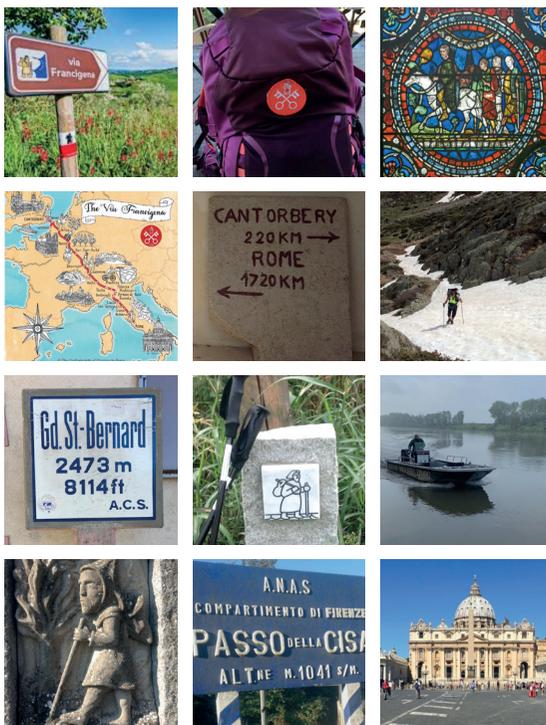


# CONFRATERNITY of PILGRIMS to ROME



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# **CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME**

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## Editorial

Welcome to our 2020 annual newsletter.

It has been an unusual year for everyone, with plans turned upside down, and life as we knew it on hold, maybe never to return. In common with most charities, the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome has seen many changes. We were obliged, with regret, to cancel our AGM and Members' Conference in mid-March. Because of the closure of most pilgrimage paths in Europe, requests for membership dropped, and with it our income. However, as horizons shrank, we made it a priority to expand our communication with our membership and beyond, in order to keep alive the pilgrim flame, and the hope of better things to come.

Accordingly, we increased the number of our e-newsletters and mailings, and initiated Question and Answer panels on Zoom, where people from all over the world had the chance to get information on, and share, experiences of the Via Francigena. Victoria Field presented a video on walking and creativity, and Sara Morano on walking the Via Francigena as a solo woman. We followed that with a more informal Zoom social, which we hope to repeat in the autumn.

As with last year's print journal, a theme has emerged: the sustainability of pilgrimage. The environmentally conscious pilgrim can - and does - agonise over the question of whether it can be justifiable to fly across the world just to indulge a desire to walk the Via Francigena or one of the Caminos to Santiago. Can the damaging effects of long-distance (or even cross-Channel) travel be mitigated? What is the place of the walking or cycling pilgrimage in a world whose climate is undeniably and deleteriously changing? Three CPR members debate these questions, and it is no coincidence that all three, independently, make reference to the saint who is the model of respect and love for creation: Francis of Assisi.

Members who contributed so generously to our appeal to help Danilo Parisi buy a replacement for his boat which was vandalised and sunk, will be interested to read the background story to the 'admiral of the Po.' We have an article by Paul Chinn on the writing of the popular Lightfoot guides, a learned piece by Jonas Ewe on the Via Francigena in medieval times, book reviews for dreaming through the winter months, and an assessment of the changing nature of pilgrimage, which was to have been a star talk of our cancelled AGM.

This is my last issue as editor, and I shall hand over next year to Tim Redmond, whom many of you know for his contributions to previous issues of this journal and to the many pilgrimage forums online. As ever, we would welcome your contributions to this or to our e-newsletters. Keep them coming, please, to [editor@pilgrimstorome.org.uk](mailto:editor@pilgrimstorome.org.uk).

**Mary Kirk**

## Should we go or should we stay?



**Andrew Dennis, a serial long-distance pilgrim who has walked the Via Francigena north and south, is an organic farmer in Lincolnshire, and a former Radio 4 Farmer of the Year. Here he debates the environmental ethics of a walking pilgrimage, and suggests pilgrimage may have much to teach the world.**

*'Praised be my Lord for our sister Mother Earth/The which sustains and keeps us/And brings forth diverse fruits with grass and flowers bright.'*

(St Francis of Assisi, the Canticle of the Creatures)



At this point in time St Francis's appreciation of the wonders of the earth has seldom seemed more apposite. Against a background of rising temperatures, diminishing forest cover, pollution of our air and seas, and the extinction of species, an almighty responsibility rests upon us all to live more lightly in order to reduce our impact on the planet. If we want to honour the prayer of St Francis, if we want to survive as a species, we need to scrutinise, adapt, and - in some instances - stop what we're doing altogether. This is a challenge which applies to every form of human activity, pilgrimage included.

One of the questions presently being asked by pilgrimage bodies, including our own, is whether they are justified in encouraging people to go on

pilgrimage, or whether under the prevailing ecological conditions it's immoral to do so? This seems apt when pilgrimage is enjoying such a significant renaissance. Mecca, Amritsar, Rome and Jerusalem are all recording huge increases in numbers of pilgrims while some, like Santiago, have approached what might be called 'peak demand.'

What, therefore, are we to do: should we go or should we stay?

**Let us look at this question in more detail.**



*The Pride of Canterbury on her way to Calais*

On an everyday level, pilgrimage certainly does seem to have an ecological case to answer. Pilgrims making their way to their starting point or back home again by air expend enormous quantities of non-renewable polluting fossil fuel. It's estimated that a single flight from Rome to London carries a carbon footprint of 234kg CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger, more than the average produced by the citizens of 17 countries annually. And even if you don't fly, one of the first obstacles the pilgrim encounters when walking from Canterbury to Rome is the English Channel. How on earth are they to cross that in a sustainable way? Zero-emission vessels of the type Greta Thunberg used to cross the Atlantic are rare beasts. Inevitably most take the ferry which has a lower carbon footprint than flying. Even so, black mark.

There are other ecological challenges. Take what we eat: it's not always possible to eat sustainably in a way which supports the local food economy. How many pilgrims resist the temptation to head off to the supermarket rather than stock up with local produce? Not many, which is weird given that supermarket food is usually far more expensive. It's estimated that 30 percent of our carbon footprint comes from food.

Where we stay poses a third ecological stumbling block unless we're prepared to camp. Pilgrim hostels are not always available, and in England they're non-existent. When I phoned ahead to enquire if St Albans Cathedral, a famous medieval pilgrim destination, provided pilgrim accommodation I was directed to the Holiday Inn! Canterbury Cathedral doesn't offer affordable pilgrim accommodation either. In this instance it was necessary to literally turn my back on the cathedral and look elsewhere.



Photo: Gear Porn

Lastly (and there are more categories) I would highlight what we wear. 'Engineered' high-viz kit might well have the virtue of being lightweight, but most of it is synthetic, combustible and made from non-recyclable materials. When you put it on you stick out like a Belisha beacon. What is this telling us? Isn't the general idea to blend in and harmonise?

These are just some of the ecological challenges facing modern pilgrims. In a way you can't help feeling sorry for them.

But thankfully none of these challenges is insurmountable!

Practical measures to address some of the problems are already in place. The Green Pilgrimage Network, described in 'Green Pilgrimage Network. A handbook for faith leaders, cities, towns and pilgrims'<sup>1</sup> as "a faith-led initiative arising from a conviction that caring for the environment is a religious responsibility," is one among many groups promoting sustainable pilgrimage. The British Pilgrimage Trust, the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham, and countless confraternities, regional authorities and EU-backed bodies are busily putting green policies in place.

Indeed, given the direction of travel it's possible to perceive pilgrimage not so much as a problem but as a *solution* to climate change. Fossil fuel may be expended in certain instances but consider the nature of the pilgrim and what they represent. Once the pilgrimage gets under way most pilgrims are keen to transcend consumer values and dissociate themselves from them as quickly as they can. It goes with the



territory. As Philip Sherrard<sup>2</sup> succinctly puts it, 'The pilgrim breaks with his material servitude,' and were they to be gently reminded of sustainable options they would gladly embrace them. This is why, coincidentally, I'm such a fan of St Benoît Labre, and have less time for St George. I'm quite certain that St Benoît, whom we meet in Amettes, would have eschewed flying, whereas St George wouldn't. He would have caught the plane.



*St Benoît Labre*

### **So why are we in such an ecological pickle?**

It seems to me that what we're experiencing today is symptomatic of a much wider conflict taking place in the human psyche. I refer here to the conflict between two contrasting value sets: between extrovert, exploitative, quantitative values on the one hand and introverted, inclusive, qualitative ones on the other. An imbalance has arisen in favour of the first at the expense of the second. Thinking has dominated feeling; masculine, patriarchal values have prevailed over feminine values, and as a consequence we've lost that life-affirming sense of the sacred. We're inclined to sideline the old ways, destroy the natural world, chase our tails at ever-dizzying speeds and fly everywhere. This has given rise to a world which St Francis and other medievalists wouldn't recognise. I'm minded to think that deep down it's not one that we recognise either.

