

CONFRATERNITY of PILGRIMS to ROME



NEWSLETTER no. 24 2018

CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk

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CPR steering group

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Confraternity is in good fettle. We are continually looking for new ways to reach out to pilgrims and would-be pilgrims walking or cycling to Rome. I am delighted to share with you the first printed newsletter from our new editor, Mary Kirk. Although we increasingly communicate with members via webmail, we feel it is important to use good old-fashioned printed pages at least once a year.

Moving with the times and reflecting the now far cheaper production methods, this is our first all-colour newsletter. Mary has pulled together a lively mixture of articles and reviews, and I hope you enjoy them, and that some of you will be inspired to make your own contributions.

Our website, www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk, is constantly evolving and improving, and we do our best to keep it updated. We are always looking for news of completed journeys and for photographs to add to our photo library.

We had a good number of CPR members making their way to Rome on foot this summer; some of them will be at our AGM and Open Day in March next year to talk about and share their experiences.

Our membership continues to grow and we have had more than 100 renewals or new members so far this year, and have issued more than 90 new pilgrim passports.

We have a most active representative in Canterbury, Julia Lewis (née Peters). The official start of the Via Francigena at Canterbury Cathedral and the 32km way to Dover remain among our key focuses. Julia is also continuing her work on updating our accommodation lists.

Finally, we are planning to bring the CPR into line with other like organisations, such as the Confraternity of St James, and to apply for charitable status. This will give us many advantages in terms of fundraising and future planning. We expect to be in a position to update members on this major development at the next AGM on 16 March 2019.

Brian Mooney

NEWS FROM THE CONFRATERNITY

AGM Saturday 16 March 2019 Southwark Cathedral

The Confraternity's 12th Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Open Day will be held at Southwark Cathedral Conference Centre on Saturday 16th March 2019 starting with tea and coffee and registration, at 10.30am.

Southwark is an exciting new location for our AGM. The Cathedral has excellent facilities and it is of course on the traditional pilgrim route from London to Canterbury.

We have two exciting speakers this year. Anja Bakker will be there with Sean the Harp to sing and play, and tell us of her epic journey from West Cork to Rome, the first woman to carry a harp to Rome. And Yorkshireman Stuart Nelson will be giving an account of his 2018 walk from the Scottish Borders to Rome.

The full programme will be announced nearer the time.

There will be plenty of opportunity for those setting out on the Via Francigena to ask questions and seek practical advice. Non-members and those thinking of joining us or planning to walk or cycle to Rome are most welcome. We are hoping for a good turnout, so please make a note of the date in your diary.

Brian Mooney

Accommodation Update

The CPR accommodation list has proved invaluable to pilgrims walking to Rome over the past decade. Built from contributions from those who have journeyed to Rome, by 2015 the list included hundreds of listings, many of which were outdated. When Canterbury representative Julia Lewis (née Peters), took on the update of the list, it was immediately apparent that a new approach was required to keep it continuously updated and relevant for pilgrims. With the help of CPR members who volunteered their time and, recently, two students at the University of Kent temporarily employed by the CPR, the accommodation list has been transformed into an interactive online map.



CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

HOME ABOUT US ▾ JOIN US ▾ PLANNING ▾ RESOURCES ▾ VIA FRANCIGENA ▾ CALAIS ACCOMMODATION ▾ EVENTS ▾ CONTACT

The screenshot shows a Google Maps interface with a search bar at the top. Below the search bar is a map of the region around Amiens, France, with various accommodation icons (bed and breakfast, campsite, hostel, hotel) placed along the route. A legend on the right side of the map lists the accommodation types: Bed and Breakfast, Campsite, Hostel, Hotels, Pilgrim accommodation, and Tourist office. Below the map is a search bar with the text 'Search for' and a search button.

The map provides many benefits over a paper list. It enables pilgrims to search for accommodation in a particular section of the route, to better plan the distances between their accommodation at each stage, and to simplify budgeting for accommodation with the possibility to search for low-cost pilgrim options, or to quickly compare prices of private lodgings. The CPR is currently focused on the UK and French sections of the route, as good accommodation information for the Swiss and Italian sections is available on the European Association of the Vie Francigene website (viefrancigene.org). The CPR map currently has more than 250 accommodation listings in the UK and French sections of the route including pilgrim accommodation, campsites, B&Bs (also Airbnbs), hostels and hotels.

In order to make the accommodation information as accessible as possible, once the map is completely up-to-date, the CPR will also publish a pdf version. This will allow pilgrims to download the list for offline use while on the route.

The CPR continues to value the accommodation information shared by pilgrims who have walked or cycled to Rome. If you would like to see accommodation you used in the UK or in France on the CPR list, please email details to Julia Lewis at: canterburyrep@pilgrimstorome.org.

Julia Lewis

Calling all photographer pilgrims



Poppies and poplars in Lombardia - Tim Redmond

Do you have any digital photos of your journey to Rome? I am looking for more pictures to add to our photo gallery. Please take a look at it now that it is finished and running and see what you think – all feedback is great-but I would love to add more.

Send them to cprphotolibrary@gmail.com but please not as single high-res images - put them into a file and send that. Otherwise the system may not be able to cope. I'm looking forward to seeing masses of wonderful photos! Thank you.

Cee Weston-Baker, photo editor

The Confraternity marks Danilo Parisi's work

The Confraternity recently sent the legendary Po ferryman, Danilo Parisi, a small gift in recognition of his work over the years, not only ferrying pilgrims across the river, but keeping pilgrim statistics. It was delivered by Stuart Nelson, on his way from Lindisfarne to Rome. Stuart will speak at the next AGM on 16 March.



Goodbye to Canon Clare



It was announced earlier in the year that Canon Clare Edwards, Canon Pastor at Canterbury Cathedral, has been appointed Rector of the benefice of BrookDean in the Forest of Dean and in the diocese of Gloucester, and will take up her new post in the autumn. Canon Clare is known to many pilgrims who start out on the Via Francigena from Canterbury, and she has blessed many of us since she arrived at the cathedral in 2004.

Canon Clare writes: "When I leave the cathedral will be two canons down, so I don't see pilgrimage being any particular person's brief for a little while. At one level it wasn't mine when I came, but because I'm interested in it I took it on and developed it. Before I came it was held rather loosely and corporately, I think. Our day chaplains are good and I've tried to keep them up to date and have provided them with various pilgrim resources which I will make sure are stocked up before I go."

We wish Canon Clare well in her new post, and thank her for her devotion to pilgrims and pilgrimage.

Canterbury statistics spring-summer 2018

Canon Clare has provided some facts and figures of those travelling alone or in groups of less than ten who have asked for their passports to be stamped:

“In the last four months we have knowingly welcomed 406 pilgrims, two dogs and a harp named Sean (not including a group of 70 who had a day walk on the Via Francigena)! They came from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Uganda, USA, and Wales.

Ninety-one percent of these were walking and nine percent cycling. 28% completed their pilgrimage here in Canterbury, a massive 61.3% were on their way to Rome, just 1.4% going to Santiago de Compostela, and the remaining 9.3% to various other destinations. 70% were making their pilgrimage in one continuous journey whilst 30% were doing it in stages. 22.4% were journeying alone and of those 75% were men and 25% women. The other 77.6% were travelling in twos or threes or slightly larger groups. 1.7% were under 20 years old, 25.9% between 20 and 40years, 59.6% between 40 and 60years and 12.8% over 60s.”

CPR badges on sale

The left-hand badge is a self-adhesive embroidered textile badge, weighing two grams, which will be sent to all members on subscribing. You will also be able to buy more for £3 plus postage. The one on the right, is more durable and reusable, and makes an excellent souvenir of a pilgrimage to Rome. It is made of zinc and weighs 65grams with a 26mm-wide slot so it can be fixed to e.g. backpack straps. It costs £7 plus postage.



To buy these email info@pilgrimstorome.org.uk, or for pilgrims passing through Shepherdsweil on their way to Dover they are available in the church at a price of £3.

NEWS FROM THE EAVF (EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF THE VIE FRANCIGENE)

Calais commits to pilgrims on the Via Francigena

On 9 June the city of Calais and the EAVF organised an event which emphasised the city's commitment to promoting the Via Francigena, with the result that the city of Calais is now recognised as the official gateway to the Via Francigena in France.

The day was spent in meetings and a walk on the Via Francigena (GR145), learning more about this pilgrimage route, designated a European Cultural Itinerary by the Council of Europe. In the morning a plaque of a pilgrim was unveiled on the Cathedral of Notre Dame. The Cathedral will become a symbol of the welcome for pilgrims, somewhere they can receive a pilgrim blessing, get their credential stamped, and pick up practical information. Eventually a hostel providing 20 beds will be created.



Present at this gathering were Natacha Bouchart, mayor of Calais and vice-president of the Hauts-de-France region, Massimo Tedeschi, president of the EAVF, vice-president Martine Gautheron, director Luca Bruschi, Charles Myber secretary of the association Spiritualis in Francigenam, and Dominique Darre, president of the Association pour la Valorisation du Patrimoine Architectural de Calais, as well as many pilgrims and members of local walking groups from different areas of France.

