

Location

Rome

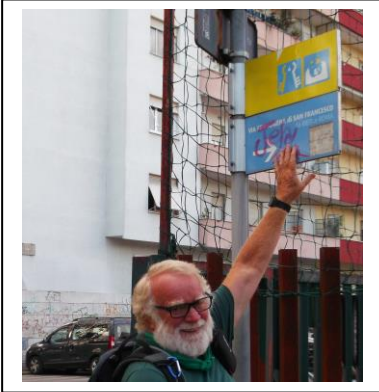
KM's to Rome

All
done

Steps Today

31,167

At our rather meagre breakfast of packaged dried foods and jam Carol questioned me about the walk into the Vatican. I assured her that it was mostly along bicycle paths and that most of these paths were beside the river. Fortunately, this proved to be so as we snaked our way to the Vatican firstly along the Aniene river then a shortish walk through the suburbs to connect with the Tiber river. It has been my practice to touch the first sign I come across as I leave a village as a way of bringing me luck for the day, this is my last sign touch.



Once we hit the city of Rome, we did take the opportunity to deviate through a park for a morning cuppa and break. The park only had one entrance/exit, and the bane of all walkers is having to backtrack, so I tried to persuade Carol to do one last bush bash so that we didn't have to retrace our steps. I explained to her that she only had to climb over a five-foot-high fence, roll down a small cliff and bush bash through twenty metres of thick scrub populated with thistles, but she was having none of it - she'd left for the exit before I had even turned around (damn those linen shorts). As I found our way back to the

official track, to our surprise we came across a gum tree planted on the sidewalk, Carol has forgiven me all my deviations and lost tracks over the last five weeks given that she has had the opportunity to hug a gum tree. I have missed the Australian bush and am looking forward to doing some walking at the "Prom" when we get home.

At the tree hugging, we were only seven kms. away from our final destination on this walk; for me the end of a three-month journey starting in Langres, France and for Carol, a five week walk starting in Lucca. This was not a religious walk, but I can't ignore the spirituality of the walk and its related experiences on the journey. So, it is somewhat with a heavy heart that I know it is coming to an end. Carol asked me how I was feeling as we neared the Vatican; to be honest I was a little flat. I was tired and my body needed a rest; it was strange to be finishing a walk which has been so front and centre in my mind for three months, and in the planning stage for three years. I was a little flummoxed, and a little melancholy.

People may think that it is a big achievement to walk such a long way, but anybody who is reasonably healthy and fit could do what I have done given the desire. What I am proud of is that I have been able to pretty much maintain the motivation to finish the walk. There were a couple of times during the last three months that I was ready to pack up and fly home but I managed to work through those times and continue. I was very lucky that my health held up and I had no serious injury to curtail me on the walk. Other than a few feet problems initially, I have had no injury problems other than a bit of general soreness. I would like to say it was all about good preparation but I can't as I didn't do enough preparation before I came, I was just lucky.

This is Carol and I arriving at the Vatican. It's been settling having Carol on the last five weeks, someone to share the burden of travel and the good and bad times. I think back to that week I spent in the rice paddies and the



conclusion I draw from that is that we are not suited to spending a lot of time alone.

There was one further thing to be done before the journey was complete, the collection of my testimonial for doing the walk. We attended the appropriate place at the Vatican, I presented my pilgrim passport and the attendant presented me with my certificate, speaking to me in French, mistakenly thinking I was French because of my name and where I started. Having sorted that out, I asked about my audience with the Pope. She very politely explained that this was not possible but she could arrange for a meeting with a Franciscan friar if that would please me but I passed on that as I don't think anybody but the Pope can send Cardinal Pell back to Australia, so one of the aims of the walk was not achieved.



This is me with my certificate.

Now that the journey is complete and as I sit on the terrace of our hotel with the dome of St Peters in my sight, I do feel elated. As with all good times in life we quickly forget the bad experiences and remember the good ones. I also will enjoy a nice relax before coming home and it will be good to not have to worry about navigation, food and water. I will miss the daily experience of seeing new things, the joy of the great outdoors, the brief meetings with fellow walkers and the overwhelming hospitality of the people along the way particularly the Italians. What I have principally learned is a journey is like marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it

I will also miss the variety of food that I have enjoyed over the three months, from the beautiful swiss muesli to the Italian pastas and of course the ice

creams.

And now the statistics:

Total kms. on the actual walk: 1,556 compared to an anticipated 1,487

Total kms walked while away: 2,006

Total steps taken: 3,009,155

Carol had not been wearing her orange scarf in recent days so when she had it on for the last day of the walk I asked her why she was wearing it today, she replied she was wearing it as a tribute to me so I thought I would include a special photo of Carol with scarf as a tribute to her support of me while she was doing the walk and also while at home in Melbourne.



This is my final blog in respect of the walk but I will publish one more blog to list the imbedded literary quotes in my blogs. I have been impressed by how many of the quotes have been identified, we are obviously a well-read community.

And one other little matter, given that it is Grand Final week in Melbourne. We passed this on the way to Rome, and for Tommy's and all you other Richmond supporters sake I hope that it is an omen.

