CONTENTS

SUMMARY 3
CONTEXT OF THE CAMP 5
REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE 8
  FARM LA JUNQUERA 8
  FARM EL ENTREDICHO 9
RESTORATION WORK 10
  TREE PLANTING 11
TEACHING SESSIONS 14
  SOIL ASSESSMENT 14
  REGENERATIVE BUSINESS 15
  HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT 16
  TREE PRUNING 18
  RAINWATER HARVESTING 18
  MICROORGANISMS REPRODUCTION 19
  PLANT PROPAGATION 20
  NATURAL BEEKEEPING 20
  COOKING LOCAL FOOD 21
SOCIAL IMPACT 22
CAMP EVALUATION 23
VOICES FROM CAMPERS 25
CONCLUSION 27
SUMMARY

Camp Altiplano hosted a two-week Restoration Experience from January 27 to February 7, 2020 and welcomed 10 diverse, enthusiastic people from 6 countries for a regenerative, practical, and educational program. The land of the camp belongs to the regenerative farm La Junquera in the region of Murcia, in southeastern Spain. This Ecosystem Restoration Camp course was organised by Silvia Quarta, the new Altiplano camp coordinator, in partnership with La Junquera, Regeneration Academy, and Alvelal, a local regenerative farmers’ cooperative.

The purpose was to learn about the causes of and solutions for ecosystem degradation in the context of a continental, dry climate and to join local restoration efforts. Participants were inspired by connecting with like-hearted people and making a life-giving contribution in the face of ecological crises. Together the campers engaged in hands-on restoration activities, mainly tree planting to restore natural areas, as well as teaching sessions about agricultural solutions and regenerative practices by fantastic local experts.

Silvia Quarta teaching about rainwater harvesting at Camp Altiplano

Alfonso Chico de Guzmán sharing about farmland restoration at Finca La Junquera by Patagonia
The blended theoretical and practical learning included topics and activities such as:

- Doing a visual soil assessment to evaluate soil health and biology
- Planting native, locally adapted trees and bushes for natural restoration
- Understanding the history, land use, and human development in the region
- Developing a regenerative business using the lean business canvas model
- Learning about holistic management and holistic grazing with animals
- Taking care of and pruning young almond trees at the camp
- Reproducing local, indigenous microorganisms to revive soils
- Learning about rainwater harvesting, erosion control, swales, and keyline design
- Propagating plants with seeds and cuttings to start an on-site nursery
- Cooking, preserving, and fermenting local products to make delicious food
- Learning about regenerative beekeeping and the hive intelligence of bees
- Exploring regenerative agricultural best practices at two local farms

Altogether, it was an inspirational, collaborative, and educational experience! Camp Altiplano will continue to offer restoration experiences, courses, holidays, and retreats for international and local people as well as corporate training – to breathe back life into the region.
In April 2017 Camp Altiplano was established as the first camp of the Ecosystem Restoration Camps, a non-profit foundation supporting research, training, and community engagement in large-scale ecosystem restoration. The camp is located on 5 hectares of land belonging to the regenerative farm and small settlement La Junquera. At 1,100 meters of elevation, the farm is in a high steppe ecosystem with a semi-arid climate and an average annual rainfall of 250 mm. The extreme weather conditions and severe degradation caused by deforestation, industrial agriculture, water exploitation, and climate change make it a challenging case for restoration.
Murcia is one of the lowest-income regions in Spain with high levels of rural to urban migration caused by a lack of employment opportunities due to agriculture becoming more industrial, centralised and competitive. It is an example of how land degradation is intricately connected with an erosion of social fabric. The first campers arrived at an empty ex-barley field on this remote mountain plateau. But a lot has changed over the past years thanks to all the volunteers' efforts to restore the soil, plant trees, harvest water, and build the necessary infrastructure to host earth restorers on site. After three years, the first results are visible and Camp Altiplano is part of a growing network for ecological and social regeneration.
REGIONAL CLIMATE DATA

AVERAGE YEARLY RAINFALL IN MM (1980-2015)

Average monthly rainfall in mm (Topares, 1980-2015)

Mean daily temperatures

July
Max 32°C (average hottest 35°C)
Min 17°C (average coldest 12°C)

January
Max 11°C (average hottest 18°C)
Min 1°C (average coldest -5°C)