So what are we to do?

To regain a sense of balance I suggest we need to bring these two value sets into harmony so that the one *enhances* rather than diminishes the other. So they may dance together as equals. Excitingly there are signs that this is already happening: in my own field of agriculture where sustainable, compassionate methods are catching on, in complementary medicine, in eco-architecture, in the rise of the environmental movement, in the political sphere as symbolised by the collapse of Apartheid and Communism, in the large numbers of women in positions of influence. In all these areas there's evidence that a new direction is underway.

Pilgrimage has a role to play in this, too. As the shining exemplar of the sustainable approach to travel it brilliantly encapsulates the ecological agenda. It addresses the matter of the sense of the Sacred. It unifies and threads nations together along a golden line. It promotes local economies. It is in fact wholly expressive of the zeitgeist which partly explains why it's becoming so popular. It would be impossible to stop pilgrimage even if you wanted to. It's too late for that. As Victor Hugo reminds us 'Mightier than an army with banners is an idea whose time has come.'

Should we go or should we stay? *Of course* we should go!

If I may I'd like to finish with a parable.



*View towards Besançon from the Chapelle des Buis*

When I was staying in the Chapelle des Buis outside Besançon, home to a small community of Franciscan friars, I fell in with a Swiss tax collector named Jan who was convalescing from an injury. I could tell he was frustrated. Lean, bespectacled, bubble-bright and in his sixties, Jan talked fast and furiously about his journey during which his ankle had simply given out under pressure. He'd pushed himself too far. It was dreadful for the poor chap. I could tell he longed to get on. He was running out of time; time cost money and he had a flight to catch.



*Andrew Dennis and Br Jacques Jouet*

At the other end of the spectrum, Jacques Jouet, one of the Franciscan brothers, symbolised everything Jan wasn't. If Jan personified one value set and appeared detached from nature, Br Jacques was steeped in it. He revered and magnified God's creation with open arms and wrote and performed songs about it. He played us some of them on his smartphone after breakfast in the friary. Jan and I were captivated. They possessed a sort of purity, an authenticity.

It was interesting seeing Jan and Br Jacques united side by side in that beautiful musical place where the presence of St Francis, the nature saint, was palpable. Seeing them there together reminded me that no one aspect or value set is more valid than any other provided we keep them in balance.

As long as we're courageous enough to listen.



<sup>1</sup> *Green Pilgrimage Network. A handbook for faith leaders, cities, towns and pilgrims.* Available as a download from [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)

<sup>2</sup> Gerard Palmer and Philip Sherrard *Two British Pilgrims to the Holy Mountain*

Andrew Dennis walked from his organic farm in Lincolnshire to Rome in 2015.

## To be a Green Pilgrim: Sustainable Travel on the Via Francigena



**CPR member Margaret Hadley (Muggie) recently retired after a long career teaching English Literature at the University of Calgary. She has walked both the St James Way, and in 2018 the Via Francigena. Here she offers valuable practical suggestions to increase the sustainability of personal pilgrimage**



*Photo: M. Grand*

An invitation to make a donation to Sustainable Travel International caught my eye shortly after I completed my two-part pilgrimage to Rome in mid-November, 2019. Like many other pilgrims, walkers, and cyclists, I had flown many thousands of miles to reach my trailhead on the Via Francigena, first to Canterbury, a second time to Lausanne. And I twice flew many thousands of miles home to Western Canada.

According to Sustainable Travel International ([sustainabletravel.org](http://sustainabletravel.org)), one of many online carbon emission calculators, these two return flights of mine created a total of about 6500 tonnes of carbon emissions - just so that I could walk on unspoiled paths through the unspoiled natural beauty of

England, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Several train and bus journeys in Europe further added to my carbon footprint.



*Lake Bolsena (M. Grand)*

What does 6500 tonnes actually represent? I had no idea, but the online resource Our World in Data says the global average for carbon emissions was 4.8 tonnes per capita in 2017. To put the whopping carbon footprint of my three-month pilgrimage into greater perspective: “The average annual per capita carbon emissions on our planet *must not exceed 2.1 tonnes* if we are to reduce global warming to no more than two degrees C above pre-industrial levels by the year 2050” (the goal of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, *my italics*).

Clearly I am not writing as a scientist, but I do write as someone who accepts the scientific evidence for climate change and global warming, as well as one who sees the too-clear signs in nature. In the Canadian Arctic, polar bears are now encroaching on populated coastlines as the sea ice melts. A recent prediction, which really shook me, claims that by end of this century polar bears will be extinct. And if we were in doubt, the current COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically and conclusively demonstrated the polluting effect of air travel.



*"Leave only footprints; take only pictures." Photo: M. Kirk*

My short sojourn in Europe had a significant environmental toll. Of course, a pilgrim by definition is from away from home, and many must necessarily travel by air or sea from the far corners of the earth if we are to walk the 2000 km journey from Canterbury to Rome. Others, living closer to the Via Francigena, also travel by air, car, bus or train, not at such a great environmental cost, but significant, nevertheless.

The European Association of the Vie Francigene (EAVF) adopted the slogan "Via Francigena for the Future," specifically to show its support for the protection of the environment through responsible tourism. Green thinking and green action are a new part of the philosophy of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome. Of course, many of us are already environmentally conscientious in our everyday lives at home. But how, I wonder, can we pilgrims balance our privileges as travellers with our responsibility to the environment?

Carbon offsets, though controversial, are still an obvious and important first step when these are bought judiciously. Pilgrims can go to websites such as Sustainable Travel International to calculate the environmental cost of their flights. My one-way flight from Rome to Calgary translates to a CAN\$16 offset (about £8). A paltry sum! It embarrasses me.

By donating to one of many energy-efficient and renewable-energy projects and businesses worldwide, my conscience can be somewhat salved. By choosing Gold Standard carbon offsets, I can be sure that key environmental criteria have been met. Gold Standard projects support

forestry and biodiversity, clean and efficient energy, animal welfare, or local communities; always turn away from fossil fuel use; and have low environmental risks.

In addition to committing to buying carbon offsets, what other pledges to being a Green Pilgrim could a person make?

Well, for example, a Green Pilgrim on the Via Francigena could simply pledge:

- to buy and sell used walking and camping gear from sports consignment shops through online resources such as Kijiji
- to carry lightweight, reusable cups and utensils
- to carry a water bottle, avoiding buying bottled water, unless the bottle is refilled again and again
- to dispose of waste properly, and to pick up litter along the route - especially plastic bags and bottles - and properly dispose of it



*Photo: M. Kirk*

- to light candles in churches visited along the way, with a prayer for the earth we have been given stewardship over. Something

simple, like St. Francis of Assisi's words, "Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Earth, our Mother, who nourishes us and sustains us"

- to limit meat consumption to once or twice a week
- to prefer a vegetarian or a vegan diet
- to leave only footprints and take only pictures
- to become a member of the Green Pilgrimage Network, initially coordinated by the erstwhile Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

Green Pilgrims could formalise their pledges by designing and creating their own Green Pilgrim Passport, simply by adding a page to the CPR Passport. They could also design their own badges, perhaps just by attaching a green ribbon to the CPR pilgrim's badge.

These are just a few, mostly obvious suggestions. Others will offer ideas I have overlooked, and more original ones, too, I am sure. The important thing is to get a start, to make a commitment, and to repay the hospitality extended to pilgrims by honouring the people and beautiful splendour of the countryside we walk through on the Via Francigena.



## 1620 and all that

**Victoria Preston, author of 'We Are Pilgrims'<sup>1</sup>, and trustee of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome, makes the case for a renewed reverence for nature as part of our pilgrim ethic**



In 2015 Pope Francis issued an encyclical that began with the words "Laudato si', mi' Signore" - Praise be to you, my Lord, a quotation from St Francis of Assisi's beautiful canticle, in which he reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life, and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. The relationship between faith and the natural world (highlighted in this 180-page Vatican document) is an ancient one, and today is embraced by all the major faith groups, not least through the practice of pilgrimage.

The Green Pilgrimage Network offers a useful source of information on environmentally-conscious pilgrimage in Europe, but in the 400th anniversary year of the landing of the Mayflower on the coast of Massachusetts, we might focus our gaze across the pond.

On September 6, 1620, a group of travellers (later labelled 'Pilgrim Fathers') set off on a voyage to what was, for them, a new world. They dreamed of a life free from oppression. But as is so often the case in human history, over time the rules of their new society were in turn deemed oppressive, not least by the Transcendentalists of New England. This group, which arose in the 19th century, wanted a direct connection with God, rather than one mediated through a Puritan hierarchy. In his influential essay *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the movement's leading thinkers, put forward the idea that God speaks to man through the phenomenon of nature, and that 'Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us.'

