

Via Francigena Origin

The section of this route connecting Parma to Lucca (Italy) existed as a Roman road from 177 AD, was extended thanks to the Lombards, and eventually ran from France through Burgundy to Rome. It became a pilgrimage road known as the Via Francigena late in the tenth century, when it was used for the journey from Canterbury (England) to Rome. The founder of this pilgrimage was Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, who travelled on foot to Rome in 990 to meet Pope John XV and receive the pallium and cope of his consecration.

The route passed through the cities of Arras, Reims, Besançon, Pontarlier, Lausanne, Aosta, Pavia, Piacenza and, after crossing the Cisa Pass, through Lucca, Siena, Bolsena and Sutri to Rome.

The Via Francigena rapidly became a main artery of pilgrimage trodden by hosts of pilgrims of all origins and of every degree from emperor to commoner.

It was a great boon to trans-European intellectual exchanges.

Development as a cultural route

In April 1994 the Advisory Committee acted on a proposal from the Italian Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment by adopting the Via Francigena as a Council of Europe Cultural Route.

In the context of this route, the Via Francigena Association founded in Martigny, Switzerland in 1997 intends to put the historic journey back on the map to make it a cultural and tourist asset.

For this purpose, it can rely on the diary written by Sigeric on his return to Canterbury, meticulously describing all 79 stages of an epic trip covering almost 1 700 km. From his account, it is possible to identify the monasteries and abbeys which offered him hospitality and the towns where he stayed.

With the inauguration of this cultural route, minor centres and localities not so familiar to the general public can be rehabilitated while enabling travellers to follow the traditional stages of the pilgrimage.

News

The Via Francigena is a means of rediscovering works of art, venerable documents and old legends, thanks especially to the Association's sympathisers who divulge their personal discoveries.

Initially, this may lead to the mounting of exhibitions like the one organised in the former hospice of St. Theodule (13th-14th centuries) in Martigny in September 1998. This Vatican-sponsored exhibition invites others all along the Via Francigena.

Information:

Hubert MOULIN
Secretary of the "Amis de la Via Francigena" Association
1941 Vollèges - Switzerland
Tel: (027) 785 13 40

<http://www.francigena.ch>

This is the site of the Association Via Francigena which manages the Via Francigena Cultural Route. It presents the latest news of the route and its development.