



Truffle Pursuit

Italy's Piedmont gets down and dirty over the ethereal white tubers.

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID LYON

“**T**ASTA, TASTA! SNÜFLA, SNÜFLA!” Giorgio Romagnolo whispers insistently to his white hound in the Piedmontese dialect of northern Italy. (“Taste, taste! Sniff, sniff!”) “*Cerca, cerca!*” (“Search, search!”)

We are deep in the woods in the dark of night. Nose to the ground, Romagnolo’s dog, Diana, flashes like an apparition in and out of the undergrowth. Silent as a snake, she dashes beneath shrubs and snuffles around an ancient oak’s root line, pausing at a clump of lindens before bolting into a gully. Romagnolo and I follow by starlight, slipping and sliding on the

wet leaves and muddy loam of the hillside.

“She smells it,” Romagnolo says in French, our common tongue. “Watch! Here she comes.”

The dog sprints up from the gully in a dead run, following a drainage line to a towering oak at the edge of a clearing. She stops as if she has hit a wall, then digs frantically at the roots. Romagnolo dives for the dog, restraining her by the collar and cooing softly to calm her. He switches on a flashlight and probes the earth with a small pick.

Thrusting his hand into the soil up to the wrist, Romagnolo twists his fingers, tugs gently, and extracts a lump that is a little smaller than

Nosing around at the Alba White Truffle Festival, a monthlong celebration held every October.