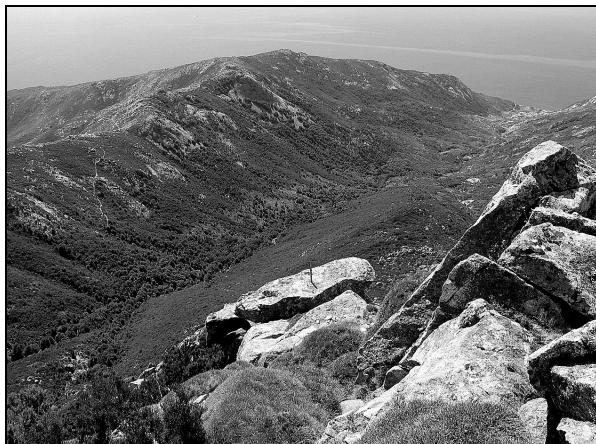
My visit was on a walking holiday between the 8th and 15th October 2008. Visiting dates are important because this is at the end of the tourist season and the following week facilities start to close down.

An article from the web says that for Elba as a whole its geology is 'very interesting for the structural complexity' (bless it!). Even the zones making up the island are described as Complex 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. These Complexes have been stuck together by a host of tectonic shenanigans (that are not further discussed here). Observable geological history begins in the Late Cretaceous and major changes occurred up to the Late Miocene /Pliocene epochs.



Elba may be thought of as having a north-south twin hammerhead at its east (mainland) end, a central short east-west shaft and a roughly circular west end to the shaft. All of this is within a total length of 27km. We were based on the west end at

a town called Marciana Marina that has a fishing and recreational boat harbour. Impressively, the west end of the island houses a 1019m mountain, Monte Capanne on its 17km diameter base. We walked on and around Monte Capanne.



Monte Capanne (Stock photo)

Monte Capanne is relatively simple in structure, being composed mainly of a great lump of uniform porphyritic granodiorite. It was emplaced around 7Ma ago. It does have its fractures and intrusions but from the coast to its very peak most of the material has large plagioclase feldspar crystals set in a medium grain-sized, pale grey matrix. The porphyry is an attractive rock to be on. There being so much of it, makes the finding of other rock types more exciting.

Serpentinite for example may first come to your notice in a road cutting or in statues or table-tops around the towns. Hydrothermal activity through rock fractures caused alterations to the emplaced granodiorite. As well as serpentinite, talc deposits were once worked near to Marciana Marina.

A look at a geological map of Elba showed that around the edges of the main bulk of Monte Capanne, were exposures of wollastonite, diopside and biotite schist. These may have come from the alteration of limestones from the Cretaceous era.

Elba was a strategically placed island during centuries of wars between rival dukedoms of mainland Italy, also for foreign forces. Apart from

essential ports, the main towns of the western end of Elba were defensively situated about one third of the way up Monte Capanne. From the higher level town of Marciana, rather than coastal Marciana Marina, there is a cable car to almost the peak of Monte Capanne.



The town of Marciana with Monte Capanne in the background (Stock photo)

Earlier I noted the uniformity of the granodiorite of Monte Capanne ‘from the coast to its very peak’. Yes, I did climb Monte Capanne fully one day, even if it was downwards! There is a cafe at the top by the cable car station, but one needs to check when it is open. The walk down is a bit scrambly in parts but also includes broad, old tracks then side-roads and is thoroughly recommended in the right weather. Views, numerous butterflies, a magnificent bright green lizard and even the rocks provided plenty of entertainment on the ‘climb’. Lower down, are groves of sweet-chestnuts (the nuts being once a very important food source). There were groups out collecting chestnuts while I was walking through.

On another day, a bus enabled me to get to a village called Chiessi around the foot of the mountain and on the coast to walk back about 5km and to discover my own serpentinite source. Then a bus took me back to Marciana Marina. It was unexpectedly hot but well worth the effort.

Altogether it was a most enjoyable trip, good company within our group and easy to get around. I understand that from the end of September the weather is somewhat unpredictable. We were lucky to have it so fine.