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**The Rebirth of a Medieval Pilgrimage Route:  
A Study of the Modern-day *Via Francigena* Pilgrims**

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## Abstract

Today, the long-neglected *Via Francigena*, a 1,180-mile medieval pilgrimage route between Canterbury, England, and Rome, is attracting an increasing number of 21st-century visitors. Between the 4th and 16th centuries, streams of pilgrims traveled this path to the Eternal City; however, after the 17th century, pilgrim travel waned. In contrast to the situation 500 years ago, during the past 20 years, a significant number of trekkers and cyclists have followed the footsteps of the medieval pilgrims. Surprisingly, little research has been conducted on the profiles of the contemporary *Via Francigena* travelers and their motives for undertaking a pilgrimage. Incorporating quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study explores the modern-day *Via Francigena* travelers' demographics and their reasons for embarking on such a journey. The Autoethnographic research explored the experience of today's pilgrim, as the author walked 200 miles (322 km) of the route in the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018. The results of a survey ( $N = 208$ ) conducted for this study suggests that the pilgrims of today are connected spiritually with the route; however, the majority did not consider themselves religious. Since the vast majority of the study subjects confirmed that their *Via Francigena* journey was a positive experience, the Council of Europe and the *Via Francigena's* governing councils within the route's 29 stages should incorporate these travelers' motives and their profiles in future development and promotion planning.

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I am especially grateful to my fellow *Via Francigena* travelers from all over the world who shared their experiences. Their cooperation made this project possible.

I would also like to acknowledge my feet, which carried me 200 miles from Siena to Rome. Although they became frustrated as I frequently misdirected them and forced them to forge ahead through mud, over rocks, and into streams, we finally found our way, one-step at a time.

Most of all, I acknowledge my patient husband, John, who never doubted my ability to complete this journey. He continually offers encouragement and the willingness to support my sometimes-quirky obsessions.

To all, I will you a *buon cammino!*



## Chapter 1

### The *Via Francigena*'s Rebirth

There is no moment of delight in any pilgrimage like the beginning of it.

—Charles Dudley Warner

A fondness for Italian culture, an obsession with adventure, and curiosity about life in the Middle Ages led me to explore and study the *Via Francigena* (“the road from France”), an ancient pilgrimage route that connected in medieval times Canterbury to Rome (Fig. 1). First traveled by Roman soldiers and shepherds during Classical Antiquity, the path guided Christian pilgrims beginning in the early Middle Ages. This natural trail, which follows ridges and watersheds through England, France, Switzerland, and Italy, became the principal corridor for Christians who desired to visit the relics of the apostles Peter and Paul in Rome.

After the Middle Ages, pilgrimages from Canterbury to Rome came to an unexpected halt. Henry VIII’s break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534—and hence with Rome—and the Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther, generated Protestants not interested in relics or pilgrimages. The *Via Francigena* increasingly lost popularity and fell out of favor entirely by the 18th century. For over 200 years, very few pilgrims traveled the path. However, in the late 20th century, a renewed fascination with traveling all or segments of this 1,180-mile route (1,900 km) emerged after the Council of Europe recognized it as a “Cultural Route” in 1994.



Figure 1. Map of the *Via Francigena*; Canterbury, England to Rome, Italy.  
Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/images/t3br9D>

I first became acquainted with the *Via Francigena* a few years ago while studying religion in Rome. Learning about medieval religious practices, I discovered that modern-day pilgrims now make journeys on this route, starting in England, France, or towns in Italy and ending at the Vatican. Curious about the type of traveler who would be attracted to this kind of adventure and possibly spiritual experience, I found no empirical studies that examined the travel motivations and profiles of contemporary *Via Francigena* pilgrims. Do these travelers consider themselves pilgrims or tourists? Do they undertake this journey for religious reasons? If so, are their motives linked to traditional Catholicism or to a spirituality that is more general? Are these travelers old or young? Where do they live? To answer these and other questions, I designed a study based on qualitative and quantitative research, as well as personal experience. The findings created a *Via Francigena* traveler profile and ascertained possible motives that drive individuals to explore this ancient

pilgrimage route. In this paper, I present the history of the *Via Francigena* and the results of the research to create a sketch of *Via Francigena* travelers and reveal important motives that guide them toward this journey.

## **History of the Via Francigena**

An examination of the *Via Francigena* as a pilgrimage route begins with recognizing the influence of the famous *Camino de Santiago*, also known as “The Way of Saint James,” on contemporary pilgrimages. This ancient pilgrimage route is a system of numerous paths and roads from every major city in Europe leading to *Santiago de Compostela*, in Northern Spain.

Christian tradition suggests that St. James preached the gospel in Spain, and the saint’s body was discovered near Compostela during the 9th century. At the site, King Alfonso (792—842) built a small chapel for the relics, which inspired devotional attention (Davies, 1988). The first pilgrimages to the site occurred during the 9th and 10th centuries, and in the 11th century, the journey to see the relics gained attention throughout Europe (Amaro et al., 2018). The chapel of Saint James then became a focal point for pilgrims that endured for centuries and has persisted to the present day.

In 1985, UNESCO acknowledged the city of *Santiago de Compostela* as a World Heritage Site, and in 1987, the Council of Europe proclaimed the network of paths the first European Cultural Route (UNESCO, 2017). In 2017, over 300,000 pilgrims completed the Camino, making it the third most important Christian pilgrimage destination after Jerusalem and Rome (Pilgrims’ Reception Office, 2017). Over the last two decades, public authorities have invested extensive

resources in promoting the cultural tourist attractions of the cities and regions along the path, which has made it the most recognized European pilgrimage route (Lois-González, 2013).

While the well-known *Camino de Santiago* comprises several separate routes originating from numerous cities and villages throughout Europe, the *Via Francigena* continuously covers 1,180 miles (1,900 km) from Canterbury, England to Rome, Italy. It is unfamiliar to most travelers and even many Italians, yet the *Via Francigena* is even older than the *Camino de Santiago* is.

During the period of Classical Antiquity, Julius Caesar opened this route between the North Sea and Rome with the construction of the Roman and Longobard roads. Evidence suggests Christian pilgrims began traveling this route to Rome by the end of the 2nd century, if not earlier (Trezzini, 2009). The popularity of Rome as a destination for pilgrims dramatically increased in the late 4th and 5th centuries with the development of the cult of saints. Many Christians believed the saint's bodies or relics of their bodies were present in their tombs. If the pilgrims visited the saints' burial sites, the saints could carry out miracles, such as curing the sick and exorcising demons (Howe, 2008).

In 801 and again in 813, the Holy Roman Emperor ordered the destruction of all altars with no relics in an effort to strengthen the church and position the clergy more tightly towards Rome (Frankiel, 1985). In 816, the Council of Chelsea ruled that the deposition of a consecrated host in the reliquary of an altar sufficiently sanctified it. Rome, undoubtedly the location richest in martyrs and thus relics, attracted an increased number of pilgrims as well as relic-traffickers intent on profiting from these rulings (G. Caselli, personal interview, June 13, 2017).

Thus, an increased number of pilgrims, as well as merchants, journeyed from England to Rome on a system of roads and paths initially used by shepherds. In 875, the route became known as the *Via Francigena*—the road from France (Trezzini, 2009). Rome had achieved designation as the Western city richest in relics and shrines, and of course, it was the seat of the pope. The accessibility of Rome compared to the Holy Lands, and the growth of the cult of saints undoubtedly enhanced this city's importance as a pilgrimage center (Howe, 2008). Unfortunately, the early pilgrims did not provide complete written travel diaries, at least ones that have survived.

