

Florence to Siena

Km's to Rome:327

On day 83 we leave Florence for the walk through Chianti ending up in Siena, the walk arranged by Hidden Italy. I walked to Impruneta(it means amongst the pines) while Carol and Leigh travelled with the luggage later in the day. They decided to fill in their time with some shopping and climbing the bell tower next to the duomo. Carol wanted to get a good view of her favourite dome.



The walk out of Florence took me past this old Fiat 500 at the cities southern gate, it looked like it was still in working order, lovingly restored and maintained , not sure how practical it is for



the bigger framed people. Once I left the cities limits I was walking amongst beautifully tended vines and houses on quiet country roads. The walk wasn't part of the official tour so I found my own way to our destination. I had many views of Florence on the journey, made me quite sad to leave. On arriving at my destination I was

greeted by this rather curious cat. Impruneta is a quiet small village with some interesting buildings, unfortunately the old church was not available for viewing. Carol had run short of one of her medications and the local pharmacy provided her with enough for the rest of the trip without a prescription, try doing that in Australia.



With the group all connected again we enjoyed a lovely meal and night at a local family hotel, the patriarch was 77 and in between attending to us he was watching the funeral of Queen Elizabeth.

Next day we headed off to San Casciano Val di Pesa our first real foray into Chianti. Lots of rolling countryside, olive trees and

vineyards, is this the best part of Tuscany? This is a question we frequently revisited over the next few days. We were headed for the Agriturismo Font De'Medici. This proved a wonderful place to stay with good views, great accommodation and sumptuous food. We were surrounded by beautifully maintained tranquil gardens.

This is an example of the cheese available for breakfast, which also included house made bread, fresh from the



oven, we all decided that this would be a great place to stay for a couple of days or even longer.

On the walk into the Agriturismo we passed this man pruning a tree on the side of the road, it

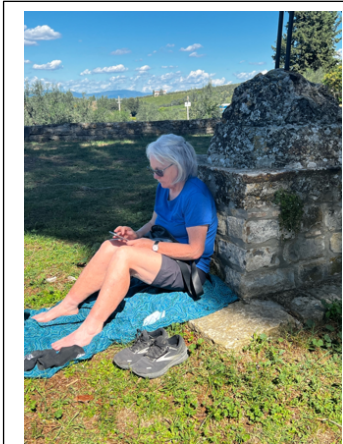


was an elm tree and he hadn't read the latest occupational health and safety guide. We were to come across lots of these trees, huge trunks with all branches cut back. The views in the background are indicative of what we have been getting in Chianti.

Like this man the farm workers are all of a mature age, there are some younger people working in hospitality but it is very rare to see anyone under fifty working round the farms. The exception is the itinerant workers who judging from the colour of their skin are recent immigrants. There is a strong voice from some politicians in Italy to stop all immigration but not sure who is going to pick the grapes and olives if they do.

The walking is

easy in Chianti thus far, no prolonged hill climbing and good tracks or lightly gravelled roads such as this. It certainly makes for very pleasant walking after some of the hot barren days experienced in France, although the heat does



appear to have effected Carol a little bit during the day.

Day 85, it struck me today just how long I have been away, seems a life time ago that I arrived in Canterbury for the start of this walk. It's so long ago I am having trouble recollecting the early stages in any detail which is a pity as I have really enjoyed this walk and feel confident with only



327 kms to go that I will get to Rome safely and injury free. It's been great having travelling companions as well, however it can lead to some vigorous discussions. On the walk into Greve in Chianti (funny how lots of the villages have the in Chianti added) we visited the Abbey at Badia a Passignano, Abbazia di San Michele which is a Benedict abbey tracing its roots back to the 890's. In the 18th century the monks were expelled and it was sold into private hands. It has since been returned to the Benedictine monks.

Our first bone of contention was about if we should make a financial contribution to visit the church. One of our travelling group was very much against contributing as the Catholic Church has vast wealth which should be distributed to the poor and needy and therefore didn't deserve a financial contribution. That became the prevailing view. The bigger dispute was over the piece of art work on display outside the entrance to the church, some of our members felt that it was just a continuation of the hypocrisy about the story of original sin, while

others namely me felt it depicted a celebration of the local olive growing industry. It was certainly a beautiful piece of artwork but I will let you decide for yourself.

