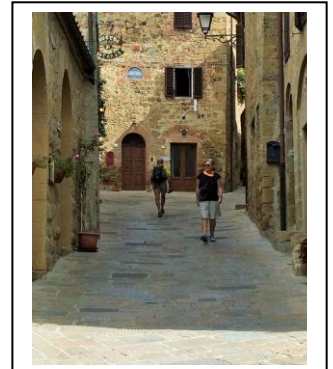
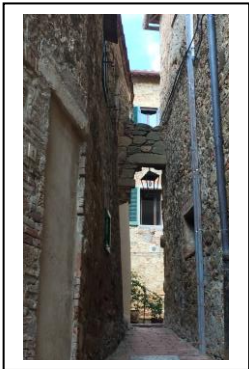


Before we left Pienza Carol did a mad rush along the ramparts for a last view over the valley. We have lovely memories of this place. The first time we came to Italy, we caught the bus from Siena and arrived to find a little gem of a village. Here was where we got our first taste of walking in Tuscany. From the ramparts we gazed across the valley with wonder and excitement because, on that sunny Spring morning, we were about to amble along the quiet country lanes way below, towards Montepulciano.

Pienza was the project of Pious 11 whose idea it was to build a model Renaissance city a la Florence, but on a hill and the idea has worked a treat. Pienza has another claim to fame; it was the birthplace of Garibaldi, the person credited with unification of Italy in 1848 (fifth form History class).

Today we headed out of Pienza on a road we have walked four times, but I like life on the road. It's a lot easier than civilian life, you feel like you're part of a motorcycle gang. The road was a veritable highway today with ten walkers, four French, two Italians, two Eastern Europeans and us. Our initial destination was Monticchiello a small village made up of archways and laneways.



Morning strolls around villages, particularly the tourist honey pots, are always worthwhile, you catch sight of the buildings close up, with all their quiet mystique, and on this particular morning, Monticchiello was silent as the locals were not up and not many tourists had arrived. It's also a great time to have the ritual morning cup of tea, with a view of course.

The walk into Montepulciano is along the standard Tuscan white road, beside well-ordered grape and olive farms. Using the farms as a yardstick this is a very prosperous area. This was today's

first relatively close view of Montepulciano which sits on top of the highest hill in the vicinity. When we got to the village we were faced with the decision of catching the bus or walking to our accommodation which was in the Piazza Grande on top of the village. We opted for the walk so we could browse in the shops on the way up. Except for the wine shops a lot of merchandise for sale was the same old tourist stuff which had been made at the same place somewhere in Asia; the only difference was Montepulciano printed on the product. These villages will lose their charm and their market if they don't start to create an identity for

themselves which attracts visitors. How many fridge magnets do we need?

We had two nights in Montepulciano and we already knew the village well so we decided to reduce the marathon to our next destination, Citta della Pieve. I found one of the local walking trails to Chianciano Terme, which is on the way to Citta della Pieve. This gave us a lovely walk for the



morning, and meant that I would have only 22 kms to walk on Sunday. We loved the walk on newly developed tracks with easy to navigate signage. Interestingly, the tourist information staff in Montepulciano had no knowledge of these walking trails, but were experts about where and how to get to the wineries, Montepulciano being a mecca for wine lovers.

This gives me the opportunity to present a great investment opportunity. On our walk, we passed



this unoccupied farmhouse perched on a small hill overlooking the valley. As you can see from the long shot it has the prized south facing slopes which grow the best wine in Europe. This property has great appeal to any of the wine drinkers reading this blog (and I know who you are)



either as an Investment opportunity or a tax minimisation arrangement or just as a holiday home away from the winter

blues; contributions as usual, to the normal swiss bank account.

As we were walking over the highest part of the hill I felt this strange eerie sensation, was it because we had just passed a monastery or had the constant walking finally caught up with me and I had become ill. Then I realized what was happening - I was cold, a sensation I haven't felt for nine weeks, I even had to put extra clothing on to stay warm, what a shock. But it soon passed as we dropped down the other side of the hill and the chilly wind went on its way to surprise other unsuspecting walkers.

I know that people in Melbourne are very familiar with this sensation to the body called 'feeling cold' (Hi Steve, I'm thinking of you) as they battle through a very harsh winter but I just refer you to the superb investment opportunity already mentioned.

We arrived at Chianciano Terme in time for lunch to find an uninspiring, sprawling mass of moderately ugly buildings. We wanted some food before taxiing back to the 'Monte'. Our only choice without scouting the whole city was a maudlin looking restaurant with a marquee style outside eating area. Carol, appalled by the poor aesthetic, suddenly lost her zest for life and was not going to eat any lunch. She relented when the waitress arrived to take our order and asked for a tuna salad. I ordered a standard margherita pizza. We mixed and matched and Carol's mood reached greatly elevated heights when she piled her fresh salad greens onto a slice of pizza and took her first mouthful.



Selfie design update:

I am not sure I have a future as an inventor but the selfie works well as this photo from yesterday in Bagno Vignoni (no it's not the afore mentioned Chianciano Terme!) will attest to. Carol's pilgrim scarf has become a permanent fixture, she has really joined the pilgrim programme.

Pilgrim Tips: I have been using a water bladder on this trip and to keep my water cool I have been freezing a half litre bottle, taking the top of and inverting it in the bladder.