

Date: 29/10/2010 Place: "Zaostrog"

Kms walked: 1617

I was rather hoping the next postcard I wrote would have been from Medjugorje but things conspire against me. Whereas a Postcard I wrote some time back was mainly about getting lost, this one is on the subject of Schedule Changes (or "the best laid plans of mice and men .....")!

First I will start where I left off last time – should I or should I not walk alone through Albania? Many people did respond to my request for advice/alternative routes etc. Thank you to all who did. After a lot of soul searching and asking the Holy Spirit for guidance I have decided I will not walk through Albania on my own. There are both trains and buses that follow approximately the way I was going to go so my intention now is to take public transport. I think I would feel safer on a bus than train though probably I will want to buy a travel ticket for my rucksack as I suspect it will not fit on a luggage rack and I do not want to leave it where I cannot see it, for example in the boot of a bus. So that is the first change to my schedule.

Remember in my last Postcard I spoke about the strength of the wind? Well that was just a taster of what was to come. About 3 or 4 kms before Sibenik there is an inlet with a long bridge across it. Well, it had been a bit on the breezy side up to that point though nothing drastic. By the time I was about 2/5 of the way across the bridge the wind was blowing a gale. I was hanging on to the railing for dear life and at times when it gusted even more strongly I had to stop. At one point I thought I would have to get down on my hands and knees and crawl so that

a) I was lower than the railings and b) did not present such a barrier to the wind. I kept wishing someone would stop and give me a lift. They didn't!



The bridge seemed much longer than it looks here



Detail from door panel of the Cathedral in Sibenik

The center of Sibenik and its Cathedral (dedicated to St James) is a World Heritage site. Certainly the Cathedral was very beautiful on the outside but the interior was gloomy and you had to pay to get in. Nonetheless I had promised myself I would say a rosary there so I did. It was chilly walking around the town and perhaps I missed something because I didn't find it so very remarkable. Also I had booked into a room, been charged full season rates, the room was grim, had no heating and I was cold in it. Not great memories of Sibenik!

My next 'tangle' with the wind was to come several days later walking onwards from Omis (where I had some unusual accommodation – see later) which is south of Split. It started when the wind ripped off my rucksack rain-cover without my realising it – how would I, the rain-cover is behind me! Luckily I discovered the cover was gone about 5 mins later and retracing my steps was able to recover it. Losing the rain-cover at the onset of winter would be bad news. I put the cover back on. It had rained the previous day and was still cloudy so I thought it might rain again so needed the

cover. But I made sure I secured part of it so it could not detach itself completely from the rucksack. Just as well - within about 20mins the wind tried to grab it again.

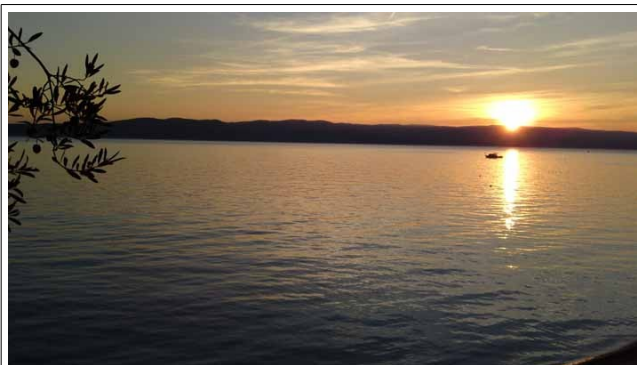
By now the clouds had mainly dispersed and it didn't look like rain so I took the cover off. As my journey continued the wind increased and gusts became stronger. It got to the point where, like on the bridge, I had to stop at times and just hang on to my pilgrim staff and brace myself because if I was moving the wind was able to make me lose my footing. I was relieved when I eventually came to the end of that day's walking!

Understandably I was a little apprehensive when I set off the next day. However skies were blue and cloudless and the wind did not seem too bad ..... but ..... I reached a point in the coastline where there was a largish kink to the left, perhaps where a river had once been. There were roadworks so traffic was only one way at a time. When I started round that section the wind was so strong that it was pushing me back even when I was stationary. Just after the bend was a small town and thankfully an open café.

I sat in the café completely un-nerved. Remembering how I had felt at Senj I realised why – it was the unpredictability of the wind and the sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. Consulting the BBC weather website filled me with dread. The wind speed would drop considerably tomorrow which was good, then be similar to today the next day which was not so good, but then would *double* on Sunday and Monday. “Well,” I said to myself, “I just won't be able to walk on those days. I will have to find somewhere with cheap accommodation and stay there until the weather changes.”. So another possible schedule change.

The concept of being prevented from walking because of the weather was something completely alien to me. I had seen people before, on other pilgrimages, taking a bus just because it was raining. “Wimps!” I thought to myself as I trudged on, getting soaked. Rain is a nuisance, uncomfortable and can render me pretty cold and miserable (not to mention grumpy), but I haven't experienced it to the point where I felt my life was in danger as I felt to some extent with this wind. Of course this sounds melodramatic, but I could well foresee the wind tripping me up and causing me to fall into the path of the traffic (and as I said before there are some who drive very very fast) and I found *that* life-threatening.

