

Geology

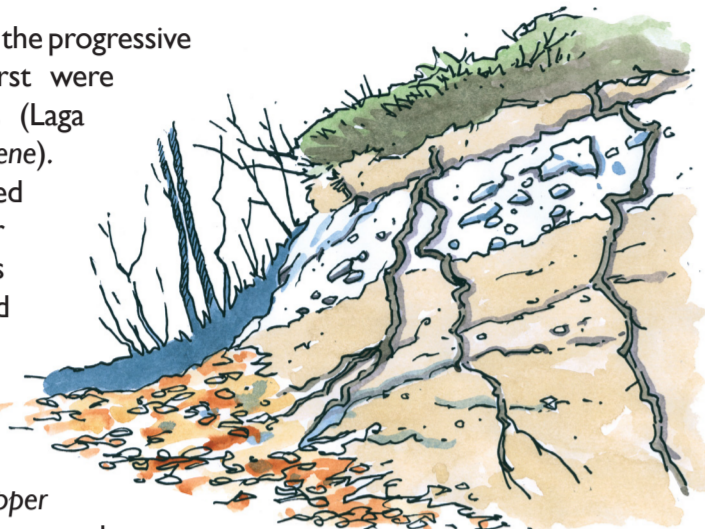
History of the places

Archeology

History of men

Lazio has been shaped by volcanoes, we could say with a joke. The African plate pushes towards North and wedges under the Eurasian continental plate. The result of the enormous forces that drive **continental drift** produces compression and distension belts along which several volcanic complexes have grown, from the Vulsino Volcano to the Ponziane Islands.

Lazio's **geological landscape** is characterized by a great diversity. On the North-West – South-East axis we can find the great mountain range of the Apennines, produced by the crash between the two continental African and Eurasian plates. This dynamic is still ongoing, with the progressive uplift of elevations that at first were made by deep sea sediments (Laga Mountains *Triassic – middle Miocene*). Or else we can meet rugged landscapes including either "scarp" geological formations or sediments of the so called "Laziale Abruzzese carbonate platform", gathered along the ocean edge (Simbruini, Ernici, Mainarde, Meta, Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci Mountains *Lias – upper Cretaceous*). Transition areas between these two main geological domains form minor ranges such as the Sabini, Lucretili and Prenestini Mountains.

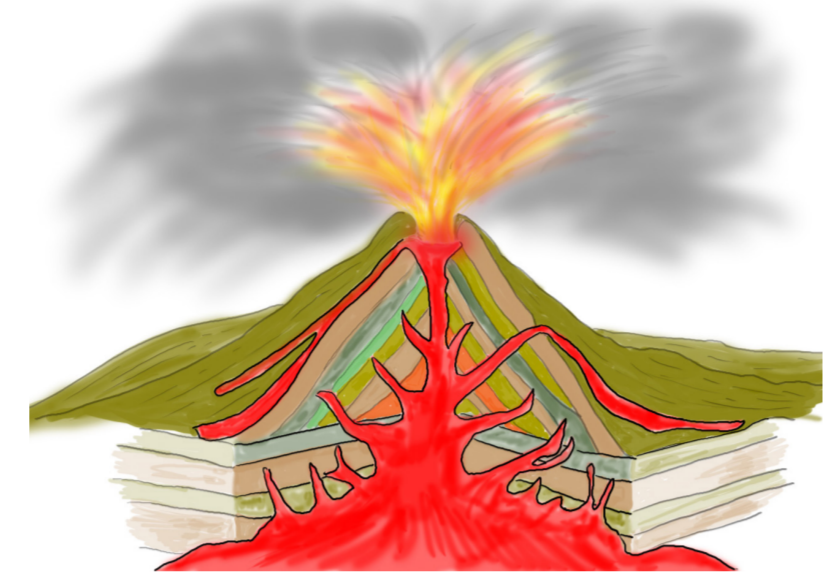


In recent times, biogeographical research of this sector of the Italian peninsula was revitalised by a new light: in many areas of the South Eastern part of Lazio (Prenestini, Lepini and Ausoni Mountains) many **dinosaur footprints were discovered**, among which the spectacular tracks of **Sezze** and **Esperia**. It seems likely that, apart from marine environments, these places also hosted land areas able to support and feed these great prehistoric reptiles.

