

Germany to Rome
in 64 days
Our Pilgrimage

by

Mike Metras

with notes by

Petra Wolf

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Tentative first steps

An often-walked path – Wangen

Day 1

10 mi (16 km) – 10 mi (16 km)

180 ft (55 m) up – 490 ft (150 m) down

Home

Highlight: Always a joy.

When we walk to Rome we are leaving our garden house on the grounds of Kisslegg's Old Castle and walking every step from our front door to St. Peter's in Rome. We will no longer hear the nearby church-tower clock bells ring every quarter hour to remind us that time is passing. I'll not miss the reminder but I will miss their music. I'll also miss the fresh bakery bread every morning.



Our home in Kisslegg sits on the other side of the lake in front of the castle (the big place on the right).



Our home close up.

A rainy beginning

A wet, tough climb – Kemptner Hut

Friday, August 4 – Day 8

4 mi (6 km) – 75 mi (121 km)

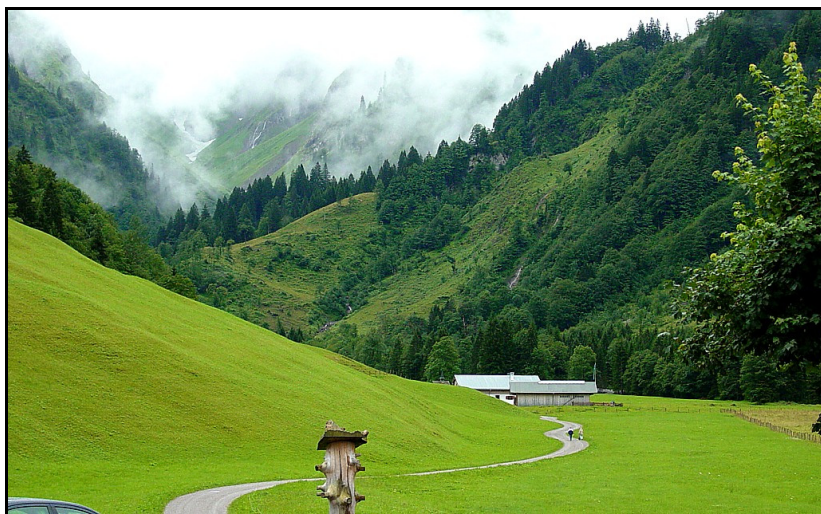
2,855 ft (870 m) up – 330 ft (100 m) down

Kemptner Hut

Highlight: Walking through a waterfall.



It was an easy beginning yesterday, a good way to start a long walk. But today shall prove different. The walk starts comfortably up a small road through that wide grassy meadow we looked out on from the restaurant last night. As the valley narrows we start to walk on hillside paths that often are parallel to the hillside instead of flat. That is, we're walking sideways with one shoe below the other all the time.



Walking up this valley and we'll turn left at the clouds.

We follow the hill contour into creeks and back out onto the hill wall. I'm beginning learn something about my fear already. My shoes stick well on the surfaces whether they are wet, slippery, or grainy. I gain confidence and begin taking longer and bolder steps where before I would be taking small steps for fear that I was about to slide into the forest below.

Oh, yes, the drizzle hasn't let up from last night. It continues all day today. It is never heavy, but it is always there. Its momentary stops

A rainy beginning

New shoes – Madau, Austria

Saturday, August 5 – Day 9

11 mi (18 km) – 86 mi (139 km)

2,360 ft (720 m) up – 3,020 ft (920 m) down

Gasthof Hermine

Highlight: A huge waterfall on the way down into Holzgau.



Kemptner Hut with its cable car supply line in the morning sun. We walked up the valley at the right yesterday.

It's 8:30 and we're already a couple hundred feet above the Kemptner Hut. I stop for a photo and am happy that what I get actually begins to capture the size of the area and the gorge we walked up yesterday getting here. The sun is shining around patchy clouds and the air is brisk. The rain has stopped but the dirt is slippery.

We turn and walk a short distance over the ridge to the Austrian border and look down a broad, glacier-carved valley into Austria. The beginning of walk is easy though we walk over a lot of rocks and roots and through a lot of mud.