My spirits were considerably lifted in the next couple of kms when I was able to walk along a minor road with almost no traffic and despite being higher than the coast road, was sheltered and warm. Then the day ended by my being given an apartment on the beach for only 15€ because of a computer error. It was absolutely beautiful and I was able to cook a hot meal!



Sunset view from beach apartment



Lovely quiet walk next day along the seafront.  
No traffic, what bliss

Next day was again blues skies and sun but this time no wind and I arrived at Makarska. It was here that I planned to start inland towards Medjugorje and indeed hoped to be there within about 3 days. It was now Friday, the predicted high wind was expected Sunday & Monday. To reach Medjugorje you have to go up the mountains along which I had been walking. Checking Google 3D maps it looked as though the road would have to climb but then I would be on a sort of plateau. Perhaps the winds would not be so strong there as they would not be being funnelled. So perhaps I would not have to sit out the weather.

The next thing to pre-occupy me was accommodation. (the reasons will become clear later). It would be too cold to camp wild at higher altitudes but looking at the map there didn't seem to be anywhere I could reach in one day that had accommodation. I started thinking that perhaps I would stay in Makarska and walk then bus it back then bus out the next day and return etc. So at least I had somewhere to stay. When I asked at the Tourist Office they confirmed my suspicions that there was probably no accommodation in the town at which I wanted to stop.

So I went to the bus station to check out bus availability on my route. "Oh no" they said "there are now no buses on that route. The road is closed. There has been an avalanche. The buses are going to Medjugorje via the coast road, turning inland at Ploce. You could do that." This was a real nuisance as I was looking forward to getting off the coast and away from the wind. Armed with that info and some maps from the Tourist Office I went to a nearby pub! "I'm sure that even if the road is closed to cars I would walk across the rockfall" I thought to myself as I studied the maps. I had walked down roads before that were closed to cars due to roadworks. The girl who had served me came over, curious as to what I was doing.

I explained. At first she did not believe I had arrived from Rome by foot so I showed her my Pilgrim Credential. She was so moved that she was nearly in tears. We got to talking about my onward plans. Apparently there was a point in the road that went up the mountain (my planned route) which was only one way, controlled by traffic lights. The road narrowed and the side of the drop was crumbling and falling away. It was at this point that the avalanche had occurred, completely blocking the road.

Did I want to walk up a mountain road (on a day that might be rather windy) and arrive at a point where I had to avoid rocks by going to the side of the road which was crumbling and dropped steeply away? No, I don't think so!

Again I was plagued with doubts about continuing at all. Perhaps it was just getting too cold and wintry. Perhaps I should just get a bus to Medjugorje then give up the walk until the weather started getting better.

But no, it wasn't that cold. Apart from the very windy days I just described, I am still walking in shorts and a sleeveless top.. And the wind would only last for a few days and then it would be OK to walk again. No, I'm still not ready to give up yet.

It would have to be the coast road, so my schedule changed again. Anna (the girl I was talking to in the pub) told me the avalanche had happened only 3 days ago. Wait for it ..... more melodrama ..... I should have been on that road 3 days ago but I had been delayed in Split – see later! I subsequently found out that this was a most unusual occurrence, the road has been open for 35 years and nothing like this has ever happened before and the road will now be closed for about 5 months, so I don't think it would have been a matter of me picking my way over a few boulders. It was a

miracle no-one was injured. Anna remarked that the mountains were very beautiful, but very dangerous.



Beautiful but dangerous mountains



Makarska marina and mountains

Returning to the question of accommodation - why was I so worried?

The day I left Split it was much later than I should. I had hoped to walk 25kms but did not leave until about 10:30. Nonetheless rather surprisingly I did reach my planned destination – Omis albeit quite late. I knew there was a Franciscan friary there and rather hoped they would give me a bed. Alas the answer was No. They did give me a stamp for my Pilgrim Credential. So I went back into town to look for a room. The 1<sup>st</sup> place I tried had a room but it was 200Kunas (Kn). I had been told 3 weeks ago that because it was now end of season I should be able to find a place for about 70 – 100 Kn. In fact my experience was that rooms offered to me were 150Kn so 200Kn was well above the going rate even for a foreigner. I felt I was being taken advantage of so said NO. The next place I tried was very brusque and said “We only have apartments”. When I asked if there was anywhere else, she suggested the woman who had already tried to get me to pay 200Kn. I continued to walk round the town. The only obvious alternative was a 5\* hotel, way out of my league. I went into a bar and asked if they knew of anywhere. No. Then a souvenir shop (on the basis the guy there might know of somewhere). No.

