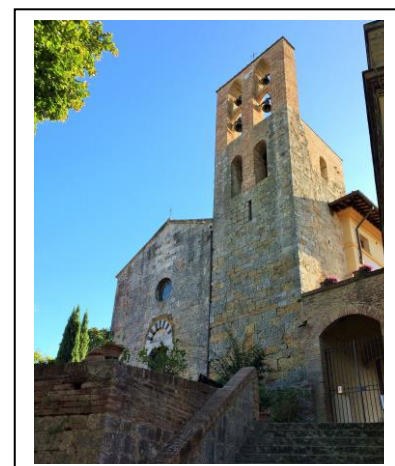


Len's 51st letter from the Via				Date:3/09/17	
Location	Buonconvento	KM's to Rome	383	Steps Today	26,916

Pilgrim Carol has come off 'the bench' to provide today's chronicle of our walk from Lucignano D'Arbia to Buonconvento. Earlier today, I made the mistake of expressing a different opinion from fearless pilgrim Len, who was unmoved by the quiet, valley walk along a country lane. He expressed the desire to be up there in the clouds with the eagles! So, he laid down the challenge for me to take charge of the day's blog. Not wanting to 'shirk the issue', I decided to 'throw caution to the wind' and have a 'red hot go'. Yes, it's footy finals in Melbourne so it's time to pull out the clichés. Oh, the joy of being in Tuscany when your footy team isn't in the finals. To quote Gerard Whateley circa 2016, I have to say, 'it's a great time to be alive'.

We had a very easy 13 kms walk today into Buonconvento. We started off from Lucignano D'Arbia - a postage stamp village adorned with some old stone archways and a beautifully positioned church (see photo) - to the disconcerting sounds of dogs barking en mass. There must have been a dozen or so of them all contained in an enclosure (Len is becoming more convinced by the day that his luck will run out and he'll find himself the victim of an attack). Fortunately, it didn't take long to put some distance between us and the braying pack, which eased their stress and ours!



We soon found an easy rhythm, walking in the cool morning fresh air through picturesque country, quite close to a typical country railway line. Yesterday, we saw the cutest little two carriage blue train travelling along this line. I wish we had taken a photo. It looked like a toy and we wanted to jump aboard. We hoped we'd see that train again, travelling up and down the line but sadly not another sighting. It was enough to imagine, just for a second, some trainspotting days in retirement.

The morning's walk was so relaxing after the heat of the last two weeks. Our sky canvas today was a pastel blue with smatterings of mashed tater clouds - the hues so different from an Australian summer sky. Some impressive hilltop mansions dotted the landscape, just to add some architectural interest into the mix; we thought they could even have been small hamlets. *What's not to like, Len?* Sometimes you have to be in the gutter looking at the stars!

There's no Via without a hill though, and the next hour had us climbing quite steeply for some expansive views on both sides of the ridge. We could see Montalcino and San Quirico in the distance, and we were pretty excited to get a glimpse of the abbey Monte Oliveto Maggiore (a working monastery, dating back to the 13th century). The photo here has it barely visible in the



distance. I reminisced for a while about our two previous visits there. The first was with our 'Sunday Boulevard Cafe' book club (which must now be in its 20th year). That day was full of

drama and adventure as intrepid walkers, Dela, Sue, Paul, Len and not-so-intrepid me, all took off on an ill-fated expedition to find a gentle hill top path. I guess 'what happens on the track stays on the track', but I'll just say that Len fell from great heights three times onto his back (religious connotations there) and Dela nearly came to grief when we sent her bush bashing up the hill on a reconnaissance mission.

What does occur to me in visiting these familiar places, is how different the experience is each time. Today's walk was much more scenic and enjoyable than I remembered when we were here with Leigh in 2015. Today, we found Buonconvento to be a charming and relaxed, largely pedestrian village. Last time we were here it was hectic, people were everywhere; we stayed in a terrible hotel with Basil Fawlty owners and were convinced by Leigh that the beds were teeming with bugs.

Today, though, we strolled around the village; the destination was always going to be a trattoria with a light lunch of pici ragout (Len) and pepper soup (Carol). Len took the opportunity to read over his maps while waiting for our meals to be served.

But there's no show without punch and lunch was followed by an uphill walk to our accommodation for the night, an impressive villa set back from the road with a pencil pine lined driveway and expansive grounds, all being mowed by a little robot (how do they do that - they just trundle quietly along, never missing a beat).

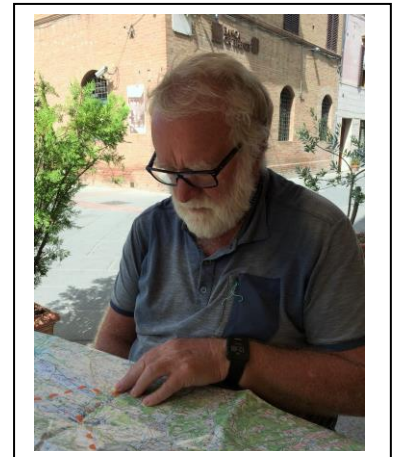
The host took great pleasure in taking us down to his wine cellar, explaining the various wines and inviting us to select any we liked for pre-dinner drinks. Neither of us had the heart to tell him that we

didn't drink - it would have seemed like an insult to the hard work of everyone at the Podere

(sounds more exotic than 'farm' doesn't it).

The pool in this photo was pretty inviting but sometimes you haven't got the courage to endure the temporary pain of plunging into cold water.

We're now looking forward to another 'bellissimo' Italian meal. We have four weeks of walking left and I'm wondering when I'm going to see spinach and ricotta Ravioli on the menu and think, 'Not that melt in your mouth pasta with fresh tomato sugo again!'



Note from Len: I am new to this social media thing and I have just discovered that you can control the settings on a blog. It is now possible to record a comment without having to register and give away the numbers of your swiss bank account. Please leave some comments as Carol and I would love to hear from home. Don't be shy about making a comment as you cannot swim for new horizons until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

Travelling Bookclub update: I am currently reading three books at the same time, Portrait of a Lady, Travelling with Salmon and The Medici Secret by Michael White, a new addition to the club reading. It is a bit of a potboiler and is just the thing after a hard days walk as it does not require the use of a lot of brain cells. Travelling with Salmon is a book of essays and is great to dip in and out of. Portrait of a Lady is for rest days of which we have a few coming up so I hope to finish it this week. Further suggestions welcome.