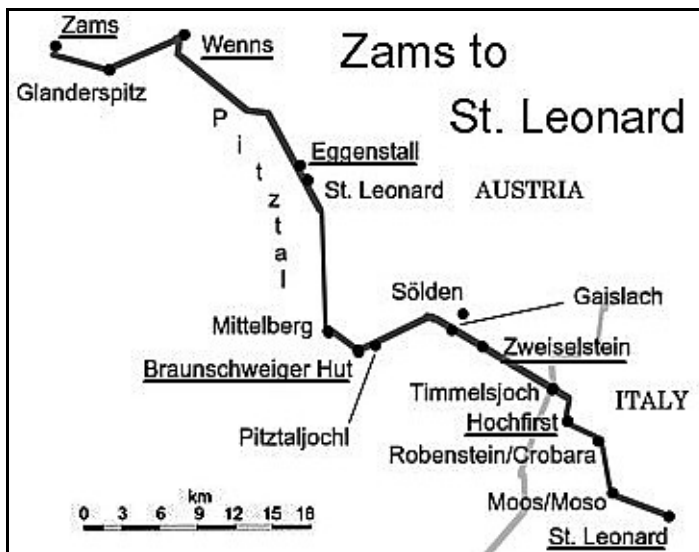
Walking over Austria's Alps

Walking over Austria's Alps

Our first steps of our pilgrimage to Rome are behind us. We have rested an extra day in Zams to acclimatize ourselves. I have begun to face my fear of heights and learned a little about them already. Little of the July's sun is showing its face. The rain is often falling on us.

We are deep in the Austrian Alps. The mountains are high, the valleys deep. And both are steep sided. When we are high and can see far, it is like being on the set of "*The Sound of Music*," which was filmed in this area.

In the next six short days, we will cross the rest of Austria. At the end of the sixth day we'll be standing in Italy ready to continue southward. We will walk up two beautiful valleys, Pitztal and Timmelstal. We will cross a frightening mountain pass, Pitztalerjochl, and two other calm passes.



Zams to St. Leonard Map.

Germany to Rome in 64 days

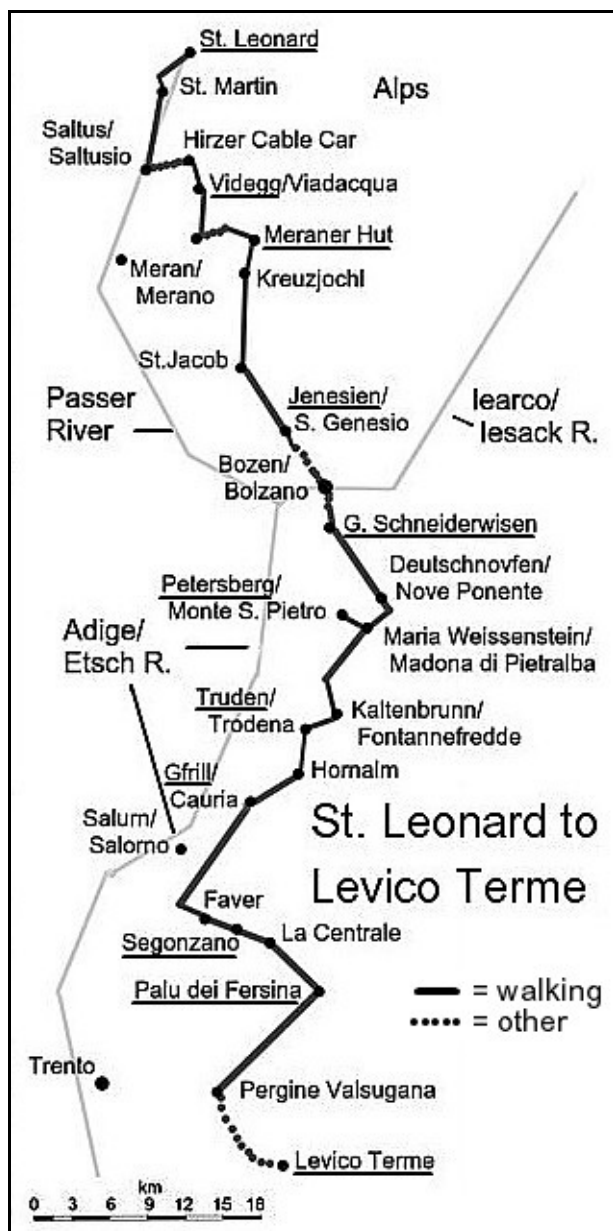


Morning in the Pitztal.



Pitztal goes on.

Germany to Rome in 64 days



St. Leonard to Levico Terme map.