The birth of the **Tyrrhenian Sea** is linked to the development of wide volcanic systems throughout the whole Pleistocene (from 2.6 million years ago), that certainly characterize the coastal North-Western and Central areas of the region: **Vulsino, Vicano** and **Sabatino** volcanic districts. Each of these volcanic landscapes is interested by collapse calderas that currently host wide lakes such as **Bolsena, Vico** and **Bracciano**. In these areas streams and creeks that cut through volcanic plateaus produce erosion shapes such as **gorges**, that are **canyons** of stunning beauty.

In the Southern sector of the present river Tiber valley stands the **Vulcano Laziale** whose activity continued up to recent periods.

During the Quaternary, the **recent geological and paleontological history** of the Lazio region appears extremely interesting thanks to the findings that witness human presence since the most remote prehistory.



Along the coastal plains, ancient and recent **dune deposits** testify our most latest history. The same happens with alluvial sediments in the valley of the river **Tiber**, whose riverbed slowly migrated from South towards North due to the birth of the **Colli Albani** volcanic complex. This geographic edge somehow divides the region into two parts thus representing a physical but also a cultural limit that for many centuries has conditioned Italy's pre-roman cultures.

The **course of the first human settlements** in Lazio, the evolution of strategies for the exploitation of resources and soil, the models of frequentation, at first with temporary settlements that later turned into sedentary, cover an extraordinary span of time and highlight that our region is a precious place to study the evolutionary dynamics of anthropic action.

The **man of Ceprano** is probably the first and most ancient finding of the Homo genus in Italy and one of the most ancient in Europe. With the discovery of the famous Neanderthal skulls of **Saccopastore** Rome has also become the capital of prehistory... And what to say about the incredible prehistoric environment of the Mount Circeo area with the **Guattari Cave** skull? These are just a few witnesses of the most ancient human frequentation of our peninsula. A process that, thanks to the presence of water and its importance for agriculture and breeding, displays the development of important settlements mainly around volcanic lakes. The Marmotta Neolithic settlement close to **Lake Bracciano** is not the only one, but for sure a very remarkable example.



The **development of protohistoric communities** at the end of Bronze Age and the beginning of Iron Age shows the change of the settlement pattern from small scattered centres to the growth of proto-urban cores that gradually become more complex and extensive. These first embryonic towns will later produce the strongly characterized world of Etruscan culture and the widespread network of the Italic people.

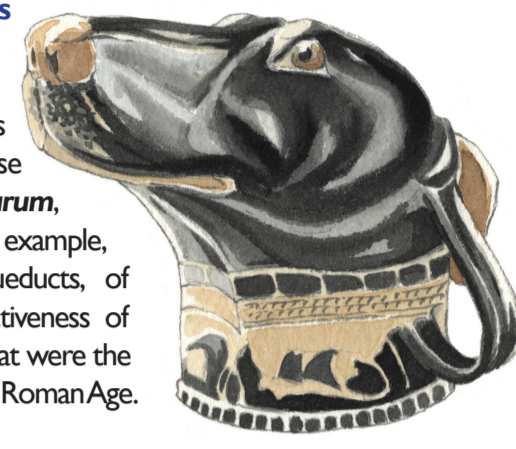


Lazio has an **incredible archaeological richness**, made for example by the complex acropolises and funerary treasures of **Tarquinia, Caere, Veio, Vulci, Praeneste**. These places characterize our region with the heart of a cultural process that builds the bases for the birth of what will become one of history's greatest empires, **Rome**.

All the region is marked by the traces of republican romanization, at first, and the following total control of the Roman empire.

The **whole territory appears** strongly conditioned by Roman presence. From the urban harbour infrastructures represented by the settlements of **Ostia** and **Portus** to the spectacular evidences of **Villa Adriana**, Tivoli, and the whole **Tibur** archaeological complex, up to the town of **Tusculum** and the imposing countryside settlement system made by the **rustic villas** or the seaside villas in coastal areas.

Along the **major routes** passed the spreading of culture and important transformation processes took place. Among these the via Appia, **Regina Viarum**, is the most spectacular example, together with the aqueducts, of the perfection and effectiveness of infrastructural systems, that were the true cardinal points of the Roman Age.



