

# Hamburgers with a side of ancient history

MARINO, ITALY

## McDonald's builds store that leaves Roman road intact, and on view

BY ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

It's a common enough story in Italy: An ancient ruin — in this case, a length of Roman road — is discovered during the construction of a building — in this case, a McDonald's — and puts a halt to the work until the site can be excavated.

Rather than fret about lost time and money, McDonald's decided to sponsor the dig, and it worked with the archaeological authorities to preserve the road, built between the second and first centuries B.C.

As of Tuesday, visitors to the fast-food restaurant, about 12 miles southeast of central Rome, could walk along the 147-foot stretch of road without even having to buy a Big Mac.

Many parts of Italy contain subterranean riches, and over the centuries, countless edifices have incorporated or adapted the ruins of previous eras. Several restaurants in Rome, for example, have an important historical or archaeological lineage, like being the site where Julius Caesar was murdered or a place where oil amphorae were stocked in ancient times. Even the McDonald's in Termini Station in Rome includes a section of the Servian Wall, from the fourth century B.C.

But the work at the McDonald's in Marino — more precisely in the hamlet of Frattocchie, known as Bovillae in ancient times — stands out because the

project incorporated the road, which would otherwise have been reburied.

"Archaeology is constantly bringing to light testimonies of the past that have to be documented in an exacting manner but can't always be properly preserved," said Alfonsina Russo, the Culture Ministry's archaeological superintendent for the area.

In many cases, unless the finds are exceptional, they are reburied in the hopes that they can be re-examined later. "It's better to protect them than to leave them exposed, when it's not possible to properly care for them," Ms. Russo explained. "The earth protects, man destroys."

The finding of the road, uncovered in 2014 while digging for the foundations of the McDonald's, came as a surprise. "We decided with McDonald's to protect and promote this important site, which would have otherwise fallen again into oblivion," Ms. Russo said.

The road was a diverticulum, or side passage, leading to the Appian Way, a Roman thoroughfare begun in 312 B.C. The uncovered stretch probably led to a villa or a great estate, Ms. Russo said.

Archaeologists on the dig have said that the unearthed road, which has grooved signs of ancient wear and tear from cart wheels, was most likely used for a few hundred years before it was abandoned. The skeletons of three men found in the gutter of the road, which have been reproduced in resin casts, are signs that the road had been abandoned,

said an archaeologist involved in the effort, Pamela Cerino.

The skeletons, which have yet to be dated through carbon testing, were found with items including terra cotta

tiles, which led to the hypothesis that the road went out of use in the second or third century A.D., Ms. Cerino said.

She was hired by McDonald's but worked under the supervision of the Culture Ministry, as is usually the case in Italy when private property is involved. McDonald's spent around 300,000 euros, or about \$315,000, on the restoration project.

The road was excavated, documented and enclosed in a gallery with a glass roof, so that patrons of the restaurant can look down on it. The entrance to the gallery is separate and can be visited by anyone, not just McDonald's customers.

Given its remoteness from major attractions, the site is unlikely to attract many tourists, although explanatory panels in Italian and English have been installed throughout the site. School groups from nearby towns began arriving on Tuesday, when the site officially opened to the public.

The gallery is closed off by a gate and monitored with surveillance cameras, and McDonald's Italia has pledged to pay for its upkeep. "That's the most important thing, guaranteeing its constant maintenance," said Ms. Russo, who added that Culture Ministry officials would periodically check on the site. "It's easy to excavate," she added. "The more critical operation is to preserve a site."

"We're proud to be here, giving this Roman road," said Mario Federico, managing director of McDonald's Italia, who said it was the first time the restaurant chain had encountered the need for "a solution of this kind" in Italy.



ELISABETTA POVOLEDO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A stretch of Roman road that was an offshoot of the Appian Way was discovered during the construction of a McDonald's in Marino, Italy, on the outskirts of Rome.