Walking our own path

Walking our own path

It's time to look for our own path. We've walked our last on E5. In the Adige Valley we can walk more easily and quickly, or so I think. The Universe has a way of throwing a curve ball sometime, a way of letting you know you're out of sync with it. "So you aren't satisfied with your speed, try this one. Don't be so impatient." I pull a muscle in my arch on the way into the valley. From now on I walk more slowly, much more slowly than in the mountains.

In retrospect we learn a few things because of my injury. We made the move to the valley because of impatience, money, and apprehension (mostly mine): impatience because I wanted to move more quickly; money because we wanted to spend less for the whole walk; and apprehension because I began to feel that the spending would deplete our funds too quickly. [As I look at it from this point, this fear and trepidation looks a bit heavy; But that's where I was that day.]

The lesson: be patient and trust that all will be provided when we need it. Take things as they come. When push we too hard, something often slows us down. Everything happens in its time, not ours. We can manage it a bit. But when we get pushy, we are asking for more than we think we are asking for. So now we walk the valley more slowly than we walked the mountains and have to deal with the pain in addition.



Petra: The task of finding our own path is both difficult and good. We have to talk with people. We need more help. We need maps and information on places to sleep. When we walk with all the information that the E5 provided it's easy to walk the path. Here we are in a valley with only a bicycle path and some beginning information. The path develops as we walk, like in our life. This is a fantastic training in finding our own path. We take on this challenge to find our own path as we move very slowly through the valley.

Traditionally, when pilgrims walked rather than rode to Rome, they would have walked the valley rather than the mountains. They would have been walking the easiest way they could find to get to their destination. And we are, after all, pilgrims. So in addition to the reasons above, we decide to come down



Early winter in Tuscany

A kilometer along the way as we're threading our way along the unmarked VF picking logical streets from the city map, I realize that I left my hat in the bar. I'm in no mood to go back. I want to cover some distance today. Petra says, "I never liked it much anyway. You can get another." We continue forward.

Four miles (six km) down the road Petra stops in a pharmacy for a pack of Kleenex (you can buy them in pharmacies or tobacco shops in Italy). I stay outside, retie my shoes, and sit a couple minutes. Then I get up and go into the store. As Petra is about to leave a clerk asks Petra, "Is that your hat on the post out there?"

"We left a hat in Marina Massa. How could it be here?"

Petra looks out. "It looks like ours." She comes back to me, "Is that your hat? It looks like it but I cannot believe it."

We go out and look. "It looks like mine."

We walk over to the post. We walk around the post checking out each side of the hat.

"Ya. It looks like mine. And there's the tag. I think it's mine."

Petra picks it up, smells it, and says, "Yes, it's yours." She puts it on my head.

How does a hat walk 4 miles (6 km) and know where to hang itself so we see it? We saw no one put it here. Neither of us remembers seeing it here when we arrived. Yet here it is. We talked to no one in the place where we left it about walking the VF. How did they know we were on the VF? And yet someone had to recognize we left the hat in the bar and to dispatch someone with it. And whoever brought it had to either guess we were walking the VF or otherwise seek us out and put the hat where we would see and recognize it. And why did the clerk in the store ask Petra if it was hers? Again some Italians go far out of their way to help a pilgrim. The Universe once again made so many things work together to make our pilgrimage more enlightening. What other wonders are down the road?



Later, the pharmacy clerk, realizing Petra wants only one small Kleenex pack and not the whole package of packages, buys the big package for herself, searches out Petra, and gives her the one small pack she wanted. Another person helps us.

Germany to Rome in 64 days

So much green – Valpromaro

Wednesday, December 13 – Day 45

12 mi (20 km) – 504 mi (813 km)

Parrocchia di S. Martino

Highlight: An evening with Don Mario.



After praying with the nuns this morning, we head down the still illusive VF pathway. South of Pietrasanta we miss where we are supposed to go over a ridge. We end up far out of the way and much higher than we bargained for. At least we have some good views of the costal plain and sea. The route markings still aren't always there when we need them. At times we wonder out loud whether the people who placed the signs ever walked and had to follow another's signs. Don't get me wrong. There are a lot of well-placed signs but too many badly placed ones also.



Sometimes we find signs that are made with a lot of love like this one at a shrine. It directs us to both Rome and Santiago.

At Camaiore a bartender tells us about a restaurant “1.2 kilometers” away. By the time we get there we have surely walked three kilometers (two miles). Again distances are reported short and this time he even added “.2” to it. But we're rewarded for our patience. The ten-

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A Roman road on an overcast morning.

