

### Slide 1

I came across the idea of the Via Francigena (VF), a topic I knew nothing about, at the age of 54. I mention this because I think it is an example of what women can create, no-matter what their age.

Today I'm going to explain:

- what the VF is
- how to relaunch an itinerary, or even two itineraries, after they had fallen into oblivion for 3 or 4 centuries.

### Slide 2

The itinerary became the main axis of Western Europe's road networks in 58 B.C. when Julius Caesar created a "Highway of the Sun", the shortest connection between the North Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

Its course partly overlapped with the so-called "Tin Route" from Cornwall to Switzerland, which went on to Marseille, and with the European network of Roman roads.

### Slide 3

I'll talk about the challenges faced and about the cultural, economic, and social returns of such an enterprise: the most exciting adventure and involving experience of my life! Not yet finished...

It is never too early to begin, like Oliver 18 months old in 2017!

### Slide 4

Since Jerusalem was under Arab control, Rome was the main destination for Christian pilgrimages up until the dawning of the cult of St. James of Compostela, in Galicia (northwestern Spain) in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cent. (9<sup>th</sup> Century?)

In Italy, during the Middle Ages, the Via Francigena followed Lombard or Roman roads.

In 725 AD the Via is called "*iter francorum*" going through the kingdom of the Franks (Belgium, Netherlands, North of France) and in 876 is called "Via Francigena" for the first time. It would still change names according to where the people would come from: "Chemin des Anglois" in the North of France, "Chemin Romieux" or "Via Romea" on the way to Italy because its destination was Rome; "Via Francigena or Francisca" in Burgundy or Lombardy.

### Slide 5

The VF would mainly serve the needs of Popes, Emperors, bankers, merchants and highwaymen. After the declaration of the Holy Year /Jubilee in 1300 AD, thousands of wayfarers walked it.

The VF was reconstructed according to the oldest pilgrim diary (990 AD) written by an Anglo-Saxon pilgrim, the Archbishop Sigeric, drafted upon his return from Rome to Canterbury.

The 79 (*sumansiones*) stages described represent the backbone of the road known as VF.

Across the centuries, the VF became part of a great network of European routes, but the pilgrimage to Rome waned around the 17<sup>th</sup> Cent.

## Slide 6

A few words regarding Cultural itineraries and the revival of pilgrimage routes to Rome. In 1987, Santiago de Compostela (Way of St. James) became the first cultural pilgrimage route of the Council of Europe. In 1994 the VF became the second, after Italy promoted it on the occasion of the Great Jubilee in 2000.

## The Way to rebirth

The first project I presented in Strasbourg in 1996 “ L’An 1000: Route de Sigéric des Alpes à la Manche” (The Year 1000: Sigeric’s route from the Alps to the Channel”, had the goal to promote smaller and lesser known villages along the traditional pilgrimage routes.

In 1997 the VF Association was born, while in Italy the interest in the project seemed to diminish together with the European funds. The Italian Ministry of Tourism had decided to set aside the VF project as no longer economically interesting. While in 2017, 50.000 pilgrims would spend at least 2 nights on the VF!

In 1998 thanks to the help of the vicar of Verbier (Switzerland), we created the first VF website.

## Slide 7

Pilgrims immediately understood the importance of the only alternative pilgrimage road (other than Santiago) and started inquiring about it.

In 2000, as I hesitated publishing the first guidebook VF from the Great St. Bernard Pass to Rome, a French pilgrim I met on a bench in Via della Conciliazione facing St. Peter’s said to me: “Nothing is ever perfect. Just publish it!”

Pilgrims became gradually more demanding: they wanted to have the Pilgrim passport and the “*Testimonium*” and more detailed guidebooks.

## Slide 8

My main contribution has probably been giving back to the VF its European dimension. I was brought up in Geneva in the heart of an international family. I lived in Rome for 50 years; so this was somehow my duty to rediscover and promote the VF in England, France and Switzerland where it was totally unknown.

That’s why I decided to split the total itinerary into 2 sections:

Canterbury to Great St. Bernard, and Great St. Bernard to Rome

## Slide 9

Between 2004 and 2007 AIVF published *Topofrancigena A and B*, still much requested by pilgrims.

AIVF was the official partner of the Council of Europe until 2007. After that I handed over the task to AEVF (European Association of Vie Francigene) founded in 2001. AEVF gets together cities, provinces, Regions that these ways go through. In just 10 years the VF has reached such an amazing level of interest and success. Nowadays everybody has heard about the VF through newspaper, TV!

## Slide 10

Between 2006 and 2007 the first DORMIFRANCIGENA A and B would provide the complete accommodation list, more important than maps for pilgrims!

Up until 2007 the pilgrims walking along the VF were true pioneers: 50% of them would go back home frustrated, due to the total lack or even excess of improvised signposting and official military maps dating back to 1945...!

## Slide 11

In 2015 finally AIVF developed 3 applications for iPhone, absolutely the best to not get lost, because paper guidebooks get outdated very quickly!

## **Slide 12**

Since 2007 AIVF exclusively follows its main goals:

1. Promote cultural and touristic value of pilgrimage roads to Rome (as reported on our 1997 headed notepaper)
2. Help all pilgrims, in every way, who want to walk the VF!
3. Provide a historical and scientific support by publishing the newest research especially the 4 main historical routes; see the maps on the table in the back.

You have the opportunity to experience walking on medieval or ancient Roman roads, cross fords or hike paths lost in the countryside.

## **Slide 13**

Let's make a quick trip from the Great St-Bernard to Rome with a few slides in order to encourage you to put on your shoes and GO. Step by step you reach St. Peter's tomb!

## **Slide 18**

The name Via Francisca – Francesca means the road leads beyond the Alps. It is mentioned in the XII-XIII C. in the history of many little towns in Ticino. In parts it overlaps the “Via Regina” (Royal road) that we often cross near Lugano.

## **Slide 19**

In 2006 I discovered in S. Pellegrino church in Giornico (a church appropriately described as being on the “Via Francisca” a wooden life-size statue of the saint.

On its cape, the symbols of the pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela (the seashell) and to Rome (the keys of St. Peter)

## **Slide 24**

Between Lukmanier Pass and Olivone

## **Slide 26**

In 2014 AIVF made a first attempt to revive the VFL crossing by boat the Lake Maggiore and through the Ticino Park in order to reach Pavia taking the easiest itinerary (provided navigation is possible).

In 2017, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AIVF, volunteers walked the VFL nearly all way from Constance to Pavia thanks to an extraordinary cooperation between Lombardy and Canton Ticino.

## **Slide 27**

The next step will be to cross the Alps and promote the VFL with local towns and associations in Switzerland.

This attempt will probably follow the pattern of Sigeric's way: a min. of 5 years are necessary to relaunch an old pilgrimage route.

## **Slide 28**

2018 is also the birth of the Swiss-Italian Association “Amici della Via Francisca del Lucomagno” with a specific e-mail address and a Facebook page. You'll find more information about it in the flyer on the tables at the back of the room.

One step at a time, the VFL will become Central Europe's main walkway from north to south. A road starting in Germany and ending up in Rome!