

Date: 29/07/2010    Place: Citta di Castello    Kms walked: 416    Kms Left: Not sure, lots!

As I start to write this there is an incredible storm going on. I thought the one that happened when I sheltered in the bird hide was impressive. Nothing compared to this one! And this time I am in a tent though thankfully not my own tent but a pretty robust Red Cross tent provided as a refugio at Citta di Castello for pilgrims on the Via Francigena de San Francesco route. I am very grateful for it as they only charge 5€, but just before the storm broke I was enquiring about a shower. Just outside the tent there is a mobile loo/washhouse thing and it has a shower. Unfortunately there did not seem to be any water, which is why I was enquiring. I have camped wild for the last 3 nights so really do need a shower! Back to the storm – it became so loud I had to look out of the tent and yes. It is hailstoning! Pretty dramatic. Thank God this is Italy as I am still warm. If it was England I would be freezing and utterly miserable right now!



Storm approaching!



Italian hailstones!

Anyway – on with the story.

First I would like to report that I have had no further dramatic adventures either with animals or geography! Though I did have one slightly sleepless night camping wild not very far from a house which had several dogs which barked incessantly throughout the night. It had been quite late and I had walked quite far and was a bit desperate to find somewhere. When I pitched there had been no sound of dogs.

Next I want to tell you that this postcard is a dissertation on taking the wrong route! As it happens, my previous experience as a pilgrim has taught me to be fairly philosophical about not being on the road I thought I was. There are many ways of ending up on an unanticipated road and I think I have found all of them!

First of all you can be on a route that is signposted in only one direction – and not the one you are going in, as I was when walking from Rome to Rieti. Sometimes it was obvious what direction the route had come from but other times not and it is easy to make a mistake as I did and ended up with the dramatic episode with the guard dogs. There is not much one can do about those situations.

Then there is the situation when one is on a path that is not marked on one's map but had been waymarked and one gets to a T junction with no obvious waymark for the route one is on. One has

a 50-50 chance of taking the wrong way. In my case I would say I have a 9 to 1 chance of talking the wrong way! This happened after I tried to go from I Prati where I had stayed to celebrate my birthday to my next destination. I had already decided to abandon the Via Francigena de San Francesco from that point as I knew it went over very high ground with an uncomfortable narrow path.

Having established at Greccio that there was a path I could follow, and the very kind lady in the Information Office there photocopied a part of a map for me, off I went – and in no time at all went wrong and ended up on the road to Stroncone – which I did not want. I came to a junction and there was a map of mountain routes, showing me a way whereby I could correct my error. I decided to take it but was off both my road map and the one from Greccio. After some hours mainly climbing, I arrived at a T-junction. Naturally I took the incorrect route which took me down down down – but the wrong side of the mountain!



I was going to follow Sentiero D7



Seeing Stroncone in the distance should have given me a clue that I was descending the wrong side of the mountain!

Eventually I came out onto a road and there was a chap there so in my innocence I asked him was the town I now headed for straight ahead. He looked at me a bit strangely. “No” was the response, “you have to go back up and down the other side” - or words to that effect, given my level of Italian, that seemed to be the gist of what he was saying. Unfortunately my reaction (oh no!, I've gone wrong again and now I have to climb back up all that way [about 400m in altitude] again) must have registered in my face because he immediately said he would take me in his car. Unfortunately I really did not know where I was and in the end admitted to my actual destination of the day, and he insisted on taking me there. A bit like meeting Giulio in my last posting, it seemed terribly rude to have refused so I allowed him to take me. We picked up his wife who was very chatty and when they dropped me off at the campsite in Marmore, it was only about 9:30. But as they dropped me off, his wife asked me to pray for them and there was something in her eyes that told me all this had been meant to happen, my going wrong was so that I could meet her and answer her request to be prayed for.

In fact had I just ignored the guy and walked on about 100m I would have come to a road sign which would have told me where I was. At that point I would have changed my route to walk via Terni. Had I done so, I would have missed the lovely waterfall of Marmore.



Descending the right side of the mountain with Terni in the far distance. I have to cross the river.



A pause for prayer at a roadside shrine



The waterfalls of Marmore



You can just make out a partial rainbow!

Another way of taking the wrong route is when you really are totally incompetent at map reading! There is really not much of an excuse for this type of error! I was now in Assisi – such a beautiful place but it was so very hot – but that's another story ('sin sceal eile' as it would be in Irish except I think I have left out an accent or two!) Anyway, I was leaving Assisi but because of where I was staying, it did not make sense to go back to the waymarked route in Assisi town, but to intercept it on the way out from Assisi to Valfabbrica, my destination that day.

So again, off I went, got to a road junction (and there is really no excuse for this as the roads were marked on my roadmap), and I chose the 'not right' road. Alas and alack this error was multiplied by a huge factor when I came upon a turning to the left waymarked with the yellow Tau symbol. It was at about the right place for the real left turning I was looking for. Of course I did not realise I was on the wrong road to begin with! Anyway I took the turning, ended up in a farmyard after about an hour, was told to carry on by the farmer's wife, went round in a small circle ending up having to scramble down a 15 foot bank sending my rucksack down first. Then found the Tau symbols again which sent me even further astray. Walked up and up and up and arrived at a dead end. For once had to retrace my steps. A few hours later arrived at a place I could identify on my roadmap. I had been walking for 6 hours and I was now 4kms away from Assisi where I had started! It was now 12:45 and by the road I was now on, I still had 14kms to go .... and it was hot!



Alas following the Tau symbol this time ....



....brought me to a dead end!

In the end I reached Valfabbrica but by walking 25kms instead of 12! En route tried to find somewhere to camp wild but not successful. I knew there was a Youth Hostel there but suspected it would be full. No it wasn't. There was another pilgrim there, a German called Kurt who luckily spoke very good English (I have absolutely no German). I had a room to myself, the hostel had a lovely garden and very good value beer! It was Saturday. I was very very worn out after the day's walk. The next day was Sunday and the Feast of St James. All these things combined to persuade me to take yet another rest day. I had had one already in Assisi – I didn't feel I could just walk thru Assisi. But I really felt the need to stop, so I did.

Luckily though the weather turned and the temperature went down. On my approach to Assisi it had started to get really hot – high 30's/low 40's. It made walking very much of a challenge and I was finding it difficult to stick to my plan of camping wild 2 nights, indoor accommodation 1 night. I found I was so hot I really couldn't face trying to find somewhere to camp wild, needed to be inside. It was now only high 20's/low 30's in the afternoon. I found I was able to walk much further so over the past 3 days made up for the rest day in Valfabbrica and have arrived in Citta di Castello on the day I had planned when I re-did my schedule on 16<sup>th</sup> July.

I signed off the last missive as a very happy contented pilgrim. Well since then there have been many many moments like that. The countryside has been beautiful, the sun has been shining and not too hot. There have been 'downs' as well but the 'ups' have definitely been in the majority. And finally – flowers!



Take care all and God Bless

Ann