

Date: 03/09/2010

Place: Padua

Kms walked: 940

Kms Left: Lots!

Hello people! I started this on 3rd but it's taken a couple of days to finish!

Have now reached Padua which is in fact a slight detour. In the grand scheme of things, my route passed within 2 days of Padua so I felt I could not be this close and not visit the place so much associated with St Anthony. Just a quick word about Padua. I really like it. It is a lovely city (though very expensive!) and the Basilica of St Anthony is so incredibly beautiful. The works of art on the walls – they take your breath away. Also there was a Friar who was on duty to bless those whose wished it. His words of blessing were nourishment to my soul.

In my last postcard I had said it looked like the countryside would change. And yes it did! The phrase “I came down from the mountains” keeps going thru my head. It sounds highly melodramatic but certainly the change was dramatic. For basically the whole journey from Rome I have encountered hilly/mountainous terrain. OK there were flat bits as you crossed the valleys but these tended to last for a half day, maybe a day at the most. And in the main you were still 300 – 400 meters high. Also the last stretch of the journey was the highest. But as I left Galeata the mountains had given way to hills and now the hills gave way to flat countryside stretching into the distance.



One of the higher parts of the journey



The view from the other side of the pass



Mountains have given way to hills



.... and hills give way to flat countryside

I arrived at Ravenna and decided to spend 2 days there, in fact I tried to book a 3rd day but the hostel was full. The hostel at Ravenna by the way is really lovely. Not that far from the centre and like others I have come across does close for part of the day, but it doesn't kick you out til 11:00 and it re-opens at 14:30. Many of the hostels close about 10:00 and you cannot get back in til 16:00 or 17:00. This is not a problem if you are only staying 1 night, but if you want a rest day it is not helpful to have nowhere to rest! Ravenna was lovely but alas I did not have time to see the Church mosaics for which it is famous. I will have to return!

After Ravenna I reached the coast and the combination of heat and humidity served to half my daily average walking distance. The walk out of Ravenna was absolutely horrible. It was along km after km of industrial grot en route to the port. At one point there was a chemical I could smell in the air and it started to make me feel sick. When I reached the port area, if I had been tempted to take a short-cut, well here was my opportunity. I saw a sign “Ferry to Croatia”!



A tempting shortcut!



Never mind, there's always the beach!

But I resisted the temptation and plodded on and found the campsite I had been searching for. It was a lovely site, small but not expensive and with its own private beach, only about 100 yards from my tent. Naturally I had to go for a swim (and yes – all this time I had been carrying a swimming costume, weight 105gms, not the most obvious item of pilgrim apparel!). It was lovely. The beach was sandy, no stones or rocks in the sea. The sea was warm. I floated in the water, counting my blessings.

My route stayed on the coast for several days and then took me inland towards Padua.



Water feature at one of the beach resorts



Typical seaside wares!

But during that time I had to revisit a small town called Stia (from which I wrote the last postcard) in order to get my 2nd anti-tic jab which I needed for Croatia. It can be quite difficult to cut a long story short – but here goes! I met a Priest at the Pax Christi Peace house who had told me to look him up when I went thru the town before Stia. Unfortunately that day was Fiesta and the office was closed. So I went on to Stia and found accommodation with the Parish Priest there and took the opportunity to write the next postcard. The following morning I left much later than normal, partly due to the postcard. I went to get a coffee and croissant for breakfast and who was sitting outside the café but Gianni, the Priest I had met at the Peace House! We shouldn't have met – I should have been away well over an hour ago! Anyway the upshot was that after I explained I had this problem getting the anti-tic jab his cousin, who could speak good English, took me to a doctor to get him to write a prescription and then to a chemist to get the medicine. The only problem was that it would take 10 days for the medicine to be delivered. I chose the 'bird in the hand' on the basis that even if I went to a bigger town, it might still be a 10 day wait so said I would walk on and then return by public transport.

At the appropriate time I rang the chemist but the vaccine had not arrived. I rang again the following day and still no joy. “Ring back on Monday” was the advice. It was 28th August and I had to have the second shot by 2nd September so I was getting a little worried.

Continuing my journey inland I was now crossing the Po delta. Even though I avoided major roads there was more traffic than I expected and it tended to be fast as roads were flat and straight. Finally on the Monday I was to ring the chemist again I arrived at the main Po itself, a river I had crossed by boat in 2008 when I walked the Via Francigena to Rome. My map showed 2 bridges at Corbola so I chose the minor road. As I came closer to the river, there was a road sign indicating 'Dead End'. Optimistic as always I carried on, hoping that it only applied to cars and the bridge was still operational for pedestrians and cyclists – I was on a cycle track by now. If I had looked at my next (and newer) map which also showed this area I would have seen that the bridge no longer exists. So I discovered yet another way to add length to the day's walk – try to cross a non-existent bridge, then have to go the long way round to get to the one that does exist!

Anyway I went the long way round to the major 'red' road with the bridge. It started way before the river, crossing agricultural land high up. As I started along the bridge, I passed a sign informing me the bridge was just over a km long. “I'm not going to like this” I thought to myself, but the nearest other bridge was at least 10kms away and not in a direction I wanted to travel. So up I went. It climbed higher and higher and then reached the river where there was a walkway with a barrier so one was protected from the traffic. But it was hairy being so high above the river. Traffic was fast and heavy with lots of lorries. When large ones went by I stopped as the tail wind was quite strong and buffeted me. At last I was over land again, still high but the road started to slope down.