Emerson's idea that through a direct experience of nature we can understand the very meaning of existence spurred one of his students, Henry David Thoreau, to live life on his own terms. After a failed attempt to buy a farm, he was given a piece of land (by Emerson) and here on this sparsely wooded plot by Walden Pond, Thoreau erected a small hut, bought

from an Irish labourer who had worked on the construction of the nearby Fitchburg Railway.

This is the setting for *Walden*, Thoreau's account of living in and with nature, and arguably one of the foundation texts of today's environmental movement. In it Thoreau sets out the profound rationale for his actions, 'I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.'



Thoreau's hut

This expression of the journey into 'self' quickly captured the imagination of ordinary men and women, and the site of Thoreau's hut became a place of pilgrimage: a shrine to the pastoral dream; that timeless desire to strip away the material world, to get back to the land, and to hold, if only for a moment, a true consciousness of what it is to exist.

Thoreau's creation was more than a book on living with nature, or a treatise on individual liberty: it was a window into a highly spiritual existence in which life in the immediate present connected boundlessly with the unfathomably ancient world. Throughout his life Thoreau turned to the *Bhagavad Gita* for inspiration and in *Walden* he describes how every morning he bathes his intellect in its 'stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy,' and how, upon laying down the book, he goes to the well for water, where 'Lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug,' and how 'the pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.' A distant place, a revered text, an association with an exceptional spiritual person - Walden Pond had all the components of a pilgrim destination, and more than a century after the initial publication of *Walden*, it was still attracting over half a million visitors a year.

In June 1893, the 'Wilderness Prophet' John Muir made a pilgrimage to Concord, Massachusetts, to see the place where Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau lived and died, and to see Walden Pond, by then firmly established as a shrine to the ideal of free will. Muir is an enthusiast, and tactfully does not comment on its proximity to the road and the Fitchburg rail line. He writes, 'No wonder Thoreau lived here two years. I could have enjoyed living here two hundred or two thousand,' but Muir is not undiscerning, noting that the pond is 'only about one and a half or two miles from Concord, a mere saunter, and how people should regard Thoreau as a hermit on account of his little delightful stay here I cannot guess.'



*Walden Pond*

At the time of his visit, Muir was already a distinguished thinker and writer on the natural world and an environmental activist. He had lived alone for two years in an isolated hut in the epic landscape of the Yosemite Valley. He had helped found the Sierra Club, one of the most influential environmental groups in the US (then as now). And he had inspired President Theodore Roosevelt to embark on a wide-ranging conservation programme which included establishing Yosemite National Park.

Muir advocated that we should not only respect the natural world, but that wilderness should be preserved for purposes greater than human use. In this regard, Muir's sentiment is close to the Zen Buddhist ideology that nature has an intrinsic value, rather than simply being a tool or resource for the benefit of mankind. His is the enlightenment of a truly spiritual being, out in the natural world, looking for a way to live, breathing in creation, feeling the delicate balance of all things, and seeing the earth for what it is; our life support system. If we should ever doubt it, we might, as

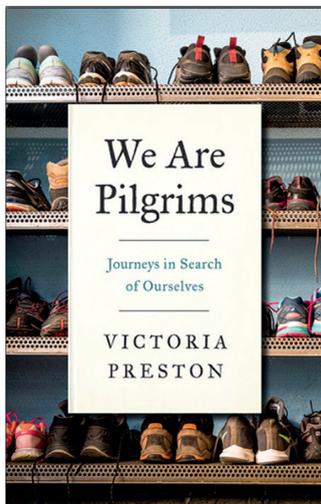
our ancestors once did, look up at the stars and the moon, and remind ourselves that at every given moment we are hurtling through space.

In the century or so since Muir died, society's concern for the natural world has expanded from the local to the systemic, and now includes the pressing question of what we can do to limit or prevent changes to the planet's climate.

Expressed in many different ways and at all levels of society, from inter-governmental accords, to citizen action, this reverence for the planet and the recognition that we need to change how we live is now embraced by all the major faith groups. But, like our earliest belief systems, our renewed awareness is founded on a recognition that our very existence is subject to the forces of the universe.

As we head towards the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower's arrival in the New World, let us reflect on today's 'new world' pioneers: those who are helping steer the course towards the distant shores of net-zero carbon emissions. And on 11 November 2020 - as many raise a glass to the past and to the future - let us give thanks to Thoreau and Muir and the many others who since the dawn of time have helped remind us how much we owe to nature.

**<sup>1</sup> Victoria Preston – author – ‘We are Pilgrims – Journeys in Search of Ourselves’. For CPR members’ 30 percent discount - order direct from HURST and enter Promo code ‘HURST30’ ([www.hurstpublishers.com](http://www.hurstpublishers.com)).**



## The admiral of the Po ferries his 10,000th Pilgrim

**Brian Mooney, former chair of the Confraternity, describes how his friend Danilo Parisi came to be the much-loved ferryman of the Po, and celebrates the crossing of Danilo's 10,000th pilgrim.**



*Photo: Saf Badger*

As you read this, Danilo Parisi will have ferried his 10,000th pilgrim across the River Po.

It has been a long voyage up and down the same stretch of water for this former rugby player and coach since he restarted a ferry service in 1998 to carry Via Francigena pilgrims across the River Po on their way to Rome.

Known fondly as the Admiral of the Po, Danilo had reached a grand total of 9,799 pilgrims when Coronavirus struck and the Via Francigena was effectively closed down on 15 February 2020. As pilgrim traffic resumed on 20 June 2020 he began counting down to his 10,000th. When he celebrated his 71st birthday on 19 August, Danilo had just 40 to go.

But it is not just about numbers. Danilo reaches out to each and every pilgrim, and tries to give all who are briefly in his care a special sense of belonging. Each pilgrim is invited to inscribe their name, nationality, gender and age, and the details of their journey, in a large book – his *Liber Peregrinorum*.



The magisterial register now runs to four volumes and it is a veritable treasure trove of the Via Francigena – an unmatched record of the early history and growing popularity of the reinstated pilgrim route. Each year Danilo mines it for an updated statistical analysis of pilgrim journeys to Rome which is published annually by the CPR (see our previous newsletters and e-newsletters).

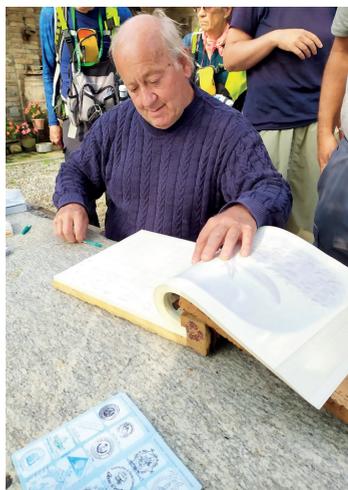
The ride on Danilo's launch follows the border between Lombardy and Emilia Romagna, two of the Italian regions worst affected by the Covid-19 outbreak.

Since the Coronavirus lockdown was lifted, Danilo has been ferrying his passengers in a hired launch, an interim replacement for his own boat which was stolen and vandalised during the shutdown.

Thanks to the generosity of our members from many different countries, the CPR has helped raise a large slice of the funds needed to buy him a new launch which will be put into service in 2021. Local and Regional authorities will also be assisting in the purchase of the new vessel. If you haven't already contributed you can still do so at <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/helprelaunchdanilo>.

Danilo was born some four kilometres downriver in the neighbouring parish of San Nicolò a Trebbia. In his youth he was a keen rugby player for a local side and he was later a rugby and swimming coach. He has turned his hand to many things in life – “*un po' di tutti*,” as he says. One of his great passions is cooking; for some years he helped a girlfriend run a restaurant in the Mediterranean resort of San Remo.

In the early 1980s Danilo returned to his native country to the stone farmhouse on the banks of the River Po at Soprarivo di Calendasco where he set up a rural cultural centre – *Il Circolo Ricreativo, Culturale e Sportivo Biffulus*. It was in 1995 that several Via Francigena pioneers who were tracing the old route arrived on his doorstep.





*Danilo in the early days of his ferry crossing*

“They told me how many pilgrims were following the Camino in Spain and that the same phenomenon was about to happen in Italy,” says Danilo. “This fired my enthusiasm, and from there my passion was born.”

They also pointed out that Danilo was more or less situated on the route where Rome-bound pilgrims from northern Europe in the Middle Ages would have crossed the River Po by sailboat and barge on their way from Pavia to Piacenza.

Without further encouragement, Danilo decided to relaunch the boat service and set about obtaining a commercial licence to ferry passengers, opening for business with a motor launch in 1998. He carried just two passengers in his first year, but the numbers crossing the river on his watch have grown more or less exponentially ever since, as has the list of the different nationalities of Via Francigena pilgrims he has carried – now from a total of 76 countries.