Rainfall/Evaporation rate

Average annual rainfall
200-250 mm

Average precipitation
0.832 mm/day

Average potential evapotranspiration 2.732 mm/day

Wind

SWW Prevailing in late Autumn to Spring. Strongest in December
La Junquera is an organic farm that is being revitalised, diversified, and transformed into a regenerative farm and inspirational example for local farmers, the community, and the region. The vision is to showcase how a farm can generate an economic income while reviving the community and restoring soils, water cycles, and the landscape. The owner, Alfonso Chico de Guzmán, works in line with the holistic, science-based, and practical 4 Returns framework developed by Commonland to restore landscapes by focusing on the return of inspiration and social, natural, and financial capital.
The farm consists of 1,100 hectares of hilly land, of which 800 hectares are agricultural land and 300 hectares natural zones with an average elevation of 1,100 meters. The production is focused on heritage grains, some legumes as well as a nut agroforestry system with almonds, pistachio, and walnuts. Alongside those, Alfonso grows fruit trees like apples and cherries, as well as grapevines, vegetables, and aromatics. Some of the land is rented out to shepherds for their sheep to graze. In addition, the farm is trying to bring back a forgotten local breed of cows, together with chickens and pigs for eggs and meat production.

Regenerative agricultural practices put into place include rainwater harvesting with ponds, swales, rock lines, and keyline design (most of the farm is rain-fed without any irrigation); soil building through limited tilling, cover crops, holistic grazing (manure), compost, and microorganism application; and plants grown in poly-cultures, crop rotations, alley cropping, or other agroforestry systems. Moreover, the farm works to restore its natural zones by planting native trees and shrubs to bring back biodiversity and habitats for birds, snakes, toads, frogs, dragonflies, and other animals.

**FARM EL ENTREDICHO**

During the restoration experience the group went on a day visit to another local farm, El Entredicho, a 750-hectare organic farm and member of the regenerative farming association Alvelal. The owner, Rafael, gave us a tour to show their nut production with almonds, pistachio, and walnuts grown in a silvopasture system integrated with forage and animal grazing. Besides a lovely walk around the farm, we also saw their tractor and seeding machine, visited the small nut factory, and enjoyed lunch and the Spanish hospitality.

**5 CORE PRINCIPLES OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE**
As a practical activity, we joined the farm work and planted some almond trees, replacing the ones that died after the first year and learning about how the soil quality differs around the land and impacts the trees’ growth, as well as how to properly plant and give them the best survival chance. We also met the shepherd walking with his herd of sheep and dog to graze the land. At El Entredicho the goal is to transform the land from mainly annual grain production with the need for tillage and limited harvest to perennial nut-based silvopasture systems to conserve and restore soils and produce higher yields.

RESTORATION WORK

In the hilly landscape of Murcia, the removal of the tree and shrub layer has caused soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and degeneration of the ecological functioning of the land. Therefore a major activity of the camp program was to restore one of the natural areas of the farm and support nature to grow back into its original form, a Mediterranean oak forest. The restoration plan developed by a farm intern was to plant native, local, and well-adapted trees and diversify the species. We planted holm oak (Quercus llex), aleppo pine (Pinus Halepensis), terebinth (Pistacia terebinthus), black hawthorn (Rhamnus lycioides), saltbush (Atriplex halimus), and rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis). Juniper and retama were also in the plan, but they were not available at the local nursery.

We arrived at the natural area, a hillside with a view of the camp, with the goal to plant 1,000 trees together. The maps on page 13 show the natural area planned for restoration activities during the 2 weeks and then the land we actually worked on and tracked to plant trees. We learned the practical details of a proper planting technique to ensure a high survival rate and accelerate natural regeneration. We also counted the trees and all together planted an amazing 980 plants, almost reaching our goal of 1000! The tree planting was one of the highlights for the group, and over time we got more skilled and effective. Many participants felt inspired to continue planting trees (in their homes) beyond the camp.
**TREE PLANTING**