Research indicates that Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the first *Via Francigena* traveler to maintain a precise written record of his itinerary while in Rome and throughout his return trip to the Channel, a distance of approximately 1,150 miles (1,850 km). His text demonstrates that the journey required 11 weeks of daily travel. As suggested by Birch (1998), using the calculation of days and miles suggests that Sigeric and his attendants walked about 15 miles a day. Today, *Via Francigena* travelers walk a similar distance as they trace Sigeric's 79 stages, and his route is now recognized as Europe's most challenging pilgrimage walk.

The Archbishop traveled to Rome to accept the pallium, an article of religious attire, worn as a vest and used as a liturgical vestment and a papal insignia. The vestment served as a mark of honor and a sign of an archbishop's bond to the Roman church (Schoenig, 2009). Since the 5th century, popes have encouraged archbishops throughout Europe to make the pilgrimage to receive this vestment, and accordingly, Sigeric journeyed from Canterbury to Rome in 990 to receive his pallium from the hands of Pope John XV (Champ, 2000; Ortenberg, 1990). While visiting 23 churches in Rome and after investiture by the Pope, the Archbishop instructed his entourage to

write detailed notes about sights seen in Rome as well as the stops during their return route to the Channel. Sigeric “behaved like the present-day tourist who chooses to see what appeals to him most and then records it” (Ortenberg, 1990, p. 201). The text, known as “The Itinerary of Archbishop Sigeric,” survives in the British Library in London (Fig. 2).

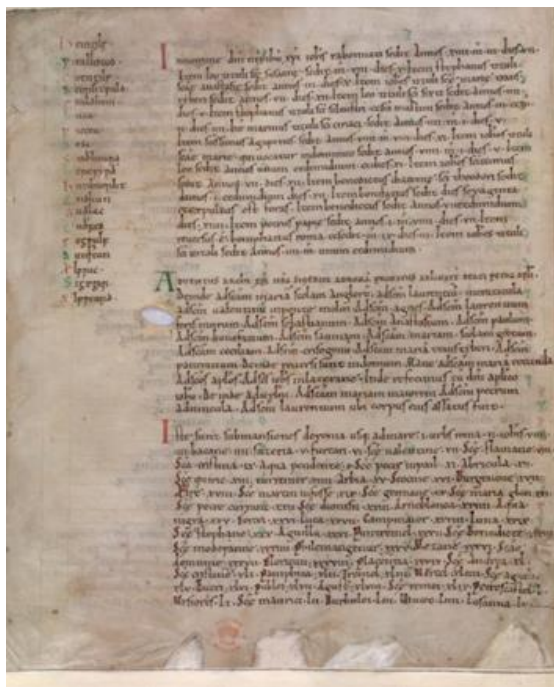


Figure 2. “The Itinerary of Archbishop Sigeric” resides in the British Library, London, England. Copyright British Library. Retrieved from <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/itinerary-of-archbishop-sigeric>

Sigeric’s travel register indicates that before he departed Rome, his route around the city was well organized and that 14 of the 23 churches he visited lay inside the city walls (Fig. 3). In contrast, historical documents indicate that Christian pilgrims spent most of their time worshipping in churches outside the city walls. Sigeric’s “travel guide” illustrates how the churches inside the

walls, such as S. Cecilia in Trastevere and S. Croce in Gerusalemme (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) began to gain prominence.

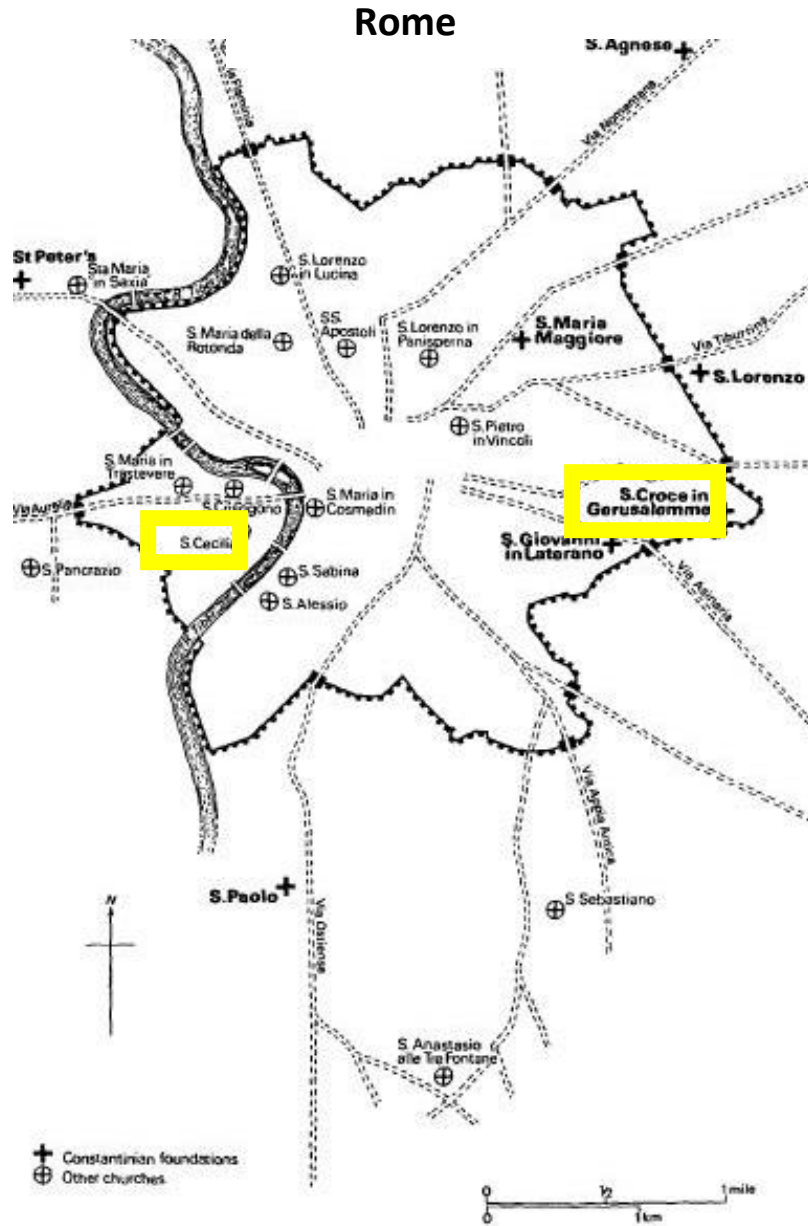


Figure 3. Archbishop Sigeric's Roman pilgrimage. Source: Ortenberg, V. (1990). Archbishop Sigeric's journey to Rome in 990. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 19, 209.



*Figure 4.* S. Cecilia in Trastevere in Rome, Italy. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Santa\\_cecilia\\_in\\_trastevere,\\_esterno\\_02.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Santa_cecilia_in_trastevere,_esterno_02.jpg)



*Figure 5.* S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, Italy. Retrieved from <http://lookrome.com/resources/upload/places/panorams/254/capture.jpg>

The status of these 14 churches inside the city's walls began to rise in the late 8th century when the Church abolished the law prohibiting the movement of bones. During the 9th century, the Church started transferring the remains of saints and martyrs from the catacombs to the city's

churches (Birch, 1998). When Sigeric arrived in Rome, he wished to be in the presence of these relics (Fig. 6). Ortenberg (1990) noted his selection of churches indicated specific devotion toward the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the local saints of Rome (Lorenzo, Agnese, Cecilia, Sebastiano, and Pancrazio).



*Figure 6.* Relic of Saint Cecilia in S. Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome, Italy. Retrieved from [https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/romanchurches/images/6/64/Santa\\_Cecilia\\_in\\_Trastevere\\_tomb.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/250?cb=20120203144043](https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/romanchurches/images/6/64/Santa_Cecilia_in_Trastevere_tomb.jpg/revision/latest/scale-to-width-down/250?cb=20120203144043)

Sigeric's text documenting Rome's churches provided a source of inspiration for Anglo-Saxon art and devotions in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, while offering an intimate view of Rome to the multitudes of Anglo-Saxon pilgrims traveling to Rome during that period (Magoun, 1940; Ortenberg, 1990). The second part of Sigeric's itinerary documents his return journey from Rome to England. According to Ortenberg, Sigeric chose to record the evening stops along with geographic interests such as river crossings; however, some locations, such as mountain passes, were omitted (Ortenberg, 1990) (Fig. 7).

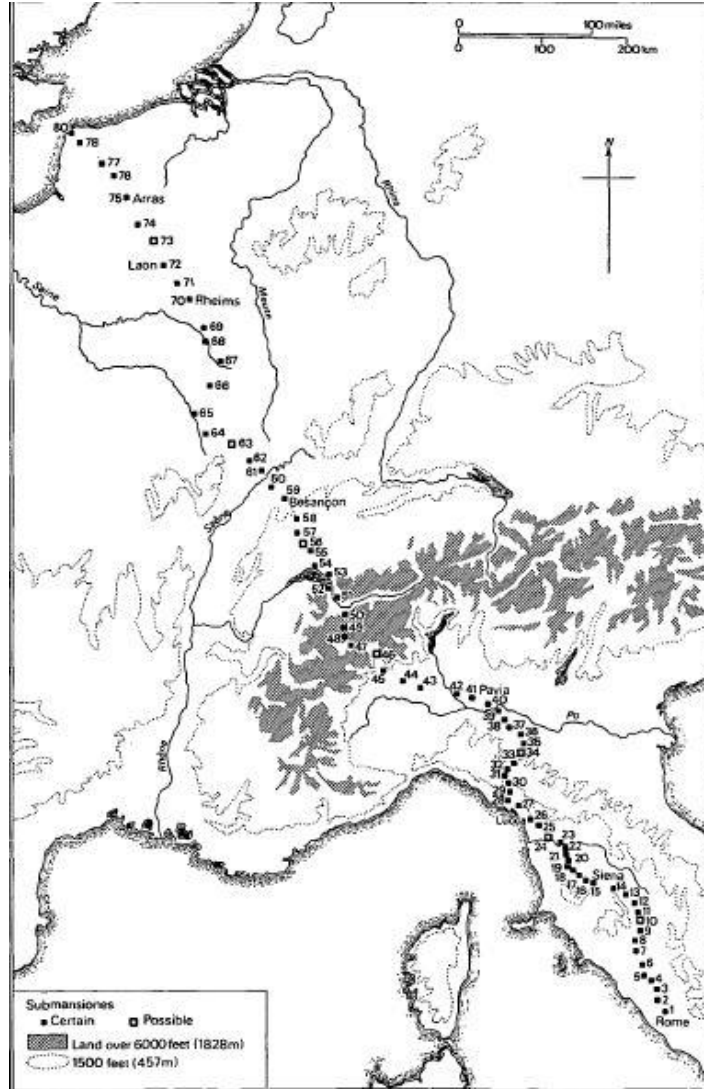


Figure 7. Map of Sigeric's return route from Rome to the English Channel. Source: Archbishop Sigeric's journey from Rome to England. Ortenberg, V. (1990). Archbishop Sigeric's journey to Rome in 990. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 19, 209.

The Archbishop's itinerary is unique because it contains the only surviving list of Roman churches between the 8th and 12th centuries. It is the only text of this kind to come down to us from Anglo-Saxon England, where the Roman pilgrimage was particularly popular. Sigeric's document

brought awareness of little-known saints and their cults, which after the Archbishop's trip were adopted by the future Anglo-Saxon pilgrims.

By the early 12th century, the *Via Francigena* pilgrimage became formalized. The Catholic Church established a ritual that was required to receive indulgences. These remissions of punishment for sins became available to those who journeyed on pilgrimages and visited specific shrines (Champ, 2000). With Pope Boniface VIII's proclamation of the first Holy Jubilee Year in 1300, thousands of pilgrims followed the *Via Francigena* on their way to Rome (Trezzini, 2012). Initially, Pope Boniface had scheduled a Jubilee year to occur every 100 years; however, subsequent popes reduced the period to 33 years and eventually 25 years. With the establishment of a Jubilee schedule and a formal system of selling indulgences to those visiting Rome, the number of pilgrims traveling the *Via Francigena* dramatically increased. However, as the Protestant Reformation took hold and Martin Luther criticized the selling of indulgences, making a pilgrimage to Rome fell out of fashion, and a journey to the Eternal City was no longer a shared aspiration. As Champ (2000) explained, the city had ceased to be a focus of unity and a source of salvation, instead of becoming a focus of division and source of discord. After the 1600s, fewer pilgrims journeyed on the *Via Francigena*, and the downward trend continued for hundreds of years (Trezzini, 2012).

## **The Modern-day *Via Francigena***

Limited accounts of walking the *Via Francigena* between the 17th and early 20th centuries exist. For example, in 1901 Hilaire Belloc walked from France to Rome and wrote about many of the villages that appeared on Sigeric's itinerary. However, in general, the route was all but abandoned as the gentry, and newly emergent middle class preferred to make their pilgrimages to Rome via rail and sea.

Nearly 10 centuries after Sigeric's journey, in 1985, Giovanni Caselli, an Italian historian and archeologist living in London at the time, retraced the route of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Fig. 8). Until Caselli explored the route of Sigeric, no historian or archeologist had ever surveyed it on the ground. Using Sigeric's document as his guide, he traced and physically marked the Archbishop's route from Canterbury to Rome by himself. In an interview, Caselli explained that the study of ancient roads intrigued him as a student of history and archeology, and he wanted to "demonstrate that you could walk across Europe using survey maps" (G. Caselli, personal interview, June 13, 2017). In 1986, he proved this true when he led Charles, Prince of Wales on the route with his newly created maps (G. Caselli, personal interview, June 13, 2017). Based on Caselli's drafts, the Italian Military Geographical Institute completed the mapping, which was published in 1990, the 1000th anniversary of Sigeric's journey. Using these maps, Caselli published a guidebook, *Via Romea, Cammino di Dio*, which renewed interest in walking long distances as a means of exploration and encouraged travelers to become contemporary *Via Francigena* pilgrims (Caselli, 1995).



*Figure 8.* Italian archeologist Giovanni Caselli during personal interview in Florence, Italy, June 13, 2017.

The *Via Francigena* experienced a revitalization when it became recognized by the Council of Europe in 1994 and was designated a Major Cultural Route in 2004 (Trezzini, 2012). Today, the European Council of the *Via Francigena* collaborates with local municipalities and regions, from Canterbury to Rome, to promote the route and maintain the trail (Figs. 9—11).



Figure 9. Start of the *Via Francigena*, Canterbury, England. Copyright 2017 by Robert Healy.



Figure 10. Directions to the *Via Francigena* from the Canterbury Cathedral. Copyright 2017 by the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome.



