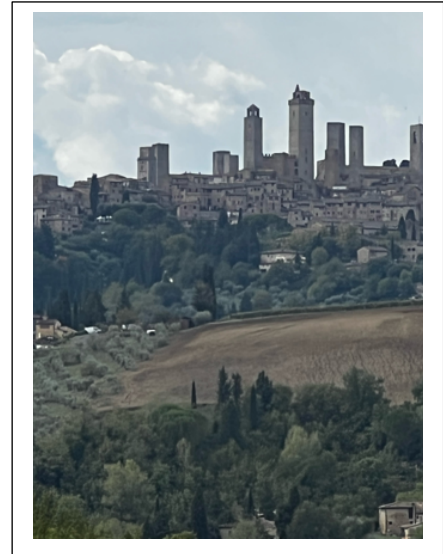


San Gimignano to Bagno Vignoni

Km's to Rome:224

On Day 89 we headed off to San Gimignano for a few days rest and recreation, it was in the countryside with superb views out of our window of the famous towers of the village. A view we looked forward to on awakening each day, Carol didn't have to move at all to take in the skyline. It was a nice relaxing time but once a walker always a walker as we managed to clock up quite a few kilometres exploring the countryside. On one such occasion we came across a bridge covered in mud from a recent downpour, I was doing an exploratory walk across the top of the bridges protective walls to see if we could get across and I hear this plop plop plop behind me, it's Carol up to her knees in mud crossing the bridge. I pulled her up to the river bank but alas too late, her legs were covered in mud and her shoes were large clumps of mud. After a prolonged clean up we were on our way, hope we have no need for toilet paper on the rest of the walk. On our return with the aid of sticks Carol did the tight rope walker method and incurred no damage. I have no photo as I felt if I took one the stress caused may have literally tipped her over the edge into the river. The rest of our stay was much less exciting, but it is always good to visit San Gimignano despite it being a tourist honeypot.



This is a shot of the Agriturismo on the day of our departure to Colle Val d'Elsa. It was a relaxing couple of days, especially as there was a restaurant attached and even though the room was self catering we partook of the fine food each night, I guess the walking over the next week will remove the excess.

Today's walk is a nice easy stroll to our destination as we will be following the Via Francigena bicycle trail which is along an old railway line thus no hill climbing until we get to the village.

On the walk we passed this old grape picking machine which may have to be recommissioned if the Italian government stops all

immigration.

On our way into Colle Val d'Elsa we got caught in a thunderstorm, we had to take refuge in a restaurant for an early lunch as it was so heavy, but our gear did withstand the worst of it. We ran into a couple from Brighton in Melbourne who also had to brave the rain. They are doing the walk from St Bernard's pass, Australians on a per capita basis are over represented on the track. Perhaps this suggests we need more village to village walks in Australia for us baby boomers to spend our money on. This would stop us from being called the now more common unfriendly description as wealth horders.



Next day was a lovely walk to one of our favourite villages in Italy, Monteriggioni. This is a small village on a hill surrounded by intact protective walls. It was an overcast wet day and we came across this person who has adopted the method of a quirky friend of ours, Count Paul (

he is a Polish Count), who uses plastic bags to protect his shoes when walking in the wet, a great example of recycling. Here is the evidence, although Count Paul does a much neater job of applying the plastic bags.

This fellow was a bit of a lost soul but he unlike most of the Via walkers did not want to engage, I had to sneakily take a photo of his feet.

There was disappointment on our arrival, an error with the booking, everybody was blaming each other but I suspect our booking agent didn't follow through with confirming the booking. We were relocated to a hotel out of the village which was very disappointing, it was a nice place but not inside the magic walls of Monteriggioni. We returned the next day back on the official Via

Francigena to Siena, the walk starts off through some lovely forest on dirt tracks. I have had complaints about the number of nature shots on my earlier blogs but I feel the spider webs in the morning are worthy of

being highlighted in this blog. On the basis that it includes Carol this nature photo of the huge oak tree that is indicative of many of the trees here can also be included. We passed perhaps twenty of them over the morning.