Above the river there is a walkway but you can still see the water beneath your feet!



Halfway across the Po now

About halfway to the end of this section of the bridge I heard a noise. I stopped and listened. It was a miaow. I looked over to the other side of the road and there was a little ginger kitten, walking alongside the curb, the same direction as me, miaowing continuously. A lorry thundered past and the little thing was blown against the curb, almost off its feet. I crossed over and tried to pick it up whereupon it lashed out at me in fear and ran a few steps on. I caught up with it and blocked its way with my staff.

“What are you doing here?” I said to it. It looked up at me and what a pitiful sight. One of its eyes was glued completely shut with yellow gunge and the other glued half shut. The poor thing could hardly see. I had a small cloth bag where I kept my sunglasses so I put that round my hand and tried to pick it up again. But this time it wriggled away and onto the cement parapet, stopping just millimetres from the drop to the field, 60 feet below. My clumsy attempt at rescue had put the kitten in even more danger. If I reached for it again it would probably recoil and fall. What could I do? What was I going to do with a rescued kitten anyway? I walked away.

But I couldn't get the image of the kitten or the sound of its cries for help out of my mind. I was deeply ashamed that when I thought of using my jacket to try and capture it, I had not wanted to get it covered in yellow gunge. My jacket was more important than the kitten? I had to go back. I still didn't know what I would do with a rescued kitten, but I had to go back

At the end of the bridge I stopped, put my rucksack on the other side of the barrier, took my jacket and set off back to where I had left it all the time thinking “It's probably too late. It has probably fallen off or has now been killed by a lorry”. Callous as it might sound, I thought perhaps the problem had been solved. I didn't really want the question of what to do with a rescued kitten. At first I couldn't see it, nor could I hear it. Then I made out the sound of its miaow.

I came to where it was and my heart sank. It was still on the parapet, more or less in the same place, literally on the edge but crouched down, too afraid to move. How on earth was I going to get it? I lay down on the road, flat on my tummy, not occurring to me that I might not be that visible to the passing lorries. Not saying a word in case I frightened it, I put the jacket across the palm of my hand and made a grab for it. Gottcha! It tried to wriggle free but this time the jacket covered it and I quickly gathered all the corners into my hand, turning it into a bag from which the kitten could not escape. The poor thing miaowed plaintively but I kept telling it not to be afraid.

Returning to my rucksack I put the kitten and jacket into one of my 'kit' bags so I could put it down and get my rucksack on again. I had a vague idea of releasing the little thing in a field and hoping it

would just fend for itself. But in my heart of hearts I didn't think it stood much of a chance, being half blind. Then I thought perhaps if I let it go near a farmyard it would make its own way to the yard and get itself adopted. There was a farm just along the road so I started for it.

Unusually there was no fence or ditch so I crossed into the field with no problem. Then my feet (which are in God's Hands) took over. I found myself going through the farmyard gates which were wide open (again a little unusual) at which point I sent up a heartfelt prayer. "Please, please let these be good, kind people who like cats and will adopt this little lost creature".

I could hear the sounds of cutlery on crockery, they were at lunch, but at least there was someone in. I knocked on the door and a woman came out. I explained in my broken Italian that I was a pilgrim and how I had found the kitten on the bridge. The kitten was still miaowing. She said "and you want me to take it?". I nodded. "Yes" she said, quite matter of factly, as though it was a common occurrence for a pilgrim on foot to turn up at her door with a rescued kitten! She called her son who came to the door. I opened the bag and the kitten poked its head out and the woman took it into her hands. Amazingly its eyes were both wide open with no trace of gunge. It looked a lot better than when I had caught it. It stopped miaowing. Her son took it off her and 'cooed' at it, it settled in his hand and he held it to his chest. I was so relieved I nearly started crying. They offered me something to eat but I didn't want to intrude further.

Making my way to the nearby village to stop for a rest I thanked God I had gone back for the kitten, and the people were obviously going to give it a good home. What with crossing the bridge and rescuing the kitten I felt quite drained so was grateful to find a small bar where I rested and had a coke and sandwich. But what if my vaccine had arrived on time? I would have been in Stia that very day. What if I had looked at the other map? I would have crossed the bridge much earlier. The Lord works in mysterious (and sometimes not so mysterious) ways. And my jacket? Yes there was a small bit of yellow gunge on it, but it will wash out!

Nearly forgot – one of the results of replanning my route was that I now passed thru a little village called San Colombano. Saint Columbanus was an Irish saint (not to be confused with St Columba) who travelled on several missionary journeys across France to Italy, founding monasteries as he went. He settled in a small town near Bobbio north of Rome and there is a town nearby named after him. Well I was very surprised to find this place also name after him. Unfortunately the Church was closed and there did not seem to be a resident priest. I would dearly have loved to have had a parish stamp from there.



Arriving at San Colombano



Pause for prayer at the old Church in San Colombano

And now for something completely different!



Bottle holder, an alternative use for one's walking boot!

I am still meeting many Guardian Angels who help me on my way – Gianni, his cousin Lucia, the lady and her son who adopted the kitten are just a few. So yet again I thank you all for your prayers and good thoughts for me.

Take care and God Bless

Ann