*Figure 11.* View of St. Peter's Basilica from the *Via Francigena* trail, September 17, 2017.

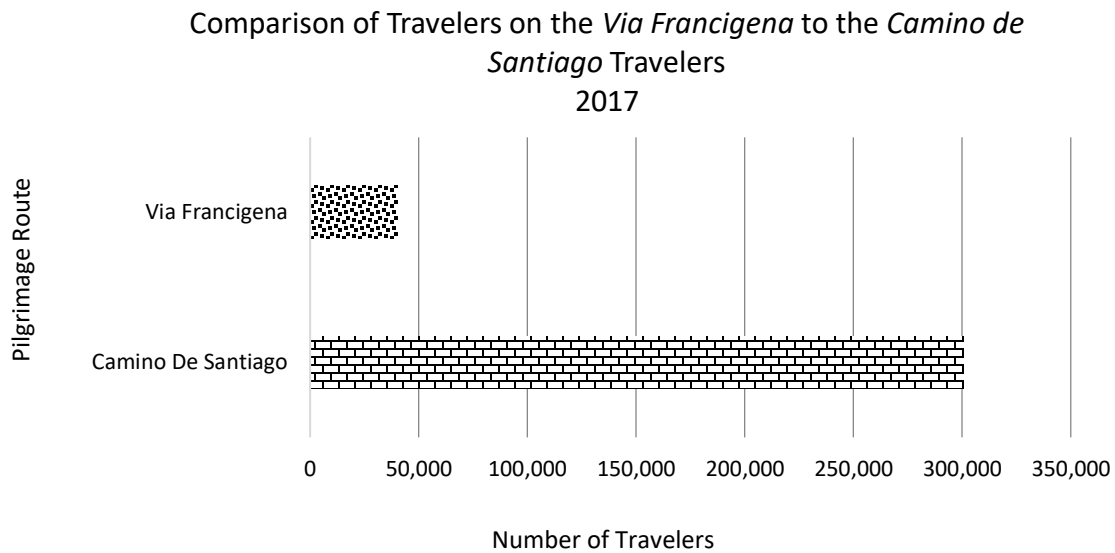
However, the contemporary *Via Francigena* is still in its infancy in many ways, especially as compared to the *Camino de Santiago*. I know from personal experience that many Italians who do not live near the trail are unaware of its history or the route's importance to contemporary pilgrims.

The route covers a vast territory and divides into several sections, but no central agency grants the *Via Francigena* travelers the official "Pilgrim's Credential," which provides a means to document their journey. Neither the Canterbury Cathedral, where many travelers begin their journey, nor the Vatican keeps records of *Via Francigena* travelers. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how many people travel the *Via Francigena* each year. In 2017, The European Association of the *Via Francigena* Ways—a group representing the 34 municipalities along the

Italian section of the *Via Francigena*—estimated that the route saw approximately 40,000 people flow through the roads and paths (Bruschi, 2017). This published number is only an estimate; according to the Confraternity of Pilgrimage to Rome—a charitable non-denominational organization promoting pilgrimages to Rome, as well as one of many groups that issue the “Pilgrim’s Credential” (Fig. 12)—not all who travel the *Via Francigena* notify an official body (Mooney, 2017). In contrast, the Pilgrim’s Reception office in *Santiago de Compostela*, the sole supplier for the pilgrim “passport” and the certificate of completion, reported that 301,006 pilgrims walked the *Camino de Santiago* in 2017 (Fig.13) (Pilgrims’ Reception Office, 2018).



*Figure 12. Via Francigena Pilgrim’s “Passport.” or credential, which is issued at select tourism offices along the route. Pilgrims receive the stamps at churches, accommodations, and restaurants along the trail. The credentials once existed as “badges” made from pewter or tin that were worn on clothing and hats. Medieval pilgrims adorned themselves with these medals as proof of their accomplishment and devotion. Copyright 2017 by Jackie Blackwell.*



*Figure 13.* The number of *Via Francigena* travelers vs. number of *Camino de Santiago* travelers, 2017. Sources: Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome E-Newsletter. (2018). *Camino de Santiago* Pilgrim’s Reception Office, 2018).

A principal *Via Francigena* statistician is Danilo Parisi, the Po River ferryman (Fig. 14), who is a gatekeeper for a section of the *Via Francigena* in Corte Sant’Andrea in Northern Italy (Fig. 15). Parisi records the number of pilgrims who cross the Po River each year. Parisi’s statistics indicate the trend to travel the trail is positive. He reported that during the 2000 Jubilee Year, he ferried only two pilgrims with only a minimum increase in travelers until 152 pilgrims requested his service in 2007. Since 2013, he has noticed an increase in travelers from 520 in 2013 to 1,176 in 2016, more than doubling in four years (Mooney, 2017) ( Fig. 16).



*Figure 14.* Danilo Parisi, Po River ferryman. The ferry's dock is in the same place where Sigeric crossed the river 1000 years ago. Copyright 2017 by Hans Jonson.



Figure 15. Corte Sant'Andrea, in the Calendasco area of Italy, where 21st-century pilgrims cross the Po River by ferry. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/maps/place/26856+Corte+Sant'Andrea+Province+of+Lodi,+Italy>

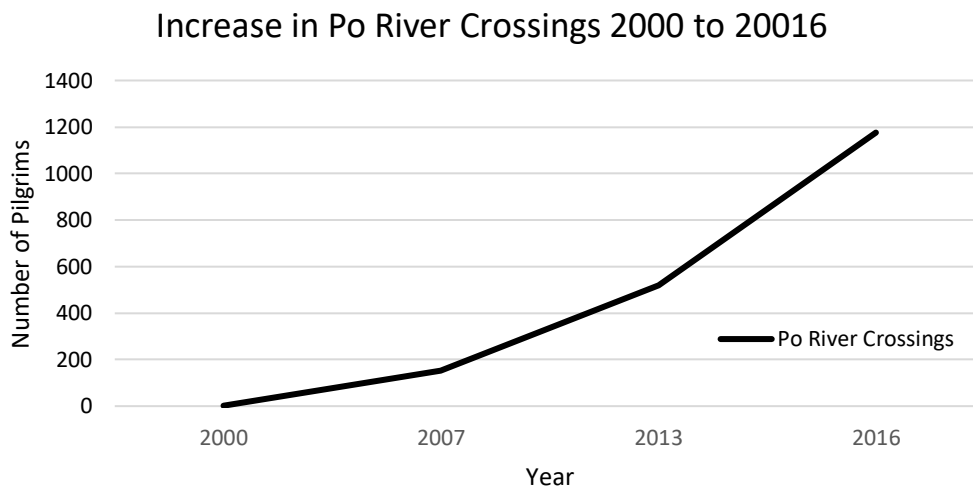


Figure 16. Po River crossing by *Via Francigena* travelers, 2000–2016. Source: *Confraternity of the Pilgrims to Rome, Newsletter*, 9(23), 13–16).

## **The *Via Francigena* Study**

Desiring to know more about the contemporary *Via Francigena* pilgrims, I gathered qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of people who had recently traveled the route. This project unfolds as follows. Chapter Two reviews the literature concerning the attraction of pilgrimage routes in both the Middle Ages and the 21st century, pilgrimage, and the underlying reason for the recent increase in this type of travel, which some term “religious tourism.” The methodology used to gather the quantitative and qualitative data and the study’s sample is explained in Chapter Three. Chapter Four reports the results of the project’s survey instrument and offers a summary of interviews with *Via Francigena* travelers; and is followed in Chapter Five, which provides a discussion of the significant discoveries from the research data and provides a recap of my two *Via Francigena* journeys. The paper’s final section focuses on the connections among all *Via Francigena* travelers, no matter their motives, and the enduring importance of journeys, such as the *Via Francigena*.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Pilgrims are poets who create by taking journeys.

