



ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE VIA FRANCIGENA (AIVF)

1997 – 2017: 20th Anniversary of AIVF

LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS

2016

Last year was marked by great progress on the historical itineraries mentioned here in geographical order, from north to south (already included on the APPs).

- AIVF worked together with the *Association VF Alta Lunigiana* (AVFAL) of Succisa-Montelungo (stage XXXII for Sigeric in 990) allowing the following achievements: finding the best possible route **from the Cisa Pass to Pontremoli**, between August and December 2015; clearing of trees and repairing of trails and stone walls, starting in March 2016; and finally, the placing of specific trail markers on the whole 14-km section up to Migneno, and the installation of 2 large explicative signs with precise information to help pilgrims choose between the official VF and the historical variant via Montelungo.

In this small, isolated area on the western slopes of the Cisa Pass, known for its mushrooms, the population is becoming more and more sparse; the trail was restored by unemployed people, under the direction of Mattia Monacchia, and the Hotel Appennino opened its season 2 months in advance for the VF tour operators: an un hoped-for comeback to life! The first pilgrim walked this variant on May 31st, and by the 15th of September, there had been at least **a hundred: without a doubt, a great success; reserve your excursions for 2017** with Mattia!

- On July 7th was officially inaugurated by the AEFV (*Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene*) **the historical variant via Abbadia San Salvatore**; since **2006**, AIVF has been strongly committed, with all its strength, to restoring this forgotten route. To complete the historical offer via the Monte Amiata (1730 m), Stelvio and Leonardo located and reestablished a trail with markers, "*La Via di Sant'Antimo – San Salvatore*" which begins at Buonconvento and links up with Abbadia San Salvatore.

- For the **Etruscan-Medieval Via Francigena from Monterosi to Isola Farnese** (former variant of the Lakes), an *Observatory for the Historical Routes of Rome-XV* was constituted (in September 2015) thanks to the commitment of the engineer Gianni and the Association "*Valorizziamo Veio*". This Observatory includes about 30 public and private institutions, with the goal of finding and rendering practicable and official the historical routes which have survived urbanization, such as the Via Veientana. The problem of the end of the Via di Cesano, however, has not yet been resolved (ACEA bridge "privatized" on the Via Formalicchi), despite the strong support of the *Veio Park* (territory that extends from Campagnano to La Storta!).

- The access to the *Insugherata Park* is now definitive, with the demolition of the gate at number 1021 of the Via Cassia. At the same time, the former mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli (*Associazione Priorità Cultura*), was able to establish a bypass around Formello via **a wooden bridge over the Cremera River** to reach the archeological site of Veio and Isola Farnese: the new official VF is **shorter by 7.5 km**.

- As for the **three APPs** of the **DorMi ToPo Francigena** (GSB – Piacenza, Piacenza – San Gimignano, San Gimignano – Roma) – which can be downloaded to smartphone, tablet, iPhone or iPad – pilgrims have been able to test them and have been enthusiastic since they are a great help in finding the way (while still leaving the choice between the official VF of the AEFV and the historical variants of AIVF), also providing GPS coordinates for all lodging possibilities (exact information is a priority for AIVF) and a simple approach to making reservations. The positive comments we've received certainly justify the investment in time and money. **With the help of your feedback, updates will be possible twice a year.**

The new website is even more efficient and complete – still in four languages – particularly with **specific pages for England, France, Switzerland and Italy**; in addition, there is a new page about the **Lukmanier Via Francisca**.

NEW PRODUCTS to highlight ROME as your pilgrim destination (Rome primary destination of medieval pilgrimages)

- September 2015: **reflective safety strips** *Omnes viae Romam perducunt* for arms or ankles
- January 2016: huge success for the **Keys of St. Peter, medallion** in wood for your backpack, produced by the artisans of the Don Bosco-Pisa prison under the supervision of Nino Guidi – Association Montagne di Legami.
- May 2016: **badge with the Keys of St. Peter** for your hat or jacket.

January 2016 : latest **publications**: to respond to numerous international requests, we sent to press the 6th edition of the **DORMIFRANCIGENA B** and the **Credential** with the Lukmanier Via Francisca, attesting to the new route.

ITINERARIES 2016-2017

From Switzerland to Italy

ALREADY ONLINE: **The route of the Emperors**, from Constance to Pavia, the **Saint Columbanus** route, i.e. the Lukmanier Via FRANCISCA!