Tree planting experiences at Camp Altiplano showed that plantings in hand-dug holes had a very low survival rate due to high compaction, poor soil quality, and extreme weather. Experience showed that digging half-meter-deep holes with an excavator and moving the soil highly increased the survival. Besides loosening the soil, the holes collect water, create shade, and act as a windshield for the young trees. Starting from the dugout holes we used a clear step-by-step planting process for doing restoration work. In step one we loosened and moved the soil with a hoe in the prepared hole to reduce compaction, enable better water filtration, and make space for the young tree – at least 2-3 times wider and about the same depth as the root ball.
Photo series of the step-by-step tree planting process with campers David and Veronika
Secondly, we dug a little trench on both sides of the hole facing uphill, creating a v-shape to collect extra run-off water in this semi-arid climate. Into the hole, we added compost to give the trees a nutrient and microbial boost for increased fertility. We checked the root ball for circling roots, breaking or straightening them as needed. Then we planted the trees gently and firmly into the ground, making sure to pack the soil around the roots to eliminate air pockets, as they may dry out and damage the roots. Finally, we added a piece of cardboard as mulch around the young trees as well as placing rocks on the cardboard and around the tree to collect moisture, create shade, and offer a supportive micro-climate for growth.

We used cardboard as a mulch to hold moisture, moderate temperature extremes, reduce weed competition, and feed the soil. After several days of planting trees, we ran out of cardboard and continued to collect grass and any other organic matter on-site, which was very little, and at the end only used rocks placed around the tree. As another alternative and in addition to compost you may want to apply biochar, microorganisms, mycorrhiza power, or other soil amendments. Finally, watering and follow-up care are the last steps in a successful planting process and important to ensure the tree’s well-being. Once the trees survive the first year, they have a good chance to continue growing.

Map of the natural restoration work and tree planting done at a hill in one of the natural zones of La Junquera farm from Jan - Feb 2020.

Size of total area restored: 0.518 hectare or 5180 square meters.
SOIL ASSESSMENT

At the base of any restoration efforts or agricultural production lies soil. We learned about healthy soil as a living organism, one that needs minerals and thriving soil life. The soil food web is a term used to describe the community of plants, rhizobacteria, and mycorrhizae fungi growing at plants' roots, along with the many other animals living in synergistic relationships and exchanging minerals, water, and sugars produced by the plant through photosynthesis. The bacteria and fungi offer the plant protection, increase root surface, increase absorption, and act as a transport system for nutrients.

Healthy soils are also carbon-rich and have high humus content, the end product of the breakdown of organic matter by bacteria, fungi, microbes, and animals such as earthworms, nematodes, protozoa, or arthropods. This transformation is called humification and forms stable, permanent structures of organic polymers enriching the soil as humus like a battery storing energy in the soil. Key agriculture techniques we discussed that build soils are no or minimum tillage, deep ripping (for compacted soils), mulching, cover crops, green manures, application of compost (compost tea), biochar, and reproduction of (indigenous) microorganisms.

“SOIL IS A LIVING ORGANISM” BY THE PLANT HEALTH CURE
For the practical part, we learned to do a visual soil assessment as a reliable, quick, and easy tool – complementary to professional lab tests - to assess one’s soil condition, inform decisions, and understand the impacts of agricultural practices. This way of testing relies on our five senses to collect data on the key indicators of soil structure and composition, organic matter content based on colour and smell, root content, soil cover, and water infiltration capacity. We walked around the farm in small groups to pick two different spots for our visual soil assessment, made a hypothesis first, and then evaluated and compared the soil quality.

It was an engaging experience to share learnings and connect physically to the soil under our feet. Building a relationship to soil made a big impression on campers like Marinka, who shared: “Before I joined the camp I had never paid much attention to soil, and since I got back I am digging in the dirt and smelling it wherever I go ;-)” Soil is essential for ecosystem functionality and the production of food, fibre, and energy, as well as for erosion control, nutrient abatement, water infiltration, carbon sequestration, climate regulation, pest control, and biodiversity. Healthy soils are intrinsically linked with healthy plants and thus healthy food, healthy people, and a healthy planet.

**REGENERATIVE BUSINESS**

Who would have thought business planning could be regenerative and fun? Thanks to the enthusiastic facilitation of Jacobo Monereo and the playful engagement of the entire group – no matter their business skills and liking – it actually was. He taught us about the lean business canvas, a model and template to create a clear, practical, and visual one-page business plan. This framework can be used to design a start-up or develop an existing business and includes all key elements from target customers, their needs and your relationships, to the solutions your business provides to things like your unique value proposition, key activities, resources, partners, revenue streams and cost structure.

