

The INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION VIA FRANCIGENA (AIVF), celebrates its 10th anniversary next year, having carried out an amazing feat: in **less than 6 years** it has created a **1,900 km European Cultural Route** with the cooperation of the **5 countries involved!**

To be honest, it will take years to improve on it, but the AIVF has given this route a logistic UNITY in Europe, a historical VALUE, and validity as a true pilgrim's way undertaken in an ecumenical SPIRIT. The AIVF has 530 members in 14 countries and 4 continents!

This 2006 LETTER to the FRIENDS is above all a **BIG THANK YOU to ALL** those who help, cooperate with or support the AIVF at an institutional level.

You, PILGRIMS and FRIENDS, are the lifeblood of the AIVF, not only for the revival of the VF as a pilgrim's way, but also because your suggestions encourage us to do more and better.

In October 2005, when Jean Marc Poma arrived in Rome, he explained to our chairman Adelaide Trezzini the difficulty of finding accommodation every day ;and this is how the idea of **DORMIFRANCIGENA** came about and now completes the *Guide Vademecum Italy* Ed.2003!

In April 2006 Jean-Marc said: "**TOPOFRANCIGENA** (cartographic sketch maps), **DORMIFRANCIGENA** and **GUIDE-VADEMECUM** (historical, cultural and institutional information), represent a complete, coherent and practical set for use by pilgrims of all nationalities." Thanks to the publication of **DORMIFRANCIGENA**, the **6th milestone**, pilgrims feel more at ease as they walk along the Via Francigena.

The ever growing number of pilgrims on the VF, has aroused the interest of several Italian publishers. A number of guide books suggest their own local VF routes and the fact that there is absolutely no cooperation between the various associations certainly does not make it easy to establish just ONE VF route!

The AIVF is the **promoter** and the **only coordinator** for the **European VF**.

The association has recommended a route on the **Topofrancigena B** sketch maps and on the **updates** (on the website), in cooperation with 5 of the 7 provincial Italian police forces involved, who have themselves placed VF stickers (6x8 cm) where most needed.

Plans for VF guide books are being developed in England, Germany and even in Australia. In April and June Radio Vatican and German Radio interviewed the experts on and those responsible for the AIVF. Pilgrim-FRIENDS were also interviewed, among them the Canadian Nicole Pomerleau.

We are delighted to see that **more and more volunteer** families are coming forward to offer accommodation to pilgrims (among others, families in Chateauvillain-F, Ste Croix, Martigny-CH and in Robbio-Italy). Protestant ministers and parish priests are also volunteering their help, and a wonderful co-operation has been established with various tourist offices (such as in Péronne, France). Providers of accommodation (*Les Oiseaux* in Besançon, to name but one) are extremely helpful, and the person in charge of the office for local roads in Valais does all she can for pilgrims' security around Martigny.

Each represents a link in the chain to create this great **road of peace and friendship** through Europe.

All roads lead to Rome (*omnes viae Romam perducunt*), the shortest routes in history.

Our pilgrims soak up the history of Europe as they walk; some read St Paul's letters, others meditations prepared beforehand.

Our coordinators in France; for the Pas de Calais, **Charles Debacker** of the association "Pays de la Leulène", for the Marne **François Louviot** and **Pierre Desmoulins**, **Catherine Boussard** of the Tourism Office in Chateauvillain (Haute-Marne), and Charlotte Musselwhite in Seveux (Haute-Saône) are very happy to give help to our pilgrims as they walk along.

Recently the Roman-medieval way from **Guînes to Wisques** has become available for the VF; **Seveux LXIth mansiones** of Sigeric has reestablished its old role as a waystage, now offering accommodation and the pleasant roads between Seveux-Cussey s/ l'Ognon LXth can now be done in ONE day (34km instead of the 47 suggested in Topofrancigena Ed 2004), just like in the year 990, when Archbishop Sigeric undertook the walk.

In Italy, so that travellers are encouraged to use the alternative country routes suggested in the TOPOFRANCIGENA, our VF stickers have been put up. Follow those stickers showing our Logo (the one approved by the Council of Europe in 2001). There are about 10 other types of VF waymarkers around and some are misleading. Local governments are not that interested in the VF pilgrim ways.....