So I set off out of town, telling myself “God will provide. He has not failed me yet.” By now it was 19:00 and nighttime. To my relief the street lighting and pavement continued beyond the edge of town. Just after I passed the Friary again I spotted a closed beach bar on the sands below, and it seemed to have a kind of shed beside it that perhaps I might be able to get into. By the way, it was a bit windy! I went down the dirt track to investigate. I couldn't get into the shed thing but the beach bar had a veranda with a roof and walls on 4 sides with a gap of course to get onto it. I stood and contemplated. “Would this be OK?” I was possibly visible from the road, but only by people walking past, which there probably would not be many and I would be in shadow. “Yes, this is where He has lead me” I decided. It had the added advantage that I was still very near the Franciscan Church so could go to Mass the next morning (they had Mass at 7:00).

So I spent the night there – see picture. Surprisingly I was warm – I was fully dressed but also had my waterproof trousers and jacket on. So the silver lining was that although I had thought it was now too cold to camp, perhaps it wasn't. But that only applies to sea level. And it also applies to a non-windy day! The wind increased during the night, every now and then it took a big, deep breath and went WHOOOOOSH. I thought any minute now it will break one of the tree branches and throw it at me. It didn't, the trees were too stubborn and refused to yield any branches! The following day I did go to Mass and that was the day the wind tried to take my rucksack rain-cover.



Pause for prayer en route to Omis



Unusual places to sleep No 2

So lots of doom and gloom? Actually No! Changes to plans? Well, Yes.

So why am I not full of doom and gloom? As in previous Postcards, there are too many examples of the acts of kindness and the unexpected good things (like getting the apartment on the beach) to mention them all but here's a few.

First there was the lady in Zadar who absolutely refused to let me pay for my room. She wouldn't even hear of a donation. She said I brought a blessing on her house. I felt very humbled and blessed. She took me round the town in the evening after Mass and showed me things I would not have discovered for myself. There is a sea organ, a series of holes in the cement promenade and the changes in air pressure caused by the waves makes them play notes. In the same area is a large circular solar panel which gathers energy during the day, then lights up with different colours and patterns at night. You walk on it to make it change colour and pattern.



Solar panel in Zadar



Being a tourist in Split – I'm the little blue speck at the feet of the statue. You rub his toe for luck

Then there was the woman in Biograd who put me up even though she was going away that night and had to trust a complete stranger with the key to her house.

But the really great thing that has happened since my last Postcard is that a good friend came out to meet me and keep me company for a few days. We met in Split and it could not have worked out better in that I walked into Split on the same day that he flew in. We drank too much and stayed up far too late. I could have done with a rest afterwards! But after all these months it was so good to talk! We were very lucky with the weather – it was warm and sunny, a bit grisly on Sunday morning but didn't actually rain, then cleared up. I enjoyed playing at being a tourist – again see picture above. On the Sunday after Mass in the Cathedral we met a group of young American women, all friends since college days and chatted to them for ages. Then we went for breakfast in

Luxor, just opposite the Cathedral. If you are ever in Split, you just have to go for breakfast at this place and hopefully sit outside. There is just something about it. Unfortunately as I said the weather was a bit grisly just then and rain threatened so we sat inside. Even so it was a great experience, great waitress, relatively expensive - but justifiably so, not ripping-off-ly so. I just loved it – it felt so posh.

Did you notice I put quotes around the town name – this is because I am still actually staying in Makarska and walking and 'bus'ing as I described earlier. This was mainly as a back-up plan in case I had to sit out the weather. My accommodation is a lovely apartment about 2 minutes from the marina and it has heating, large kitchen/diner, satellite TV (though I don't think I can get any English channels – haven't tried yet), separate bedroom, bathroom with bath and washing machine, balcony and all for 120Krn a night.

Yesterday (Sunday, the day of predicted high winds) dawned with grey, angry, clouds. I caught the bus out to where I had stopped the day before. My plan was to attend Mass at the Franciscan Friary there and if the wind felt threatening, return to Makarska. But although it was a little fresh very occasionally, the wind did not become strong, the angry clouds passed by without spilling their content and it was a very pleasant walk, much of it by the sea.

It's quite strange walking through these little towns dotted along the coast at this time, out of season. The seafronts are like ghost towns with lots of boarded up cafés and awnings with tables and chairs neatly stacked underneath. I keep thinking “I could sleep under there!”. There is lots of accommodation, apartments and rooms to let as well as hotels but they too are mostly closed.



'Ghost seafront' – this is 10:15 in the morning



And finally a flower – I haven't seen one of these before

So despite my vagaries with the wind, landslides etc I am still going and I am still meeting Guardian Angels, thank you for your prayers.

Take care and God Bless

Ann

ps. I have just come back from a most beautiful Mass in the Franciscan Friary here in Makarska. There was a 6-man choir singing in multipart harmony and although it was not a fully sung Mass it was not far off. The Church looks modern and behind the altar is a most exquisite mosaic stretching from floor to domed ceiling. The combination of the voices and mosaic was truly heavenly.