—Richard R. Niebuhr

#### **Pilgrimages of the Past**

Today, the word “pilgrimage” commonly invokes a medieval image of a cluster of pious individuals worshipping a saint or venerating a relic. However, the concept of pilgrimage existed long before the medieval period. A study of ancient literature suggests that pilgrimages took place long before Abraham left his home in Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis II: 31).

Understanding why people journey to a geographical location worthy of adoration begins with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the world’s most important literary works and the earliest known acknowledgment of a pilgrimage in literature. The Gilgamesh stories tell of an ancient Mesopotamian king who embarks in 2700 B.C.E. on a quest to the Garden of the Gods—perhaps the origin of the Bible’s Garden of Eden to understand the meaning of death and the secret to immortality (George, 2003). Journeys such as this have continued over centuries as Jews journeyed to Jerusalem, Hindus visited the Ganges, Muslims made their way to Mecca, and Christians traveled to Rome.

Nasty, brutish, and short describe the lives of those who lived in medieval Europe, where a pilgrimage brought hope to those grappling with their day-to-day reality. For Christians, a pilgrimage became an aspiration and an adventure, as well as an out-of-the-ordinary means to

escape their customary existence. The pilgrimage offered the opportunity to see for oneself the sites of significant spiritual events, as well as to witness the evidence of spirituality demonstrated through miracles and healings. In addition, many pursued the pilgrimage road for possible atonement for sins and punishment for crimes (Ure, 2006). For example, in his book, *The Spiritual Meadow*, the 7th-century Byzantine monk, John Moschos, wrote about a muleteer, stricken with guilt after his mules trampled a child to death, who set off on a penitential pilgrimage to the Holy Land to receive forgiveness (Moschus & Wortley, 1992).

During the heyday of European pilgrimages, Rome emerged as the most prevalent destination for Christian pilgrims, and many remained in the city once they completed their journey. A small collection of letters written by Anglo-Saxon nuns in the first half of the 8th century refers to Anglo-Saxon men and women who made pilgrimages to Rome. Some of the letters mention travelers who journeyed to Rome to spend their last days on earth in the same place Saints Peter and Paul preached and became martyrs. The nuns remained in Rome to encounter the reality of the martyrs' suffering and death (Hunt, 1999; Smith, 1999).

The quest to connect with the saints' relics became a compelling motive for the Christian pilgrimage. The literature of the time depicts this powerful association. For example, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written between 1387 and 1400, provides a glimpse of what motivated 29 pilgrims to travel to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral (Chaucer & Coghill, 2003). Chaucer presents individual pilgrim's tales as part of a story-telling contest as they make their way to Canterbury. As Swatos (2002) discusses, Chaucer's pilgrims display both "secular" and "sacred" motivations for their pilgrimage; however, the "sacred" functions fade as the

“secular” concerns of the pilgrims brighten. For instance, the Prioress lives in a convent, yet she parades around showing off her bejeweled rosary that appears to be more for decoration than devotion.

Determined to visit a shrine of a specific saint, early pilgrims traveled for several days to offer their particular saints’ unique devotions. The pilgrims would ask the saints to grant favors to themselves or family members, or they traveled to the shrine to fulfill a vow or give thanks (Davies & Davies, 1988).

In 1453, Boccaccio referred to relics in *The Decameron*’s humorous frame story about Friar Cipolla (VI, X, 459). In the last narrative of the sixth day, Friar Cipolla reveals that he journeyed to Jerusalem for veneration of relics, such as “one of the feathers of the Archangel Gabriel” which he dropped in the bedroom of the Virgin Mary “when he came to make the announcement to her in Nazareth” (Boccaccio & McWilliam, 1972, p. 459). This belief in the power of relics and the possibility of receiving a miracle compelled countless Christians to travel to Jerusalem, Rome, Canterbury, or *Santiago de Compostela* (Davies, 1988).

Others traveled to receive absolution for their sins. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, written through dictation, explains how the English Christian Margery Kempe (c. 1373–after 1438) traveled to holy sites to purchase indulgences from the Catholic Church at sacred sites (Kempe & Bale, 2015). Indulgences were pieces of paper offered by the Church to represent pardon or time off from Purgatory. (Contrary to popular belief, indulgences do not constitute particular number of days in Purgatory, but a specific number of days of prayer. However, a “plenary indulgence” can free a soul from Purgatory or offer the recipient freedom from sin at the moment of death.) During her

pilgrimages, Kempe purchased indulgences for family, friends, enemies, other souls trapped in Purgatory, and herself. For many during the Middle Ages, the religious pilgrimage became the principal method to ensure spiritual salvation, as fear of eternal damnation in Hell was a powerful motivator. (Although today the Catholic Church still grants indulgences for certain religious practices, there is no specific indulgence for walking the *Via Francigena*.)

With the impending Reformation (1517–1648), Protestants perceived no value in a pilgrimage to Rome and discredited the scheme of the Christian pilgrimage, especially relics and indulgences. During this time, the practice of pilgrimage was not over, but its inducements and conventions stood challenged, and its momentum much diminished. Also, with the growth of nation-states accompanied by the decline of the universal Christian church, a proliferation of national regulations affected pilgrims (Ure, 2006).

However, tourism emerged as the one element of a pilgrimage to Rome that remained a motive during this period of decline beginning in the early modern period and continuing into the 21st century. After the decline of the religious pilgrimage, many Europeans went on “pilgrimage” not out of devotion but out of sheer curiosity and fondness for novelty (Sumption, 2010). Often their destination was a natural feature, such as a mountain, lake, or exotic setting rather than a church with relics or a holy site. Many portrayed their experiences through travel diaries, describing their “journeys within” as well as the physical aspects of their trips.

In 1902, the prolific Anglo-French writer and historian, Hilaire Belloc, documented his personal experience of a walking pilgrimage from central France, across the Alps, to Rome, trying to follow Sigeric’s route (Fig. 17). His book, *The Path to Rome* (1902), remains in print, and its

popularity continues today. More than a travel diary, the book is a depiction of Belloc's inward pilgrimage. During his journey in 1902, he imagined himself walking through civilization, appreciating his interaction with the local peasants and artisans, which he captured in pencil and ink drawings. Recognized as a snarly and stubborn character, he was also known for his intense Catholic faith. In his introduction, Belloc vows to strengthen his faith through his pilgrimage:

I will start from the place where I served in arms for my sins; I will walk all the way and take advantage of no wheeled thing; I will sleep rough and cover thirty miles a day, and I will hear Mass every morning; and I will be present at high Mass in St Peter's on the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul (Belloc, 1902, viii).



*Figure 17.* British author and historian, Hilaire Belloc, walked from France to Rome in 1902. Retrieved from <https://www.oldthynderbellocblogspot.com>

## **Study of Contemporary Pilgrimage**

Studies of pilgrimages as anthropological and sociological subjects began to draw researchers' attention after the Second World War (Nicoleta, 2016). Two of the first anthropologists to reveal the effects of pilgrimages on individuals were Victor and Edith Turner, who defined a pilgrimage as a journey to and from sacred sites and deemed it a credible topic of study. Beginning

in the 1970s, the Turners recognized the importance of pilgrimages as a significant socio-religious phenomenon and studied the practice of pilgrimages in detail.