Sun, rain, snow, and mud

tree-lined hilltops, everything that “Tuscany” has come to mean in our memory from years of reading.



The medieval skyscraper town from a few hills away.

Two different routes face us this morning, one proposed by the VF map and the other by the *Guida*. We choose to follow the latter since it offers the possibility of a mid-day stop in Colle Val d’Elsa. The VF map’s route stays more to the hills avoiding places where we might find something to eat. Our route to Colle Val d’Elsa is marked so it isn’t that it isn’t a VF route. It seems to be an alternate route not sanctioned by the VF Association (p. 283). A Kompass walking map (p. 287) for this section helps us stay on track. We have come prepared not to get lost again.

In mid-morning we stop for a few minutes to rest. I forget my walking stick when we leave and don’t notice it for a kilometer or so. When I realize it’s gone, I retrace my steps. I know we have been coming down, but I don’t realize we have come down so far. By the time I get back up the hill to the stick, I have to take my sweater off. Petra rests while I’m gone.

Our walking sticks have always been long, fairly straight branches we have found along the path. Most of the time we don’t need them.

Sun, rain, snow, and mud

Winter wonderland – Acquapendente

Saturday, January 27 – Day 57

11 mi (18 km) – 669 mi (1079 km)

Associazione Casa di Lazzaro

Highlight: Fresh snow and bright winter sun.



Petra gets up before I do and braves the cold house to start a fire in the kitchen stove. The bedroom isn't warm when I get up. The kitchen is. Thanks, Petra.

Petra: We have a great homemade breakfast in our warm kitchen. We drink Earl Grey tea and eat leftover panetone from Christmas. Delicious. I usually have tea in my backpack to give us a warm treat on a cold evening or like here for a homemade breakfast. This kitchen stove is like mine in my Berlin apartment many years ago. It brings back memories. I still know how to run this type of stove. I enjoy them even though they are work. To get more wood I had to go around the house in the cold last night and carry it back into the upstairs kitchen. While I was out, I saw a lot of stars, a very clear sky and it felt cold. That told me we would have a bright and sunny winter wonderland this morning. And it is.

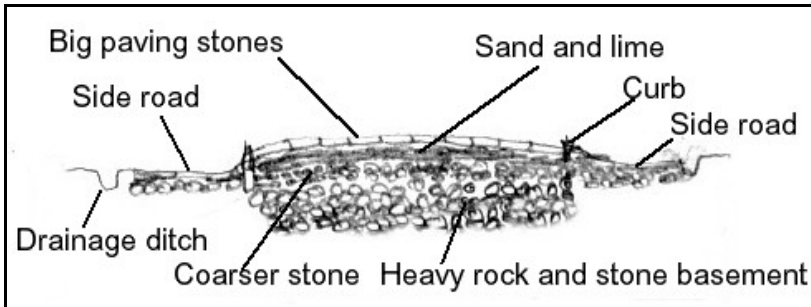


Morning in Radicofani. It's not as cold as it looks.

We're out in the snow early. The sun is beautiful and bright. The air is crisp and clear, the wind calm. And it's cold—around 30 F. (-1 C.)—the coldest we have walked in. It's pleasant. The sun keeps us warmer than the thermometer says we should feel. Of course walking

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quite level and in places cars still drive on it, 2100 years after it was built.



My rough version of a cross section of a Roman road created from memory of an elaborate illustration along the path.

We walk segments of the Via Cassia's ancient surface many kilometers in the next days. We cannot help but think of who has walked on the same stones. Roman armies, senators, free men, and slaves were followed by other armies from the north and west. Sts. Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Sienna walked among armies, merchants, pilgrims, and other clerics. Now modern pilgrims walk it and in some places share it with cars. And it has been lying right where we walk since before 150 BC. It has endured the long haul.



More new VF signs.

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religious house here to stay in so Petra calls places listed in a B&B resource book she picked up in the Viterbo B&B last night while curiously checking out the things laying around. The curiosity paid off.

B&B Arco Tauro has a place to stay but it's on the edge of town and we're not ambitious to go looking for it. Not to fear, the woman running it picks us up.

As we settle in Petra is in for a surprise when she begins taking a shower. The hot water turns cold after a couple minutes. Seems the room is mainly a summer room and during the summer the small water heater along with the solar water heater backup does the heating job quite well. Winter is another story. We never get an adequate supply of hot water for a good shower. Petra suffers through a cold shower. I decline. I'll wait until tomorrow night. Our experience at B&B Arco Tauro, despite the cold shower, is good.

