



ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE VIA FRANCIGENA (AIVF)

LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS

2018

In conclusion to our **AIVF 20-year Jubilee**, we finished in Pavia the **Via Francisca Lukmanier (VFL)** pilgrimage which we had started in Constance-Germany (510 km): **100 people participated** in the event on May 6th – unthinkable 3 years ago! The province of Lombardy came through with flying colors!

A fundamental step for the future development of the VFL took place on April 6th at the city hall in Ponte Tresa-CH, with the founding of the **Italian-Swiss association Friends of the VFL** (associazionevfl@gmail.com) with 5 members (to be able to have 7 members total with the future representatives of German-speaking Switzerland): Alfonso Passera president, Ferruccio Maruca vice-president, Gabriella Bruschetti secretary. Now that the constitution is adopted, there is much work to do: improve the agreements with the civil authorities in Italian-speaking Switzerland, consolidate the economic base with numerous new members, the website, FB, the *Dormifrancisca* with improved pilgrim menus, events, hikes, without delay, to then be able to export the model north of the Alps.

The AEFV (European Association of Via Francigena routes) shows great interest in developing the **network of pilgrim routes in the center of Europe**; our (Sigeric's) Via Francigena is only present in Western Europe. After the wonderful documentary by Italian Swiss TV (FALÒ) on June 29, 2017, on the subject of the Via Francigena and VFL trails, (<http://www.rsi.ch/la1/programmi/informazione/falo/tutti-i-servizi/Sentieri-di-fede-sentieri-di-pietra-9281386.html>), the Italian Swiss press has also contributed a lot to promoting the VFL (the *Corriere del Ticino* of May 26, 2018 had 2 full pages on it, and the *Azione-Migros* had an article in their edition of May 14th). New "pioneers" will also be setting out on the VFL in 2019: they will also have a **pilgrim passport (credential) valid from Constance to Rome**, as well as a pennant!

The historic route of Montelungo is becoming more popular, thanks to the work of the *Associazione VF Alta Lunigiana (AVFAL)* and the large number of pilgrims hiking the **route of Leonardo da Vinci** and of the Duchess Marie Louise of Parma, routes restored (thanks to a gift from AIVF) with the economic development expected in the Upper Lunigiana region, as evidenced by the opening of B&Bs and the Pilgrim Hostel in the former Trattoria Pinelli in Montelungo! With only 6000 € and lots of good will, a Tuscan community has been revived!
After the Cisa Pass, the route is now easier and faster, less than 4 hours from the pass to Pontremoli!

The Via Francigena of the Lakes is also moving ahead quickly, thanks to the commitment of the *Associazione Terre Comuni* (Campagnano-Cesano-Canale Monterano, with transversal itineraries), along with the presidents of the regional parcs of Veio (*APP Veio Park* for free) and Bracciano-Martignano and the involvement of 8 municipalities. The itinerary, carefully chosen with the help of numerous inspections by AIVF and local experts, requires little work by local authorities to ensure safe conditions. The **Veiente prehistoric route** has been miraculously preserved, both north and south of the Lake of Martignano, towards Cesano, Veio and Isola Farnese. The presentation of the technical project by the firm Riggio (sponsored by AIVF with 5000 €) will be submitted at the end of September for approval by the Lazio Region, after which the specific trail marking can be prepared to make it easier to follow this route.

Other projects are being studied to complete the VF through the **Parco dell'Insugherata** (trail finally cleared in August!) and thereby reach the center of Rome from Monterosi crossing only through parks: the "miracle" is not yet reality but we still have high hopes!

The **3 APPs Dormi ToPo Francigena** (Great San Bernard–Piacenza, Piacenza –San Gimignano, San Gimignano–Rome), which can be downloaded to smartphone, tablet, iPhone and iPad, were entrusted to Innovation Engineering Roma in January. The complex work required a lot of time and the largest financial contribution ever made by AIVF: 15,000 €. We are still in the process of perfecting the APPs, re. altimetry profiles on the 2 suggested itineraries (AEVF-AIVF). The APPs are of great help along the way (leaving the choice between the **official VF and the historic variants**), and furnish GPS localization for lodging (exact information is a priority for AIVF) and easy reservation. AIVF has no doubt that this is the way of the future... even though some French pilgrims still prefer the "classic" guidebook.

The ***Dormifrancigena for Italy*** is updated each year with all details, thanks to the help of Antonio Tripoli ; Margot Collins-Fäh has created a printable version in PDF which can be bought at our shop (about 280 addresses), in place of the paper version of the *Dormifrancigena*.

ITINERARIES 2018-2019

From France to the Great St-Bernard (GSB)

The various blogs of pilgrims having hiked the VF in France mention the **main problems**: long, monotonous stages, few places to stay and too expensive, and also the poor quality and the high prices of meals, as compared to Italy.

More and more pilgrims, especially from the USA, Australia and Holland, begin their VF at the 0 km marker in front of the Canterbury Cathedral. The official French VF, the **GR 145**, adds about 150 km to the VF in France, as compared to a "direct" route. The AEFV has decided to publish in the spring of 2019 a new guide from Canterbury to the GSB Pass, which would be a compromise between the

requirements of the French Federation of Hiking Paths (FFRP) (minimum 60% on trails, sometimes poorly maintained and difficult in rainy conditions, which are frequent in Central Europe) and the requirements of pilgrims who simply want to hike to Rome!