In the afternoon the Association Arras-Compostelle-Francigena organised a 20.5km walk along the Calais-Wissant section of the Via Francigena.

New way-marking in Arras



On 14 September the city of Arras unveiled new way-marking signs – bronze arrows on the ground – for both the Via Francigena and the Way of St James routes through the city. Both routes are designated Council of Europe cultural itineraries, and this project – an initiative of the Association Arras-Compostelle-Francigena – and realised with money from the city of Arras – has won the European Heritage Year 2018 label.

The EAVF launches first official guidebook to the Via Francigena north of the Alps

The European Association of the Vie Francigene has announced the launch in April 2019 of the first official guidebook to the Via Francigena north of the Alps. The book, in French and English, will focus on the section that links Canterbury with the Great St Bernard Pass.

This new tool will complement the existing Terre di Mezzo guide to the Italian section of the VF. Furthermore, the new guide - the result of the collaboration between the publisher Suisse Itinérance and the EAVF - will demonstrate the increasingly international dimension of the EAVF, delegated by the Council of Europe for the protection and promotion of the Via Francigena.

In addition to this, the EAVF is going to launch a communication project dedicated to the Northern Via Francigena through its Swiss representative: ten people will be selected for a three-week walk from Canterbury to the Great St Bernard Pass, whose adventure will be the subject of a film. Their arrival is scheduled on 22 June 2019 at the Great St Bernard Pass.

Canterbury and the pilgrim tradition – Canon Clare Edwards



I am always surprised when people talk about renewing pilgrimage in England, or learning from those who have been doing it so much longer than us. Not because I don't think we've got anything to learn from others, but because pilgrimage has been part of the English landscape and beyond for a very long time. There seems to be something in our DNA which drives us out to explore for ourselves these ancient routes which meander across our countryside and through our towns and villages. As outwardly we explore the terrain, inwardly we find ourselves exploring life and our own spirituality, what we're about, how we fit into the whole, where we've been and where we're going, what helps us on that journey and what gets in the way.

For the past 14 years I've been Canon Pastor at Canterbury Cathedral, which involves - amongst other things - working with our wonderful staff and volunteers to welcome visitors and pilgrims. I have to be careful when I use the word pilgrim to remember that pilgrims come in many different varieties, from far-flung places and from just down the road. Some arrive under their own steam and others come by car or coach or plane. Some come because it's a world heritage site, and some because it's the mother

church of the Anglican Communion. Some come because it's on the coach itinerary, and others because they've saved up for years to make this particular journey to this specific holy place. Visiting school children would probably be able to tell you that a pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to a holy place. It is, yet behind those relatively simple words are many different and complex ideas and experiences.

Pilgrims have come to Canterbury following in the footsteps of Augustine since he arrived here from Rome in 597AD. They've come to see the place where Thomas Becket was martyred in 1170AD, and they've come to witness or indeed to ask for themselves a miracle at his first burial place in the crypt and later at the great shrine in the Trinity Chapel, until its destruction in 1538. And still today they come, people who in some way want to be part of that story. A story of endings and beginnings, of inner and outer journeys, of joys and sorrows, of thanksgivings and petitions. People come on their own, they come in twos and threes, they come in larger groups and it is our great privilege to offer hospitality and welcome. In part that comes from our Benedictine heritage which calls us to welcome all as we would welcome Christ. I'm sure we often fail in that, yet it remains our aim and our desire.

Pilgrimage continues to grow, and in recent years we have looked to enrich the experience of those pilgrims who - as our record cards say - are 'arriving or leaving without motorised transport'. A bit clumsy, I know, but whilst we don't want to exclude anyone who regards themselves as a pilgrim, we do want to recognise and respond to the particular needs and hopes of those who are physically making a journey, on foot, by bicycle and occasionally on horseback.

Those completing their pilgrimage here are usually coming from Winchester, Southwark or Rochester. And there are always exceptions: the Italian gentleman who walked from Jerusalem in prayer for a young girl with cystic fibrosis; an English man who had come from Sussex following a route associated with the burial places of his ancestors; school groups which come on pilgrimage, sometimes one day's journey, sometimes several.

Pilgrims may arrive and share in one of our daily services and we can publicly welcome them with the traditional 'Congratulations Pilgrims'. Groups of all denominations can request a chapel for their own prayers or Communion service, some will meet with one of our priests for the pilgrim office or some quiet prayers of thanksgiving, and some will simply arrive quietly, do what they need to do and go on their way.

This summer we have welcomed an Ignatian interest group and pilgrims following a specially prepared pilgrim pack from 'Open Doors' - praying, raising funds and awareness for persecuted Christians around the world.

We don't have any ancient pilgrimage certificates to use as a template for our certificates so we have a simple modern one for children and those adults who would like one, detailing where and when people have made their pilgrimage. And when we know groups are coming we do our best to welcome them with drinks and a tasty slice of buttered Pilgrim Loaf, a tea bread so named because the cathedral pilgrimage group were given it by a host church when we walked from Winchester in 2010.



The Pilgrim Tile

So, in their arriving what might people want to reflect on? Our pilgrim 'office' – a short order of prayer particularly suitable for use with groups, includes an image of the 14th-century Pilgrim Tile found in the cloisters here in 2014 and now used on our Pilgrim Passports. It also has a psalm, a reading, prayers of thanksgiving, the beautiful Pilgrim Prayer by Kathy Galloway and some questions: What are you hoping for today? What do you ask of God? Are there things you need to leave behind here in this holy place? Are there things you ask for, for yourselves, for those you know, for those you don't know? What might God be saying to you today, and will you take a moment to be still, to be quiet and to listen? What are you most thankful for? What have you learnt? Whilst these are God-centred they can easily be adapted for use with those who would find this language less helpful. And usually somewhere in our conversation we recognise that every ending is a beginning and each journey completed becomes the foundation of what is yet to be.

May flowers spring up
where your feet touch the earth.
May the feet that walked before you
bless your every step.
May the weather that's important
be the weather of your heart.
May all your intentions
find their way into the heart of God.
May your prayers be like flowers
strewn for other pilgrims.
May your heart find meaning
in unexpected events.
May friends who are praying for you
carry you along the way.
May the circle of life
encircle you along the way.
May the broken world
ride on your shoulders.
May you carry your joy and your grief
in the backpack of your soul.
May you remember all the circles of prayer
throughout the world.

Macrina Wiederkehr

Used with permission

Endings are always beginnings. For those setting out on their pilgrimage, mainly to Rome or to Santiago de Compostela, or the shorter journey to St Augustine's at Ramsgate, there is the end of the preparations and the beginning of the journey. Even when the cathedral is closed for the evening or in the early morning there is usually a priest available to greet people, stamp their pilgrim passports and offer a blessing. These are very special and often emotional moments, and it's not unusual for tears to be shed.



Kilometre Zero stone in Canterbury

It's a privilege to have those conversations with pilgrims about their hopes for the journey. Some walk with a particular prayer intention; many walk at a turning point in life looking for new directions and purpose, more and more people are desperate for the space, the solitude, the slower pace to get life back in perspective. Some walk to raise funds for charity or in memory of someone special in their lives and we've had families who've just wanted time to enjoy each other's company and the beauty of creation.

Sometimes we learn a lot about the pilgrims we bless and send on their way and it's a great joy to receive the emails or the postcards or the photos telling us that they've arrived at their destination. Often our pilgrims are not English speakers so the exchange is more limited but a smile and the sign of the cross made in blessing is widely recognised and we hope they go on their way encouraged. It's particularly lovely when pilgrims are blessed and sent out at the end of our 8am daily service of Holy Communion, there's a whole congregation to wish them well and be interested in where they are from and where they are going. And perhaps in the witnessing of these moments new pilgrims are born! We pray God's blessing on them, that they may know Jesus going before them as their guide, beside them as their friend, behind to keep them safe. We pray that they may be good companions to other pilgrims, that they may tread the earth lightly, and that they may be a blessing to all those places through which they journey. We give them a light and waterproof prayer card with the pilgrim blessing by Macrina Wiederkehr and we send them on their way, blessed and grateful for their presence amongst us.

Did St Peter ever get to Rome?



Brian Mooney argues that the pull of Rome goes beyond the presence – or identity – of relics

Few people walking to Santiago today believe the bones of St James really are beneath the altar in the Cathedral. The story of the apostle's body being spirited across the sea from Judea, where he was martyred under Herod Agrippa in AD 44, to north-west Spain, and lying buried waiting to be rediscovered at the cusp of the *Reconquista* is for most people just that – a story. The tradition that he preached in Iberia is also widely dismissed. But it makes no difference to the pilgrim experience; people walk to the shrine of the apostle in Santiago in large because they are following 12 centuries of prayerful footfall.

The same is also true for those setting out on the still more ancient pilgrim route to Rome. But again, while the weight of tradition strongly attests to St Peter's being entombed in a grotto beneath the Basilica that bears his name, there is in fact no conclusive proof that he ever got to Rome.

Over the centuries, Protestants have seized upon this apparent lack of evidence to challenge the authority of Rome and thereby question the legitimacy of the Petrine succession. This is not the intention here, nor does the debate detract in any way from a pilgrim journey to Rome. For most pilgrims the pull of Rome, which has endured for two millennia, goes far beyond the mere identity of the bones in the crypt beneath the high altar of St Peter's. A site can be sacred without a tomb, and faith in the tradition is more than enough.

Not surprisingly for a subject which can never be proved one way or the other, and on which there are few facts which would pass muster in a court of law, there is extensive literature on the question.

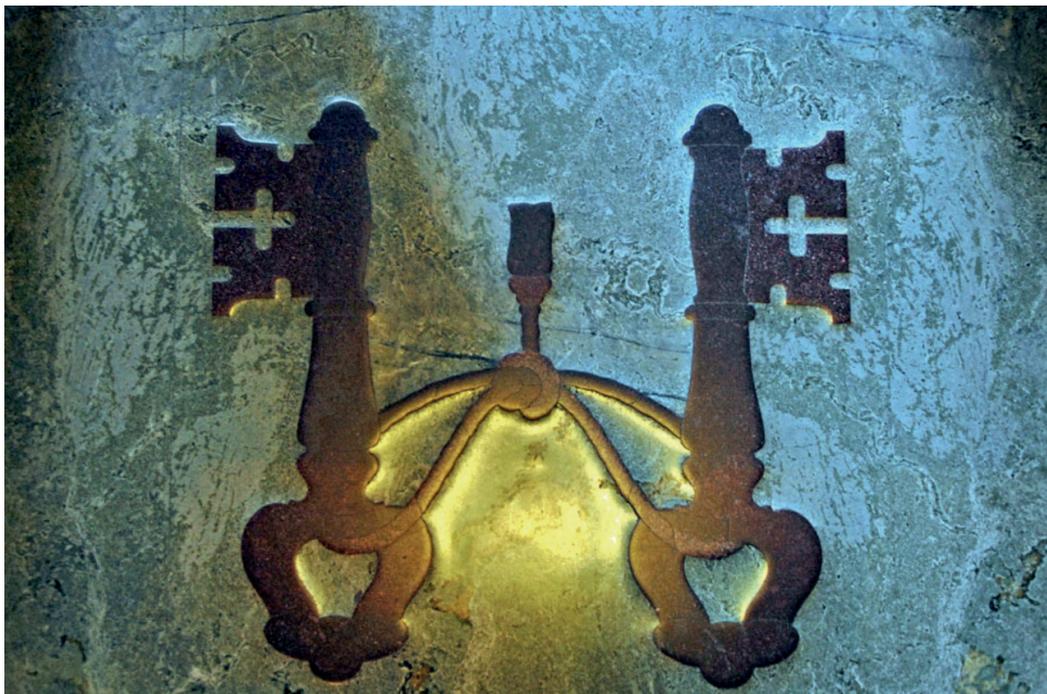
A principal difficulty is that, in contrast to St Paul, whose journey to Rome is recorded in great detail in the Acts of the Apostles, there is no explicit scriptural reference in the New Testament to Peter's being in Rome. There is, however, a record of him at the end of his First Epistle sending greetings from the church in Babylon – taken by many biblical scholars to be a coded reference to Rome, but also taken by others to be none other than the ancient city on the Euphrates. The first clear written statements placing St Peter in Rome do not occur until the second century. These later writings include the apocryphal 'Acts of Peter' which recount the story of Peter fleeing from persecution in Rome and meeting Jesus along the Via Appia to be asked, "Quo Vadis?" (Where are you going?). The Acts of Peter, almost certainly written towards the end of the second century, also record the story that Peter was crucified head-down about AD 64 at the height of Nero's persecution of Christians.

The debate doesn't just swirl around the written records, for nor is the archaeological evidence conclusive. Excavations in the 20th century unearthed remains in the grottoes beneath St Peter's which have been forensically dated to the first century, and there are nearby inscriptions which would appear to identify this spot on Vatican Hill as Peter's burial place. But there is no evidence that there was any Christian interest or veneration on this site – St Peter's *tropaion*, or memorial – until towards the end of the second century, well over 100 years after this death. There is an added complication in Rome in that, according to ancient tradition, St Peter's skull is in the Basilica of St John Lateran. More troubling, an excavation in Jerusalem has revealed an ossuary inscribed Shimon Bar-Jonah, the name by which St Peter was known in the Gospels. DNA, of course, would prove nothing because there is nothing to match it with.

The Vatican holds fast to its Petrine foundations, and at a Mass in November 2013, Pope Francis publicly unveiled what the Catholic Church says are the bone fragments of St Peter. This was the first time the nine pieces of bone, encased in a box inside a bronze reliquary, had been exhibited in public. A new book in 2018 by American lawyer John O’Neill, *The Fisherman’s Tomb*, examines the intrigue and vicissitudes behind the discovery of these remains and concludes without equivocation that they are indeed St Peter’s.

The story of Peter’s journey to Rome, however, won’t rest there. It is further tested by the few known facts of his life. Peter was a fisherman who was not highly educated and who spoke only Aramaic; he was hardly the type of person to undertake a long journey across the Roman Empire to a cosmopolitan city where Latin and Greek were the dominant languages. The far more widely-travelled Paul went to Rome only because, as a Roman citizen, he elected to be tried there.

In the absence of conclusive evidence, the Roman Catholic Church in the final analysis relies primarily on the great weight of tradition that Peter was martyred and buried in Rome. With or without an authentic tomb, this seems to have been good enough for most pilgrims down the centuries. Moreover, the Buddha’s wise prescription: “Happiness is a journey and not a destination” will readily resonate with those setting out on the Via Francigena.



The memorial to SAS men Dudgeon and Brunt



The pilgrim on the Via Francigena who walks from the Passo della Cisa to Pontremoli on the small road which winds downhill through Gravagna will pass a half-hidden memorial to two SAS men shot by the Germans in 1943. It is decorated, poignantly, with some faded imitation flowers, and a poppy wreath.

The two men whose death is commemorated there are Captain Patrick Dudgeon MC and Parachutist Bernard Brunt. They were two of 13 men tasked with disrupting German forces and severing supply lines in an operation known as Speedwell. The plan was that these 13 should split into two groups and then into pairs to attack targets in designated areas: group 1 was given sections of a line between la Spezia and Bologna, and group 2 including Dudgeon and Brunt between Genoa and La Spezia.

On 8 September 1943 General Eisenhower - the commander in chief of Allied forces in the Mediterranean - announced that the Italian Government had agreed to end all hostilities. In a broadcast on Algiers radio at 17h30

local time, he said: "All Italians who now act to help eject the German aggressor from Italian soil will have the assistance and support of the United Nations."

The men taking part in Operation Speedwell were briefed on 5 September, two days after the armistice between Italy and the Allies was signed but before it was announced, and flew to Italy from North Africa on the night of 7/8 September. It seems both groups were dropped off target. The second group with Dudgeon and Brunt was dropped approximately 15km south of Pontremoli near the village of Barbaresca Tresana. In three separate incidents five members of Operation Speedwell were captured and subsequently executed; some eventually made it back to safety, and some were later captured, having managed to sabotage railway lines in the area before capture.

Despite being in uniform and unarmed, Captain Dudgeon and Parachutist Brunt were condemned to death, led down the mountain to a point east of the memorial, and executed by firing squad on 1 October 1943.

On the evening of the day when I came across the memorial I was eating with fellow pilgrims, three of whom were German. We spoke about it, and one of them remarked, "It was only right they were shot - they were behind enemy lines." However, the legality is questionable on two counts. Firstly, they were unarmed, uniformed soldiers. Secondly, although Germany did not accept the armistice between the Italian government (which had replaced Mussolini) and the Allies, by virtue of it they had become the occupying enemy force, to whom resistance was justified.

But I felt that in the context of the brotherhood of pilgrims to argue that their execution was a war crime (as from a British point of view it undoubtedly was) would be to rekindle old enmities. Pilgrims walk the way of peace, and these memorials are just that, reminders of historic sacrifices, albeit within living memory.

Mary Kirk

- A footnote from CPR chairman Brian Mooney:

One of the many rewarding things about walking is that you come across monuments and memorials which, in a car, you would ignore or fail to see. And you get to read them and reflect on the stories they tell. I have frequently found myself pursuing stories of French and Italian Resistance heroes, or Allied servicemen, who are commemorated with wayside shrines or plaques. In the same way, one is drawn into the war cemeteries in northern France.

The Via di Francesco

CPR member Peter Scuffil compares the Via di Francesco with the Via Francigena and other pilgrimage routes

My wife Sara and I set off on the Via di Francesco from Florence on 28 September 2017, heading to La Verna, Gubbio, Assisi, Spoleto, Rieti and Rome. That's 560 km, split into about 30 stages.



Fra Filippo Lippi fresco in Spoleto Cathedral

The way is varied and beautiful. The stages are not unduly long, but frequently seemed so, being hard - there is a lot of up and down, sometimes on rocky paths, through beech and oak woods, but later olives. Wild enough for wild boar to cross our path, and once we saw a notice about wolves, although I would think one would have to go very much further off the beaten track to have any close encounters. Much of Italy is mountainous, although 'very hilly' might be a better description of this way. But the good news is that much of it is on footpaths and farm tracks and not on asphalt. The way-marking was reasonably good for the first 150 km and usually more so thereafter, so that we often didn't need to refer to our guidebook. Also the path was usually far from roads too, making it very different from the Via Francigena which we walked in 2015 between Milan and Siena. Indeed it was the asphalt and traffic we found really too much on the Francigena.

We had with us Sandy Brown's Cicerone Guide 'The Way of St Francis', a recent accommodation print-out from his website, and another refuge print-out found on line. The Cicerone guide we found both useful and annoying. The author seemed unable to give directions clearly and simply. The text was unnecessarily wordy and Sandy Brown uses transatlantic terms. His accommodation print-out was good and really useful, although somewhat incomplete and the prices shown were surprisingly out of date. The refuge print-out gave details of possible places to stay between Camaldoli and Assisi. We also picked up another good list at the Spoleto tourist office which gave details of accommodation between Assisi and Greccio near Rieti.

In other years we have walked at least six caminos across various parts of France and four others in Spain. These well-trodden ways are established and the pilgrim can expect to find hostel accommodation costing between €5 and €15 a night in daily stages. And the same is true on the Via Francigena.



Santa Maria, Trastevere, Rome

Not so on this route. We found only eight hostels specifically for pilgrims. Six times we were forced to stay in Bed and Breakfast accommodation at €50 plus (and breakfast out of cellophane packets). Seven times we stayed in convents. Our print-out may often have said the price was by donation, but whether people had been mean in the past I don't know, for "donation" was no longer the case. Instead expect to pay €25/30 per person. Nor usually was there the familiar "coin cuisine" as seen in French hostels.

Sandy Brown rightly warns you that restaurant meals are also expensive - if you can find a restaurant that is! We saw few set menus and we chanced upon only one "pilgrim menu." Bars are few and far between, as well. Cafes and pizzerie are much more abundant. The coffee is universally delicious and cheap. And when you find the village "forno", you can usually get a range of pizza, with all kinds of topping, as well as bread and cakes. Grocery

shops will also make you a panino filled with whatever you choose. But without some planning you could go to bed feeling hungry. Sandy Brown reckons on a “moderate” daily budget of €56 per person (2015 edition). So a 30-day walk could be quite expensive. But we managed on a somewhat tighter budget of perhaps €40-50 each.

Inquisitive Italians would wonder where we had walked from and were amazed. It seemed they hadn't seen a stream of pilgrims before. As we saw only three other walkers the whole way we can only suppose not so many people walk this way. This might also explain the shortage of pilgrim infrastructure.

We saw few tourists apart from in Florence, Assisi and Rome. Assisi is quite small and after 9am the floodgates are opened and the town is swamped with tourists. The way goes through many other interesting towns, large and small, and fans of Giotto, della Francesca and Filippo Lippi will be rewarded. And we can say that absolutely everyone was friendly and helpful with two exceptions, strangely, both in monasteries, one at Fonte Colombo and the other at the disgusting and dirty Monterotundo. Also on four or five occasions we had cause to hitch-hike after getting lost, needing to get to a distant shop. We found it extremely easy, but perhaps two 70-year-olds don't look threatening.



della Robbia at la Verna

So how did this way compare with other pilgrimages? We both agree it was harder and more strenuous, (even allowing for the fact we are older). Nevertheless, we consider it one of the best, despite the drawbacks I have mentioned. It's a rugged and sometimes lonely path that also goes through some exquisite towns. “Had we been frightened?” some Italians asked. “What of?” we asked. “Robbers and thieves! All Italians are crooks!” Well for us nothing could be further from the truth. If you do this walk, you'll love Italy and more importantly Italians too.

Via degli Abati

Charl Durand describes the variant route known as the “mountain Francigena” - from Pavia to Pontremoli

The Via degli Abati (The Way of the Abbots) is a nine-day, 125km pilgrimage route in the Lombardy region of northern Italy. It developed after St Columba, a monk from Ireland founded a monastery in the town of Bobbio, at that time part of the Lombard kingdom in the year 614. Not only was this a route for abbots and other church officials in northern Italy to travel to Rome for Church business, it was also an alternative route used by pilgrims during the Byzantine occupation of the Cisa Pass. After the death of St Columba and the return of his relics to Bobbio the town became a pilgrim destination in its own right, especially for pilgrims from Ireland, Britain and France.

The route fell in disuse for hundreds of years as pilgrims travelling between northern Europe and Rome went by the easier route over the Cisa Pass on the Via Francigena. Only recently, through the research and efforts of a local scholar, Giovanni Magistretti, was the route re-established for modern pilgrims in 2011. Today it provides a slightly shorter alternative route to the Via Francigena between Pavia and Pontremoli. It traverses several remote valleys that form part of the Apennine mountains. It is these valleys that shape the character of the Via degli Abati, which now is mainly used for recreational purposes by local hikers and adventurers, and only a handful of pilgrims traveling to Rome walk the entire Via degli Abati.

It has a reputation for being a difficult route because of the mountainous terrain. That may well be true, but anyone who has walked - up and down - the Great St Bernard Pass from Canterbury on their way to Rome will not find it excessively hard.

In September 2017 my wife, Adeline and I walked from Lausanne to Rome along the Via Francigena. I was in two minds whether we'd walk the Abati route, but curiosity got the better of us. The morning we left Pavia we took a right-hand split just outside the town, and instead of the yellow and brown

Via Francigena pilgrim we started following the red and white Via degli Abati emblems that point the way to Pontremoli.

Ninety percent of the first day's walking is on flat terrain. It follows the Po River for a while, crosses over and then goes through pastoral land up to Broni, a town in the foothills of the Apennine mountains. The last two kilometers were a stiff climb to the town of Colombano. On the



second day the 'real' Abati started. Every day we'd climb several hundred metres out of a valley, and then descend the other side of the mountain, losing more or less all the height we'd gained during the day. The mountain scenery was exquisite throughout the journey and made the effort throughout more than worth it.

Initially the landscape is mostly covered in vineyards and produce fields, but those gave way to increasingly dense indigenous forest as we went deeper and higher into the mountainous terrain. We walked along hillsides dotted with tiny hamlets, often not seeing a single soul as we passed through. As we walked it became clear that this region of Lombardy is a part of Italy that time has forgotten. There are no tourists, no highways and no major infrastructure developments. In many areas we saw farmland slowly reverting to nature, a sign of depopulation under way.

Much of the route is along hiking paths through these beautiful, emerald green forests. Many of these trails are ancient wagon paths that were used by the first pilgrims to walk to Rome. For miles we'd walk under the canopies of chestnut trees and past clusters of sprouting mushrooms. No wonder this region is also one of the funghi heartlands of Italy. Even in cases where we were the only guests at an albergo - which happened more

than a few times - we were treated to the most delicious porcini pastas and pizzas.

Because the Via degli Abati is such a 'young' route for today's pilgrims, there is almost no designated pilgrim accommodation to be found along the way. We stayed in a youth hostel in Bobbio, but elsewhere it was in alberghi and BnBs. In general the region is cheap to travel through - A €5 pizza is not uncommon, and our accommodation averaged about €50 a night. As soon as we left Pontremoli at the end of the Abati and entered Tuscany prices suddenly increased by 30 percent! I would recommend booking accommodation, especially out of season. In the town of Bardi we almost came unstuck when all of the alberghi had closed for the season.

I regret not staying longer in the town of Bobbio. It's filled with history and a unique culture that one simply cannot digest during an overnight stay. We paid a short visit to the monastery church, but didn't have time to look at the museum.



Bobbio

Distances between each of the eight stages varied considerably, from 20km to about 33km on the last day to Pontremoli. We learnt to pace ourselves when climbing the steeper uphill, and stuck to the quiet secondary tar roads to avoid some of the higher-up hiking routes that went via mountain peaks. Perhaps one of the greatest pleasures of the Abati is the absence of traffic, which made road walking a pleasure. During the rainy season hiking boots will be essential. Pilgrims also need to carry sufficient food and water as water points are scarce, although one can of course ask locals for water. The region's people hardly speak a word of English, but they're friendly, helpful and quite curious about pilgrims. Knowing a smidgeon of Italian will go a long way around here.