After leaving the forest there is a bit of the

dreaded tarmac walking but soon we were back into forest walking. The climb into Siena is a tough one, this is the third time we have done this and it doesn't get any easier. We are returning to Siena simply because it

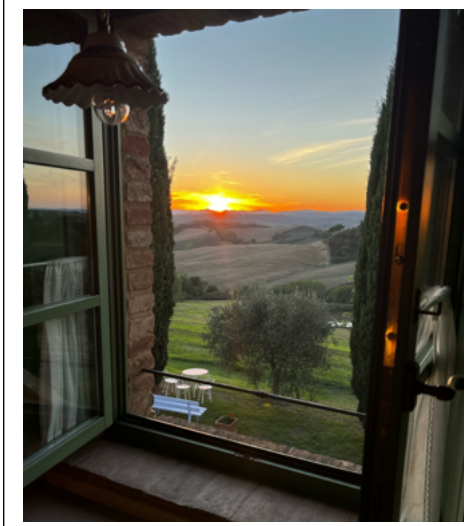
is on the official route and we are now following the official route to Rome from San Gimignano without any of my shortcuts or deviations. We both like Siena so we didn't mind spending another night there, particularly as we ended up in a very nice hotel.

Monteroni d'Arbia was our destination the next day a walk through the back roads out of Siena and quiet white roads through hilly Tuscan style farming countryside, lots of pencil pines. As we left Siena we passed the Campo which was the start of a bike race, the scene was one of the typically Italian chaotic approach to life.

A lot of the places in this area have d'Arbia in their names, unfortunately I set my navigation program to Point d'Arbia a place six kms further on, not a smart move on a hot day when the walk was already 24 kms. Fortunately three kms past our turnoff to our hotel I



realised my mistake and we turned back, a disappointing end to a good days walking. Carol forgave me and we enjoyed a pleasant night at our hotel.

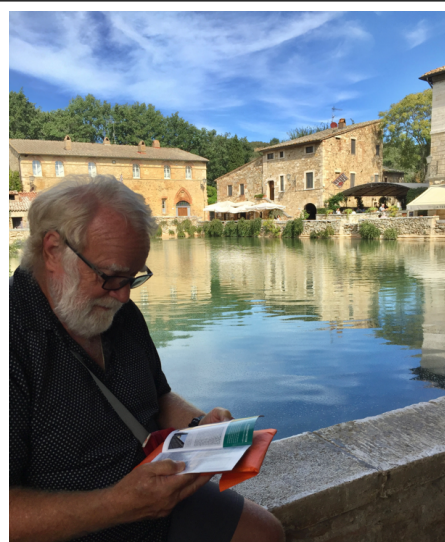


Given the extended walk from the day before it was good the walk to Buonconvento was short, for a stay at the wonderful Podere Salicotto just outside the village. It sits on top of a hill which gives 360 degree views including magnificent sunsets every night, as viewed from our window. The breakfasts are possibly the best we have had on the trip and the host certainly knows how to make you welcome. We both had a very relaxing

two day stay here and were very sorry to leave. Here is Carol saying goodbye to our hosts. The host brought the property in 2000, took five years to renovate and have developed a stunning property. They also told us that in the seventies and eighties people were walking off properties and giving them away, oh for a time machine.



It was with sadness that we left our wonderful abode to head for Bagno Vignoni an old Roman spa town. A walk through cultivated undulating hills followed by a steep walk down into the town via a forest track. One thing we have noticed more on this trip is the amount of native vegetation that is left amongst the farmed countryside. We have learned that the topsoil on the uncultivated land is very light and if cleared the soil will slip into the valleys and basically leave rocky outcrops, understanding this we noticed quite a lot of areas that had been cleared and now were not sustaining any significant plant growth, I suspect the areas were cleared for the timber. The waters in the town come out of bedrock and are around 28 degrees. This



is me beside the old Roman spa checking the map for the next few days, can't beat a paper copy. We are staying in a lovely hotel with its own pool using the waters from the mountain. We have both had a swim and feel revitalised, well for a few days maybe. Our stay marks the 100<sup>th</sup> day of my journey it has all gone so quickly. We are both coping well but have a tough climb up to Radicofani tomorrow, hopefully the breakfast fare



will keep us sustained. We did have some of the healthy stuff as well, Bonne Camino.