*Photo: Tim Greig*

By no means all pilgrims walking or cycling the Via Francigena today avail themselves of Danilo's service; in contrast to the Middle Ages when the unbridged river was a real barrier, there are now bridges higher up the river at Pieve Porto Morone or further east on the Via Emilia, and there is an alternative route to Piacenza via Valloria and San Rocco al Porto staying on the north bank. Many pilgrims also start their journey nearer to Rome. But Danilo's records provide a good barometer of the Via Francigena, and he calculates that he carries about 80 per cent of the long-distance walkers. The crossing is about 700 kilometres from Rome.

Danilo ferries both cyclists and walkers. It is advisable to book your ride by calling him in advance on +39 0523 771607.

Pilgrims who cross the River Po on Danilo's launch find the experience one of the highlights of their journey. If nothing else, the cool air generated as his boat speeds 3.5 kilometres down the river is a relief from the stifling summer heat. But it is the warm welcome in the shaded courtyard of his farmhouse – where many enjoy a meal and refreshments and lodge for the night – the friendly banter he shares with pilgrims from all walks of life, and the ceremonial signing of his book, and the stamping of the pilgrim passport, that make the encounter so memorable.

Danilo charges a modest amount – enough, if he is lucky, to cover his fuel costs and other expenses. He runs the ferry for the excitement of greeting and helping people, and for the love it.

## Writing the Lightfoot Guides to the Via Francigena



**Paul Chinn** who, with his wife **Babette**, writes the popular **Lightfoot Guides to the Via Francigena**, tells the story of how these came about, and how their production keeps the environmental cost to a minimum

Like so many before and after us, my wife and I caught the Camino bug back in 2005 when we made the journey from Le Puy en Velay to Santiago on horseback. On the journey we discovered the inherent generosity and warmth of people from so many countries and backgrounds that our work in the business world had sadly stifled by the all-consuming desire for instant success.

Of course the journey was not without its problems, and as we got deeper and deeper into the funnel of roads approaching Santiago the sheer weight of numbers began to turn each day from one of reflection, companionship and enjoyment of the landscape into a race for the last available bed space.

In 2006 the bug had us back on the road travelling again on horseback.



*Babette riding Gwen, with Vasco the dog*

This time from our home in the north of France to Rome along the Via Francigena – our logic was that we could enjoy the best parts of the pilgrim experience without the crowds that had perhaps led to the worst. Once again we experienced great generosity of spirit from strangers in the many communities that helped us along the way but, given the route's status as an EU cultural route, we were stunned to find how little reliable information was available with the inevitable stress of being repeatedly lost and having to spend numerous nights *au sauvage*.



*The 2020 Lightfoot Guides to the Via Francigena*

So, we determined that we would try our best to improve the experience for those following in our footsteps/hoof-prints by producing a guide book that would allow everyone to enjoy the journey. Of course, we tried to find a publisher, but with such a small market no one was interested and so, undeterred, in 2007 we formed our own company, Pilgrimage Publications, and after a detailed survey of the route we released our first edition of "The Lightfoot Guide to the Via Francigena." Our ethos was that our books would hold sufficient detail (5200 instructions in the latest two-volume edition) that it would be impossible to get lost, for - even as the number of signposts has improved - they remain the subject of vandalism, trophy-hunting and not infrequent brushes with ever larger tractors and farm machinery. Signposts also mark only the official/political route rather than the historic route and do not show more practical alternatives (we propose 53 alternatives saving some hundreds of kilometres).

Having experienced 30-kilometre days that painfully became 40-kilometre days, we insisted that our data should be accurate and presented in such a way that pilgrims could take informed routing decisions in line with their fitness and the prevailing weather conditions. We also recognised from the outset that the route would be subject to change and that we must

anticipate having to update the books regularly. Traditionally, publishing houses achieve economy of scale by large print runs. These build stock which would be sold over a number of years, but at the price of becoming out of date or being pulped, with the consequent economic and environmental costs.

We opted, from the beginning, to use current printing and distribution methods that meant there would be no stock that would hinder our ability to update as frequently as we judged necessary, by printing hard copy or distributing our eBooks only at the time of an order. We also chose to separate the "get-you-there" guide book from the "what-can-I-see" companion volume to allow pilgrims to decide what they wanted buy or carry.

After many significant changes, the greater part of the Via Francigena official route is finally becoming stable and perhaps our current seventh edition will require much less rework than its predecessors, although we can anticipate that the pandemic will have significantly added to the periodic churn of the nearly 900 accommodation listings.

Over the years we have established good working relationships with the leading via Francigena associations and have shared data on sections we have surveyed and taken their input on changes they have sponsored. We are also indebted to those pilgrims that have contacted us through our website [pilgrimagepublications.com](http://pilgrimagepublications.com) to alert us to changes that they have spotted en route, and we would happily welcome more from future pilgrims. However, there is no substitute for days spent on the ground following and recording the route either on foot, for greatest speed on my trusty mountain bike or - when we can - with our horses. On this route alone we have covered around 12,000 kilometres and still counting.

When we have selected a section of the route in need of review the first challenge is to get to start of the section. In France the SNCF (the French railway system) generally offers a great service, but the network generally radiates from Paris and so inevitably we need to start at one of the towns a few days' ride to the north of my goal. In Switzerland and Italy more train services run parallel to the route. Prior to an update survey, we gather the current edition of our guide, earlier GPS traces, the input that we have received from pilgrims and the VF associations and load as much as possible on both my phone and laptop. Where large changes to the official route are known, we form an initial view on the need to delete, update or add alternatives that will form part of our survey program.

A typical survey day is much like that of any pilgrim, with an early rise and heading out to pick up the trail. On the trail we turn on our GPS recorder and begin to make voice notes at each waypoint, a potentially confusing junction or an intermediate point to give reassurance of being on track. We aim to average a waypoint every 500m. If we are following a section we have previously surveyed then we endeavour to follow existing instructions and note changes, while on new sections we will aim to follow signposts if they exist and revert to association maps only if the signing breaks down.



We believe few pilgrims feel comfortable in conflicting with the signs even where official maps may say otherwise. For the alternate routes which are generally not signed as part of the VF we rely largely on national footpath and road maps.

At each stop-over location, the first port of call is the tourist office where we hope to get an updated list of accommodation and add to our library of history and cultural data. The opening of new accommodation and the closing of others is a constant challenge. The evening would be spent in one of the listed hostels or hotels, though we do have our favourites, while friends and contributors are gracious enough to offer us their hospitality. The main task for the night, though, is to ensure that the gathered data makes sense, is safely backed up, and that we have a route plan for the following day. Not infrequently this will involve retracing part the route to explore an alternate or to fill in data that were insufficiently clear.

However, the survey work is only the start of the process. Despite having developed a number of tools for analysing and formatting the data we have collected, each edition requires an extensive amount of time at the computer screen, perhaps between three and six person months per edition – validating accommodation information, consolidating and rationalising route information, map production, improving layout, researching history, preparing books for publication and proof-reading.

As the route is regaining some of the popularity that it shared with the Saint James Way in medieval times, commercial interests are beginning to come into play with diversions to the route favouring one commune over another, associations making exclusive arrangements with publishing houses and even the copyrighting of sections of the route. Nonetheless we, together with other like-minded authors, continue to be committed to help everyone get the most from their pilgrim experience on this route and other less well travelled roads.

## A little detour, but so worth it!

### CPR member Paul Blackett describes a chance discovery In Tuscany

It was on a hot day in June as I was checking out from my overnight stay at Hotel la Vecchia Carteria in Colle di Val d'Elsa when the receptionist asked if I was walking the Via Francigena. She said that there was a lovely walk along the river that would save me walking through the town, and it was only 500m longer. I thought - why not? She even gave me a free map.

It turned out to be the Sentierelsa Trail, and one of the most beautiful places I found on my pilgrimage. It's not strictly on the Via Francigena, but as we all know you often have to walk a little extra to find accommodation, and if you are staying in the town itself, this is worth a walk through on the way to rejoining the main route.



The trail is a well-marked path and runs from San Giorgio to the bridge at San Marziale, 3km to the south. It is an easy walk, for the most part alongside the Elsa river which is an amazing turquoise colour. The Diborrato waterfall near the end is 15m high but mostly it is a string of low lazy waterfalls and lush vegetation that looks to be well cared for. Stepping stones and rope bridges make for good photos and the shade was most welcome in the June heat!

