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### VIA FRANCIGENA: All Roads Lead to Rome

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promises of airline ads of the 50s. It is exalted and glorious, as we revel at once in our amazement inspired by the program, of course, but by the world, as well. In comparison, our “real” journeys are a series of humiliations, of removed shoes and three-ounce shampoos in quart-sized clear baggies. Only in Google Earth are more stopovers a plus, enhancing our voyage rather than detracting from it.

If the great world maps of the Middle Ages served to remind us of the plan of God (as they saw it), and the work of Bosch emphasizes our great distance from Him (as he saw it), Google Earth allows us to sit on his throne, if only briefly, before our freefall back to the world around us. Can we be surprised if we experience a bit of turbulence upon reentry? I, therefore, prefer to return to Google Earth, calling up my world, made to order, oriented and centered as I wish, layered to my personal interests. And then, with a flick of my wrist, I set the world to spin.

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## VIA FRANCIGENA *All Roads Lead to Rome*

By Adelaide Trezzini (President, Association Internationale Via Francigena)

Julius Caesar opened this shortest route between the North Sea and Rome and during the Early Middle Ages in Italy, the route followed Roman and Longobard roads. Although it was first called Via Francigena for the first time in 876, over the centuries the Via changed its name according to the provenance of its users: it was “Via Francigena-Francisca” in Italy and Burgundy, “Chemin des Anglois” in the Frankish Kingdom (after the evangelisation of England in 607) and the “Chemin Romieux,” the road to Rome. An itinerary detailing 80 stages of the VF can be found in the oldest diary of an Anglo-Saxon pilgrim, Archbishop Sigeric the Serious of Canterbury, who journeyed that way when returning from Rome where he received the pallium from Pope John XV in 990.

In Italy the Via Francigena crosses the road to Santiago, which facilitates cooperation between the two itineraries. But for the rest of Europe, as this Vademecum, stage by stage, describes so well, the itinerary and the pilgrimage of one man, Sigeric, as documented in the diary where he describes the stages of his journey, crisscrosses the many routes used by those making their way to other centres of pilgrimage: Compostella, Rome and Jerusalem.

Depending on the time of year, the political situation and the popularity of certain saints’ shrines along the route, travellers may have taken one of three or four crossings of the Alps and the Apennines. The Lombards maintained and defended the road as a trading route to the north from Rome, avoiding enemy held cities such as Florence.

Following the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 640, Rome became the main destination for Christian pilgrimages until the tenth century (though it was superceded somewhat by the the pilgrimage veneration of St. James of Compostella in Galicia). Because of this, all kinds of travelers from popes, emperors, bankers, and merchants to highwaymen traversed the Via

Francigena. With the proclamation of the Holy Jubilee Year in 1300, thousands of wayfarers travelled the Via Francigena per year on their way to Rome. Ultimately, as pilgrimage to Rome fell out of fashion in the 17th century, so too did the traffic fall off along the Via Francigena.



The VF became *Cultural Route of the Council of Europe* in 1994 and **Major cultural Route** in 2004, but its true revival as a modern pilgrim's way from Canterbury to Rome, has been possible thanks to pocket booklets published (2000-7) by the International Via Francigena Association (AIVF) founded by Adelaide Trezzini in 1997.

The Via Francigena is NOT and will NEVER be as EASY as the *Camino of Santiago*! But pioneer-pilgrims will appreciate the special strong human and spiritual experiences to be had on the Via Francigena. An example of a recent trip is described in this article:

