

Len's 37th letter from the Via

Date:14/08/17

Location

Aulla

KM's to
Rome

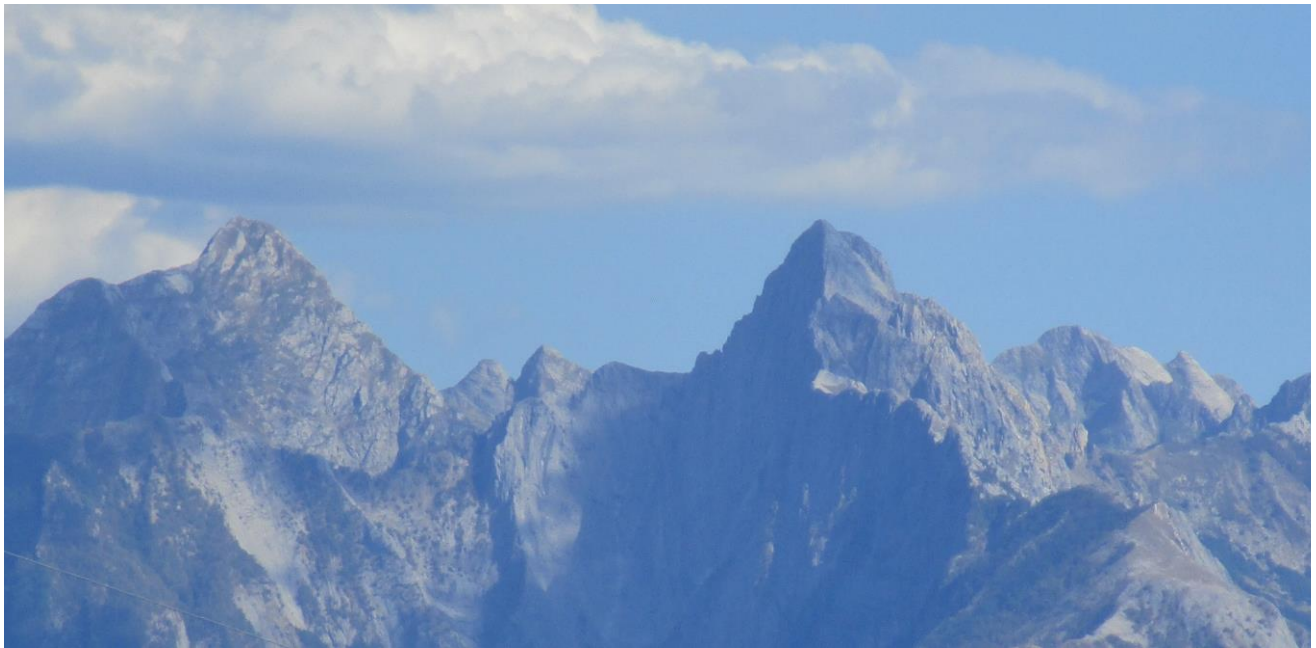
623

Steps Today

56,267

Because of lack of accommodation in Aulla I stayed two nights in Pontremoli coming back by train from Aulla.

Today's walk was long at 32 kms. but there weren't any significant hills to climb basically walking on either a floodplain or just above it in the foothills. Also, it was going to be interesting as I had done part of this walk before. I spent a lot of the day in the forest walking along shaded paths, crossing stone bridges and enjoying this view for most of the day.



It may not compare as favourably with the Swiss Alps but I think it comes very close. There is a walk you can do along these mountains but I imagine it would not be for the fainthearted or elderly pilgrims.

When I ventured out onto the floodplain there was lots of small market gardens which appeared to be mainly for personal consumption. This is an example of the many lovely tomatoes I passed over the day, they were just beside the path so it was very tempting to put some in the lunch box.

When I was still at school I picked tomatoes as a weekend job. The strong pungent smell of thousands of ripe tomatoes (and overripe, this was before mechanical picking) put me off tomatoes for years. But these tomatoes smell like a sweet lolly ready to eat straight off the shrub. Some of the tomatoes I have purchased have been so nice they compete with the grapes and berries as to what will be eaten first.

The country is very fertile so it is odd that there is no evidence of commercial production, perhaps water is a problem as the river was very dry.

I came out of the floodplain into the little village of Pieve di Sorano. There is an old church there and next to it was a tourist office which was



featuring a photographic display of the local attractions on the Via Francigena. There were some beautiful photos and showed this region in its best light.

As part of the complex was this new drywall fence, there was only a little bit of mortar used on the top to cement in the flat stones to create a finished surface. I hope that the skills used to create this type of structure are not lost in our modern world.

As I moved through the village the path took me to a display memorialising the second world war. There were photos of Pontremoli after the Americans had bombed it, being occupied by the Germans at the time. It's sobering to see these photos and compare it with the old parts of the city which have been rebuilt.



It is one of the few public displays that I have seen which celebrate Italy's involvement in the second world war. I know that the Apennine mountains, at which I am at the foothills off, was an area where there was a lot of Italian resistance action against the Germans, perhaps this is why the local people are not so conflicted in memorialising the second world war.

I must improve my Italian as the curator could not speak any English so I wasn't able to ask him any questions. I suspect that this display is a personal one rather than as part of any museum so I was interested to find out if that was so, the man was quite old but not old enough to have been involved with the war, perhaps his parents where.

As these things pan out I met a couple of walkers one French and one German. The German was very chatty and had very good English so after a little while I asked him how he felt walking through an area his country had invaded. His response was that at that time it was not his country or his parents, in other words just an aberration, an interesting response, Methinks a country is charged with exposing its many grievous faults and failures, with dragging them up to the light.

We then became a real international brigade with two Italian walkers joining us, I think a father and daughter. The man had had a bad fall and was really struggling. Just so I can get another bridge photo in this is him. Anyway the Italian lady started flirting with the younger gentlemen in the party and it appeared they were making some arrangements for later that night. The Frenchman was leading the



group and he was so excited that he went the wrong way. By an amazing coincidence it was exactly the spot where I took a wrong turn with Carol when doing this part of the walk before so I recognized the error and turned the brigade around. As I was not part of the later festivities and didn't want to waste any more times on incorrect turns I dropped off the group and made my way to Aulla on my own.

Pilgrim Tips

Always wear a hat with a full brim, skin cancers on the ears are painful.