**Starts: 43.423651, 11.130836** The north-east end of the bridge on the SP5 next to a zebra crossing

**Ends: 43.404116, 11.134240** The north end of the bridge over the Elsa on the Viale dei Mille

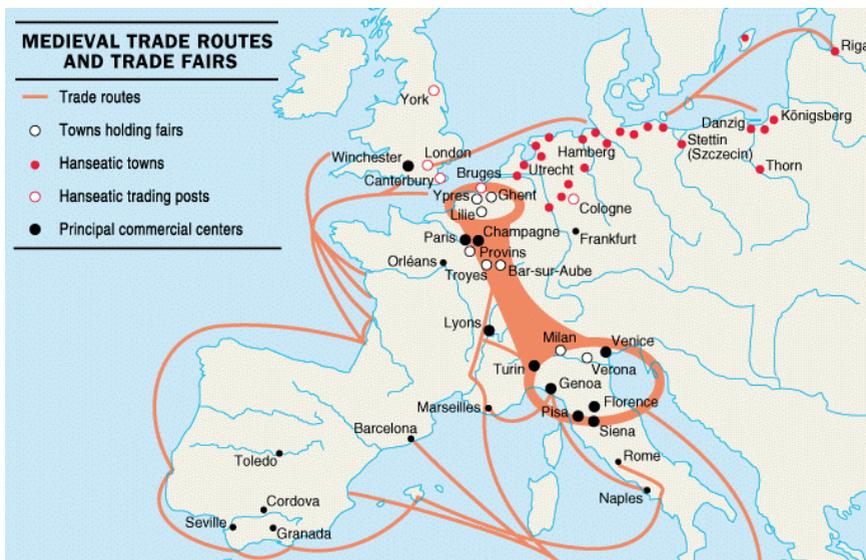
## Trade routes and the Champagne Fairs

Jonas Ewe, former CPR trustee, describes how today's pilgrims on the Via Francigena are walking what was once the busiest trade route between north and south Europe.



We can speculate what route Sigeric took to Rome, but know he returned from Rome to Canterbury year 990AD by taking the quickest way home along a trade route across the Alps at the Great St Bernard pass and the Jura. Much trade also crossed at the Mont Cenis pass west of Turin and north along the Rhone, Saône and Seine rivers, the route which the medieval Italians called the Via Francigena.

It was not solely the feet of medieval pilgrims that created what today is the modern-day Via Francigena. Sigeric would also have encountered merchants, couriers, soldiers, clerics, royalty, entertainers, scholars and apprentices, masons, carpenters, sculptors, vagabonds and outlaws, and thousands of loaded mules, numerous four-wheeled wagons drawn by oxen, and guided by the *vectuarii* - professional haulage contractors hired by the merchants.



In the centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean Sea became controlled by the Muslims from North Africa, and pirates hostile to European merchants roamed across it. Sea transport

was still quicker, but risky, and insurance premiums were high. Consequently, goods had to be transported overland between the northern markets and Italy, and beyond to the Middle East. Later, at the beginning of the 11th century, Genoa, Pisa and other maritime republics increased their war fleets, and the greater security and economic recovery were marked by an increase in volume of trade and shipping.

However, land transport remained difficult, uncomfortable, unsafe and expensive. The merchants therefore travelled to more local fairs.

When the Viking raids ended, political stability and the medieval warm period of c950 – c1250 caused agriculture to expand. Forests and marshes were cleared and cultivated. This led to increased food production and a population increase. The protection of the rural population and some “law and order” was provided by local strongmen and feudal lords. From the 10th and 11th centuries onwards some managed to accumulate lands, castles and create extensive principalities. For example the counties of Brie and Champagne were ruled by the richest and most powerful rulers in what is now ‘France’ (‘France’ itself then was little more than the area around Paris, the Ile de France).

Trade routes were also conduits for new ideas. There was an increase in the rate of inventions, innovations and improvements such as windmills, improved water mills, horizontal weaving looms. Better building techniques resulted in the Gothic cathedrals and stone castles. The simple wheelbarrow appeared at the end of the 12th century. The invention of eyeglasses in the late 13th century in Pisa made reading easier. Some ideas came from trade with the Muslim world, China and India - for example the spinning wheel from the Muslims; gunpowder from China.

In the mid-11th century what is the modern Via Francigena ran south from Calais through more or less independent states - the counties of Flanders, the Vaermandois and its strategic strongholds in St Quentin and Péronne, the counties of Laon, Reims and Châlons, and the county of Champagne with the capital in Troyes, Vitry, and Langres where the Bishop was also duke and peer of France. And thus on to the Kingdom of Burgundy.

The counties of Brie and Champagne were ruled from about the year 950 to 1316 by the wealthy Counts of Champagne. By the 12th and 13th centuries Brie and Champagne attracted noblemen from many parts of western Europe. The attraction of Champagne was in part because of its rulers. Count Henry 1 (1127-1181) was nicknamed ‘the Liberal’ and his countess Marie (1145-1198), daughter of King Louis VII of France and Aliénor of Aquitaine, was a patroness of early French literature. The counts and nobility competed to display their wealth by building impressive stone houses in the capitals Troyes and Provins (now a UNESCO world heritage

site). A further expression of wealth was to wear garments made of expensive Flemish woollen cloth. Demand for luxury goods increased.

The rich count and countess, the nobility, the free-spending fashionable youth with servants and hangers-on had to be serviced, fed and entertained by craftsmen, retailers, tailors, goldsmiths and grocers. To provide the capital towns with those goods and services, more people were brought together.



The Champagne rulers supported the local fairs in Provins, Troyes, Lagny-sur-Marne and Bar-sur-Aube which consequently grew in importance and international influence. *Lex mercatoria*, the set of laws and practices used by merchants throughout medieval Europe, regulated the trade. Even unpaid debts from the fairs could be enforced in the commercial cities of the Low Countries and Italy.

The fairs were located on the crossroads of ancient land routes and became one of the reviving forces of the economy in medieval Europe, and by the late 12th century the main market for textiles, fur, leather and spices. By the 1170s the coinage of Provins was the dominant currency not only in eastern 'France' but also in central Italy. Similarly the originally local Troyes weight was adopted as an international standard, '*troy weight*,' for weighing

commodities in London, Paris and Holland. It is still used today in the precious metals industry, 1 troy = approx. 31.1 grams.

The long-distance international commerce based on the Champagne fairs also resulted in local products travelling long distances. Fromage de Brie was already well known as far as Flanders in the 14th century. By the end of the 13th century trains of pack mules operated regularly to and from Italian towns across the Alps at the St Bernard and Mont Cenis passes. But no bubbly Champagne was available as it was 'invented' only in the late 17th century when bubbles in the wine were accepted as not being a faulty bottle, but eminently drinkable.

The fairs were spaced throughout the year: Lagny-sur-Marne during January, Bar-sur-Aube mid-Lent, Provins in May and September, and the June "warm fair" in Troyes and also the "cold fair" there in October.

One of the most significant raw materials to be carried about medieval Europe was wool destined for the textile industries. Cheap cloth produced everywhere relied on cheap local wool. One of the traded commodities was English wool. Between about 1250-1350 the trade in wool was *the* driving force in the English medieval economy as only English wool was good enough for the luxury cloth woven in Flanders and Florence.

But the Italian merchants and bankers had innovated and developed new commercial practices and international banking, so from the mid-13th century Italian merchants could borrow money at much lower interest rates than the Flemish could and were able to offer English wool producers better terms, for example payment in advance. The Flemish traders were outbid and replaced by the Italians.

In Florence in 1211 bankers were making commercial loans at 22 percent interest. A century later it was very different: the Peruzzi bank in Florence was paying depositors eight percent and charging ten for commercial loans. By the 14th century 'Italy' was the financial centre of Europe. The Italian wool merchants in London continued exporting wool to Flanders, the Champagne fairs, and directly to Italy. The Italians were the master manufacturers of luxury woollen products. A top quality woollen garment for a rich Florentine banker could cost the equivalent of one to two years' wage of a master stonemason.

To give an idea of the volume of trade and traffic generated, in the record year 1305 at the peak of export, the quantity of English wool export was from between 8,000,000 and 11,000,000 sheep. Today there are 15 million sheep in the UK producing about 2kg wool each. A mule can carry a load of about 100-150kg. The road that Sigeric took was busy.

It is worth mentioning that another commodity exported from England was Cornish tin. Until the 14th century Cornwall had a near monopoly in the large-scale production of tin in Europe. It was sent as far afield as Italy, Provence, Bruges, and though Cologne to the Frankfurt fairs. However, during the 13th and 14th centuries it was replaced by Central European tin from Bohemia, Saxony, Silesia and Moravia.