In this approach, AEFV wants to include in their guidebook "**variants**", **historic routes** available in France (for example La Leulène -Pas-de-Calais- and Besançon-Mamirolle-Nods-Aubonne-Pontarlier-Jougne, proposed by AIVF since 2004).

In January 2018, AEFV took the good initiative to publish, on their website and on their APP VF for Switzerland, the historic VF Pontarlier – Jougue – Orbe (which AIVF has been promoting since 2002). To underline the importance of this option, AIVF and AEFV organized an "historic" event June 10th and 11th in Jougue: a hike along the itinerary from Les Fourgs to Jougue, with a message by AEFV president Massimo Tedeschi in the church of St. Maurice on the site "Antifern" (*mansio* where Sigeric stopped overnight in 990 A.D.). Claude Putallaz and Jean-François Tosetti took care of technical and logistic aspects, as well as contact with the media. It was a memorable experience for AIVF president Adelaide Trezzini and the French and Swiss friends of the VF to walk 300 meters along the Roman road between Ballaigues and Les Clées. The AEFV president took advantage of the opportunity to ask AIVF to finish establishing the historic itinerary between Orbe and Lausanne, which avoids 22 needless km currently imposed by the VF70. In the meantime, *SwissMobile* decided to **link Sainte-Croix directly to Orbe** (decision made in September 2017 and signposted in August 2018).

We are proud to finally be able to propose **Sigeric's VF in 3 days between Pontarlier and Lausanne (71 km total, of which 47 on official Swiss trails)**! Pilgrims can decide themselves which route to take, while waiting for the study and decision by the official organizations, *VaudRando* and *SwissMobile*.

<https://map.schweizmobil.ch/?lang=de&land=wanderland&route=all&bgLayer=pk&season=summer&resolution=100&E=2528588&N=1171054&layers=Wanderland&trackId=4692485>. The press in Switzerland and France have also contributed to this progress.

2018 will also be a year of **closer teamwork between AEFV and AIVF**, marked by a meeting in Piacenza with the leaders (Sami Tawfik and Luca Bruschi) in which they underlined their respective roles and the objective of improving their collaboration and the visibility of each association.

In Italy

AIVF is concentrating on **making better known the historical variants**. Videos, FB, and other solutions are being studied.

The hospitality in the hostels and religious communities is the strong point of the VF in Italy. We must all express our gratitude by our behavior, both individual and in groups. All hospitality depends exclusively on volunteers, whose contribution is WORTH A LOT (time spent, often without fixed hours, efforts, selfless commitment, unlimited hospitality to all pilgrims) and it deserves, in all cases, an honest and inoffensive gift. **As we have unfortunately observed in previous years**, there are tourists who are simply looking for a no-cost option, with the absurd expectation of pilgrim hospitality, and they do harm to the whole spirit of pilgrimage: this is NOT acceptable and discourages even the most dedicated volunteers. Tim and Paul, British and American pilgrims who left from Canterbury in 2018, were surprised to discover that long-distance pilgrims were a minority in Italy, compared to people who were just off hiking for a few days...

We remind you that it is a major problem when people reserve lodging and do not show up, which reduces availability for other pilgrims; it is indispensable for people offering lodging to know how many places they really have available for those who ask to stay there.

FRIENDS AND ORGANIZATIONS

AIVF has observed the necessity to open itself **more and more to contact and teamwork** with experts, public organizations and private parties who share a common interest in the VF, both in Switzerland and other countries. The General Assembly of AIVF in February 2018, in Berne as always, invited representatives of FVFF (French Federation of VF) to join us, along with Hermann Heiter of the Swiss Friends of the Way of St. James. It was also the time to renew our leadership team: Franco Poretti of Lugano became treasurer, and Marco Frigerio of Lugano our auditor.

AIVF will participate in the **Forum for Pilgrim Routes** in Paris, April 5-7, 2019.

Thanks to our international members, the renewal of dues from our faithful Swiss friends and the sale of our quality products, always in demand, AIVF maintains a positive balance and can achieve its new goals. Without its team of coordinators and translators, all volunteers, AIVF would not exist; to them goes all the gratitude expressed by the pilgrims.

AIVF does everything possible to maintain the effectiveness and the reliability of the services it offers, as shown by the immediate answers sent to those requesting information or ordering material.

Michel Bonnenfant responds with infinite patience to approximately 500 French pilgrims each year. **Margot** Collins-Fäh is still the president's right-hand woman and dedicated to helping all other pilgrims!

AIVF is proud to count in its database **2.660** pilgrim-FRIENDS (as of September 1, 2018).

IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM EN ROUTE: we will help you to the best of our abilities

President Adelaide Trezzini (tel. 06 85302675 /+41(0)91 967 39 69), when she is in Rome or the Ticino (Italian-speaking Switzerland), very gladly meets with pilgrim FRIENDS. info@francigena-international.org -Postbox 422 CH-6932 Breganzona

Please contact us by e-mail : that way you are sure to receive an answer, even if we're not there when you call.