SOME HIGHLIGHTS for the VF and the AIVF THIS YEAR

Progress hasn't always been easy: a GEIE (European Group with Economic Interest), has been created to include Santiago and Via Francigena under the name **Ways through Europe**. Coach trips along the VF are being offered by tour operators. It is obvious that they are not interested in those pilgrims who walk the way. For this reason the AIVF is often boycotted at VF events: the success of the association among genuine pilgrims like yourselves and the trust you have in the AIVF, obviously does not go down well with others....

The Swiss Guards in Rome, a corps created by the most famous pope of the Renaissance, Julius II, **celebrated their 500th anniversary** in an unforgettable way; which was given a lot of publicity in the media. On 7 April 80 former Guards started on their walk from Bellinzona-CH, took the boat across Lake Maggiore, walked to Piacenza, over the Appenines and along the Via Francigena covering a daily average of 34km a day. Along the way a number of events were organised in their honour and the walk ended triumphantly on 5 May in St Peter's square. At the end there were 134 Guards, who, having walked from the basilica of San Sepolcro of Acquapendente to Rome, without using a bus, thoroughly deserved their *Testimonium*, which they received during..

To date this year 550 pilgrims have **registered on the VF pilgrim list** in St Peter's Basilica, so about 300 more than last year.

Not all VF pilgrims reach Rome.....,"Rome is to be deserved" as said Rose and Roger Barra.

The number of our **Full-Francigena pilgrims** (Canterbury-Rome) is steadily increasing. This year there should be about thirty: some have already arrived, others are on the way, yet others are about to set out. Cycling along the VF is an option which is easier and faster

Last March **Nicole Pomerleau** (Canada) and **Anne Marie Secondé** (France) left Canterbury. Heavy rain made their journey difficult in France. Nicole followed the route suggested in the *Topofrancigena* maps and very much appreciated the contact she had with the local inhabitants and their generosity. She also welcomed the difference in mentality from one country to another and has no hesitation in calling the VF a simply marvellous route! Anne Marie went on from Rome directly to **Jerusalem**. **Trevor Garrett** (Ireland), and **Brando Wilson** (USA), are also on their way to the Holy Sepulchre, but following different routes: the former through Bari and Brindisi, the latter through France, Germany, Serbia and Bulgaria, a 5000km journey.

Everyone can choose the mode and the route that suits him, since all ways lead to Rome: this is what is so wonderful about the VF.

The pilgrimage can be done in long or short stages: our FRIENDS the **Fischers** (Germany), who are more than 70 years old, go on their VF one week a month; **Chris Dyos** and **Fiona Mitchell** accomplished their pilgrimage from Aberdeen (Scotland) to Rome over 4 years. The AMI Bertrand Helle and family left Canterbury at the beginning of August.

Most **German pilgrims** go over the Gotthard Pass, but we hope that the **oldest and easiest way south** through the Rhine valley, Chur and Lukmanier, Bellinzona and Pavia will be chosen more often in the future. Several **French people** from Southern France have chosen the **Altavia** and join the VF in Aulla or La Spezia, not to recommend-not friendly (Fam.Coron-F 8.06)

Dear Pilgrims-AMIS, Adelaide Trezzini-AIVF will be glad to hear about your experiences and receive your suggestions. Telephone her if you have problems along the way or when you arrive in Rome.

CONTACT: Peter Sherwood petersw@netvigator.com from Hong Kong does not know French and hopes to find 1 or 2 friends to walk with him in May 2007, Canterbury-Rome in 2 stages.

Don Bruno Vercesi has chosen for you the **considerations** of the **young Flemish pilgrim**, Matthias, after he had spent 4 months on his pilgrimage: *"I have achieved a personal goal, I have found Joy, I have accepted myself as I am; meditation along the way has helped me so much, as has the support of an Italian priest. Now I am a happy man, a weight has dropped off my shoulders, I have found peace"*.

Our new motto : GET TO KNOW THE EUROPE OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY, SO THAT YOU MAY GET TO KNOW YOUR OWN SELF BETTER?

The AIVF and its generous helpers, **Virginie Brouillard**, **Joe Patterson**, **Klaas van the Poehl** and **Hubert Moulin** will continue to do their best to help you.

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