The province of Varese, in cooperation with the Lombardy Region, created in record time the itinerary from Ponte Tresa to Varese with appropriate trail markers (in accord with the Italian Swiss authorities): it follows the old abandoned railway line Lavena-Ganna, the route of Sacro Monte in the *Parco dei Fiori*, crosses the historical center of Varese to enter the Valle dell'Olona with its Lombard UNESCO site (Castelprio), Gallarate, joins the Via Francigena in the *Parco Naturale del Ticino* (the biggest in Europe), and 125 km later arrives in Pavia.

On April 30, 2016, the first event "Lukmanier Via Francisca" (with a hike, various presentations and finishing with a delicious polenta) organized from **Badia di San Gemolo** (13th century) to **Ganna**. In the Swiss canton of Ticino, the regional organizations of Lugano and Bellinzona having different institutional tasks, it is indispensable to create an association/group *Friends of the Via Francisca* in order to develop the project; we are counting on Matteo. The entire itinerary of **360 km follows marked pedestrian trails**. The itinerary from Constance via Chur, Bellinzona, Agno and Varese is already "officialized" on the AIVF credential; we are counting on the support of the AEVF to get this itinerary included in the overall network of European routes to Rome.

From France to the Great St. Bernard Pass

In France

The VF itinerary still has no official route which is adapted to the **needs of long-distance pilgrims**; the GR 145 imposed by the FFRP (Fédération Française de Randonnée Pédestre) is not complete and adds dozens of km (about 100) to the route.

From Besançon the scenic route via the *Vallée d'Omans* includes some very dangerous sections; an historical route (Mamirolle – Nods – Aubonne – Pontarlier) is now being studied by local associations. In the meantime, AIVF is testing a route suggested by Francis between Besançon, Hôpitaux-Neufs and Jougne. The next APP IV *Dormi Topo Francigena*, will optimize (cost and km) the itinerary Besançon – GSB, and represents a big improvement (see website page VF-CH).

In Switzerland

Romainmôtier – Goumoëns-la-Ville – Lausanne: thanks to local information, AIVF has been able to verify an historic bypass via Romainmôtier (significant stop), following the VF 70 as far as Pompaples, then the ancient Roman road, through the canal d'Enteroches to Goumoëns-la-Ville and in a direct line (approved by Margot), on agricultural roads (paved today) via Morrens and Le Mont-sur-Lausanne. The AIVF itinerary **reduces the distance by 37 km** between Pontarlier and Lausanne! A word to the wise is sufficient!

In Italy

The hospitality in hostels and religious houses is compromised by the bad behavior of certain individuals and groups. This service, **based exclusively on volunteers**, and comes at a HIGH COST (time offered, irregular hours, effort, selflessness, hospitality to all sorts of pilgrims). All this deserves, IN ALL CASES, an honest donation, not an offensive 1 or 2 euros as noted by the generous parish of San Caprasio-Aulla. Tourists aiming at zero cost, with absurd demands of pilgrim hospitality, are ruining the whole spirit of pilgrimage on the Via Francigena: THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE and discourages even the most committed volunteers!

If the costs are not covered in a way which allows them to maintain the hostel, they may have to adopt the solution chosen by the parish of San Quirico d'Orcia, which recently transformed its lodging to what they call "Casa per ferie" (holiday housing) with a set price for pilgrims with the credential (VAT and lodging tax included). Reserving and NOT showing up represents another big problem, which deprives other pilgrims of lodging; it remains indispensable to inform the host, who responds to requests based on space available. Since 2003 AIVF has fortunately received no complaints concerning its members.

FRIENDS and ORGANIZATION

- The General Assembly of AIVF in 2016 will take place as usual in November, hosted generously by the French-speaking parish in Bern. AIVF is proud to count (as of September 15, 2016) 2,275 pilgrim friends in its database.

- In the name of all the pilgrims, AIVF expresses its gratitude to all its volunteers, its coordinators **Margot and Michel**, its co-worker **Antonio** di Monza for the GPS coordinates for the Cisa Pass, the Monte Ceneri and the region of Varese. Our tireless Margot climbed **6 times the Monte Ceneri** (554 m) for you, from Giubiasco, to verify all the different possibilities, in the absence of an established itinerary. Thanks to our expert English translators **Carol** and **Jeff**, and to **Lia and Giancarlo**, who allow AIVF to pursue its activity in the most efficient way possible.

If you have a PROBLEM, we will do everything possible to help you.

Italy: Adelaide Trezzini, our President (+39 06 85302675 / +39 06 916507710) is happy to meet our pilgrim FRIENDS when in Rome or in Ticino info@francigena-international.org. **Switzerland:** Margot Collins-Fäh, 10 Zimmeregg, CH-6014 Lucerne Tel +41(0)41 2501093 ch@francigena-international.org. **Please contact us by e-mail.**