We worked in two small groups to come up with a creative business idea based on two random words that we had each written down on paper before. Step-by-step and with the guidance of Jacobo we moved through the elements of the lean business canvas to develop a regenerative business idea. The model helped to organise our thinking, collaborate as a team, share our vision, and understand potential customers, their needs, and what we could offer to meet them. The essential cornerstone of every business is its unique value proposition, which is a special, innovative good or service that creates value and links the problem or necessity of a customer with a practical solution. It was wonderful to learn some business basics and tools that can help to make ecological regeneration financially viable.
HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT

Most farmers in Spain are financially dependent on state and EU subsidies and external inputs. It is urgent time to re-connect to the ancestral and nature-based knowledge like the traditional silvopasture system of olive trees, grass, and livestock or oak trees and pigs. This is where holistic management comes in. A value-based decision-making framework developed by South African Allan Savory on holistic management integrates planning for all of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of agriculture. It focuses on the four basic ecosystem processes: water cycles, nutrient cycle (minerals and carbon), energy flow, and community dynamics and is a regenerative approach to rangeland and livestock management.

In an introduction to holistic management, Andres Fajardo, veterinary and livestock manager, explained to us the holistic grazing system: short, intense grazing periods for fertilization and controlled soil disruption, with no overgrazing, followed by livestock movement to allow sufficient rest for the land. It mimics the natural patterns of herbivores pressured by predators. The key is to keep the balance between animal movement and the time of plant and soil regeneration. The foundation is observing nature and whole-systems thinking to understand the system of influence, define goals, plan ecological processes, assume you get it wrong, and pro-actively change and learn.
To get some hands-on experience, we went outside to put up an electric fence for the cows to see how holistic grazing could be done. Thanks to an electrician in our group we also learned about the physics of electricity and the practical application for solar batteries and fences. It was a group effort to place the poles in the ground, connect them with wire and a small solar battery and finally to test if it works. Getting shocked means the fence works! The plan is to do holistic grazing with the small herd of cows in the natural areas and steeper hills of the farm, where agricultural production is not possible. The cows are well adapted to the extreme climate of this region and do well just feeding on whatever they can forage. They want to test this system even though it is more time and labour intensive.
**TREE PRUNING**

Along with planting trees, taking care of them is an essential skill. For this workshop, we went to the Camp Altiplano site to learn how to prune the young almond trees growing there. The almond trees were about 2 years old and the pruning is done to ensure healthy, balanced growth. We cut many of the branches off, leaving 3-4 strong branches with maximum distance between them and facing upwards to shape the tree top. We also cut the tips of the main branches to about 15-20 cm in length with the last bud facing upwards. For trees with many chaotic, small branches lacking the pattern described above we cut all branches off, which gives the tree a reset to start new growth. It is important to make clear, clean cuts and use good garden shears for the job. Pruning stimulates and directs the tree’s growth and is done annually to keep high productivity and good health in the agroforestry systems.

**RAINWATER HARVESTING**

Since the climate in this region is semi-arid with an average annual rainfall of 250 mm or less and is becoming increasingly erratic, rainwater harvesting is vital for the camp and farm. Silvia taught us about various strategies and techniques to store rainwater, such as collecting the run-off from roofs in water tanks using filters depending on the water quality and using fog collectors to capture water from the air through condensation. Water can also be collected from the ground by using a foil to cover the soil, placing rocks around plants as microstructures, creating swales on contour rock lines, planting on keylines, and making dams or ponds for larger-scale water retention. The goal is to slow water down and disperse it so it can actually infiltrate and sink into the ground, eventually replenishing aquifers and springs.

On the farm Alfonso has created 60 ponds, 5 of them at the camp, to capture water in the rainy seasons. The farm also applies the keyline design developed by P. A. Yeomans in Australia, to maximise the beneficial use of water as it
works well for large farms using machines for production. First, you have to understand the watershed and landscape to find the “keypoint”, a topographic feature where the lower, leveler portion of a valley shifts to become steeper. The keyline is the contour line (all points on the same elevation) going through the keypoint and follows the natural shape of the land. Cultivation then follows the same patterns in parallel (and “off-contour”) above and below the keyline to redirect water from the centre to the ridges and to prevent erosion. This helps to work towards zero run-off and erosion, which means all water is held in the soils and biosphere.

