

Aosta to Vercelli

Km's to Rome:859

After a nice rest in Aosta I left on Day 49 bound for Chatillon. This will be the third time I have attempted to complete this section, the first time I had a bout of food poisoning, the second time sheer exhaustion meant I laid down on the track and could go no further. Fortunately the second time we were near a monastery and the inhabitants arranged for a taxi to take me the rest of the way, so it was with some trepidation that I made my third attempt. In the end I made Chatillon quite easily but there is something definitely spooky about this part of the walk. There hasn't been many fellow walkers on the via and generally whoever you come across will stop and have a chat and compare notes. I came upon a women walker who acknowledged my presence by a smile and a greeting but didn't engage at all. We were walking at a similar pace so for the next three hours we were basically sharing the path which is easily navigated, passing under terraced vineyards and along the side of the Aosta valley.

The vines are grown on trellis about two meters above ground.



Despite several attempts on my part my fellow walker did not speak to me only acknowledging with a confirming nod if there was any doubt about which way to go. She didn't behave in a way that suggested she was wary of me and there were plenty of opportunities to drop her pace and let me walk on my own. It was a very strange feeling, as if I was being shadowed, she didn't take the lead at any time. On arriving on the outskirts of Chatillon she disappeared, I think she was my guardian angel. I didn't see her at all in the village nor the next day, a very strange encounter.

Walking down the Aosta valley is one of my favourite walks, splendid views no mountains to climb and food and water readily accessible, this is a view looking back up the valley, St Bernard's pass is around to the right out of frame.

My destination on day 50 was Bardì where the highlight is Fort Bard. Napoleon's second invasion of Italy in 1800 with 40,000 troops was held up for two weeks by 400 troops who controlled the fort. The fort was eventually taken and Napoleon had it destroyed being rebuilt in 1830. In recent times the officers quarters were converted to a hotel. Well worth the stay if you are in the area, however if vertigo is a problem you will need to walk up rather than take the very steep funiculars. An avengers film was also partly made at Fort Bard. Here I am fooling around with the displays.





After leaving Fort Bard Napoleon followed an old Roman road to pursue his conquest of Italy. This road is still intact in places as can be seen on the entrance into Point St Martin. This example of the road till shows the wheel ruts.

Continuing on my travels to Ivrea I kept an eye out for my shadow from two days ago but I don't think I will see her ever again. The walking is very easy in this region and it will get easier over the next few



days as basically it is walking on rice paddy levy banks.

Ivrea is a nice village and as I got there early I had walk around the old section. I even managed to get the hems shortened on some new shorts I purchased, except for my boots and undies I have completely exchanged my wardrobe for new clothes in the last week. My gear has not survived the hand washing, and for those who immediately thought why didn't Len buy new undies, didn't he wash them, I did but but I have special travel undies which scrub up very well.

On leaving Ivrea I was accosted by a beggar, I gave him my small change, and a little further on a matronly lady came running towards me gesticulating, I thought I must have broken the rules about giving money to the beggars. It turned out she was part of the local tourist information bureau and wanted me to fill in a survey for their records. She told me that they are only getting two to three walkers a day through, I asked her if my shadow had passed so she showed me the photos of all the walkers in the last few days my shadow did not feature. This is the photo she took of me, I am sure there is something in the tree shadows just above my head.

I decided to combine two stages of the Via today and took a different route to Santhia bypassing Viverone.

The walk was uneventful but did include some forest walking which was a welcome relief. It was mainly on minor unmade roads except for the last bit into Santhia which is generally what occurs when you arrive in a larger village. It was a long walk made longer by the extra 1.5 kms I had to walk to the other side of the village to my hotel which was opposite the railway station. Usually I avoid hotels near railway stations, noise and the undesirables, but the stay was very comfortable and the evening meal, centred around ossobuco, was delightful.

Day 53 is the walk to Vercelli the rice capital of Italy and as you would expect wall to wall rice paddy fields, so the walking was very easy. I invested some of my data to listen to the Collingwood Carlton AFL football match while I walked. It was far too tense to listen to the match and successfully navigate the correct roads so I had to turn it off, listening in occasionally to find out the score. Thinking the game was over I tuned in to find out the score just in time to hear the last thrilling couple of minutes, what a result for us Magpie fans.





Even if we lose all the games in the finals what a year they have given us. It made the trudge through the rice country so much easier.



Over the day I had views of the snow capped peaks of Mount Rosa. They were in my field of vision for most of the day. It got me thinking about these mountain views compared to the ones back in Australia. For comparison this is a view of the Larapinta range in Central Australia one of my favourite walking places and always rates highly in any of the world best walks lists. I am interested in what any readers of this blog think, myself I am undecided there is always something romantic about snow capped mountains, but the colours of the Australian outback are gorgeously varied and interesting. Over to you, record your opinion in the comments.

Enough of this navel gazing and back to the task of completing the walk. I meet another walker along the way, Mac from South Carolina USA. Always

interesting how Americans usually tell you the state they are from first. Mac is a Protestant minister on sabbatical and he is visiting the Christian sites in Europe. He went to Germany to visit Martin Luther sites then caught a train to Geneva to visit Calvinist sites then started walking to Rome from Geneva. He took a day off walking to catch a train to Turin to see the shroud, where he discovered you can only see the box it is held in. He is particularly enjoying visiting the places where saints have been venerated that he has studied. He hadn't studied Saint Leonard. It was interesting to talk to someone with such a religious purpose for his trip.

Finally reached Vercelli, I had organised my visit to be on a day that the museum holding the oldest book in English was opened but it had been closed for renovations after my trip planning, most disappointing.

On arriving at my B and B I was shown into a rather palatial room and offered the use of the washing machine and dryer, heaven.

In the room was a photo of athletes holding up gold medals from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Turns out his brother is a fencing champion and it was the second gold medal he had won. It's a funny old world, Bonne Camino. (P.S. For the sleuths no quote today).

