

Date: 13/10/2010

Place: City of Pag, on island of Pag

Kms walked: 1344

Kms Left: Actually I am going to remove this til I get much closer to my destination. My route keeps changing and there's no point in constantly recalculating it. The total journey is in the region of 5000 kms, so I still have a fair way to go.

Right. Back to the story. Last time I wrote I was in Trieste. I was very fortunate to be given a very warm, generous, welcome by the brother and sister-in-law of a good Italian friend. I stayed with them for 5 days for which I was very very grateful especially since when I arrived I hit a wall of tiredness and 2 nights in a row went to bed at 19:00.

What I hadn't said in the last bulletin was that the day before I walked in to Trieste, my rucksack broke. The stitching on the strap that attaches the top of the sack to the shoulder strap had started to work loose some time ago and I had taken the precaution of re-reinforcing it with a large nappy pin (an essential bit of kit when you need to hang wet clothes from the backpack to dry!). Anyway as I took the pack off to stop and rest, it slipped and landed awkwardly and the pin came undone and so did the stitching. Several other minor things had gone wrong with that pack but this was the last straw. I now had no confidence in its reliability and decided I needed a new one. It turned out to be much more difficult to replace than I expected but I found a replacement and set off from Trieste.

After weeks of walking on level ground I now climbed to about 500m and walked across a plateau of rolling hills. Beautiful scenery, it's limestone and the area is famous for its caves. I didn't have time to visit any though. In less than a day I was in Slovenia. The next day I managed to walk 30kms and crossed into Croatia where for the first time my passport was stamped. I asked them to stamp my Pilgrim Credential as well but they said No.



The rolling hills of the plateau



Crossing into Slovenia



Pause for prayer at a roadside shrine in Slovenia



Crossing into Croatia

The road started descending and next day I was back at sea-level at Rijeka. Unfortunately by now it was clear that my new rucksack and I were not going to be friends! It was quite a bit heavier than my previous one and I couldn't seem to get it to fit snugly on my back. So I had a delay while I went shopping in Rijeka and bought another rucksack.

There is a very well-known place of pilgrimage in Rijeka, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Trsat, which has been visited by the previous Pope, John Paul II. The legend of it is that when on his way to Syria, Francis of Assisi was shipwrecked and landed on the Trsat plain. He had a vision that Jesus's house in Nazareth would appear there. Some 80 years later the house miraculously transferred itself to Trsat after the fall of St Jean d'Acre, the last Christian outpost in the Holy Land. A few years later the house left Trsat and re-appeared in Loreto on the Italian Adriatic. I visited this shrine (Trsat I mean) and was able to attend Mass the day I left Rijeka. I gave the 'old' rucksack to one of the Franciscan Friars there, explaining that it had only been used for a few days, confident that he would be able to pass it on to someone who needed it.

I was now into what I thought of as the second stage of my walk – the Croatian Coast. I was following the main road all the way down to Albania. Traffic was heavy out of Rijeka, there are some oil refineries south of the town so large lorries were not uncommon. The weather was not great either!

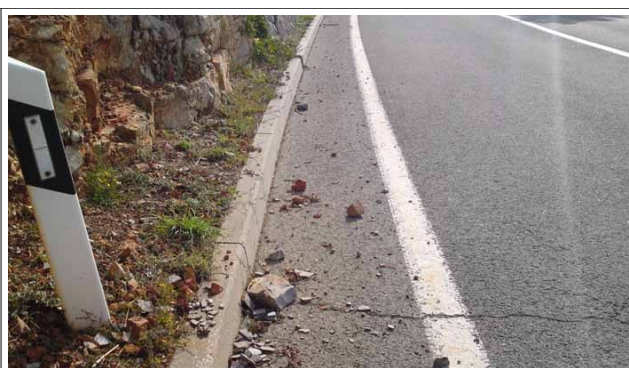
My first 'challenge' came when I discovered that the camp-sites I was expecting to stay at were mostly closed! According to my map, the coast was dotted with camp-sites and I was looking forward to not having to camp wild so often. On the first night out of Rijeka I couldn't find the campsite and ended up getting over-tired and staying in an expensive hotel (though to be fair, it was cheaper than hotel prices in Italy).

My next 'challenge' came with the coast road. I knew it wouldn't be flat but I hoped it would not be high with sheer drops. It was! Luckily I am on the side of the mountain and the drop is on the seaward side but very often the barrier is not continuous. I was very glad I was not walking in the other direction. In fact I could not do this route in the other direction. I don't think I could even drive down that road! But every now and then the road builders had bridged a river gully and there was a drop on both sides. Mostly on my side there was a decent barrier but there were a couple of places where there was not! I had to walk in the centre of my side of the road repeating the prayer "Please don't send any traffic, please don't send any traffic". He didn't. (Thank you God.) The distances were short, only 50m or so but still worrying. Some drivers here drive very fast and they overtake even when approaching me.