I have travelled extensively in Italy, and the region the Via degli Abati runs through is truly one of its most beautiful and underrated landscapes. The Abati has an ambience of authenticity that is missing on large parts of the Via Francigena, and for that reason alone I'd highly recommend walking it.

• **Charl Durand's e-book "Via degli Abati: walking the Way of the Abbots" is available on Kindle, or by contacting bookfunnel.com.**

Over the hills to Leuca

A Lincolnshire farmer takes a journey along the Via Francigena del Sud

There were echoes of Maundy Thursday when the lady hospitaliers of the convent of St Cecilia knelt at our feet, seized hold and plunged them into a bowl of cool water. They were nothing if not thorough. Our feet were dried and kissed, our itineraries read out and a pilgrim blessing was said. When it came to my turn and Santa Maria di Leuca was announced everyone clapped.

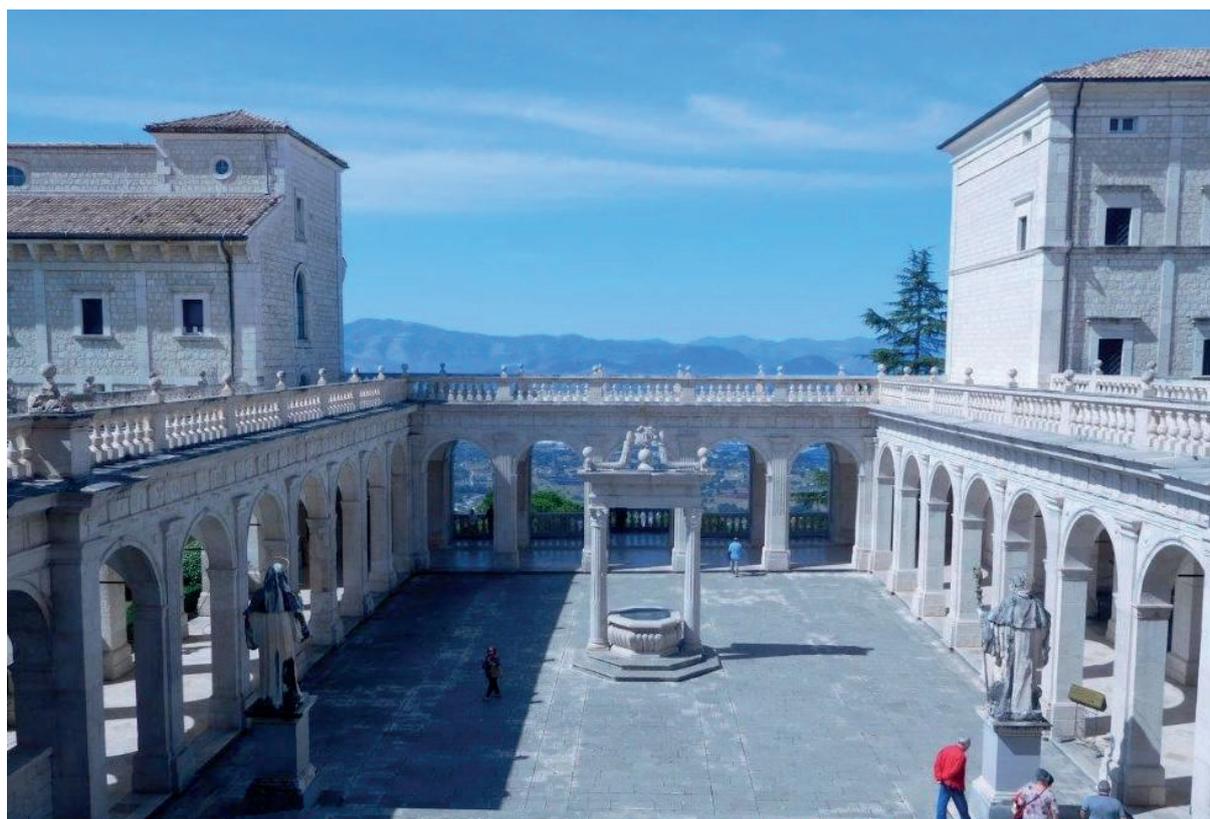
Most other pilgrims were on their way to Santiago. But on 1 September 2016 I took up the challenge to walk the 800km Via Francigena del Sud as part of a longer journey to Mount Athos. I'd walked from my farm in Lincolnshire to Rome the previous year. Now I wanted to go all the way. Unfinished business you might say.

There is no definitive VF del Sud leading from Rome, the place of St Peter's ministry and martyrdom, to Santa Maria di Leuca, the point on the tip of the heel of Italy, *de finibus terrae*, where the Apostle is said to have landed from Palestine to proselytize and preach the Gospel. The VF del Sud is an *amalgam* of roads following the ancient Via Appia together with its variants as far as Benevento (about a third of the way through), the via Traiana between Benevento and Brindisi, and the picturesque coastal route of the Salento. Very little of it is marked: the way-marker of the route I took, a crimson fish, or *ichthus*, appeared so infrequently as to be a novelty.



The way out through Rome leads past some splendid archeological sites: the Circus Maximus, the Sepulchre of the Scipioni (298 BC), the Arch of Drusus and the Museo delle Mura housed in the castellated Porta San Sebastiano. Just beyond, at the foot of the Chiesa del Domine Quo Vadis, lies the Via Appia, cobbled and straight as a porcupine quill. Opulent villas, sculptures and funerary monuments speckle the way.

Montecassino, the birthplace of the Benedictine Order, was one place I especially wanted to visit (an uncle in the War fought there), and in order to do so it was necessary to forsake the Via Appia in favour of a variant path just shy of Lago Albano, the location of Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence. I soon found myself in deep countryside exploring a landscape of woodland, subsistence farming and mules. The red soil was the colour of peppers; there were pomegranates and tomatoes and starbursts of chicory. If the cuckoo followed me all the way to Rome, the turtle dove followed me from it. It was beguiling.



Monte Cassino

Of the 30 nights I spent on the road 17 of them would be in religious houses. The Monastero Santa Maria della Rupe a Cassino was one of them. I'd trudged for miles in the horizontal rain; I was drenched and miserable and questioning the point of my journey when four smiling nuns, all under 30, received me at the gates and let me in. It was humbling.

“You must come back, Sant’Andrea” said a voice from the *cucina* the next day as I was handed a couple of *panini* for a picnic lunch (*Sant’Andrea* indeed!). One day, maybe...Incidentally, there was no charge. This was everywhere the case when staying with the church in Southern Italy. It was *donativo* only.

I crossed the high point of the Apennines between Casalbore and Troia where Campania morphs into Puglia. This was steep windswept country populated by isolated farmsteads, wind turbines and cattle guarded by dogs. At the fountain of Masseria San Vito, *una bella fontana*, I met Goos and Vin, a Dutch couple. Exhausted after the climb they were rehydrating themselves in the ice cold water. Goos and Vin were only the second pilgrims I’d met on the VF del Sud and they’d be the last. Yet I never felt alone. The ever-present pantheon of saints in combination with the characters who’d walked before me ensured this should be so.

Then there were the chance encounters.

Just shy of Brindisi on the Via Traiana I met a caravan of cyclists in the form of a bevy of beautiful English women presided over by an Italian who reminded me of a cock pheasant. This gentleman pulled up smartly when he saw me (I was eating an orange shaded by a large olive tree) after which the usual interrogation followed.

‘Where you from?’

‘Where you going?’

‘Why?’

And a new one:

‘Are you writing a blog?’

When I explained that I was keeping a diary using a fountain pen there were sighs of approval from the waiting women and the Italian grew effusive.

‘In you we have-a continuity’, he said, ‘I like-a the romantic.’

We chatted away until he announced that they must a-leave, with which they raised their bottoms in the air and pedalled off. All of which goes to show that you may cycle as well as walk the VF del Sud if you wish.

It was mid September. I’d witnessed gangs of migrant workers picking tobacco, figs, cacti fruit and cotton; olive groves grew ubiquitous as I ventured further south while between Troia and Canosa in western Puglia the vineyards took over, many of them planted with the celebrated local grape *Nero di Troia*. I often heard voices among the vines, garrulous Italian families exclaiming and joking. I never saw them. Their voices told me they were there, singing like peewits on the marshes of south Lincolnshire. Back

on the road trailers laden with grapes floated by on their way to the factory followed by plumes of dust. It was exhilarating.

Soon the sea, the sea, glimpsed just beyond Andria. Exquisite towns and cities necklaced the coast: Bari, Monopoli and Brindisi from where the Crusaders and pilgrims set sail for the Holy Land. All was hustle and bustle. I felt as if I'd arrived in New York. The only negative was the way out. The path from Brindisi led through a 'nature reserve', a ghastly, abandoned, moonscape despoiled by pylons and electrical power stations and infested with mosquitoes. It filled me with despair. As did the garbage which is appalling in southern Italy. In some places walking the VF del Sud can be a stinking, repellent experience.