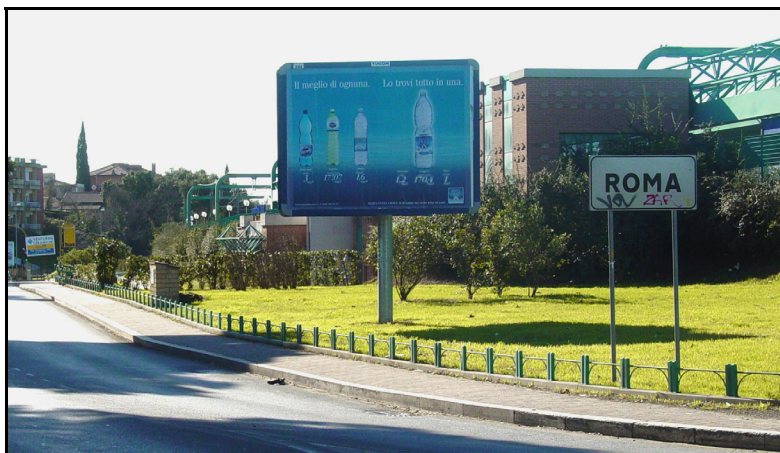
The woman also taxis us to a restaurant. Thanks. And what a pick she has for us. Il Peccato is a gem. We arrive a bit after seven to a huge, empty dining room, nothing unusual for us; we're always before the 9 pm crowd in Italy. The waitress is very helpful describing several new menu items, "new" in that we have not seen them before and have no idea what they are. In the end I settle for something I know. I have the best *frutti di mari* spaghetti that I think I have ever had. The taste is to die for. I have a huge stack of clamshells after I eat my last piece of spaghetti. It could have been two meals. The place is special for another reason. By eight the place is packed, all 20 to 24 tables are full. Two waitresses are taking care of all the tables. They seem not only to be doing it very well but also to be enjoying it. If I ever have occasion to return to Ronciglione, I will return to Il Peccato, The Sin.

RISTORANTE	Ristorante Il Peccato srl
	<i>Ubicazione Esercizio:</i>
il Peccato...	01037 RONCIGLIONE (VT)
PIZZERIA	Via Cassia Cimina km 22,200
<i>Chiuso Lunedi</i>	Tel. 0761 627666
	<i>Luogo Conservazione Documenti Fiscali:</i>
	Via Capranica, 14e - Ronciglione
	P. IVA 01873140568

Ristorante Il Pecatto. I'll stop in if I'm ever in the area again.

Germany to Rome in 64 days

I've been walking on this world for 64 years and I am now here in Rome after walking 64 days from Germany. So I have no tears this time; but I am elated.



Roma, 64 days later.



Sheep inside the city limits of Rome.

In time we arrive at Mellini Park. The VF people call it *Monte della Gioia* or *Monet del Gaudio* (Mount of Joy) in Italian the same as *Monte de Gozo* (Mount of Joy) on the Camino de Santiago a few kilometers out of Santiago.

This is the first place where we pilgrims can see our goal, the Cathedral of Santiago in Spain and St. Peter's here. We walk out and look over the city to St. Peter's in the distance. We have really arrived now. The park gives us a beautiful panorama of the city.

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Not to worry. Soon the pope comes in the back of our hall. He begins to make his way down the center aisle shaking hands with everyone as he goes, rather like an American politician looking for votes. If we would have known, we could have sat there; we were early enough. It takes him fifteen minutes to make his way to his throne at stage center. There are readings. He gives a short sermon in Italian.



Pope Benedict sits in state to receive all pilgrims to Rome.

Various speakers introduce “pilgrim” groups from many lands. The pope gives basically the same sermon to each group in its native language: French, German, Polish, Spanish, English, Italian, Russian, and a couple others. A choir group from Crystal Lake, Illinois, is announced; Crystal Lake is just down the road from my hometown, Woodstock. But they don’t mention us, the two foot pilgrims. All those announced were groups who came by bus, plane, or train.

At the end the pope gives us his blessing. We and 10,000 or so others have had our audience with the pope. We will skip it on our next visit to Rome.

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Via Appia

Thursday, February 8

Highlight: Going just a little farther, risking the unknown.

