Penn Museum has launched a new expedition. Explicitly for undergraduates of the University, it is a summer school based in Montalcino, southern Tuscany. Our research design is very straightforward: we are investigating two sites associated with a 7th century monastery in the picturesque Val d’Asso, a UNESCO World Heritage landscape since 2004. But the archaeology in many respects comes second to the day-to-day management of the students. All new to archaeology, their first challenge is to come to terms with each other, living six to a room in three classrooms in the Montalcino school. The showers are in a neighboring block, to which they scuttle after a day’s digging under the Tuscan sun. Breakfast is in a bar with fresh-baked cornetti, an Italian version of the croissant. Lunch is provided by the comune or town hall, as is dinner: healthy Italian fare washed down with the town’s celebrated Brunello red wine. Coming to terms with each other and their living circumstances pretty much occupied the initial week. Meanwhile, they all appear born to pick-axing, then recording out in the 38 degree Centigrade heat (over 100 degrees Fahrenheit). Their bravura is infectious. The Italian trench supervisors are impressed by their disciplined dedication and, in equal measure, their unalloyed enthusiasm. Having cleaned the foundation of a 10th century tower, one of the students films the results, then turns to film the panorama reaching over to the high hazy outline of Monte Amiata. Field archaeology for the most part is not rocket science; it is about discipline and the pursuit of logically arranged answers to questions posed by the material remains. Our task each evening is to illustrate this in the makeshift classroom and to demonstrate how the summer school’s endeavors are making a contribution to Tuscan history. More than this, though, we are aiming to show how the place we are excavating might become a further asset for the prosperous tourist industry based here. By doing this we reciprocate the gift of the school and the food provided by the amenable comune. Then, too, as the robot drone—a small helicopter-like device that carries a camera—has arrived today to make a photogrammetric record of the site, our expedition is introducing the many new instruments that, along with all the other age-old ones, make field archaeology perpetually fascinating. Most of all, seeing the past through the eyes of these first-timers, we realize how lucky we are to be archaeologists.

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