Acknowledging that historians and social scientists had neglected the study of pilgrimages, Victor Turner launched a comparative study of pilgrimage processes in 1973 to understand how the pilgrimage has changed over time. As Turner explained, pilgrimage was a willing action on the part of the participants wherein they entered a “liminoid” state, temporarily freed from their previous social status and responsibilities (Turner, 1973). He argued that the purpose of the pilgrimage is to create “communitas,” as during the journey “the direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as homogenous, unstructured, and a free community” (Turner, 1974, p. 69). The Turners further claimed that as people embark on a pilgrimage, they move from the familiar toward the unstructured and become freed from binding daily constraints (Turner & Turner, 1978). By executing the ritual of pilgrimage, pilgrims’ motivations and objectives are “converted into a commonness of feeling, and ‘communitas’” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 13). The experience of existing in an unstructured community where everyone is equal provides the pilgrims energy for the return to their more structured and familiar way of life. The Turners’ *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978) generated a growing interest in this anthropological study. Their work formed the foundation from which many other authors have expanded on the study of the pilgrimage.

The Turners also argued that a “tourist is half a pilgrim; whereas a pilgrim is half a tourist” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 20) and launched an ongoing discussion among scholars about whether any particular traveler could be defined as a pilgrim or tourist. Traditionally considered to be

opposite in meaning, a pilgrim is defined as someone who makes a religious journey (Coleman & Elsner, 1995), while a tourist is someone who makes a pleasure-seeking, circuitous journey (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). However, scholars now accept that we can no longer distinguish pilgrimage and tourism since travel between pilgrims and tourists appears to overlap (Aukland, 2017; Badone, 2014). Tourism research indicates that tourists journeying to secular sites share motives displayed by traditional pilgrims traveling to religious places. How these tourists regard their journeys and place them in their lives can be seen as a metaphor and sometimes a substitute for religious practice (Norman, 2011).

### **The Non-Religious Pilgrimage**

Reflecting on Turner's approach, some scholars accept that even secular cultural journeys can have spiritual or religious connotations and can be thought of as pilgrimages. Alan Morinis (1992) maintained that secular journeys made in pursuit of embodied dreams fall within the boundaries of the concept of a pilgrimage. He suggested that a pilgrimage is best described as a journey undertaken by someone in search of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a treasured ideal (Morinis, 1992).

In support of Morinis' argument, various scholars, including Reader and Walter (1993), Porter (2004), Beaman (2006), Gilmore (2006), and Selby (2006) have drawn attention to journeys and sites that, while not linked to any particular religious tradition, share characteristics customarily associated with religious pilgrimages. For example, non-religious journeys evoke acts of devotion, provide emotional healing, and speak to issues of identity and belonging (Reader, 2007). A case in

point is how a *Star Trek* convention fits within Morinis' broader definition and represents and becomes for some participants a contemporary pilgrimage (Porter, 2004).

Memorials commemorating the dead are also prime examples of this phenomenon. The Vietnam War Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., which bears the names of all the Americans killed in the Vietnam War, is the focus of organized and individual journeys. In a like manner, Jennifer Selby (2006) explained how journeys to Ground Zero, the site of the September 11, 2001 attack in New York City, are modern-day pilgrimages for those who suffered a loss during this tragedy or wish to identify with it.

Sites and events where devotees gather fall into the category of contemporary pilgrimage. For instance, Elvis Presley fans continue to visit Graceland, Presley's home and burial place in Memphis, Tennessee. During Elvis Presley Memorial Week, which takes place each August, fans and devotees gather at Graceland for candlelit vigils and prayers. Visitors even confess to healings taking place this week (King, 1993).

Throughout the modern era, "art pilgrimages" have gained popularity. Works of art—such as Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Mona Lisa in The Louvre in Paris, France and Michelangelo's sculpture of David in the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy—develop into pilgrimage sites for many people.

Even novels can inspire pilgrimages. A case in point is Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). The much-loved children's novel attracts a worldwide audience to the book's setting in the Canadian Maritime Province of Prince Edward Island (PEI). A journey to 19th century farmstead that was the inspiration for many of the book's settings is especially popular

pilgrimage for the Japanese, and each year thousands make the journey from Japan to PEI to find Anne of Green Gables. The address (221B Bleaker Street) of another fictional character, the detective Sherlock Holms, is also a spiritual journey for fans of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's (1892) detective fiction.

Pilgrimage can thus be described not just in religious terms but also as a ritual that can go beyond the boundaries of the formally religious into secular contexts. Therefore, the intersection of the sacred with the secular pilgrimage has developed a lucrative niche market for the tourism industry (Eade, 2015).

Because of the Turners' and Morinis' work, studies of contemporary pilgrimage, either religious or secular, are flourishing. The increase in scholarly interest corresponds to the considerable number of people visiting traditional sites, as well as non-religious destinations. Several scholars, such as Reader and Walter (1993), Badone and Roseman (2004), Beaman (2006), and Raj and Griffin (2015), have studied journeys in relationship to religiosity, while others, such as Cohen (2011) and Caruana and Crane (2011) have examined the secular motives of a pilgrimage. However, most empirical literature addressing these factors in relationship to a traditional pilgrimage trail centers on those who travel the famous *Camino de Santiago* or a variety of religious pilgrimage sites throughout the world, such as the Great Buddha of Kamakura in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan; the Ganges River that runs from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal; and the city of Mecca in Saudi, Arabia (Amaro et al., 2018; Badone, 2014; Battour et al., 2017; Poria et al., 2003; Reader, 2007).

Only recently have scholars devoted empirical research to investigate pilgrimages along the *Via Francigena*. Most research relates to specific regions within Italy. In 2016, Bambi and Icobelli developed a study of travelers on the “Tuscany” section of the path to define a “user” profile and a quantitative estimate of the number of people touring this section of the route. For this study, the authors applied a camera trapping system as a sampling method. The application of camera trapping allowed the researchers to obtain information about user profiles (sex, age, length of pilgrimage, and mode of the journey) in a continuous period during the tourist months of 2014 (Bambi & Icobelli, 2017). Their study discovered that the modern-day *Via Francigena* pilgrim enjoys the trail in the spring and summer (in particular, April, May, and August) and that the majority of the pilgrims were between the ages of 51–60, but well represented in the 41–50 age group. There was an equal balance of men and women. More men than women traveled alone, yet most pilgrims preferred to go in pairs. These modern-day pilgrims were motivated mainly by the environment and expressed the need for an experiential journey.

Other current *Via Francigena* scholarly literature includes a project conducted by Salento University researchers who mapped and cataloged the natural and cultural highlights along *Via Francigena* Salentina, the southernmost section of the route. They concluded that an extension of the *Via Francigena* to the Salento area is feasible, but it is a complex and ambitious idea due to law compliance issues and the current management structure between public institutions and private parties (Trono et al., 2017).

With the advent of self-publishing travel diaries, several modern-day *Via Francigena* pilgrims from around the world have recorded their motives to embark on the journey. One woman

proclaimed that she set out to walk from Fidenza, Italy to Rome to “get out of her head and into her heart” (Wyatt, 2017, p. 427). An Australian woman hiked from Saone, France to Rome with her husband for the scenery, culture, and art (Ramsay, 2013). After learning about the *Via Francigena* from a shop owner in France, Robert Muirhead (2015) trekked 1,292 miles (2,080 km) from Canterbury to Rome to “prove that he could meet the challenge.” Multiple *Via Francigena* pilgrims have delivered hours of armchair reading through their online books and travel blogs. Most of these accounts infrequently discussed religiosity as a motive for the journey, yet many regarded spiritual welfare as an outcome.

Although some scholars have conducted first-hand research regarding the motivations of travelers on the *Camino de Santiago* and particular sections of the *Via Francigena*, an in-depth approach to studying the motives of the contemporary *Via Francigena* traveler appears neglected. With the considerable growth in religious tourism and the uptake in *Via Francigena* travel, I offer this empirical study to help better understand these phenomena.



## Chapter 3

### Methods

It is not the road ahead that wears you out; it is the grain of sand in your shoe.

—Arabian proverb

This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to discover the underlying motives for today's *Via Francigena* travelers. I gathered quantitative data using an online questionnaire to survey over 200 individuals from around the world who recently hiked, drove, or cycled the *Via Francigena*. Additionally, I interviewed six individuals from the United Kingdom, United States, and Italy who recently returned from a *Via Francigena* trip. As a complementary method of research, I incorporated two personal *Via Francigena* journeys that covered 200 miles (322 km) of the trail.

#### **Questionnaire: Criteria, Recruitment, and Instrument**

*Via Francigena* Study subjects had to be over 18 and had to either have covered any section of the *Via Francigena* between 2005 through 2017, be currently traveling the route, or planning to begin a *Via Francigena* outing within the next 24 months. The journey could be on foot, bicycle, horseback, or by automobile and could be as short as a day or as long as over 100 days. Participants

could reside in any country, begin their journey in any location along the route, and travel alone, informally with others, or as part of an organized group.

From September 1 through December 13, 2017, I used a variety of methods to target *Via Francigena* travelers. First, I announced the study on social and networking websites, Facebook and LinkedIn, and requested that those interested in participating visit the study's website at <https://viafrancigenastudy.com>. I posted requests for participation in English, French, and Italian every 2 weeks throughout October, November, and December 2017. Additionally, while traveling the *Via Francigena* in September 2017, I presented study recruitment cards to travelers I met along the route. Finally, while attending the Annual Symposium for Pilgrimage Studies at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia on October 6–8, 2017, I recruited participants by distributing these cards. The study recruitment card (Fig. 18) provided the *Via Francigena* Study's website address, my name, and contact information.

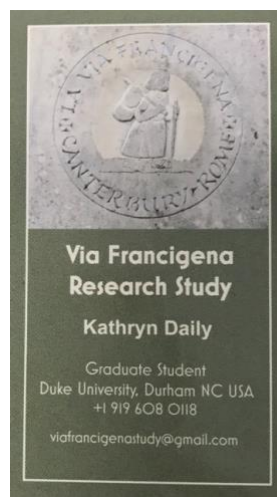


Figure 18. *Via Francigena* Study recruitment card.

On the *Via Francigena* Study website, I offered respondents an English, French, or Italian language questionnaire. I selected these three languages based on the recommendation of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome, a British charitable non-denominational organization dedicated to promoting the pilgrimage to Rome. This organization also provides travelers with the *Via Francigena* “passport” and therefore has a useful understanding of the average *Via Francigena* traveler’s profile. Furthermore, the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome published an article about the research study in their December 2017 newsletter, distributed online to their 793 members. From October through December 2017, the study website also invited *Via Francigena* travelers to participate in a face-to-face, telephone, or video interview.

The online questionnaire, conducted through the Duke University Qualtrics Survey System, quantitatively and qualitatively measured five features of the *Via Francigena* travelers — demographics, motivations, activity patterns, assessments, and experiences (Appendix A). I pretested the questionnaire with two travelers who had walked the *Via Francigena*, one tourism consultant, and four acquaintances who had never heard of the *Via Francigena*.

Before completing the questionnaire or participating, the *Via Francigena* travelers were asked to read and agree to the Duke University Institutional Review Board’s Informed Consent form, which described the study, provided information about qualifying for the research study, explained the benefits and risks of participating, and informed them on how to obtain the study results.

The questionnaire included four sections with a total of 116 variables across 41 questions. First, to analyze why participants decided to travel the *Via Francigena*, the survey instrument

measured the degree to which 18 motives were instrumental in the decision to travel. The motivation rating used a 0–100 scale, where 0 represented “not at all important” and 100 “extremely important.” Several of the motives, such as whether they considered themselves religious or not religious, were selected from previous literature (Battour, Ismail, & Awais, 2017; Oviedo et al., 2013). In addition, I reviewed travel diaries of pilgrims who traveled the route from 1200 through 1920 (Belloc, 1902; Birch, 1998; Kempe, 2015), along with accounts of contemporary travelers (Jen, 2015; Ramsay, 2013; Wyatt, 2017) and personal motivation. Through this research, I created 18 motives to represent the intentions of the typical medieval pilgrim as well as recent travelers.

The second and third sections inquired about the respondents’ characteristics during travel and their assessment of the trip. Questions associated with the travelers’ characteristics asked where travel began and ended, how they celebrated their completion, and what (if anything) they acquired as a souvenir. Respondents assessed their experience by rating on a scale of 0–100 the degree to which the journey met their expectations, the likelihood of their repeating the excursion, and how safe they felt along the route.

The fourth section assessed the specifics of a traveler’s experience. Here, *Via Francigena* travelers were asked to indicate on a scale of 0–100 the degree to which they saw themselves as pilgrims or tourists, with 0 meaning they considered themselves pilgrims, and 100 signifying that they saw themselves as tourists. Participants then provided their definitions of “pilgrim” and “tourist.” The survey also asked if they obtained their “Testimonium”—the *Via Francigena*’s official document (obtained either from the Vatican or Italian tourism offices in Rome) that certifies

the completion of the pilgrimage to Rome. As part of recalling their experience, participants could also describe their favorite memories, offer one-word descriptions for their journey, and give other comments.

Participants provided demographic information in the questionnaire's final section. Along with age, gender, education, marital status, and country of origin, the travelers indicated if they considered themselves religious and if so their specific religion and the frequency with which they attended religious services.

## **Interviews**

As a complementary research method, I interviewed six individuals who had walked, driven, or cycled sections of the *Via Francigena* since 2013. On the *Via Francigena* Study website, travelers who met the study criteria were asked to participate in a 30–45-minute interview. Since research shows that direct questions are not the most effective technique for understanding a traveler's unconscious thinking (Martin, 2010), I applied the biographic narrative interpretative method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). The BNIM is a passive interview approach built on the principle of non-interruption. Using the BNIM, the interviewer asks an initial narrative-inducing question, which allows individuals to tell stories about their experiences and often provides optimum information. The interviews took place via face-to-face interaction, over the telephone, or online video. All interviews were conducted in English. Participation was voluntary, and the sessions lasted 30–90 minutes.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked an initial question: “Why did you decide to travel the *Via Francigena*?” I then allowed the respondents to tell their story without interruption. For the interview, subjects were recruited through social media, the *Via Francigena* website, and personal contacts made while traveling in Italy.

## Personal Experience

Two personal *Via Francigena* journeys contributed to this research. The first 100-mile (160 km) trek from Acquapendente, Italy to Rome, Italy took place September 3–17, 2017, and the second walk of similar distance from Siena, Italy to Acquapendente, Italy occurred March 17–27, 2018 (Fig. 19). I traveled alone, carried a backpack, and stayed in either monasteries or pilgrims’ accommodations. Each day I kept a written account of the journey in a journal or on audio recordings when too wearied to write.



