

Date: 30/06/2010 Place: Monterotondo Kms done: 30 Kms Left: Don't know yet!

Am thinking I will call my bulletins by the above title! Somehow I feel the journey is taking place on the edge of reason and reality! (not to mention sanity)

So my plans to start on Fri 25th were somewhat amended by circumstances beyond my control! Arrived Wed evening at Bercy station, Paris to catch night train to Rome to be told there was a strike and no trains to Italy for 2 days! I had 2 problems - 1), I had no accommodation booked as it was a night train and 2) I had bought a very cheap apex ticket for about 35€ which they were quite happy to refund but were then saying I would have to buy a full price ticket - over 100€! I was a little perturbed.

The info guy at Bercy station told me to come back there next day after 17:00 - he said he would have a solution for me. In the meantime I went back to the YHA I had stayed in before as I knew how to get there and they had room but for 1 night only. So next day I had to wander round Paris with rucksack trying to decide whether to go back to station as he said, risking that all he was trying to do was get me out of his hair on the Wed, and wouldn't even be there and I would end up stuck in Paris a second night and with no accommodation again, or to try and book into one of the other Paris YHA places.

Visited Notre Dame cathedral - had not been before. Not a good time to go, there were hordes and to my delight I got in just as a Mass was starting. BUT I was most disappointed with the hordes which had no respect and came up the isle and took photos of the priest et al during the celebration. I then went to the Blessed Sacrament chapel to say prayers and even there, despite the multi-lingual notice stating no visits, it was only for private prayer, the hordes could not respect that either and people came in to gawp and take photos!

In the end put my trust in God and returned to the station after 17:00 as the info guy had said. But he had been telling the truth. They had put some buses on and he got me onto one of them. There were more people than buses so he really did look after me. I wish I had told him I was about to start a pilgrimage. Will pray for him. Felt rather sorry for several people on the bus who had bought 1st class train tickets!

Up-side was I got to Rome a day instead of 2 days late and didn't need to worry about accomm for that night. Downside was journey took just under 24hrs so I arrived in Rome at 18:00 with no accomm. Still I should be used to that by this stage!

By now I had decided to stay a few days in Rome. I need to get an Italian phone card and a couple of other things including a visit to the Irish embassy which of course would not be possible until Monday. This meant I could not go to pilgrim accomm (you are usually supposed to only stay 1 night). Luckily there is a campsite not too difficult to get and in fact very convenient for St Peters (on a direct bus and train route), too so I stayed till Monday then spent 1 night in pilgrim hostel then start out on Tuesday - the feast of Saints Peter & Paul, very appropriate don't you think.

Truly moving Pilgrim Welcome ceremony at hostel with 2 young seminarians who washed the feet of the pilgrims. Then next day they gave me a special Blessing to send me on my way - very special experience.

Left St Peter's 11:25 yesterday. It was hot!! As I got to outskirts of Rome, using google instructions, I found the waymarks for the Via Francigena de SanFrancesco! Wow I was overjoyed.

I promptly lost them, then found them again, then lost them again, then found them and have followed them all the way here! But not without the help of the google instructions. The waymarks are missing at some strategic junctions.

Camped wild last night, had to keep going til nearly 21:00 before finding a place, but got somewhere in the end. Annoyingly it was quite humid so tent wet this morning – condensation. Very heavy and again weather was very hot – suspect it's in the 30's though not seen a temperature guide. Got a hotel in Monterotondo, needed it and not too dear but will have to camp wild 2 or 3 nights for each hotel night. Slept for quite a bit of time.

Will get round to revising my website when I have finished the stuff for CPR – and have the energy. In the meantime will send out the occasional 'Postcard from the Edge', probably with pics.

Take care all & God Bless

Ann