

## **PHOTO ESSAY: MT. VESUVIUS AND POMPEII**

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**T**hese pictures were taken on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011, when my wife (Nancy Macdonald, Rivier Class of 2006G) and I climbed Mt. Vesuvius and toured the ruins of Pompeii in Italy. Pompeii was a thriving port city on the Gulf of Naples, when, as recorded by Pliny the Younger, on August 24, 79 AD around noon time Mt. Vesuvius, a conical volcano suddenly erupted with what is said the force of four Hiroshima type atomic bombs. There have been many eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius since although none have been known to be as destructive as that which destroyed Pompeii. The last major eruption occurred in 1944. Today, at the top of the mountain, which is over 4200 feet high a crater or caldera exists where on some days small wisps of smoke or steam can be seen indicating Vesuvius is indeed a still very active volcano. The area around the volcano and Pompeii itself has become densely populated in recent years and is rife with souvenir shops, refreshment stands and all the hustle and bustle of busy tourist area. However once entering the excavated city of Pompeii itself, which is fenced off from the rest of the world an eerie but reverent silence is felt as one can't escape the fact that one summer day 2,000 years ago thousands of people were killed and a city was frozen in time.

This work is a sample of the many pictures we took that day in the shadow of a volcano.

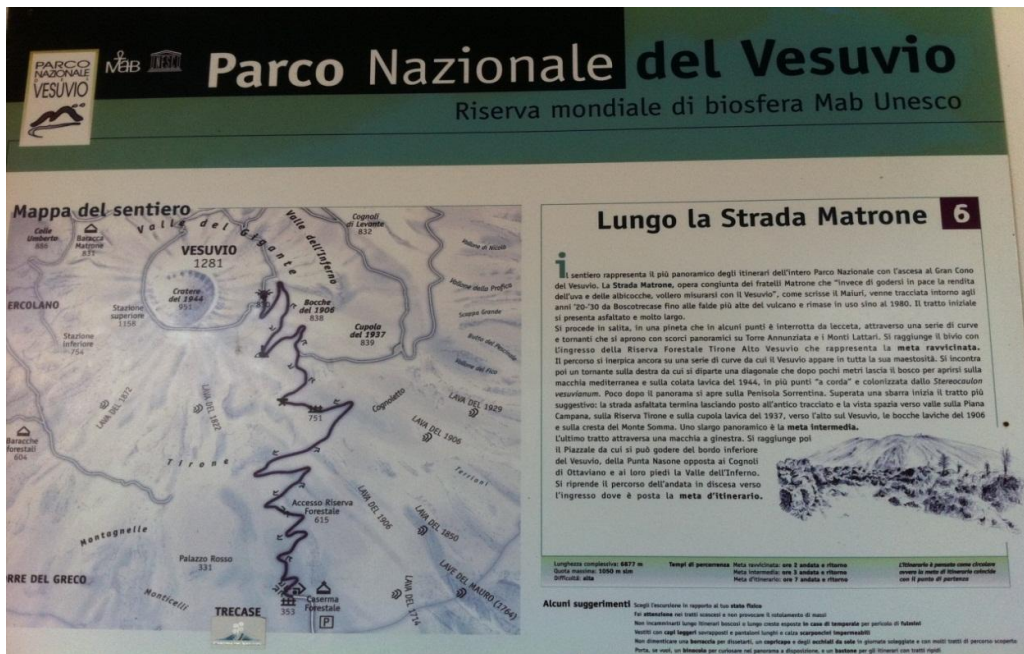


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- 1. View of Mt. Vesuvius as seen from a ship's porthole in the Gulf of Naples at sunrise.**



2. Approaching Vesuvius, seen from the busy highway area at the volcano's base. It is surprising how many homes, businesses and other structures have sprouted so close to a volcano.



3. As this map indicates, Vesuvius and the area surrounding the volcano have been made into an Italian National Park. The roadway we are taking up the volcano is indicated by the dark black line.



4. Upon arrival in the park, a private company offers four wheel drive service up the narrow, winding cobble stoned road to the tree line. As the volcano rises over 4,000 feet, this is highly recommended.



5. View of the volcanic summit ridge as we approach the tree line. Sparse signs of any human presence are a striking contrast to the sights and sounds of vivid civilization seen at the base of the volcano.