MICROORGANISMS REPRODUCTION

As mentioned before reproducing and applying indigenous microorganisms to the soil can really kick-start vitality so long as the soil provides enough food and protection for microbes to thrive. For this simple reproduction technique, we first collected leaf mulch and humus from the planting hillside to have a diversity of local soil biology to reproduce. The recipe calls for combining 50g of humus and leaf mulch with 100g of cooked mashed potatoes and 50g of sea (or rock) salt – high mineral content is important – and adding these ingredients inside of cotton bags into a barrel with 50 litres of water. Many other recipes include molasses, honey, or sugar to feed the microbes, but here we used potato starch instead.

We let the mixture sit in the barrel at room temperature, ideally the same temperature as the environment so the same natural microbes will thrive and not below 18 °C, for a few days until a whitish disk started forming on the surface. The microbe brew is ready once the disk is at its largest and stays like that for 12 hours, which we did not get to see due to the short time of the program. At that point, you would stop the process and use the brew diluted 1:10 with water on the land because waiting too long would mean the microorganisms run out of food and die. The benefit comes from reproducing local, indigenous microorganisms that are perfectly adapted to this environment and using them to nourish and boost vitality in the soil. The microbe brew we made is planned to be used to water the young trees we planted and to compare that to a “water only” control plot to see the difference.
PLANT PROPAGATION

Another workshop taught by Silvia focused on plant propagation, which is different for cultivated and wild plants. The former are chosen for good growth, taste, and yield while the latter are selected for maximum resilience and diversity. Some seeds are dormant and need to be activated first e.g. through high (or low) temperatures, being soaked in water, being fermented, or rubbing seeds with sandpaper to destroy their protective outer layer before planting so they will actually germinate. Storing seeds works best in a dry, dark, and temperature-controlled space and in local community-based seed banks.

To learn propagation in practice, the group went out to make cuttings (10-15 cm long) from rosemary, lavender, poplar tree, and wild rose. We removed the lower leaves, then used potting compost to plant them in pots and trays.

We also planted the seeds of Retama sphaerocarpa, a native bush and nitrogen fixer, after they had been soaking in hot water for 24 hours. This is the start of a little nursery at Camp Altiplano. Another good technique that we learned about but did not do is making your own rooting hormones using water from cooked, blended lentils or willow branches/leaves with an optional addition of honey and cinnamon for their antibacterial function. This gives an extra boost to grow the roots of plant cuttings.

NATURAL BEEKEEPING

At La Junquera farm the bees live in a gully to be protected from the extreme winds, with the hive facing south (bees follow the sun) and next to a walnut tree for summer shade and winter sunshine. The bees are kept in a natural, biodynamic way with minimal, gentle interference by humans, no feeding of sugar and little harvest of honey, pollen, and propolis. Since spring and the flowering season was about to start we put on white beekeeper suits and, with the beekeeper Miguel Campoy, went to observe and check on the bee colony, their population size, and their health. We also did a natural treatment against the varroa mites with sticky oxalate acid strips that rub against the bees' bodies and offer protection. The bee colony was strong, big and healthy buzzing around their home and surprisingly calm while we were marvelling at them.

The next intervention is to put up a second beehive so that when the colony splits and swarms they will hopefully move in. The more bees and various pollinators the better for the farm as they bring diversity and abundance to
the land. We also had the chance to sample delicious honey fresh out of the honeycombs, as well as pure pollen and propolis. Honey has many medicinal properties, is an antiseptic and antioxidant, contains lots of vitamins and minerals boosts energy and memory, and speeds wound healing. Propolis is also amazing to strengthen your health, and bee venom can be used directly to activate your immune system. Overall, it was fascinating to learn about the life cycle, nature and intelligence of bees and appreciate their role as pollinators and their products as medicine.

**COOKING LOCAL FOODS**

In the second week, we had the culinary pleasure to learn from and cook with a local chef named Luis Tolmos. He brought fresh, seasonal produce as well as fermented and preserved food like jams, tomato sauce, olives, capers, dried chilies, pickled vegetables, and fruits. He taught us how to preserve lemons in a brine of water, vinegar, and salt or how to store tomatoes over the winter as tomato sauce, whole poached tomatoes or sweet jam. Moreover, we prepared focaccia flatbread and green bell peppers filled with potato and egg, as well as tortilla together as examples of traditional dishes enjoyed widely around Spain. It was fun to have this hands-on cooking workshop and eat the delicious results of it for dinner together with organic wine.