Then came the silver lining, the wonderful region of the Salento along which lie some of the most glittering highlights of the VF del Sud: Lecce, the archeological site of Egnazia, and a succession of pretty coastal villages to the south of Otranto.



Fraternita Monasterio di Bose

For me the loveliest highlight of all was the Fraternita Monastico di Bose, Ostuni, a constellation of simple whitewashed buildings where you can stay

as a guest of the small ecumenical Carpignano community was another where Stephania, who wore a nose-ring, introduced me to the most delicious pastry confection in the world: *pasticciotto alla crema*. Heaven.



Santa Maria di Leuca

It was day 30 when walking over the hill from Tiggiano I caught my first view of Leuca. In Rome you glimpse the Vatican from the Monte Mario. In Leuca the lighthouse beside the Santuario marks your arrival. Preparations for a wedding were underway in the Piazza Giovanni XXIII. The Santuario was alive with visitors. I made my way to the vestry where I was given a handsome testimonial written in Latin marking the completion of my walk, booked into the Casa Pellegrino and walked down to the sea to swim.

- I used *La via Francigena Del Sud Da Roma ai Porti D'Imbarco per la Terra Santa* by Monica D'Atti, Franco Cinti, published by Terre Di Mezzo

Andrew Dennis

“Ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies”

A Roman Catholic priest reflects on his pilgrimage – and on churches along the Via Francigena

I regard myself as a walking pilgrim, even though I would find it hard to



define what that means, or what exactly distinguishes a pilgrim from other types of walker. I am also a Catholic priest. There is a line from Jeremiah I find I relate to: *Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.* (Jeremiah 6:16)

This year I left Canterbury Cathedral on Easter Sunday morning and arrived in Rome for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul on 29 June.

Churches are interesting to me on all sorts of levels, and I think I tried the door of almost every church I passed along 2000km. I was disappointed to find so many closed, but I would say never disappointed at what I found in each one I entered. They have stories to tell.

So I was upset and frustrated that so many cathedrals, and occasionally other churches, especially in Tuscany, are charging for admission. The nadir for me was Siena Cathedral, a fine building, with an exceptionally beautiful website. But it was very hard indeed to search through the website to find the time of Mass. On the steps of the Cathedral on Sunday morning was an entirely un-ironic sign stating that the Cathedral was ‘closed’ until 13.30 on Sunday. The Cathedral was closed – because of Sunday Masses! I find this strange.

A high-season admission ticket for the Cathedral is €15. And yes, I know they do not charge for admission to Mass, though I was ‘interrogated’ by an official at the door to know my reason for coming to the Cathedral at 07.55 on Sunday morning. And the fact that the website lists ‘Clerics of both genders’ amongst those people who are entitled to free admission to the Cathedral is not a comfort and not something of which I would take advantage.



Viterbo cathedral - which was open

I believe that a church should be open to all. There was no concession listed for people of limited income, or indeed the merely curious. And Pope Francis agrees with me, as he writes in his letter *Evangelii Gaudium*: *The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door.....the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.* (No 47)

I know church buildings need upkeep. That is not my point. I am happy to make a donation when I can afford it.

However, despite the irritations of closed churches, over all the Via Francigena was a hugely positive and thought- and insight-provoking experience which I would recommend to others without reservation.

Tim Redmond

- *Father Redmond kept a blog of his journey at walkingtim.com, which is still a work in progress.*

Please come in – Visitors Welcome

Jo Tinkler writes on surprise pilgrim encounters in churches between Canterbury and Dover

In the small village of Shepherdswell the Church of St Andrews (in the parish of Bewsborough where I was Authorised Lay Minister) there have been some surprises recently. For the past few years I was involved with pilgrimage in Canterbury Diocese, welcoming and leading walking groups, sharing our unique heritage along the way.

My first surprise was the Episcopal Churches of America who approached our churchwardens and arranged to spend the night at the Shepherdswell Youth Zone Building. Fifty young people from the USA on pilgrimage from Canterbury to Paris, celebrating 20 years of “Youth Across Europe” (YAE). I came up to the church to give a short history, one funny tale and a blessing. The blessing turned out to be word for word the blessing from the group leader’s wedding, they were delighted. I had to hold back a tear when in an act of huge generosity, one young lady came and gave me all her old style five pound notes because she could not change them at a bank, so she wished our church to have them instead.



St Andrew's Shepherdswell

Other groups included the Via Francigena Charity Walk and an overnight stay at Eythorne Church Centre, including a film show and a huge dinner. Incidental chocolate cake keeps happening, but that’s pilgrimage!

One night in September our neighbour went to lock up and found 20 Italian school children sheltering from torrential rain, walking on pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome. They were then stranded in our village. Shepherdsweil church community went into action and the group stayed overnight until the storm had passed and they could continue dry, fed and rested.

To check who, what and where in writing this I looked at the visitor book at Shepherdsweil. I found some surprising facts. People are on pilgrimage all year round. Our earliest Via Francigena pilgrims were from Berkshire in January; and one couple in March were on pilgrimage to Iona. Over half of the signings are from outside Kent and walking on Pilgrimage, or the North Downs Way. Switzerland, Netherlands, Perth, Melbourne, France, Wales, Italy, South Africa, Germany and New York are just a few home addresses.

The churches in Bewsborough are all striving to do more to facilitate pilgrims. They are working to provide more facilities, to open the churches more frequently, to share our heritage, to look after the spiritual needs of those who ask; and be there to welcome all on their journey. Bear with them if you visit, they try hard with a handful of villagers giving their time.



What they see is only the “tip of the iceberg”. Please, I would ask you to fill out the visitors books because it will help encourage parishioners to help, and let them know what you, the pilgrim, need. Don’t forget pilgrimage is a step and a prayer together, no matter the journey you make.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Crossway by Guy Stagg

Brian Mooney reviews the tale of an epic ten-month journey to Jerusalem

'The Crossway' is an intense, epic book. It is the story of a young man, who - by his own admission - has suffered a mental breakdown, who walks 5500 km over ten months from London to Jerusalem.

Journeying in 2013 on foot via Rome and Istanbul and with a few variants to side-step the Syrian war, Guy Stagg crosses France, Switzerland, Italy, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon and Israel.

The trek in itself is some achievement but – though the reader is left in doubt whether Stagg finds what he is looking for – it is his quest that elevates this travelogue far above the average.



Guy Stagg at Amettes (photo Colette Gevas)

The early chapters chronicle Stagg's almost accidental walk to Rome in mid-winter along the Via Francigena. He bravely climbs the snow-bound Great St Bernard Pass in February (CPR member Ian Brodrick also made a similar winter traverse in January 2010).

Stagg's journey is dramatized by a succession of crises, both personal and external, in Rome, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, and Tripoli, and is leavened by the extraordinary generosity and charity he encounters along the way at the

hundred or so monasteries he visits and stays in. Indeed, in every sense it is the charity that makes the journey.

“At the start of the journey, I thought I was walking into the wreckage of Christianity,” Stagg writes after he has arrived in Jerusalem, a city sacred alike to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. “My impression now was of how much remained, holding tight to its decayed inheritance. Despite the decline of religion in Europe, it was still possible to cross the continent like a medieval pilgrim: travelling on foot, stopping at shrines, and supported by charity.”

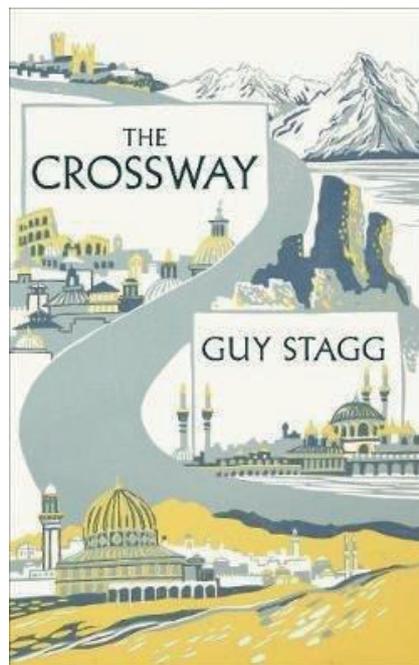
Stagg leaves no ghost of the pilgrim past undisturbed and examines his faith, or lack of it, with the same sharp eye with which he peers into the faith of those he meets. Recovering from breakdown, alcoholism and attempted suicide, his narrative is not surprisingly threaded with deep introspection.

“I thought the journey might build me up again,” he says. “I walked to mend myself.”

Does it work? “Though I left home in search of healing, only to realise that pilgrimage was hurting me, I never discovered a new reason to walk.”

Stagg writes lucidly and at times brilliantly; his descriptive prose is refreshingly original. Is this the birth of a great writer?

The Crossway, Guy Stagg (Picador 2018)



Long Rider to Rome by Mefo Phillips

This book, subtitled “1400 miles by Pilgrim Horse from Canterbury”, has been a long time coming, for it tells the story of what may be called an epic journey in 2006 by Mefo Phillips on her Appaloosa horse Leo, supported by her husband Peter driving a Bedford horsebox.



