

A visit at an olive farm.

In this area you will find 60 million olive trees and the province is Spain's largest producer of olive oil. After visiting the provincial capital of Jaen, the towns of Baeza and Ubeda we head towards Casorla. The road goes up high on the ridge and below us is an almost endless valley with olive trees as far as the eye can see. Olive trees at trees I saw every time I looked.

Undulating landscape with trees in the ruler straight lines where the ground has been raked. It's breathtaking. You cannot get enough of watching the landscape below us. Here and there are small fires and smoke rises to spread across the valley with the light wind. It becomes almost magical. We had no time to stop and sit by the roadside and admire the view but continued towards the olive farm which was the goal.



The road exit was not great. The small sign says it Almedina. You turn onto a dirt road amid the forest of olive trees. The road winds its way into the farmland of trees until we arrive at a manor building. It was built in the late nineteenth century and was visited often by the Spanish king. The farm was restored ten years ago and is now open to visitors. There are eight rooms. We are received by Felix, Professor of olive knowledge and owner of the farm. This time of year just before the harvest they clear the ground under the trees from the wild shoots and grass and the soil is raked. Olives trees may be hundreds or even two hundred years old. However, we see large areas that are newly planted. Economically, the trees are most productive when they are 25 to 50 years old. Almedina has 40,000 olive trees on their property. Yet Almedina is one of the smaller farms.



The oldest traces of olive oil have been found in Cyprus from the eighth century before Christ. The pollen from olive trees can be traced to two thousand years before Christ. The handling of the olives has roots thousands of years back in time. Its impact on public health is well known in the Mediterranean diet. Olives are used to medicine, health food, cosmetics, heat, fuel, food and much more. The flowers are colorless and bloom in May. In Jaen, the entire sky was yellow pollen during this month. The biggest risk for growers is a winter with lots of

frost.

The green olives are picked for consumption. They are bitter and must be treated with many baths. Those olives give no more than 8-10 percent of oil compared to the mature ones that provides 18-20 percent. The remainder of the weight being water to 60 percent and 20 percent pulp . Each tree yields about 50 kg of olives and it is hundred olives on each kilo. 5000 olives per tree! The good harvest is due to watering approximately 7000 liters per tree and year and fertilize. Many olive farms do not have that opportunity as they do not have access to water. In Jaen area is most plantations on relatively flat, but on the way over here you can see areas located on steep slopes. These crops require much effort at harvest and then to remove the olives then you cannot use vehicles but have to carry everything down to a road.

Harvest season begins in November and lasts until mid-January. The olives are then started to get a little brown. The first harvest yields the finest oil and commands a higher price. Today harvest is using a tractor that shakes the tree for ten seconds and a team of ten people is helping to put down the last olives with sticks quickly gather the olives and go to the next tree. Thousands of laborers are ready to jump on and help with the harvest. The traditional way is to only use long sticks to beat on the branches so that the olives fall onto a net. Man climbing up and make sure that all olives were harvested. All are sitting down and clears the harvest of leaves and branches before the olives are packed in sacks. Women continue to crawl on their knees to pick up the olives are scattered around. Direct after harvesting the olives must be delivered to the press on the same day and pressed. Quality deteriorates if the olives are overnight. There will be long hours for the farmers from first light till dark and maybe a little more. Olives harvested late in the season are of inferior quality but it is still a good oil.



The tour begins at one of the old presses. The olives are laid out on the plate and a donkey pulls around the conical stone. A method that have been used for thousands of years. The olive meat is then transported to a press. The leverage needed to create the 30 000 kilograms of pressure needed to get the oil out of the small caps with olive oil in the meat. Also the water is pressed out of the olives. It sounds as the liquid drip down in a bowl of water where pressured liquid mixes with the water in the bowl. The oil floats on the surface and can be easily

separated. During the nineteenth century the manual press was replaced with a hydraulic press.

The method used today was introduced as late as the 1970s centrifuges the olive paste with heat to quickly separate the oil and water. A team of ten men are capable to harvest 7-800 kg of olives per day. In the Jaen province there are thousands temporarily hired workers during the harvest season. 2013 looks to be a good year as the trees are rich of olives. 60 percent of all the world's olive oil comes from Spain and hence a large part from this province. Italy has been a major importer of Spanish olive oil.

The leftover pasta you can make a kind of charcoal used for heating both in homes and industries. Olive oil, which has been kept for a too long time, you can make a lamp oil, known Lampante.

Olive oil is divided, like wine, into quality groups and some with DO label. First, a technical evaluation of the farm's handling of the olives is made. To get a higher quality designation you make a blind test of the olive oil. Just like you do with wines. After a year, the oil begins to lose in flavor and after two years it loose some of its properties. One should not keep their oil in colder temperature than eight degrees and no warmer than twenty degrees. In addition to temperature, it is sunlight that destroys oil the most.

We are looking forward to spend the night at the farm on the next visit to the province. More charming place is hard to find.