**How to make tomatoe and courgette jam**

*Start by peeling the tomatoes and the courgette.*

*Cook them on slow fire, taking out the water as the vegetables release it.*

*Once they have been thickened, add honey or sugar.*

*Cook until very creamy.*

*And, of course, you need to have quality ingredients.*
SOCIAL IMPACT

The social fabric between the people joining the camp experience was built based on a shared sense of purpose, passion for restoration and care for the earth while living, learning and working together for two weeks. The group of 10 people gathered by the camp coordinator Silvia had a wide diversity of professional backgrounds, ages (from 21 to 63 years old), gender balance and great enthusiasm. The community life in the farmhouse was shaped by group meals, engaging conversations and laughter around the fireplace, live guitar music, and mountain hikes.

We also had time in the program for people to share their knowledge about things like essential oils, earthship construction, music composition, organic food, and nutrition or to give a tour of their mobile tiny home. The participatory learning environment, collaborative restoration work, knowledge exchange, interaction with people from the farm, diverse workshops with local experts and unique presence of everybody there made for an inspirational and enriching social experience. What really stood out was the openness, curiosity, and care of people, as well as their desire to contribute towards restoration and support life to thrive on planet earth.

Inspiration – How was their life changed

- Desire to continue learning about ecological solutions
- Contribution to restoration and a positive change
- Increased hope about the future from conversations
- Understanding of the hard work and time restoration requires
- Inspiration and willingness to change their own lifestyles
- Affirmation and next step on a regenerative pathway
CAMP EVALUATION

This was the first iteration of a 2-week restoration experience program of this kind at Camp Altiplano and overall a great success. We sent a survey to the participants to collect feedback on how they experienced the restoration camp, what they enjoyed most, what they learned, what did not work and what could be improved for future camps. Below is a summary of the responses.

Motivation – Why they joined the camp

• Learn ecosystem restoration techniques
• Learn how to create an ecosystem restoration project
• Attend an inspirational and educational course
• Plant trees and do hands-on land restoration
• Learn about bio-construction and natural building
• Experience something new, meet new people and be happy
• Learn about large-scale regenerative agriculture
• Discover a clear career direction and next steps

Highlights – What they appreciated most

• Happily planting trees and hands-on restoration work
• Inspirational, local guest speakers with great passion and knowledge
• Community of like-hearted, bright people caring about the earth
• Organic, emergent and flexible structure of the program and timing
• Amazing diversity of activities and balance of practice and theory
• Joyful and relaxed atmosphere for doing work and team spirit
• Learning exchange of diverse knowledge within the group
• Enjoying the whole experience of staying at the farm

Challenges – What did not work well

• Lack of structure and unclear or unequal distribution of daily chores
• Some people not contributing or taking responsibility in the household
• Getting enough rest time and quality sleep staying in a shared house
Suggestions – What could be improved

- More productive hands-on restoration work and tree planting, and fewer teachings
- Explain tree planting method in more detail to ensure growth and high survival rate
- Weave together and integrate theory and practice more for things like tree planting
- Clear coordination of all activities, overall program, and motivational leadership
- Have a responsible kitchen coordinator with cooking help and add some animal foods
- Integrate evaluation and learning from activities (and mistakes) more in the program
- Add nature observation and connection activities like sit-spots or nature walks
- Build a stronger sense of community with daily check-ins and vulnerable sharing
- Use cars only when needed for transport and otherwise take bicycles

Learnings – What they learned

- Tree planting
- Holistic grazing
- Soil health and microbiology
- Water management
- Food growing
- Compost and compost teas
- Agroforestry
- Earthworks
- Beekeeping
- Business design
- Group dynamics

Application – What steps they will take

- Plant more trees, save seeds and grow food
- Share about the connection between soil and human health
- Continue learning about ecosystem restoration
- Get involved and visit other ecological restoration projects
- Set up a food forest or eco-project back at home
- Learn better Spanish to communicate with people
VOICES FROM CAMPERS

Every person is unique and the time at Camp Altiplano, which enabled learning, skill building, teamwork, and inspiration for next steps, made a different impact on their lives. As another layer of feedback - and to share the voices of several campers and their personal reflections of the restoration experience - you can see a selection of testimonials here.