### **Why did the Champagne fairs decline after the 13th century?**

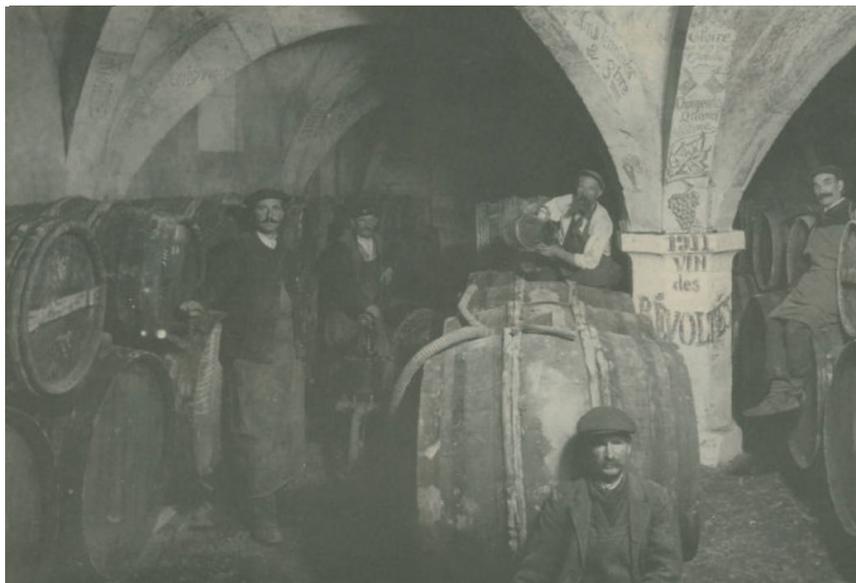
Year 1304 Champagne was united with the Kingdom of France. In 1315, 1316 and 1321 there was famine, and in 1384 the Black Death pandemic spread through Europe. The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), taxation policy, export/import duties, blockades, and competition all played their part. By the mid-14th century it was simply much cheaper, speedier and safer to send goods around the Iberian peninsula on Genoese and Venetian ships to and from the Mediterranean and northern Europe. The ships had improved considerably during the centuries and were increasingly regular and reliable.



*Church of St Pierre, Bar s/Aube, showing the 'halloy' which provided shelter for the stalls. Photo M. Kirk*

Bar-sur-Aube on the modern Via Francigena was one of the four Champagne fairs. This town is now a small quiet place with about 5300 inhabitants. After the decline of all the Champagne fairs in the 14th century it never recovered. The 12th-century Benedictine priory of St Pierre still preserves its 'halloy' around the west and south sides of the church. This is a roofed gallery which gave cover to merchants at fair-time and is the only remnant of the fair. The large market place in front has been built over centuries ago.

The restaurant 'Le Cellier', 13 rue du Général Vouillemont, near the east end of the church still has a 13th-century cellar which was part of a house that belonged to the Clairvaux monks. Did pilgrims too eat here with the monks during the 13th Century?



*The original cellar of the Clairvaux monks in Bar s/Aube*

Provins (12,200 inhabitants), the capital of Brie, also did not recover from the decline of the Champagne fairs. Unlike most buildings of this period elsewhere, which were demolished and replaced by prosperous later generations, many have survived in Provins, which since 2001 is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Poverty is a great preserver.

## The changing nature of pilgrimage

This is veteran pilgrim Roland Nock's planned presentation to the (cancelled) AGM of Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome, London, 14 March 2020



If you have walked the Via Francigena this image of a pilgrim will probably be familiar to you.



There is something about the word “pilgrim” which immediately takes many of us back to a distant past. Somehow it is fixed in our minds that this is the archetype of a “real” pilgrim, and often in debate about pilgrimage there is an idea that we ought to be preserving – or returning to - the bare utter simplicity of an earlier pre-mechanical, pre-internet age. I spend far too much of my life in the online world of pilgrimage discussion groups, and the question of what makes a “true pilgrim” is perhaps the most contentious topic of all. And I think that behind much of that argument there is this image.

Thinking of how to structure this talk I had two ideas in mind – the classic three-point sermon or a more Lutheran variation on the Ninety-Five Theses. You will be glad to hear I have gone for the first option. So I would like to suggest three different ways in which walking pilgrimage is changing: numbers, understanding, and approach.

### Numbers

For me, looking back over 30 years the most obvious change is in the sheer numbers now making walking pilgrimages on routes such as the Via

Francigena and the Caminos in Spain. Santiago keeps detailed statistics of pilgrims but they are much harder to find for the Via Francigena.

One of the myths which some pilgrims walking to Rome or Santiago have today is that they are taking part in an unbroken tradition dating back a thousand years or more. But that is not really true. By the 1970s there were times when you barely needed to take your socks off to count the numbers of walking pilgrims arriving in Santiago and asking for a Compostela. In 1978 the cathedral in Santiago issued just 13 Compostelas. In 1982 there was a Holy Year - when the feast of St James falls on a Sunday. And Pope John Paul II visited the city that year. And those two factors together boosted the numbers to just less than 2000 for the whole year – a number the Pilgrim Office regularly beats most days in summer now.



*Pope John Paul II in Santiago, 1982*

So what changed?

In the year of my first Camino fewer than 5000 people received a Compostela at the end of a pilgrimage. By last year that number had risen to nearly 350,000. Seventy times as many.

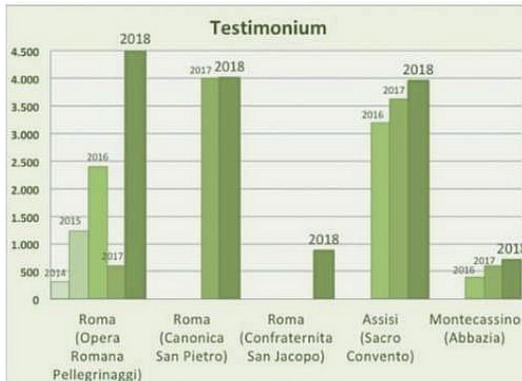
Others will probably disagree, but I think we can trace most of that extraordinary change back to the work of two men - one for the Via Francigena and one for the Camino. For the Via Francigena the leading pioneer was Giovanni Caselli, an Italian medieval historian, who re-mapped Archbishop Sigeric's route in 1985 with the help of Italy's Military Geographical Institute. The results of his reconstruction were published in Florence in 1990, the 1000th anniversary of Sigeric's journey, as *La Via Romea, Cammino di Dio*. One of the driving forces of the revival was Swiss-Italian Adelaide Trezzini, and in 1997 she established the Association Internationale Via Francigena (AIVF). Paul Chinn, who would produce the much-used Lightfoot guides, also played a role in the revival, as did Alberto Alberti, who set up an Italian Via Francigena group.

Don Elias Valina Sampedro was parish priest of O Cebreiro for many years and a student of the history of pilgrimage to Santiago. In the 1970s Don Elias began to research, map and signpost a walking route from the French border to Santiago – what we now think of as the Camino Frances. He is the man who invented the idea of yellow arrows and painted many of the first ones himself. And he drew others into the plot and encouraged towns and villages along the way to provide basic shelter for pilgrims. And he did not only inspire action in Spain. Others became interested in the project and confraternities for pilgrims began to spring up across Europe. In 1985 the first comprehensive practical guide book was released for the newly-marked route and there was an immediate doubling of the numbers of pilgrims who received a Compostela.



By the time I walked in 1990 numbers were close to 5000. But the really remarkable year is 1993 when numbers multiplied tenfold. This was the result of a huge and active campaign by the Xunta, the local government in Galicia, who saw the potential of the Camino in boosting the profile and the economy of their depressed region, and gambled successfully by building the first network of public albergues to replace the fairly random assortment of volunteer-run simple refugios set up by local groups and communities - a direct intervention which came from the state rather than the Church. I think that is significant for the way things have evolved. Just who “owns” a pilgrimage?

As more and more people walked the Caminos in Spain some of them began to think about pilgrimage in their own countries and to other destinations. So through the 1990s you can begin to see moves to recreate other historic pilgrim routes such as the Via Francigena. Again often starting with a handful of enthusiasts and gradually building up a network of supporters, and eventually winning approval and support from national governments and bodies like UNESCO. Danilo Parisi started operating his ferry across the Po in 1998 – beginning with tiny numbers and now celebrating his 10,000th pilgrim. It is hard to find solid numbers for those walking the Via Francigena but I did come across this:



In 2018 9372 people received a Testimonium in Rome, with 3950 claiming the equivalent in Assisi. But just to make the comparison – that makes the numbers on the Via Francigena roughly equivalent to the situation on the Caminos in Spain in 1992. Will the Via Francigena take off in such spectacular fashion? At the moment I think not – it is a different sort of route with different challenges, though with strong intervention from local and national governments to build more infrastructure and promote the route that might happen yet. All over Europe old routes are now being recreated or new ones built to link together as an international web across the continent.

Even Protestant countries which have traditionally been hostile to the idea of pilgrimage have embraced the idea lately. The Lutheran churches of Norway and Sweden have supported the creation of the Olavsleden paths to Trondheim. The Church of Scotland has quite recently reversed its public stance, actively welcoming new routes which celebrate Saint Andrew and Saint Magnus. And routes that have been built in the former Soviet states on the Baltic link into the wider European network.

What I find most fascinating is that these new paths seem to be fuelling an ever-growing interest in pilgrimage rather than simply spreading pilgrims more thinly on the ground. And alongside the revival of long-distance walking pilgrimage there has also been a renewal of interest in small-scale local pilgrimage to sacred sites – something that groups such as the British Pilgrimage Trust are encouraging.

## Understanding

I've talked about the huge growth in numbers walking pilgrimage routes. But I think there has also been a change in the way many people

understand what a pilgrimage is about – their reasons for walking and how they see its meaning.

