



I am sorry that this bulletin has slipped into July, we are just back from a survey trip along a section of the *chemin Plantagenêt*. This is an attractive feed route for walkers and riders from the UK and Northern France to join the main thoroughfares of the *chemin St Jacques*. I am afraid to say the route is wonderfully well signposted in comparison to the *via Francigena*, but does suffer from the inevitable "erosion".

Is it small boys or vindictive townsfolk and farmers that take joy in removing the most vital signs.

France seems also to have gone crazy over fancy new blue or burgundy painted lampposts. It seems every commune has been to the bank to get a mortgage for new road furniture and of course as the commune doesn't own the that little sticky sign there is no effort to replace it when the old lamp post is torn down and the shiny new one erected.

I am sure that you will have experienced these problems. For me it is always in the middle of the biggest and most congested city that the problem is at its worst with the only recourse being to walk a spiral route examining every post, tree and road sign until you finally pick up the trail again. This week even this method failed when the signs had been removed just outside Lion d'Angers, probably through road works, and the route made an unexpected detour around the town. We were luckily not too far from our home base and so came back to try and think our way around the problem with the help of some sketch maps we have just received from the Anjou chapter of the "amis de St Jacques".

Some good work is appearing here and there in standardizing approaches to signing e.g. symbols, colours, which side of the road, positive and negative indicators, direction and best of all distance and name of next township, but I would ask everyone to add "get the commune to take responsibility" and "no more than 500m between signs."

We are now well into the walking/pilgrimage season with a number of you *en route*. At my last count we had 14 nationalities either *en route* or planning.

We are slowly beginning to receive feed back on both the route and the books and we will try and reach consensus on what we should change before we produce the 2009 edition.

We have heard from Virginie Brouillard of the AIVF of an alternative route from Guînes to Wisques (just inland from the French channel coast). The alternative route enters the Champs de Drap d'Or and keeps to the east of the D215, bypassing Licques, using a combination of small roads and the GR128. My calculations seem to show a similar distance to the route we have suggested, with both options needing careful concentration through the many intersections. However, Virginie tells me the new route is closer to the ancient Sigeric route and has great views of the channel. We will try and find a day to test the alternative and make a GPS trace.

I have also received a suggestion to follow more closely the Valrando route in Switzerland. I am trying to research this, but if anyone can help I would be grateful.

On book content we have had conflicting views with regard to the Blog section. One side says that it adds unnecessary weight and cost and is perhaps too personal. On the other side, people tells us that they enjoy it and gain useful information. Similarly, others have suggested we should perhaps give more emphasis to religious sites en route. On this second point; we have been intentionally cautious as our experience of pilgrimage has been secular and we feel we risk alienating one faith to satisfy another. We do, however, make great efforts to list books that we think could be relevant and useful for people who want them. If you have views let us know.

On the distribution front we now have the books available from the CSJ/CPR book-shop in London and the Canterbury Cathedral Book-shop. Please use them. Later this month we will try and establish a few more outlets along the route.

We have just added to the VF series a 8.5x11 inch pictorial colour book of the route: Reflections - a pictorial journey along the via Francigena. This is meant for day dreaming over before you make the journey or for reminiscing with friends after. We hope it will also be available at the 2 stores.

Finally here in France the summer is the time for music festivals. Here is a link I found on the IECR web-site for a set of events on the VF in Northern France :

http://www.culture-routes.lu/php/fo_index.php?lng=en&btfullsrch_x=12&btfullsrch_y=8&back=%252Fphp%252Ffo_index.php%253Fdest%253Dbd_mx_lst%2526action%253Dsrch%2526mode%253Dsrchav%2526lng%253Den%2526F_fullsrch%253Dvia%252Bfrancigena%2526btfullsrch.x%253D12%2526btfullsrch.y%253D8&dest=bd_ac_det&id=00002767

And of course for jazz and pop fans there is the Montreux Jazz festival from July 4 to 19 - we will be there!

I also trust we will meet some of you on the col Grand St Bernard on July 11.

Paul Chinn

www.pilgrimagepublications.com

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