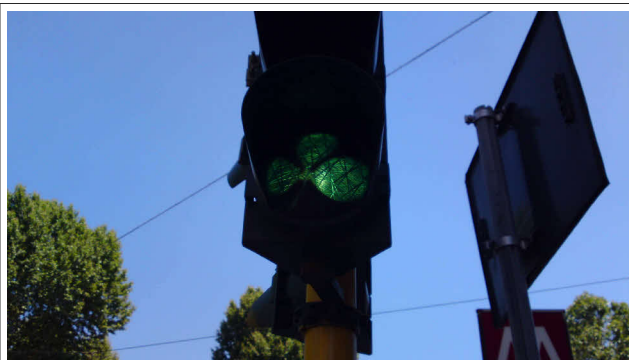


Date: 07/07/2010 Place: Rieti Kms walked: over 100kms Kms Left: Still don't know!

Have now been walking for 9 days and not making as much progress as had hoped. Partly due to the heat but also due to taking an incorrect turning – a dramatic and spectacularly bad example of which I include below. I had said last time I would include some pics.



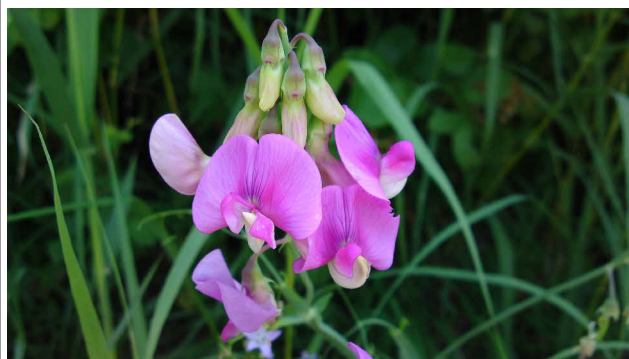
Final view of St Peter's



An Irish traffic light?



Initial day or so countryside undulating



Flora

Last time also I mentioned that I had been following waymarks. These mark a route from Rieti to Rome. Unfortunately they assume you are only walking from Rieti, so point in one direction only, and to make matters worse they often are placed only when you change direction. That means you have to guess which way the person would have been coming which can be quite difficult if you are at a crossroads as often the sign is placed such that it is plainly visible from 2 directions. Sometimes 'repeater' waymarks have been painted onto the road surface which is very reassuring. But alas this is the exception rather than the rule! This is by way of explaining why I have managed to go wrong so often!

<p>Via Francigena di San Francesco Waymark</p>	<p>'Repeater' the right way up. When I encounter them they are upside down!</p>

Although I have mainly camped wild, I did find sanctuary in a Franciscan Friary for which I was very grateful. However the next morning started off with some drama that continued later that day!

Unfortunately that morning I managed to lock myself out of my room! Went downstairs and told a friar who called to another friar who seemed to be in charge of domestic affairs. First he asked if the window was open – I said yes. He disappeared for a while. Then re-appeared with keys. But none of them fitted the lock. Off he went again. This time appeared with a couple of knives to try and prise the door open. I was feeling more and more guilty. Lauds had started by this time. Still no joy. Off he went again and re-appeared this time with hammer and chisel. That didn't work either. He beckoned me to the window of the room next door and showed me that he had also tried to get in thru the window but the ladder was too short! Then he said something I interpreted as “It will have to be later, we will have to get a locksmith” and he went off again, presumably to prayer.

I was left in the corridor. I tried all the keys from the other doors in the vain hope one might work, but no. Eventually prayers ended and another friar appeared with a lay person. They had kitchen chopping knives. That did not work either so off they went. Then someone else appeared who seemed quite businesslike and confident. He was accompanied by the other lay chap and got him to hold the chisel in a certain position, then he hit another knife and I don't know how he did it but the door sprang open! He asked me for the key and checked the lock. It was fine, no damage. I was amazed. I was sure they would have to get a new lock and repair the door. All the trouble I had caused them just because they were kind to me. Anyway I was back into the room and no damage had been done.

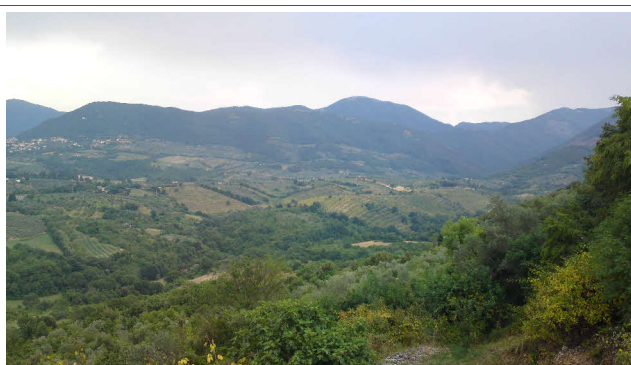
That particular day was Sunday so I stayed for Mass causing me not to be on the road until 11:20. On way out saw the Superior and said goodbye. He traced a little cross on my forehead and blessed me. It was a lovely parting gift.

Found the waymarks and followed them, taking the wrong turning now and again but discovering the mistake fairly quickly. The route lead up into high country, along not unpleasant cart tracks, climbing sometimes then levelling out. Views were beautiful.

By about 15:30 I came to a waymark at a X roads and it was very difficult to tell which way to go. R went up into an olive orchard, L went down towards a house which I thought might end in a dead end, so I chose to go straight ahead. VERY VERY WRONG.

