

Magnificent Sellaronda, Valpolicella Superiore Wine: Tutto Bellissimo.

Early morning of February 3, 2018, when it was still deep dark, our group of ski-adventurists loaded the baggage into the bus's lower compartment and took seats each holding white plastic bags with en-route snacks. One week of skiing-snowboarding in Italian Dolomites was over. Sensational experience was stored in our minds forever.

White-sparkling picks released us down,
The ones that we have just concurred,
Sea level valley was to great us now -
But our hearts were still beating on the peak heights.

The bus, powered by a super soft engine, started the motion taking us down to the urbanized, polluted, Monsanto-modified world. The bus's body was long. The downhill road was narrow and had a serpentine shape. When the bus was to make an almost 180-degree turn its bumper seemed to scratch the metal railing - a poor protection from a scary sheer drop on the left. The driver was a gentleman dressed in a well tailored-suit. Elegant light-beige gloves were on his hands. His grey hair was well combed giving an impression that he just stepped out from a hair-dresser. Marcello Mastroianni! Those Italians! Even if they deal with - plain details that might look insignificant to the outcome of the whole composition, they still would perform it in a fancy manner. I remember visiting a chamber music concert in Venice. The musicians entered the hall from the entrance door opposite to the stage. They did not walk; they flew over the floor to the stage. The violinist raised his hand with the bow. He posed. Only then he landed the bow on the instrument drawing a charming curve in the air.

Six days at Val Di Fassa inducted us in a state of euphoria - blue sky, open white terrains, and no-waiting for the lifts that greeted our buttocks with warm padded chairs. For being the most smiling skiers on the slopes we got even more goodies: open buffet every morning, five-course dinners every evening offering a whole variety of Italian exquisite cuisine one could have learned about at New York's "Dean and DeLuca". Freshly marinated Carpaccio beef softly melted in the mouth. It tasted even more delicious with a feeling that it was in the neighboring Venezia where the great Italian Chef, Cipriani, came up with the recipe. To be eatable and tasty the beef should be exceptionally fresh, not older than 10-12 hours after butchering. After dinner with Valpolicella wines one could have danced the whole night long in the hotel's dance hall. Majority, however, preferred to rest saving energy for the next morning adventures.

The American consumer would love to apply a beloved "value for money" formula to services offered in the Dolomites by the super-ski pass. Five days of unlimited skiing on more than 300 slopes serviced by 200 lifts, cost only \$314, i.e. \$62.80 per day. Remarkably, the configuration of slopes makes a form of the star having a group of majestic rocky formations staged in the center. The name of the Italian Beauty is Sellaronda. For sure, these gigantic sculptures have been pleasing the eye of the extraterrestrials for millions of years. Should a curious Lunatic look

down he would see Sellaronda as a magnificent Constellation; high peaks stretching from the Earth to the Sky like they were created by a designer on purpose. It was a great fun to ski on the “stars sticking out of planet Earth”. One can take a 5-6 hours panoramic 26-mile round trip clockwise, or counterclockwise around the group of rocks in the center. These slopes are gyms and Olympic stadiums for the world’s best alpine ski teams. We got a piece of excitement too with a kind help from two ski masters, the charming Mario and Max, the professional ski guides. At 9 o’clock every morning, Mario and Max would take us up to the mountains to ski around Sellaronda. A vanguard, the advanced skiers, Ryan, Maurice, Alice, Adam and others were led by Mario, and they skied up and down almost reaching the Austrian border. Our group, the rearguard, did not try to cover the distance over to Siberia. We practiced a meditating skiing. Max was always here to introduce new slopes and guide us to coffee-break-restaurants. Those restaurants – close to the Heavens – in food quality, and services – are close to the Madison Avenue’s chic. And they did not look like the Vienna Cafe at the Secretariat building. The ceiling height was the main attraction – there was none.

My rocket-propelled racing down the slopes were often interrupted by the sudden appearances – just in front of me - of gigantic vertical stone sculptures of different mysterious forms. They hypnotized me. I moved slowly and stopped often, so that even the “very-beginners” skiers from our group had to wait for me down the hill. I was busy addressing sharp peaks that resembled a stone-age human’s bits (?), or architectural profile of Catholic Cathedrals. I played a Chairman of the First Assembly of United Stones of Sellaronda.

The creation of the world’s largest and the finest ski resort complex, that have unified many counties and villages, did not happen overnight. In the “Museo Ladin de Fascia” (village of Di Fassa History Museum) I found some explanation for the success of the Sellaronda. According to historic evidence the earliest settlements here were formed by the ethnic groups of Ladin in 8000-5000 BC. Ladin people vigorously defended their land from invaders. Nowadays, their strong communities keep protecting the land from overdevelopment. They are very strict in preserving the Nature in the Dolomites. Not surprisingly, Val di Fassa ski resorts are controlled by the partnership of six private companies and an NGO, “Association of the Tourism Development of the Canazei Region (ATDC).” Umberto, one of the leaders of ATDC, and the co-owner of the “Corona Hotel”, where we stayed, remarked that “the local community has a considerable degree of autonomy from Rome, and account carefully all development needs, putting the Nature and human beings’ wellness first, and leaving material profits for later”.

On February 1, we gave a break to our muscles. We took a one hour bus ride to the regional capital, Bolzano. One of the attractions people wanted to see was “The Iceman” Ötzi featured at the “South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology”. Ötzi was found, by accident, on September 19 1991, at an elevation of 3,210 meters. The ice kept Ötzi’s body preserved for 7000 years. Naturally refrigerated, the mummy allowed anthropologists to come up with many groundbreaking findings. Now the world knows almost everything about the poor guy: what did he eat, what did he wear, how was his health, and how was he killed. Still, however, it is not clear who and why

he was killed Ötzi's left arm was frozen in a stretched position towards the right side of the neck. Probably, he died trying to pull the killer's arrow out of his neck. In silence, I looked at the mummy together with Dr. John Jacoby. The doctor whispered to my ear: "Had he left the end of the arrow in the body; he could, probably have lived longer." The story of Ötzi remains the oldest murder mystery case unsolved.

What personally connects me with the discoveries related to the Bronze Era Man is his diet: greens, whole grains, game meats. Obviously, he did not have a gluten allergy. Neither did he consume deep processed food or genetically modified ersatzes. I adopt the Ötzi's diet. Nothing will go into my mouth that has shorter than seven thousand years of history in the making.

Fantastic skiing, good eating, superior wines, plus the Ötzi's diet. Isn't it too much for a one week vacation? UNESCO included Sellarondo areas into the World Heritage property list as "highly distinctive mountain landscapes that are of exceptional natural beauty."

Who would argue? We know, we have been there.

Please stop pointless arguments with me;
I proved them to myself long ago,
More beautiful than peaks we just lived through
Are only those whose challenge is still ahead.

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The Dolomites – one of the natural beauties in the Sellaronda area.



St Patrick's Cathedral, NYC, USA Cathedral Tower in Bolzano, Italy



The Dolomites – The head of the woman with a child is seen in the center of the upper section of the rock.



The owner of the Hotel Corona and the author in the lobby of the hotel.

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