

The Saint Francis Beech Tree

Legend narrates that the Saint was in the mountains near Rivodutri when a violent thunderstorm broke. Francis found shelter under a Beech Tree that by the will of God stretched its branches out like an umbrella. That's how popular tradition explains the unique shape of the tree.

The Beech Tree is famous for the remarkable way its branches intertwine and create gnarls of unusual beauty. This is what makes the Saint Francis Beech Tree unique. Other examples of the species tend to extend upwards while the tree in Cepparo has undergone a very rare mutation found in only two other examples in the world: in England and in North America.

Local legend associates the Beech tree to another episode. Saint Francis moved about on a donkey he had shod by a farrier whom he paid with many thanks. The farrier was so surprised by the thanks that it took a while for him to realize that he had not received any money for the job. When he did, he ran after Saint Francis and caught up to him at the Beech Tree. He told the Saint to either pay him or give back the shoe-irons. Francis asked the donkey to return the shoe-irons which the donkey miraculously did.

Today, it is still possible to see the Saint's footprint on the ground where he descended from the donkey.

The size of the tree that shaded Saint Francis is quite impressive: it can reach up to 8 metres in height and it has a maximum circumference of 4 metres.

Furthermore, it is between 200 and 250 years old.

How to get there:

From Rivodutri a 4 km long paved road takes you to Cepparo. From here an unpaved road leads to the slopes of Mount Fausola at 1123 metres. The Saint Francis Beech Tree is at the end of a charming path.

Features of the Saint Francis Beech Tree

Family: Fagaceae

Scientific Name: *Fagus sylvatica*

Features: The tree can reach 30 m in height. It is slim with cone-shaped foliage. The bark is thin, smooth and speckled. The leaves are dark green and elliptical with smooth borders. It is a monoecious plant with dangling male and female

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buds coupled in a container called a cupola. The fruits, called beechnuts, are enclosed in the cupola which opens and lets them fall when mature. The abundant production of the beechnuts occurs every 5-10 years. This tree can be found all over Europe from Norway to Sicily and it grows at 900 to 1500 metres in altitude.

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