The route started to climb again, up and up and up. Also the weather changed as it had done the previous 2 days and storm clouds came overhead. There were several rolls of thunder and it started to rain, but not heavily. The temperature dropped quite a bit so walking was actually more pleasant though the climb was strenuous enough.

An hour later the track came to a field and immediately swung L past a fence into a wooded area, still climbing. By this stage I was beginning to have doubts. I felt there really should have been a waymark there. In the hope that I was still going in the right direction I went on. The path split in two but each leg continued parallel. Eventually it petered out. This was definitely the wrong route. There was a fenced off area but with a ladder allowing access over the barbed wire. I thought about climbing over and just trying to make my way down in the direction I thought correct. But there was no obvious path. Also I was pretty tired by now. It was 17:30 and now more or less at the top there were several flat places I could pitch the tent. So that's what I did.



In the mountains



My little tent

I got comfortable, ate and wrote up my diary. I was just finishing off when I heard the sound of bells – the sort usually hung round the neck of cows, goats etc. This was accompanied by the sound of barking. I became very uneasy. The sounds came closer and closer. “This is a herd of something with guard dogs” I thought to myself. I was absolutely correct. As was I in my concern that the dogs would discover me. After a minute or so there was the sound of barking just outside the tent. It was loud and deep and sounded like a very large dog.

All I could do was keep very very still and pray, and hope it would realise I was not a threat and go away. After several fearful minutes that was what it did. I settled down to sleep with great relief. It was short lived. About 30 mins later I heard again the ominous sound of the bells and dogs. This time more than one came to investigate. Again I kept still and prayed but I have to admit I was terrified. In all the walking I have done (and I think it's been about 8000kms since I started in 2002) I have never felt in such danger. I was aware too of not trying to 'smell' afraid but all I could think of was the dogs might, in an instant, turn on me, thinking I was a threat, and all that stood between them and me was the thin fabric of the tent, my prayers, your prayers and the Lord.

As before, the barking continued for a few minutes and then ceased. I said prayers of thanks. I shifted my position and immediately barking started again. One dog had stayed behind! Again I prayed and froze. Again it stopped. I went to sleep.

I awoke probably about midnight. All was quiet. I thought perhaps I could just pack up and try and find my way back to where I had gone wrong. I started to move about and the barking commenced again. The dog was still there, on guard outside my tent. Again I went to sleep. Waking again at 02:30 I again hoped to get away. No, it was still there.

I woke again shortly after 04:00. I could hear the sound of bells and dogs again but way in the distance. I moved about a bit. No noise. I moved about more. Still no barking. It seemed to have gone. I packed away quicker than I had ever done before, worried all the time a dog might appear and I would be much more vulnerable outside the tent. But no, I was OK. I got away. But I was not out of the woods yet!

It was still dark and my torch was not as strong as I thought. I wandered for a bit trying to find the path to retrace my steps. I thought I saw it and made for it but oh no! It was a flock of sheep with dogs of course. They immediately started barking. I turned and started walking in the opposite direction. I hoped to find the fence that had a ladder over it as I felt sure the dogs would not follow me in. They were not actually vicious, barking rather than snarling, warning rather than attacking. Nonetheless I knew they would attack if they thought I was a threat.

I found the ladder and climbed over but it was pointless trying to descend in the dark with no clear path so I went far enough in to feel safe and found a very handy rock, said my morning prayers and started my diary. By 0530 it was light enough to walk so I set off in what I hoped would be the correct direction.

It was quite difficult, picking my way over and under branches and I knew I had quite a long way to go down. In all I had probably climbed over 1000 feet. After a time I found a narrow but definite path. It led to the fence where there was another ladder. I felt I recognised the area and yes, it was the way I had come up. Quickly I started back down the track I had taken yesterday, exited the woods and was en route back to the last waymark I had seen.

It was now 06:30 and just as I arrived at the waymark what should I see but a guard dog! I had been right, it was big. It was white, a bit like the Pyrennees mountain dogs. It woofed a warning to me and then turned back towards the herd. I quickly took the turning I should have done. In less than a minute I came on another waymark. Again at a crossroads with a house in one corner. It looked as though straight on was the correct choice so off I went. It took me past a house and towards a large farmyard. I could see there was a track on the other side of the farmyard BUT

there was a cacophony of dog barking, though they sounded as though they were fenced in. However there was a loose hound type dog and as I turned around and looked back to the farmhouse, saw an alsation AND the mountain dog. The herd was coming my way. I felt sure that the correct route was straight on (and later I was proved right) but there was just no way I was going to go into that farmyard, thus possibly posing a threat. I knew I had been protected last night/earlier this morning, but that does not mean I would knowingly walk into a rain of bullets.

I turned and although was walking towards the dogs, they let me walk by. At the waymark just opposite the house I took the path leading away from where I had come. It took me eventually (as I thought it would) back to Ponticelli which I had left the previous day! So I had spent a whole day going round in a circle.

I decided for that day at least there was to be no more exploring wild country tracks. It was road that I could see on a map for me.



Mountain track -



or main road?

I learned a valuable lesson that night about choosing places to wild camp! And I wanted to let you know how effective your prayers and good wishes are and to say a HUGE THANK YOU.

I'm feeling much fitter now and seem to have acclimatised a bit to the heat – the 1st few days were a bit grim. I will be following another way marked route for the next few days – but I know from previous experience that it is well way marked and in both directions so I am hoping not to get lost so often, and be able to make more progress.

So that's it for now

Take care and God Bless

Ann