**6.**  
**We have reached the disembarkation point at the tree line. The summit to the volcanic caldera is still a steep upward hike of approximately 600 feet along a spiral rope-fenced trail across powdery volcanic ash.**



**7.**  
**Start of the rope-fenced trail leading upward to the summit of the volcanic ridge.**



**8.**  
**Bridge work along the upper part of the trail. Note the abundance of lava and volcanic ash. It became very hard to breathe from here to the top of the caldera on a hot, humid day. One can only think of how thin the air must have become on that horrible day in Pompeii when Vesuvius released its might.**



**9.**  
**Erosion has cut many gullies into the volcanic ash and lava above the tree line.**



**10.**  
**View of the top ridge along the caldera with clouds casting their shadows along its ashy lip.**



**11.**  
**Here is a close view of the caldera's ridge. Note the other hikers and rope rail on the left for scale. The enormity of the caldrion's diameter is impressive to all.**



12.

Looking over the edge of the ridge into the caldera, Although I was told small amounts of steam and smoke are regularly released from the crater floor, none could be seen this day. The vastness of the caldera is very striking. One can only imagine the amount of ash, rocks and other material thrown into atmosphere when Vesuvius erupted.



13.

Here is a different view of the caldera's edge. It is eerily silent here and when the wind is just right a very faint scent of sulfur is in the air.

On that horrible day in 79 AD, the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum lying near the base of the volcano were in a moment, buried with molten ash and their populations exposed to superheated gas resulting in near instant death. Yet because of the rapid cooling of the lava, many of the stone-based structures and much their related art were preserved.

The city of Pompeii was re-discovered in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and seriously excavated from the mid-19th century and has been under excavation ever since, while the city of Herculaneum although discovered about the same time has never been excavated due to development although some have artifacts have been unearthed. As a result of the eruption, the ancient cities were buried under up to 60 feet of volcanic material and the port city of Pompeii found itself now located a mile from the sea. It has been estimated that the number dead is in the 10's of thousands.

The excavation of Pompeii has revealed an amazing view of what life was like living in a Pre-Christain Rome.



14.

**We are entering through the outer walls of the city of Pompeii. Note the extensive use of the Roman arch as building technique. Although on this day many other tourists could be seen, a reverent silence filled the air much like other sites of tragedy where lives were lost. One has the feeling that we have entered a preserved historical tomb.**





**15.**  
**The military training and parade grounds located inside the walls of the city. One can easily imagine the city's garrison of soldiers practicing their marching at sunrise here.**



**16.**  
**This is one of the main thorough-fares in Pompeii. This street is bounded by many homes and businesses much like any modern city.**



17. Most streets were built lower than grade to accommodate the flow of sewage. The stepping stones were placed so that the average cart or chariot wheels could easily pass between them and the citizenry could cross without dirtying their feet.



18. Many buildings were adorned with fresco decorative trim. Little remains but here is an example encased in protective plastic.



**19.**  
Pompeii is well known for the fresco artwork adorning the inside of its buildings. Much of the artwork is of an erotic nature and has at times since its discovery has been locked away from public viewing.



**20.**  
Some buildings contain preserved statuary.



21. Many homes had mosaic tiled floor, especially the entry way. These have been well preserved over the centuries.



22. This is the mosaic of a guard dog at the entrance to a house. It is inscribed “cave canem” or “beware of dog”.



**23.**  
Many inhabitants of Pompeii were killed near instantly by superheated gasses from Mt. Vesuvius. In 1863 an archeologist named Fiorelli developed a method of pumping plaster of Paris into the voids left in the lava to create forms of humans, plants and animals. Some of these casts are on display at Pompeii.



**24.**  
The deaths at Pompeii were not limited to humans as the cast of this dog is twisted in agony shows. It is a stark reminder that not all of the deaths that day were quick and painless.



25.

In this picture are a plaster cast of the body of a child and some of thousands of pieces of pottery and other artifacts found and cataloged and kept in storage areas on the site.



26.

**It has been said that the inhabitants of Pompeii attributed the tragic eruption to the anger of the roman gods and spent their last seconds in prayer to them. Prayers to their gods were not answered that day as the might volcanic forces of Vesuvius erupted.**

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\* **PETER MACDONALD** is the Director of Management Information Systems at Rivier University. Peter has been with the University for seven years and is a graduate of Worcester State University in Massachusetts, with a degree in Management. He earned an M.S. in Computer Science from Rivier in 2008. Peter's wife Nancy earned a M.Ed. from Rivier in 2006 and they have two daughters working toward their B.S. at Rivier. Nancy and Peter are enthusiastic travelers and look forward to their next adventure.