

The humanity of a better Italy, behind the stories of those putting out the flames

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“Are you from the Pro Loco?”

“No, I’m from Ganna, and I want to help those who are saving my woods.” The world of the base camp volunteers is one of a kind, as **Elisa** explained, in only a few words. For days, she has been waiting tables and helping out in the kitchen. And there have been dozens of others like her: a lot of passion, work, tiredness and smiles. **In a word: humanity. In two: a better Italy.**

The world of the base camp is one in which radios are used to communicate, and where maps clutter the tables. But it is also an environment in which you can see the solidarity that is often just chat. **The solidarity of the men and women, who have spent days on the mountains putting out the fire, is quite familiar**, but the solidarity that has been created around them, maybe not.

On Friday, when the sun rose after the first night of fire, there was already the first base camp on the frozen meadow in San Gemolo. It had been set up by the members of the Red Cross, who had brought their mobile office there and installed a heated gazebo in front of it, with tables and electricity. **A luxury, in a place where the temperature has never been higher than zero.**

And while the volunteers were climbing the mountains to build fire barriers, they began to think about where they would find some food. It took just a couple of phone calls, and the bakers and the delicatessen at the **Tigros Supermarket** began to prepare hundreds of sandwiches, and sent 350 bags, each containing two sandwiches, two bottles of water and a sweet. But then, the number of volunteers increased and there were not enough sandwiches. But here too, another simple phone call resolved everything: in a short time, two minivans full of food set off from the **Centro Polivalente Anziani, in Induno Olona**.

In the meantime, many people who love these valleys began wondering what they could do to help those who were tirelessly putting out the fire. A 9-year-old boy, who dreams of becoming a firefighter when he grows up, was one of the first. With his father, he arrived on the lawn with a bag of thermos flasks full of hot tea and coffee. He began to walk around the camp, going up to the volunteers and firemen, offering them a steaming cup that warmed not only their bodies, but also their hearts.

Many people started doing the same. On the other side of the highway from the **Baita San Gemolo** agritourism, the **Red Cross** workers went back and forth with large pots containing tea and boxes full of pizza. On the following days, cakes, some panettoni and thermos flasks also began to appear. **On 6 January, there were even camels made of puff pastry**, to remind those who were

fighting the fires that it was Epiphany.

Then came Sunday, the most difficult day. It was the day when it was thought the fire had been beaten, when many volunteers thought they would be able to go back to their normal lives, to their families and their work, the following day. But it was not the case. The wind rekindled the hotspots, pushing the fire to the edge of the base camp and forcing everyone to evacuate. The gazebos were closed, the tables, dismantled, and the generators, loaded onto vans, to reach the new *operation centre*: Prato Airolo, the party area near the Town Hall in Ganna.

And while the volunteers were returning to the front, the telephones of the men and women of the **Pro Loco in Valganna** began to ring. For days, these volunteers (also with the help of the general public) took care of those who passed through the base camp, preparing lunches and dinners, with tea and coffee always ready, cutting the cakes and panettoni that were sent.

Also because they received a lot of help. On Monday evening, a phone call came in to the base camp. "What shall I do? Shall I bring some risotto?" The call was from the restaurant **Tre Risotti**, who arrived, a few hours later, with a gigantic pot filled with saffron and sausage risotto. As well as Land Rovers, with the woodland fire service badges, and the **Fire Service** tankers, at one point, another van arrived, with **Carlsberg** printed on its side. When they had been reassured that the flames would not reach the brewery in Induno Olona, they decided to thank those working on the mountains, with what is created in those mountains: Poretti beer.

And at a certain point, bottles of sparkling wine also appeared on the tables of the base camp. Fate occasionally plays a trick: the director of the Campo dei Fiori Park, Giancarlo Bernasconi, **turned 60 just as his mountains were shrouded in fire.** There were smiles and slaps on the back, to ease the tension and remind us that life goes on. And on Monday, when a glass was put in the hand of the head of the fire-fighting operations, **Alessandro De Buck**, his message was clear: **"Yes, let's drink, but the real celebration will be when it starts raining."**