A 1988 pilgrim magazine collected some data at Roncesvalles for 1987 that I found intriguing:

| <u>Religion :</u> |       |                      |     |
|-------------------|-------|----------------------|-----|
| <u>Chrétiens</u>  |       | <u>Non-Chrétiens</u> |     |
| Catholiques rom.: | 1.384 | Bouddhistes          | : 2 |
| Protestants       | : 29  | Juifs                | : 2 |
| Anglicans         | : 4   |                      | 4   |
| Episcopaliens     | : 1   | <u>Sans religion</u> | 1   |
|                   | 1.418 |                      |     |

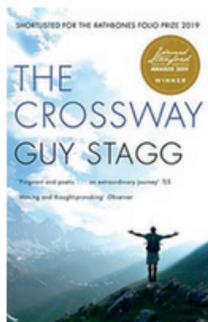
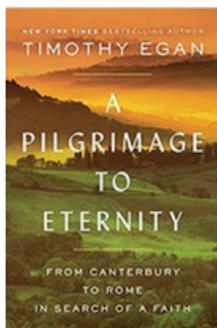
Remember that this is in the very early days of the revival of walking pilgrimage. Of those recorded at Roncesvalles that year – and that was nearly half of all those who eventually received Compostelas – only one person declared themselves to be non-religious. Almost 98% declared themselves to be Roman Catholic. I think that those of us who have walked the Via Francigena or a Camino lately will have found a far more diverse range of backgrounds than that amongst our fellow pilgrims.

I walked my first Camino three years after those statistics but my impression was that it was still overwhelmingly a Catholic practice generously left open to others like myself. As a Protestant I was still something of a novelty. On arriving in Saint Jean Pied de Port I went to ask the famous Madame Debril for a credencial and was turned down flat. One of the reasons she gave for her refusal was that I had not brought a letter of introduction from my local Catholic priest. She did say that I could probably get one at Roncesvalles where the priests were less particular. When I eventually reached Santiago I spent 20 minutes or so in quite deep theological discussion with a priest before he gave me my Compostela - unthinkable today both because of the sheer volume of numbers but also because there is a strong hostility towards anything which appears “judgmental”. This was not an issue with which Madame Debril found any problem!

I do think there has been a growing tendency to downplay the significance of the destination itself and to emphasise the importance of the journey instead. I think that the fact that the end of the pilgrim's journey is at the tomb of St Peter or St James is featuring less and less in the minds of those who walk. I think this ties in with a growing trend to view pilgrimage as a platform onto which one can project personal and individual meanings. So people develop their own small rituals and draw on a range of different

spiritual traditions and interpretations. I suppose that raises the “chicken and egg” question: does that generic mystical or spiritual stance contribute to changing attitudes or simply reflect them? I am not sure myself. What is clear to me is that pilgrimage to historic Christian sites is increasingly open to all.

Within the past couple of years there have been two major books dealing with pilgrimage along the Via Francigena by authors whose relationship with the mainstream churches is problematic.



Timothy Egan ('A Pilgrimage to Eternity') writes from the perspective of a cradle Catholic distanced from the church by traumatic family experiences. Guy Stagg ('The Crossway') writes as an atheist or agnostic who is trying to understand religion through taking part in its rituals. In both cases, the authors would probably have passed the Santiago cathedral's own test: that they made the pilgrimage for religious or spiritual reasons, or at least in an attitude of search. And, as those of us who have walked into Rome in recent years can probably confirm, your personal motives are even less likely to be questioned there.

There is no longer an assumption by most that pilgrimage by definition requires Christian faith. So a Buddhist nun can be welcome as a regular pilgrim on the Caminos and post frequently about her experience on a Camino forum. And further afield we can be made welcome on the Buddhist pilgrim circuit on Shikoku or in the Shinto shrines of the Kumano Kodo. Does a pilgrimage lose its meaning when it is thrown wide open to all and their own individual interpretations? Some people within particular faith groups certainly think so and resent it. If I were to suggest a more positive slant on the matter it would be to say that there is what I might call a growing “positive indifference” towards religious and sectarian divisions and labels

## Approach

The third sort of change I would like to suggest has happened is in what I might call the *approach* to pilgrimage: how people are actually going about it. There are a number of sore topics in discussion about pilgrimage these days: should pilgrims use mobile phones or the internet? Should pilgrims pre-plan and book ahead, or just walk and trust luck or providence? Is it okay to skip the less attractive parts of a route? Should you walk solo and independently or join an organised group? Is it acceptable to have your luggage carried for you by van each day?



*Pilgrims 1990*

When I walked my first Camino most of these questions simply didn't arise. No-one had invented the world wide web at that point and mobile phones meant something the size of a breeze block that only worked in cities. There were stretches of the Camino Frances of 30km and more between accommodation and food. Even water was sometimes hard to find. As well as being quite scarce, pilgrim refugios could be very basic – sometimes just a bare room with space to lay a sleeping bag and mat on a concrete floor. So people often carried quite large loads like our friends in the photo. That probably explains a lot about the age profile of pilgrims in those early days.

*Ages in 1987 recorded at Roncesvalles*

### Ages :

|                        |     |                      |     |
|------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| en-dessous de 10 ans : | 17  | entre 46 et 64 ans : | 235 |
| entre 10 et 25 ans :   | 639 | 65 ans et plus :     | 24  |
| entre 26 et 45 ans :   | 455 | âge inconnu :        | 53  |

By far the largest age group in those early days were under 25 and barely anyone over 65 is recorded. If you have walked the Via Francigena or a Camino lately just compare that with the people you met.

Gradually, as numbers picked up in Spain, it became worthwhile to offer more and better services (like luggage transport) at a price. It became worthwhile to open a hostel or private albergue. Bars and shops re-opened in villages where they had been closed for years. And so it became possible for pilgrims to walk in shorter stages with less physical effort and in far greater comfort. What was at first a physically demanding challenge, mostly taken up by the young and fit, eventually became a less daunting option for those with the budget and the time and the inclination to pay for an easier experience. Pilgrimage becomes a saleable experience and an industry grows up to offer complete 'off-the shelf' or tailored packages.



This headline comes from an article in *The Times* in January 2020. The writer talks about how wealthy busy people are increasingly turning to pilgrimage as a relief from the stresses of their daily lives. He writes in particular about a week-long walk on the final 100km of the Via Francigena in an article dotted with words like “hairshirt”, “endurance”, “spartan” and “suffering.” Then he reveals that all this hardship took the form of sleeping in agroturismos as part of a group tour organised by the *Catholic Herald* and which included “several multimillionaires.” They each paid £2000 to be led by an Arctic survival expert for an average of 15km per day in mid-

October! And if £2000 for seven days walking sounds on the steep side I might add that there is an Australian company offering a 19-day package which combines bus and walking along parts of the Camino Francés for £16,800 per head – about £880 per night!

It so happened that the day after *The Times* article appeared I heard online of the death of this man – David Milligan. A few months before I had followed David as he posted online about a journey he made on foot from St David's, Wales across Britain, France and Spain, to Santiago.

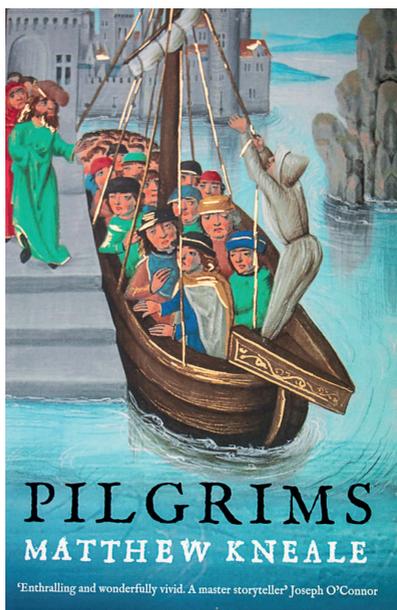


For much of the way David slept outdoors in a bivvy bag. People occasionally offered him a safe camping spot in their garden. Surprisingly often someone would ask about his journey and then offer him a meal and a bed for the night in their home. David's posts were full of joy and gratitude for such things. I couldn't help thinking about the contrast between these two extremes of approaching a pilgrimage.



I find myself much closer in spirit to David than to the writer of that *Times* article. But perhaps if I were one of the writer's multimillionaire companions with deeper pockets I would see things a little differently. But I am a bit of a dinosaur! A pedestrian fundamentalist. Things change. Things move on. There are more choices now to be made. Make of that what you will!

## 'Pilgrims' by Matthew Kneale : a review by CPR trustee and long-distance pilgrim, Tim Redmond



This book, a fictional work set along the Via Francigena, was published in June (2020) and I had been looking forward to reading it as soon as it was published. The main action is set in the year 1289, with a short prelude 25 years earlier, setting a narrative strand which is picked up at the end. Inevitably, perhaps, it is about a diverse crew of pilgrims who set out in ones, twos and threes and find themselves walking together along the way.

