

## SICILY'S 2,000 YEAR OLD CHESTNUT TREE

On the lower slopes of Sicily's volcano, Mount Etna, is a remarkable 2,000 year old chestnut tree. This tree is known as the '**Castagno del Cento Cavalli**' or the '**100 Horses Chestnut Tree**' because it is said to have sheltered 100 horses and their cavalier riders from a thunderstorm when they were escorting the young Queen of Naples, Joan (Giovanna) of Aragon (1326 -1386). A number of historical paintings from the 1700s and 1800s depict this event. It is possible that the tree may even be 4,000 years old.

Still producing chestnuts, it is now also known by UNESCO as the '**Castagna Tree of Peace**'. It is a multi-trunked tree, 22m tall with a canopy about 160m in circumference. It is the **Castanea sativa** variety. There is a protective fence around the tree.

It is situated in a landscape of chestnuts and vineyards between Taormina and Catania near the beautiful village of San Alfio. The tree is not particularly in the tourist literature for the area, but it is extremely worthwhile to seek it out. There is a little cafe nearby the tree site, and more in San Alfio.

Stanley chestnut growers, David and Helen McIntyre & Jane and Brian Casey from *Cheznuts* Eurobin, visited this UNESCO tree in October, 2017. There is a book titled **Un Castagno, Una Regina** (pub 2000) with a lot more information - in Italian - as well as many images of paintings, etchings and maps. They would like to thank Chestnuts Australia grower Richard Moxham, for loaning them this book before the trip and inspiring their quest to visit the tree. It was an extraordinary experience to visit such an ancient tree, indeed a sacred tree, which was dropping her chestnuts that day in the European autumn.