Ms Phillips, in common with almost every other pilgrim, found she had itchy feet (if that is the relevant anatomical expression for a horsewoman) after completing a ride to Santiago de Compostela in 2002 with her sister Susie. She soon discovers that the Via Francigena (especially that of some 12 years ago) provides an experience very different from that of the Camino, especially as she chooses to take a variant route which veers south from Châlons en Champagne, through Burgundy and over the Alps at Mont Cenis, rejoining the traditional trail at Pontremoli. An almost complete lack of way-marking till she gets to Tuscany means she has to make up her own route, with many false starts, and ups and downs topographical, physical, and emotional.

It is an extremely good read: the reader is impelled onwards with the pilgrim pair, and the pages keep on turning. At times it is laugh-out-loud funny, and it is written with humour and sometimes self-deprecating grace.

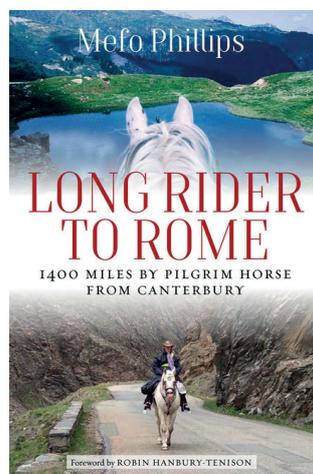
Mefo Phillips makes much of the fact she is a non-believer, and that the pilgrimage is undertaken, not from religious motivation, but to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society, and to honour her late mother who died of the disease. But for a non-believer she relies heavily on the aid of St James, who befriended her and Susie during their previous journey to his shrine in Spain. Many pilgrims will recognise the experience, as she says, "It might not have been coincidence that an unexpected solution has turned up for every small crisis. Maybe some benevolent power really is keeping an eye on us all."

What most pilgrims will not recognise, however, is the comfort of having a husband and a horsebox providing shelter, companionship and support, though at times their presence adds to the difficulties of finding accommodation.

This rollicking good read is very occasionally marred by some infelicitous irritants. For example, "moth-eaten feet;" "soporific washing;" "tunnel-infested." People do not appear, they always "materialise," and too many people are the "personification" of a characteristic. And she does not in fact "circumnavigate" the Alps, but crosses them.

But this does not detract from the fact that this is a book which deserves to be read, not only by aficionados of the Via Francigena, but by anyone who likes an albeit gentle adventure.

Mary Kirk



Long Rider to Rome, Mefo Phillips, Signal Books, 2018

SOME INSPIRING JOURNEYS 2017-2018

The Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome always wants to hear of members' journeys on the Via Francigena, and you are invited to enter these into our register on the website www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk, and send in accounts to editorpilgrimstorome@btinternet.com. We cannot publish them all, but have chosen here three of the most inspiring.

ROSS SIMPSON, RUNNING FROM CANTERBURY TO SICILY



“On the 1 May I embarked upon the most dangerous journey of my life. I ran through the gates of Canterbury Cathedral, bound for Palermo Cathedral, Sicily, carrying my tent, food and water with me in a rucksack and began my unsupported cross-continent run. To get there I'd have to run almost 3000km, or around 71 marathons in 93 days. My aim? To raise money and awareness for the brilliant and underfunded charity - Youth Cancer Trust.

I ran to Dover and hopped on the ferry to Calais. From Calais I ran across France, I traced the remembrance trail and visited WW1 and WW2 graves of fallen British and Allied soldiers. I ran past bombed cathedrals and towns, still scarred by wars of the 20th century. I ran past Reims and into the Champagne region, past rolling vineyards - Mumm, Taittinger and Veuve Clicquot. I ran through deserted villages where finding food and water was a real test. I ran up into the Jura mountains, past waterfalls and quaint hill top towns into Switzerland.

From the border I ran to the edge of Lake Geneva and traced it round heading for the snow-capped Alps. My path was covered in 20ft of snow, so I detoured along the closed road towards the Great St Bernard Pass. I didn't see a single soul on the mountain, except for two Frenchmen who skied past me and said the route was too dangerous. I was terrified the snow walls would fall and cover me. Finally reaching the top of the pass, I descended into Italy, climbing over and under avalanche snow fall into the Aosta Valley.

I was chased by bulls, pushed off my path by packs of dogs, ran past mountain fortress towns, and reached Vercelli and the beginning of the rice fields. I spent a week running through intense, still humidity, heat, and swarms of mosquitoes. I got sick, and spent two weeks coughing and feeling run down each morning.

From Fidenza I climbed into the Apennines mountain range. Most days I'd run over multiple peaks and the toll on my ill body was immense. I reached half way. The milestone which I had thought would be reassuring was now more daunting than anything, and I had to come to terms with doing the same again. My feet were blistered and the footwear I had couldn't handle the loose, rocky terrain. I fell over countless times.

Finally I reached the gateway to Tuscany and later that day as I rounded a corner I felt my first breeze since the Aosta valley. I was given the keys to an ancient castle in Pontremoli, and from there I ran down to the Mediterranean sea.

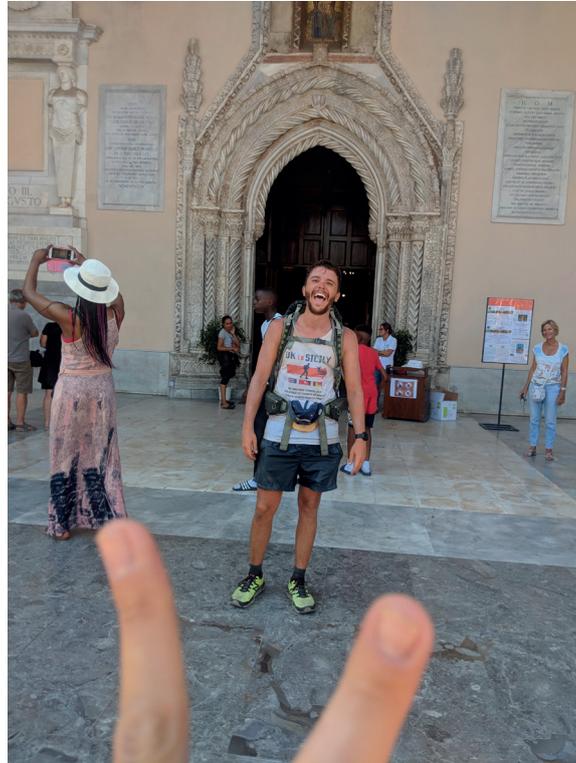
I passed along coastlines and through busy cities crammed with tourists. I ran to Lucca and then over the rolling Tuscan hills, past the patchwork fields and cypress trees to Siena. I did a lap of the Piazza del Campo. I dealt with great loneliness as I saw those around me on holiday. My legs ached, my muscles and tendons were tight and I set my sights on the next milestone, Rome. I ran down into Lazio, past mountain-top fortified towns and the temperature increased drastically. I finally reached Rome, and I ran into the Vatican City. There I had planned to spend a few days sightseeing, but they quickly turned into bed rest as my body tried to heal itself.

From Rome I ran down the ancient Appian Way and past lakeside mountain towns. I ran towards Naples and my route took to the roads more and started to become far more dangerous. The air pollution was a real issue, and the poorly-maintained Italian roads left me with barely any space to run. I stopped in Naples, and then ran on past Pompeii and towards my fourth mountain range. The weather became unbearably hot and the rise in my body temperature meant that my body couldn't prioritise blood for digestion. I spent the mornings of most days throwing up and avoiding dangerous drivers.

I camped in the mountains, my tent besieged by a family of wild pigs. The piglets surrounded my tent and I had to shout and clap to scare off the aggressive mother. I continued the next day out of the mountains and down to the northern coast of Calabria. The roads were littered with dead stray dogs and cats - a constant reminder of the danger the roads posed to me. A couple of days later I saw first hand the danger of the roads as I was escorted by the fire service through a fatal car crash site.

My days were filled with adrenaline. My feet and ankles began to swell as stress fractures formed in my overused bones. I continued on along steep winding coastal cliff roads and towards Villa San Giovanni where I'd take my short ferry to Messina, Sicily.

I reached Sicily, my body now fully exhausted and the sun exposure and dehydration a serious problem. I almost fainted more than a few times through lack of water.



Finally on the 3 August, I reached Palermo Cathedral, Sicily and finished my journey. I have a hernia and a suspected break in my left foot, but I'm so relieved to be safe and have completed my trip. I kept my suffering in perspective, knowing that out there today teenagers and young adults are being diagnosed with cancer, parents are trying to put on a brave face for their children and someone has just lost the toughest battle of their short life.

The Youth Cancer Trust offers short adventure breaks to young people diagnosed and living with varying stages of cancer. They give 14-30 year olds a chance to meet with others in a similar situation, to share their experiences, get support and reduce the sense of isolation often felt with a cancer diagnosis at such a critical age. Some of the young people are terminally ill, and visiting YCT can be a brief escape from hospitals and anxious parents, and a way to spend quality time with friends or siblings.