The closer we got to Rome on this pilgrimage, the more we thought of Jerusalem, the more we thought of continuing the pilgrimage beyond Rome. Sister Ginetta's question in Siena brought that old idea to the surface again (p. 200). She said, "Rome is only a stop along the road to Jerusalem." We've walked to Santiago, the third most holy Christian pilgrimage, and now to Rome, the second. It's logical to think of continuing to the source of Christianity and Judaism, the primary destination of early Christian pilgrimage. And as we walk through southern Italy, Greece, and Turkey into the Middle East, we also walk back through the origins of our Western "civilization."

Do we want to do this? Are we ready to continue soon? Is this the "right" time? When is the "right" time? Which way do we want to go? We don't have that answer as we stand here in Rome. But we do have the beginning of one of the routes here, the Via Appia Antica (Ancient Appian Road), the main road heading south towards Bari and Brindisi, the ports leading east.

In 312 BCE the consul Appius Claudius gave his name to the road that he had built from Rome to Capua. In 268 the Romans extended it to Beneventum and then in 191 on to the port of Brundisium. The road had a stone and gravel basement and was paved with large flat stones. A bit over four meters wide, the builders laid it straight across the land. It was a two-lane highway with walkways on the sides. The road made rapid travel possible in all weather. See page 230 for a cross section of a typical Roman road.

We've been waiting for the right day to walk the Via Appia. It has to be today or tomorrow. Our train leaves Saturday morning. It's raining hard as we get up today. But by the time we finish breakfast, the clouds are breaking up and the sun is peeking through. We pack our umbrellas and get on the bus for the Coliseum. It's time to symbolically begin our pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

We'll walk from the Coliseum though a bus goes all the way out to the catacombs of St. Sebastian. We are continuing our pilgrimage so walking from the center of Rome is a logical way to go. We walk past the baths of Caracala and enter a park sharing the road with a lot of cars passing close by. We pass through the St. Sebastian Gate and

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Our walkway: E5, the Adige, the Po Valley, and the Via Francigena.

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About us

About us



Petra and I beginning our pilgrimage to Rome.

For many years I wrote books to tell people how to repair farm tractors and use computer software. In my vacation time I traveled by car throughout the United States. I dreamed of traveling more distant paths at a slower pace. The mountains of Spain, Italy, and Greece and the Nile River called to me for many years. My earlier education in philosophy and theology called me to look more deeply into the soul of the path I was walking in life.

In earlier lives still, I studied six years to be a Catholic priest only to opt out after a second try after four years in the Army. I served in Ethiopia and Viet Nam in addition to the US.

In 2000 I left commercial writing to walk and write of more varied and subjects. In spring 2003 I walked the Camino de Santiago across northern Spain to the Atlantic. While walking there I met Petra. Since then we have married and walked parts of the Camino twice again before walking the Via de la Plata from Sevilla to Santiago in 2005. We have also spent time in India and lived two and a half years in Germany. We now live in California.

Petra began her professional life as a hairdresser only to move on to the university in Berlin where she became an environmental engineer and worked several years as an engineer. She was running an agency for renewable energy in Constance, Germany, as she began her pil-

Germany to Rome in 64 days

grimage to Santiago from Constance in the late December 2001. This pilgrimage changed her life in many ways. For one, she quit her environmental engineering career to concentrate her full time on walking and helping others walk with more awareness both along physical paths and along their walk through life, the pilgrimage of life.

Together we now operate Walking with Awareness offering slide shows and workshops on spiritual and practical preparation for walking a pilgrimage as well as workshops on walking your sacred path, the pilgrimage of life. Visit us at www.WalkingWithAwareness.com.

We still love to walk and are currently planning to begin a walk from California across the US and Europe to Jerusalem in December 2008. Check into our web site to see where we are on this one-and-a-half- to two-year odyssey.

Have a long and joyous walk through your life.

Mike Metras

September 2008.

Other Books by Mike Metras

I have written several other books on various subjects:

- ***Walking Life: Meditations on the Pilgrimage of Life*** is a book of meditations and photographs relevant to walking our life path.
- ***Sicily's Historic Coasts*** is a book about Sicily, its history, and my month-long visit there in there 2000.
- ***Ethiopia: Travels of a Youth*** is book describing people and places I visited in Ethiopia and Eritrea during the late 1960s.
- ***Money Meandering: An Introduction to Numismatics*** is a book with 87 articles on coin collecting.
- ***Axum: Coins and Places*** is a video of coins and places associated with ancient Axum, Ethiopia.

Read about and order these at www.WalkingWithAwareness.com or our sister site www.WorksAndWords.com. Refer to either of these sites also for information on how to obtain an electronic version of this book with color pictures.