My next 'challenge' was the weather. Not rain or cold but wind. A few days after leaving Rijeka, as I left the house I had found a room for the night (more of that later) the lady of the house said "It will be windy". I didn't think much of it until several kilometres later the wind came. It was blustery and very very strong. Then it would die down. Then I would turn a corner and there it was again. Sometimes I really had to struggle not to be blown into the road. I can only say thank God I did not have the combination of wind, steep drop on my side of the road and no barrier!



Great views, sheer drops and no barrier!



And another hazard – falling rocks

Then to cap it all, a couple of days ago, while striding purposefully down the road, I put my foot into a nest of creeper type plants which grabbed my ankle in a vice-like hold and I fell, grazing my knee quite badly. I washed it immediately and covered it with a very large sterile dressing and luckily it didn't go septic or anything and in fact is healing very well. Nor do I seem to have damaged the knee internally.

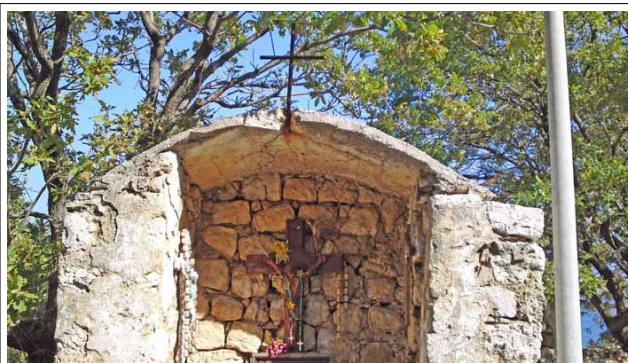
All this combined to pull my spirits down somewhat and I began to doubt my ability to continue. I wondered if I should skip a few hundred kms and go further south where it would be warmer and camp-sites would be open and perhaps return next spring to walk this section..... Have I got the sympathy vote yet?

But as has happened many times in the past, God answered your prayers for me and sent along the Guardian Angels. First the woman in a Tourist Office who said I should avoid a particularly dangerous section of coast road by taking a ferry from Prizna to Pag island and walking there instead, returning to the mainland by a bridge on the south of the island. She added too that the weather was better there. The distance would work out the same. Then there was the German couple I met on a campsite that was open who gave me breakfast and lots of information about the smaller, privately-run camp-sites still open, and said it was not windy in the south. And the lovely kind woman I mentioned earlier, who warned me about the wind. The evening I stayed with her she drove me to Mass in the nearby town and told me I was to pay nothing for the room. I left a donation though. Then at another small open campsite, they would not charge me for electricity and the person in charge went off and got a hotplate for me to brew coffee. When I told him I had no pot he returned with a saucepan and packet of soup, soup bowl and cutlery. Then he carried over a huge tree trunk, setting it beside a smaller one to give me a table and chair. And I must not forget the incredibly kind, generous Priest who could speak fluent English and invited me to dinner which meant a hot meal and delicious cake and who loves Irish music and we discovered we had CD's in common and there were sandwiches left over from a function earlier that evening so he provided me with breakfast and lunch the following day. I spent a really relaxing evening with him. And the Benedictine nuns who gave me a bed with access to a kitchen so I could have a hot meal again!

So my spirits have revived. I have camped wild but also have found more camp-sites open than I thought I would. It is warmer here on Pag than it was on the coast road, and more sheltered. It reminds me a bit of Ireland. I think it is Noel Murphy who says “I'm from Connemara where they grow rocks”, well Pag grows them too!



Pag grows rocks



Pause for prayer at a roadside shrine on Pag



The peace and quiet of a minor road



.... and stunning views

Yesterday I have a truly wonderful walk along a minor road that for much of it was actually a gravel road. No traffic, peaceful and quiet and stunning views. Such a gift after weeks of walking on roads with varying degrees of busy-ness. The City of Pag is also known as the City of Lace so I have acquired another adornment for my rucksack – a beautiful lace cross. And this rucksack? We're the best of friends!

And changes to my route? Interestingly I have been warned now by 3 different people of 3 different nationalities about Albania and I am having second thoughts about walking through it. One person suggested I go through Bulgaria instead. I have said from the outset that I will walk all the way but only if I feel safe. I have also said to people that I believe God will guide me and tell me if something is not safe. I think He may be trying to tell me something about Albania. If anyone has any suggestions for alternative routes or ways to cross Albania or would like to come out and walk with me do let me know.

Take care all and God Bless

Ann