The book consists of a series of first-person narratives as the pilgrims tell the reader why they are walking. This works in part, but sometimes I found the individual voices insufficiently differentiated, and so their stories could be confusing. One way or another, most of the pilgrims are going for religious reasons, with a significant overlay of superstition. Their reasons are commonly related to penitence for sins, real or perceived, the details of which are often related with some gusto. Another common reason is to seek a favour or miracle from the Almighty, sometimes after an earlier pursuit at a local shrine has brought no success. This might be a cure for a child, or eternal rest for the dead. The most unusual of these is the concern of "Tom son of Tom" whose beloved cat, Sammy, has died in an accident in a well. Tom is going to Rome to seek the release of the

unfortunate feline from purgatory. A couple of the women consider they have a direct line to God, which fails to convince anyone else. One of the walkers is a 'rent-a-pilgrim', undertaking penitential exercises for those who have the money but not the time to do it for themselves.

Tom was, for me, the most engaging character. He has a simplicity and naivety which wins him friends as well as enemies. But he is not a total innocent and can be led astray by the misdeeds of his companions along the way. His comments about his fellow travellers are enlightening and honest, though without guile.

As the individual accounts unfold, we get differing points of view about some of the events that happen along the road, which is illuminating and sometimes amusing. There is a gulf between how people perceive themselves and how others see them.

There is a fair amount of description of the path and its vicissitudes, though this is not in any way a guidebook or travelogue. Those who have walked may find the odd discordant note. The time given for the journey from Laon to Reims is a bit optimistic, but poetic licence should be allowed. There is a fair amount of suffering and calamity, but it is never full-blown Dickensian in its misery.

The text is lightly sprinkled with a large handful of Middle English words, listed in a glossary. These add flavour without making the text difficult to navigate. At the same time the dialogue has a slightly modern twist without being slangy or forced. Matthew Kneale adds a comment on the use of language of the book at the end.

Just as the language is a mixture of old and contemporary, the book illustrates that while in the past some things were quite different, many aspects of human psychology and relationships remain similar to today. There is human nature, good and bad, and enough kindness to balance out the harshness. The overall tenor is mildly humorous, though the sad issue of anti-Semitism is raised, and there are Welsh issues too!

What I most enjoyed was the pilgrim 'banter'. I somehow had the impression Matthew Kneale may have walked the Camino de Santiago with his notebook in his hand – I never came across that number of pilgrims, walking to Rome. Some of the comments and asides of the pilgrims sounded contemporary. There was the anxiety of meeting up with pilgrims you hoped you had 'escaped'; and the opposite joy sometimes of hearing a familiar voice as you approached a lodging. I do not remember any comment on snoring, but one of the pilgrims played the bagpipes which was seen as a mixed blessing. There were various discussions about pilgrim clothing, hosiery, capes and hats. There was a lady with an unhealthy obsession with pilgrim badges. We learned that the acquisition

of souvenirs and religious trivia seemed as prevalent eight centuries ago as it is today. And of course, there is a fair amount of discussion of food and drink. The suspicion of foreigners and their incomprehensible habits has a long history.

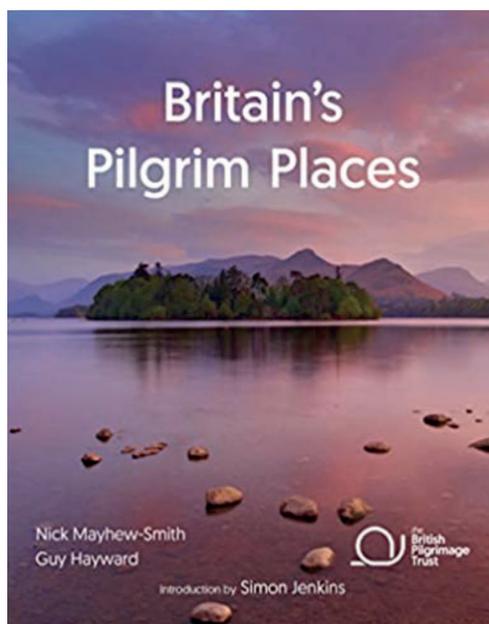
At the end of the day, I was glad to have read it, but was rather underwhelmed by the book.

**"Pilgrims" by Matthew Kneale (Atlantic Books £16.99 or less, Kindle £6.64)**

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## **Britain's Pilgrim Places**

**Mary Kirk looks at this comprehensive reference work of the holy places of England, Scotland and Wales**



If you cannot take to the pilgrim paths of Europe this year, then travel vicariously by immersing yourself in '**Britain's Pilgrim Places**,' written by Nick Mayhew-Smith and Guy Hayward, and celebrating 2000 years of the



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*Example of comprehensive indexing*

There is a brief (six-page) nod in the form of an appendix to other faith traditions which are now installed in Britain - Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, but the book is necessarily about the Christian influences on our culture and their geographical manifestations, though of course many of these were sacred well before Christianity came to these shores. Some will regret that Ireland is not covered, but that would have meant a truly magnum opus two or three times the size.

2020 is the Year of the Pilgrimage and the Year of Cathedrals, and events were being planned (pre-Covid) throughout the year to mark a revival in pilgrim places, cathedrals and 'free-form' spiritual expression. The British Pilgrimage Trust's mission - as is our own - is to harness the current powerful and insistent resurgence of interest in the ancient ways, where meaning and peace can be found in the landscape. This book is both an expression of this interest and a tool for its practical application. There are happy hours to be spent planning in its company and that of a good map.

- **'Britain's Pilgrim Places: The First Complete Guide to Every Spiritual Treasure' by Nick Mayhew-Smith and Guy Hayward (British Pilgrimage Trust), August 2020. paperback. £16.05 from Hive, and Amazon UK.**

## Canterbury Cathedral is 'Good to Go'

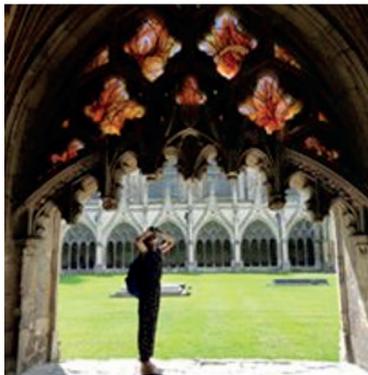
**Emma Pennington, Canon Missioner at Canterbury Cathedral, describes how the Cathedral is still a place of welcome for pilgrims - despite the constraints of Covid-19**



After many weeks of lockdown, it has been great to once again be welcoming pilgrims back to this centre of pilgrimage for over hundreds of years.

In late July we got our official seal from the Government to say that we were 'Good to Go', and had complied with all the guidelines that enable us to once again fling wide the gates to everyone. But when you come, and we do hope that you will come, you will find things a little changed. In this new age of living with Covid-19, cleanliness and the safety of our visitors and staff have become absolutely paramount. Numerous signs have sprung up throughout the Precincts and Cathedral reminding you to use the hand sanitisers provided, keep a respectful distance of two metres from other people, wear a mask and follow the carefully mapped-out route, for - unfortunately - the days of wandering aimlessly around this awe-inspiring space are somewhat curtailed at the moment.

To aid social distancing, only around a hundred people are allowed through the gates in any one hour. This is to stagger entrance and allow everyone to make their way round the Cathedral at a good well-spaced distance. Booking your visit on our website is crucial but we won't turn away anyone without a ticket if we don't have to. Children are free and the normal entry price is lowered at the moment.



Like many businesses we at Canterbury Cathedral were hard hit by the lockdown. The majority of our income relies on visitors; we receive nothing from the central Church, so overnight it simply disappeared, but we still had more than 300 staff to pay. Luckily the Government job retention scheme helped enormously, but we need your help in order to financially get back on our feet once again.

### **A warm welcome**

You will still find a warm welcome here at Canterbury Cathedral, despite the hard times and the PPE. Even if the smiles of our staff and volunteers are covered up for a time, they are still there. Also our new shop is now open and while work continues on Christ Church Gate, access to the Precincts and Cathedral is through the Welcome Centre and shop. Worship also continues with our daily round of services, details of which you can find on our website. Though we can't sing hymns at the moment, we are looking forward to welcoming back sections of our choir on 6 September, and to hear once again live singing to our brand new great organ which was completed as the doors closed for lockdown.

This is just a snapshot of life at the moment at Canterbury Cathedral and the changes we have gone through to make it safe and welcoming to you. We look forward to seeing you, whoever you are, whether curious seeker, devout worshipper, lover of the past in the present, avid Becket follower, or pilgrim passing through, you will still find us here for you with a smile of welcome and a wave of bon voyage.



- **Because of the coronavirus pandemic, all Becket2020 events have been postponed. The commemorations are now likely to begin on 29 December 2020 with Canterbury Cathedral's Martyrdom of Thomas Becket Choral Evensong, and continue during 2021.**



*Photo: Kevin Considine*

**Buon cammino!**

# CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

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