“Doing the ERC Altiplano experience gave me the opportunity to do something truly meaningful, to recharge and to take action rather than just talking about environmental woes and global warming. I want to set an example for my kids and show them that everyone can contribute and work together to improve our planet. The two-week course was amazing: Work hard at camp, play hard at camp, and fall into bed with a big smile on your face.” Erin

“I joined the camp to learn about ecosystem restoration and to discover whether I want to pursue a career in sustainability. The camp was amazing with so many passionate people sharing their knowledge about ecosystems restoration. Before I joined the camp I had never paid much attention to soil and since I got back I am digging in the dirt and smelling it wherever I go ;-) I am most grateful for the inspiring and fun people I met and their love and dedication to saving the planet!” Marinka

“It was an amazing experience. We learned how to plant trees properly and had many great workshops about regenerative practices. Restoration is not only about planting trees, but it is also about considering whole ecological and social systems. Everything has to be taken into account. It was very inspiring and I am thinking of starting a project of my own, or at least I want to spread the knowledge about restoration.” Veronika

“I joined the ERC to gain hands-on experience of the crucial techniques to regenerate landscapes and see how I could incorporate that into my career of permaculture design. I learned that teamwork goes a long way. It gave me optimism about the future and that it is possible to change human society to be harmonious with the Earth. It was also inspiring to meet people that share this same optimism.” David
“I came to Altiplano to learn about ecosystem restoration, to connect with like-minded people, and to actually plant trees and help speed up the natural processes that produce and sustain life and abundance on a piece of land that has lost much of it. I loved the whole experience. Highlights for me were the tree planting itself but also several of the workshops like soil health assessment, beekeeping or holistic grazing. I’ll definitely remember the joy of tree planting, and of doing it together. I will aim to do it much more in the coming years.” Ciske
CONCLUSION

All in all, the ecosystem restoration experience at Camp Altiplano in Spain was a great success. People from around Europe gathered for 2 weeks to learn about ecosystem functions, restoration and various regenerative agriculture practices with several passionate local experts. The campers loved the program rich in experiences from taking a farm tour, to visually assessing soil health, to giving young trees a new home, to the wonders of fungi symbiosis, to stunning mountain views, playful business planning, sunshine walks, pruning almond trees, brewing microbe tea, sowing seeds, cooking delicious meals, buzzing bees, and nightly warm fires.

Moreover, the 10 of us worked to restore a degraded landscape and planted almost 1,000 trees and shrubs in 10 days. Planting these trees is a catalyst for nature to revitalise itself. Participants came to make a positive contribution to this earth, do something with purpose and enjoy the company of like-minded people. The group was super enthusiastic, and shaped the program by sharing their knowledge, skills, and stories with each other. People left with hope in their hearts, inspiration for further action, a sense of connection, meaningful contribution and a smile on their faces.

The experience has also been rich in learning for the camp. The in-depth feedback received from campers will help shape future experiences, including paying more attention to group dynamics and tree planting instructions, as well as showing more of what worked and what did not work in terms of restoration practices at camp and on the farm. The monitoring work that will be undertaken on the land will also provide more inputs in this sense. Moreover, the camp is experimenting with a nature connection workshop in June, offering the chance for interested people to join a different type of experience, one that combines practice and emotional work.

Let’s keep restoring the land together!
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Kaestele is working and learning as a regenerative designer, community organiser, grower, project manager, facilitator, and action researcher with integral design, regenerative agriculture, permaculture, and social transformation. She completed a Master of Science in Regenerative Development with Gaia University and joined the Ecosystem Restoration Camps movement after meeting John D. Liu in September 2016.

A healthy, regenerative, and thriving planet earth is her passion and commitment. Laura was a participants of the 2-week Restoration Experience at Camp Altiplano in Spain and also in charge of documentation, tracking, and reporting. The results are many photos, several short videos, interviews, maps, an article, and this written report sharing learnings, impressions, and the ecological, social, and personal impact of the experience.

Image credits: Silvia Quarta, Laura Kaestele and Ciske Boekelo