• **Ross's JustGiving page will remain open at least till the end of October 2018: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/UKtoSicily>**

ANJA BAKKER

- the first woman in written history to carry a harp through the Great St Bernard's Pass and to Rome



On the 24 March this year I set out on my pilgrimage from my home in West Cork Ireland to Rome with a 26-string harp called 'Sean the harp' in the footsteps of a group of medieval harpers who joined various Crusades.

It was still cold with warnings of snow, rain and possible frost as we headed up towards Wexford. I played a series of 'Harp Meditation' sessions in art centres and yoga studios. The route was filled with the remains of Cistercian Abbeys until we got to Tintern Abbey in Wexford where I was rescued for the first time out of the rain into the hands of the head gardener of the abbey, who made me cry and gave me hope.

I was joined for the crossing to Wales by a friend and was safely delivered to the Pembrokeshire coast where I was welcomed and walked through wild woods, bogs, moors and abandoned 20th-century industrial landscapes in the company of sheep and daffodils. I found the Welsh to be kind and open to my journey. They're generous, appreciate the ancient bardic way and were willing to help me in return for tunes and music. There are many signs in the landscape pointing at pilgrim traditions from long ago.

I was waved on over the Severn Bridge and took a few days in Bristol to play music and meet friends, and make new ones. When the time came to go again we got to play and walk through King Alfred's world of old. We headed towards Salisbury, navigated the plains, walked by Stonehenge and turned towards Winchester and the Pilgrim's Way along which we went to Canterbury and the beginning of the Via Francigena. We met many Irish descendants for sessions and stories of times gone by and were given beds by strangers and friends of friends as we played for our food and corners to sleep. The daffodils were fading and England was in full bloom of early summer.



Anja arrives in Canterbury

With a third of the journey done, there were a few days' rest in Canterbury and we played and sang in full pilgrim mode ready to take on the next part of the journey. And so I bade a farewell to the islands and set out for French soil.

As we headed into the vast agricultural north of France the stages grew long and the accommodation sparse. The municipal campings are often a good alternative but we were followed by thunderstorms that didn't let up throughout our time in the country. The poppies and lime trees were vibrant and strong and Reims was within reach. The thunderstorms kept rumbling but above our heads the sun shone. The families we stayed with admired my strength and appreciated our music but France didn't love us as the islands did. But the Italians we met invited us to play in Pavia and in the south of Italy. I said yes to both.

From Besançon it wasn't that long to the border. France overall was a good challenge but the people were friendly, courteous and in the main helpful. It was the next bit I had been fretting about since the start of my walk: la Suisse.

Switzerland is beautiful. She shines like a multifaceted diamond when compared to the agricultural monoculture of the EU. Her flora and fauna are stunning but she's expensive in a way that is hard to deal with when you've been on the road for 80 or so days. We had another go at couch surfing, and found out that there's a whole group of people who are very willing to meet us and put us up. And then in the footsteps of all who had gone before us we climbed into the Col du Grand Saint Bernard on day 100 and walked into Italy the next day. The thunderstorms lit up the sky every night.

I found it hard to adjust to Italy. I don't speak the language, and it took me four or five days to get my head around being back in the EU again. By the time we hit the plains and the rice fields I had decided to learn one word of Italian a day and use it on one and all.

The concert in Pavia was a great success, we made the news, and we got a great write-up in a big sports paper. I headed into the Apennines alone but it was now pilgrim season with pilgrims everywhere, as the farmers started cutting and harvesting. And still there were thunderstorms nearly every night.

The regional diversity in Italy is astonishing and something especially great to experience on foot. The Associations of the Via Francigena really appreciated my extraordinary effort and helped me as much as they can. After another break in the south of Italy (Ginosa) and Priverno-Fossanova (on the VF del Sud 100km from Rome) to play festivals, I was ready to wash the piglet (as my father always used to say) and walk into Rome on 28 August after 157 days on the road.

The cherry on the cake came on day 159 when I got permission to sing one song in the Sistine Chapel, though no harp was allowed (no cameras no recordings, no nothing) but I got to stand at the altar and my voice soared through the space where Michelangelo painted the hand of God giving life to Adam.

I am a pilgrim to Rome. I've made it to Rome but many of the ones I met and walked with didn't and some never will.

I've heard many stories of and seen much of our suffering, the suffering of mankind. I've heard, reflected, walked and played to the best of my ability.

I'm proud of my achievement but I am only one of many. I've felt creation move, sigh, I've been followed by storms, I've hardly had any rain while walking. I believe but haven't a notion as to what. So I'll keep singing, walking, playing and witnessing as pilgrims do.

I'm just a woman like many others. I am the woman who walked her harp from West Cork to Rome.

Go well pilgrim go slow.

Anja Bakker



KARL CHRISTIANSEN

Berkshire to Athens 2017

In April 2017 I set off on a charity fundraising walk from my home in Sunningdale to Athens. This was partly self-indulgent – a retirement gift to myself, and an opportunity to reflect on my life.

Initially, to get to London, I completed short walks, using public transport to get to and from the several destinations; however, once in London, I continued east, striding along the Pilgrims' Way to Canterbury and then the Via Francigena to Rome and the Via Francigena Sud to Bari, catching a ferry to Patras in Greece, to then complete the pilgrimage in Athens.



On my first day I met a woman in Windsor Great Park who was suffering from terminal cancer, and I realised that by the time I returned she might not be alive. However, this seemed also to be an omen for the charities for which the walk was planned: Chance for Childhood, a small international charity that helps vulnerable children in seven countries, and Cancer Research UK, the leading cancer awareness and research charity in the country (if interested, people can still donate by going to the Virgin Money Giving website and following appropriate links to donate to my causes - details at the end of this article).

Generally speaking, my reflections focused on four themes: landscape and human impact, from the unspoilt beauty of the Alps to the horrific litter in Italy; horizons, both those in front and those behind; solitude, which is not the same as loneliness; and people, mostly on other pilgrims and people I met along the way, but also people I've known over the decades.

On a practical level, typical of my long-distance hikes, I had over-packed somewhat, and gradually jettisoned items: unnecessary extra clothing; eventually, after leaving France, my tent and sleeping bag, and much of the rest of my camping gear. Although more could have been discarded, there were a few luxury items that I insisted on carrying, such as an elegant, leather bound diary and a camera (although the phone camera would probably have sufficed). The weight of the backpack and belongings, the constant impact of walking, and the mid-30 – mid-40 C heat caused my feet to swell and, despite having broken in my boots, I was left with two hairline foot fractures and a bunion, even before

having left France, and these remained with me throughout the journey and after my return.

The route from home to Rome, although challenging in many ways, was at least punctuated with my meeting other pilgrims, at times walking with them, at times meeting them for a meal, or staying in the same accommodation. Although there was ample opportunity to enjoy the solitude I sought, it was a delight to meet some truly remarkable, even like-minded people. However, after Rome, for about a month of the walk, I met only two other pilgrims. As I was exhausted by then, having lost significant weight and suffering from the injured feet, this latter stage of the trek was the most challenging. Reserves of physical and emotional energy were simply absent. Arriving in Greece, where I know a bit of the language and have a fondness for the country and culture, was most welcome.

I was lucky enough to be hosted in Lausanne and (near) Siena by friends and friends of friends. I was also joined by friends at various stages along the route, primarily in England but also for a stretch in France and Switzerland that gave lift to my gait. Finally, however, I was met in Athens for my final ascent to the Acropolis by one of my sisters-in-law and her husband, a close friend, and my Paralympic equestrian daughter and her boyfriend. It was a pleasure to have them join me for the finish.



(<http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser-web/fundraiser/showFundraiserProfilePage.action?userUrl=Windsor-AthensWalk>)

STOP PRESS ITEM

The Third Annual Charity Walk on the Via Francigena

20 October 2018

Julia Lewis, Canterbury representative for the CPR is organising the third annual charity walk on the Via Francigena on 20 October in aid of a local homeless charity, Porchlight.

The programme for the walk:

- A blessing at Canterbury Cathedral
- A stop at St Martin's Church (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Tea and coffee, and short talk, at Patricbourne Church
- Lunch at Womenswold Church
- Tea and coffee at Shepherdswell Church
- Final push for the last eight miles to Dover
- Drinks at the White Horse Pub, Dover (famous for its walls covered with messages from Channel swimmers)

Julia writes, "The charity walk is a wonderful way to introduce local people to the historic pilgrimage route, and to engage with the churches along the Via Francigena."

Please email Julia (canterburyrep@pilgrimstorome.org.uk) if you would like more information.

ARTICLES FOR CPR NEWSLETTERS

We welcome articles, news and photographs from members on any aspect of the Via Francigena either for our regular e-newsletters, or the annual print bulletin which appears in the autumn.

Please send inclusions as Word documents to editorpilgrimstorome@btinternet.com.

CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk

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