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Vessel and Vespa de La Maddellena September Eight and Nine

This vast granitic archipelago consists of literally hundreds of islands. The primary island, La Maddellena, stands off the “mainland” of Sardinia by just a few kilometers, rising high from the sea. Ferry boats leave every twenty minutes to and fro, with three companies serving the need. The main town, by the same name, rises from the seafront promenade to the concrete bunker radar tower five hundred meters above the water.

From the quay one looks out to islands in all directions, most just rocky outcrops, larger ones with visible ruins, resorts and villas. The archipelago is a marine sanctuary, an Italian national park, yet the land is fully inhabited, covered by roads and trails. Small scale commercial fishing is apparently thriving by the number of active boats and fishermen mending their nets. The marine life appears very much intact, with fairly large fish within the marina, also jelly fish, bait fish and squid in visible abundance.



The archipelago is military, in a big way. The edge of town includes a large military training area and active patrol vessels of the Costa Guardia and “Guardia de Finanze”. The latter patrol in eighty foot vessels crusted with antennae and radar. Weapons are

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apparently enclosed within topside cabinets, hidden and clean. The role of Guardia de Finanze is not apparent, but the term is clear and clearly not associated with financial planning services.

Crumbling fortifications guard the northern reachable points of land. These complexes include emplacements for gun batteries pointed out to sea, the mounts directed toward French Corsica. Rusted fasteners embedded in stone and perimeters ground away by the heavy iron wheels testify to their use.

Garibaldi is a giant of history in these islands, the uniter of fragmented Italy during the nineteenth century. His image is displayed pervasively and the national memorial is maintained beside one of the crumbling forts that define his legacy. There was no “Italy” before Garibaldi, he united Italian speaking people during the eighteen hundreds, that century of worldwide nationalism and militarization.



Vespa scooter buzzed me throughout the island of La Maddelena and neighboring Caprera. Starting on the perimeter road, when reaching a fork I always chose closest to the sea. When the turn pointing to “Panoramico” showed itself, there was no decision, a destination or path labelled such causes reaction, not decision. There was no disappointment, where each turn of the wheel revealed another cove with azure water,

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anchored yachts, beach and funky shacks selling food and drink. The scooter was preferred, enabling the simplest parking and access right to the waterfront.



Panoramic scenery, past boat yards and resorts to the bridge crossing to Caprera Island. Caprera is an actual park with conifers, granite peaks and hiking trails. There is little interest in beach leisure while traveling solo, exploring the fortifications and gravel roads became the leisure. At one point I scooted up a narrowing line that petered out to a trail, with the fortifications beckoning higher up. Walking now, with nobody near, I explore until stopped by a rusted iron bridge that is clearly dangerous. It amazes me the number and level of unsafe places one can encounter just walking and following marked passages.

Our boat left at nine for a day on the water circling the outer islands and swimming. The sixty foot all wood boat was built in 1960. The oldest tour boat on the quay, all the others being fiberglass, she looked good to me and the skipper offered the best tour. A boatful of families and young people, I was the only single traveler. All spoke Italian, I do not think there was a German or other European national aboard. This was a Saturday in September, perhaps the Italians wait until the August crowds depart.

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As a sailor I was shocked to see so many unmarked, barely visible boulders just peering above the surface. At one point I saw what I thought was a log far from shore, the binoculars revealing an unmarked sea mount. Unthinkable in the States, yet we do not have this type of archipelago. The yachts anchored in some of the coves were owned by wealthy people, the scale shocking. Literally a hundred islands and a thousand boats of every type. The skipper kept his eye out for dolphin and circled slowly while they breached, we saw two pods. A swim stop, beach stop and lunch of pasta with crawfish served by excellent crew. Great waters.