It was titled the cycle of life and was by Andrew Roggi.

The dispute continued to entertain us as we wound our way down to Greve where Leigh was leaving us, returning to Sydney.

The talk of original sin brings me to the next book in the travelling book club, Elizabeth Finch by Julian Barnes. One of the major historical figures in the largely fictional book is Emperor Julian who became the emperor of the Western Roman Empire in 355 AD. He wanted to suppress Christian thought by bringing back Hellenic paganism, an interesting read.

We left Greve next morning for another

Agriturismo, Le Chentele. After a walk through

more farmlands we moved into a rich forest with a broad range of plants, it was good to be back on a forest track again. We had dinner that night with two Australians and two Americans from Boston. Coincidentally both couples were on their honeymoon, having married in the last two weeks.

Next morning on Day 87 I was up bright and early to experience the forest tracks again. It was a nice place to stay although it was one of the few times we didn't manage to get our clothes dry as the building was mainly in the shade of the forest. Today's destination is Gaiole.

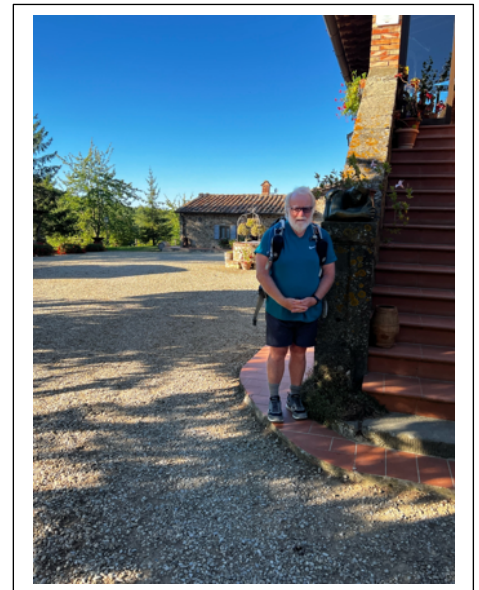
One of the many good things about Italy is all the public displays of artwork, walking through a small village we came across this marble sculpture in the local park. Somebody or

some government department has sponsored the creation of the work for our enjoyment.

We had to keep our pace up today as it was a 25 kms

walk and our lunch spot at 17 kms closed at 2.30. We arrived at a rather fancy restaurant at 1.30 and shown to our seats out of sight of the more sophisticated customers who had turned up in their BMW's and Mercedes cars. Eventually the rather haughty waiter took our order and we were able to satisfy our hunger, but we did notice that people who arrived after us were eating before us, next time I will pack

my portable shower and change of clothes in my day pack so that I don't bring down the tone of the restaurant. Fully satiated we enjoyed a downhill walk into Gaiole where we were welcomed with open arms at the L'Osteria di Spaitenna a very upmarket hotel, we enjoyed a wonderful stay. The service was excellent, the meals very nice and the views from the room



were stunning, it was just a pity that it wasn't warm enough to have a swim in the pool. There



was also a artisan potter selling her beautiful hand painted ceramics, some of which we purchased to send back home. This is a view of the hotel looking back from the next days walk. It also gives an indication of the wonderful country we have been walking through over the last few days. The walk today was a nice easy walk to Gxxxxxxx where we were to be collected and delivered to Siena. On this walk we meet Jack and Mindy from North Carolina USA who were very keen walkers, they

pop over to Europe once a year to do a few walks. You can see Carol is showing the effects of being scorned yesterday as she has dressed up for Siena.

We arrived in Siena and went for a walk down the winding streets, which were developed as a defence mechanism when the city was constructed. Anybody who has got lost in Siena will know how effective they are, but on our fourth visit I think we have finally cracked the code.

Passed this fruit shop with the seasons crops on display,



what a sight for the gastronomic sense's.

We also found time to visit the Duomo with its wonderful marble floors and old manuscripts. I am going to make this extract my personal coat of arms. Lots of colour and oomph in Siena.

Tomorrow on day 89 we head to San Gimignano for a couple of days off and to reconnect with the official Via Francigena.

Bonne Camino(no quote today).