With the **fall of the Roman empire** a new settlement model begins to prevail, the large estates, that soon become the embryo of wide **ecclesiastic land properties**. In the meanwhile, power begins to focus in and around the first **fortified centres** that later, in the XI and XII centuries, slowly turn to **medieval castles**. From now on starts another evolutionary phase for the traditional settlement system of the Lazio villages, that have been continuously inhabited up to the present times.



Environment

History of nature

Landscape

History of the land

"**Lazio naturally diverse**" is the title of a past exhibition whose aim was to describe the biological richness of our region and, at the same time, account the fast growth of a protected areas system that nowadays covers some **13.8% of the whole regional extension**.



Lazio still hosts, fortunately, a big amount of different plant and animal species. Even if this is only one of the many aspects that experts call "biodiversity", it's surely a relevant fact which enables a good assessment of the regional state of the environment. This richness is facilitated by the position and structure of our region. **Almost 400 kilometres** of rocky or sandy coasts, several Apennine peaks over 2,000 metres high, lakes, rivers, plains and hills. And more... karst caves, sulphur springs, and we could still continue.

This **environmental diversity** enables a **great variety of plant and animal species**.



That's the reason why a region whose extension barely reaches the 6% of the national surface hosts more than **50% of the Italian natural heritage**, with some **30,000 animal species** officially surveyed and **3,500 plant species**. More than 40% of superior plants, or 50% of orchid species, or 40% of amphibians and reptiles living in Italy, just to make a few examples.

Let's have an **imaginary walk** starting from the coast, where we can find **tropical plants** like the dwarf palm. If we arrive to mountain peaks we can meet **typical species of the Arctic tundra** such as Saxifraga.

Lazio offers food and shelter to symbolic animals of central Italy, like the **Marsican brown bear**, as well as endemic plants of small islands, like Ventotene's **sea-lavender**. These rare or endemic species must surely be protected, but the same should be for any other important and unique biodiversity element.

Not all species are obviously characterized by an optimal state of conservation, as experts would say, but it's mainly thanks to our protected areas system that today we can state that the claim "**Lazio naturally diverse**" is still valid.



Lazio's **high geomorphologic diversity** has produced the existence of many different landscapes, either natural and vegetal landscapes.



In the **North Western** part of the region, **Maremma** and **Tuscia** areas are dominated by the wide Pleistocene volcanic districts that gradually and gently slope towards the coast. Unlimited plateaus cut through by **deep ravines** dug by **fluvial erosion** produce a unique landscape, where the volcanic tuff-stone brownish colour prevails and can particularly be appreciated at sunset.

Long dune systems often hide a **flat coast** whose sand is rich in iron and magnesium minerals, coming from the erosion of **volcanic districts**, that give the beach a dark shade. In the Eastern part of the region landscapes are mostly linked to the **Tiber valley**, whose river slowly flows towards the "Urbe". On one side of the valley the Etruscan landscape of North Western Lazio, on the other the Sabina sweetly waving clayish hills, dominated towards East by the rocky landscapes of the Apennine mountains.

From the peaks of the **Rieti province**, North, a complex system of parallel mountain ridges runs towards South East. Here we can meet the **Gran Sasso** and **Laga Mountains** park, the Terminillo group, and the **Sabini, Salto – Cicolano, Lucretili, Simbruini** and **Ernici** mountain chains. In the Southern part of the region stand the isolated groups of the **Lepini, Aurunci** and **Ausoni** mountains, that imposingly overlook the **Tyrrhenian Sea**.

The **Grand Tour travellers**, during their educational trips, were also attracted by the **Roman Countryside** landscape, full of history and emotions. These areas have been immortalized by innumerable artists and their paintings represent a valuable witness of a historic landscape.

We cannot forget the coastal areas South of Rome where a widespread and well-preserved dune system is the natural access to the sea for the **Castelporziano** Presidential Estate. Or, moreover, the hills of Rome par excellence, that is the Alban volcanic district, also called **Castelli Romani**, with the enchanting lakes of Castelgandolfo and Nemi. Or, finally, the view offered in Tivoli by the Temple of Vesta along the Aniene river.



In the middle of the Tyrrhenian Sea, the **Ponziane islands** offer many keys to the visitors. From the various shades of colour that **Ponza** and **Palmarola** volcanic rocks display when light changes, to the overhanging cliffs of **Ventotene**.