Figure 19. *Via Francigena*, Siena to Rome. Copyright Wilderness Travel, 2017.



## Chapter 4

### Findings

An inch of surprise leads us to a mile of gratefulness.

—David Steindl-Rast

The *Via Francigena* Study was designed to determine what motivates individuals to travel the *Via Francigena* (see Methods, p. 32). In the Findings chapter, the study's survey results are presented in five sections: the respondents' profiles, reasons for traveling the route, travelers' activities and behaviors, assessments of their journeys, and reflections on their experiences.

#### Survey Results

Of the 257 surveys requested through the *Via Francigena* Study website and personal contacts (see Methods, p. 32), 221 people (86% response rate) asked for a questionnaire in English, French, or Italian languages. Of the 221 who requested questionnaires, 208 answered at least 97% of the 41 survey questions, and this group became the study sample. The majority (70%) of the completed surveys received were the English version, over a quarter (28%) were in Italian, and a few (3%) were in French.

Eleven interviews were requested through the *Via Francigena* website; however, timing and logistical issues made it difficult to speak with all who requested an interview. Ultimately, 6 interviews were conducted either face-to-face, on the telephone, or via video conversations between

September 17 and December 31, 2017. Overall, 214 subjects provided quantitative and qualitative data.

The socio-demographic profiles of the sample are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4. The majority of the study subjects were from European countries (71%), and over a quarter (26%) were from North America. Eight percent were from Asia, and less than one percent resided in South America and Africa. Italy was the most represented country (26%). Over a third (35%) of the subjects were from other European nations (Italy excluded), with 29% from non-European countries (Fig. 20). Travelers from the United States comprised almost a quarter (24%) of the study's population. Taken as a whole, 27 nations were represented in the sample (Tables 1 and 2).

European/Non-European Study Participants  
(N = 208)

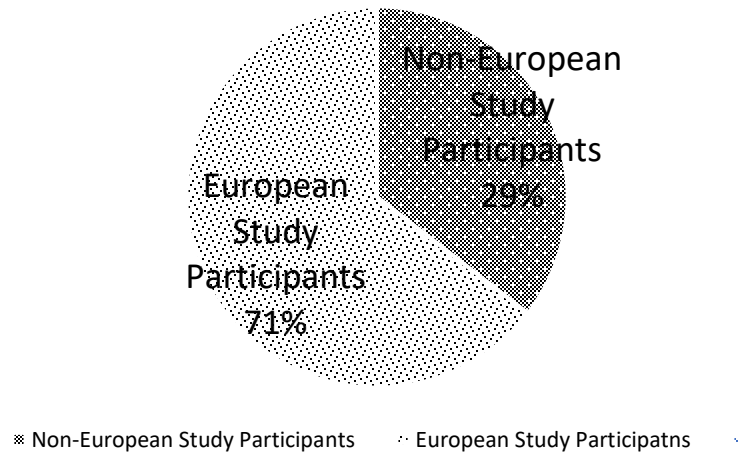


Figure 20. Breakdown of European and Non-European *Via Francigena* Study subjects.

Table 1

*Respondent Profiles: Country of Origin*

Profile	Description	Statistics	
		Frequency (N)	Percentage %
Country of Origin	Italy	54	26.0
	United States of America	49	23.5
	United Kingdom	32	15.4
	Australia	9	4.3
	Canada	6	2.9
	France	5	2.4
	South Africa	5	2.4
	Switzerland	5	2.4
	Denmark	4	1.9
	Ireland	4	1.9
	New Zealand	4	1.9
	Philippines	4	1.9
	The Netherlands	4	1.9
	Belgium	3	1.4
	Germany	3	1.4
	Malta	3	1.4
	Finland	2	1.0
	Russia	2	1.0
	Spain	2	1.0
	Austria	1	0.5
	Brazil	1	0.5
	Greenland	1	0.5
	Namibia	1	0.5
	Norway	1	0.5
	South Korea	1	0.5
	Sweden	1	0.5
Thailand	1	0.5	
	<i>Total</i>	208	100.0%

Table 2

*Respondents' Profiles: Italy, Other European, & Non-European Countries*

Description	Statistics	
	Frequency (N)	Percentage %
Italy	54	26.0%
Other European Countries	73	35.0%
Non-European Countries	81	39.0%
<i>Total</i>	208	100.0%

The demographics indicated that more women than men answered the survey questions with over half (56%) of the subjects indicating they were female. In addition, the study population was older, with more than two-thirds (67%) falling between the ages of 45–65.

The study group appeared stable. More than half of the total population stating that they were married (56%); almost half (47%) worked full-time, and approximately one third (31%) were retired. Less than one-fifth (19%) had never married, and even fewer (17%) were divorced or separated. With those working full-time or retired comprising the majority of the sample, a limited number of the sample stated that they were unemployed or in school. In addition, the total group appeared highly educated, with 21% having received a 4-year college degree as their highest level of education and almost half (48%) completing postgraduate or professional education (Table 3).

Table 3

*Respondents' Profiles: Gender, Age, Marital Status, Employment Status*

Profile	Description	Statistics	
		Frequency ( <i>N</i> )	Percentage %
Gender	Male	91	43.8%
	Female	117	56.2%
	<i>Total</i>	208	100%
Age	18—24 years	1	.5%
	25—34 years	20	9.6%
	35—44 years	26	12.5%
	45—54 years	51	24.5%
	55—64 years	69	33.2%
	65—74 years	37	17.8%
	75 + years	4	1.9%
	<i>Total</i>	208	100%
Marital Status	Married	119	57.3%
	Widowed	10	4.8%
	Divorced or separated	36	17.3%
	Never married	40	19.2%
	Preferred not to answer	3	1.4%
	<i>Total</i>	208	100%
Employment Status	Employed full-time	98	47.1%
	Employed part-time	18	8.7%
	Homemaker	6	3.0%
	Unemployed, seeking work	8	3.6%
	Unemployed, not seeking work	4	1.9%
	Retired	64	31.0%
	Other	8	3.6%
	Preferred not to answer	2	1.0%
	<i>Total</i>	208	100%
Education	Some high school	10	4.8%
	High school graduate	32	15.4%
	Some college (2 years)	22	10.6%
	College graduate (4 years)	44	21.1%
	Postgraduate/professional	100	48.1%
	<i>Total</i>	208	100%

Religion and religiosity are well-known factors of contemporary pilgrimage tourism (Poria et al., 2003), and this study included a question about the participants' religious beliefs and practices. To understand the sense of religiosity of the study's population, the travelers answered a "yes/no" question to indicate whether they thought of themselves as religious (Table 4). The

majority of the sample (51%) answered “no” to being religious; however, 45% answered “yes” to this question. Of those indicating they were religious, two-thirds were Roman Catholic (66%), with all but one Italian choosing Roman Catholicism as their faith path. Of the others who replied “yes,” almost a quarter (23%) specified that they were Protestant. The remaining 11% selected Christian Orthodox, Christian “other,” Buddhism, or stated that they did not have a faith path.

In a follow-up question, the “yes” respondents were asked about the frequency with which they attended religious services. Over a quarter (28%) answered that they attend church once a week or more, while over a third (38%) indicated that they participate in a service 2–3 times a month to several times a year. Less than one-third (30%) stated that they attend services a few times a year to once a year, and 2% indicated that they never attend religious services (Table 4).

Table 4

*Respondents' Profiles: Religious Practices*

Profile	Description	Statistics	
		Frequency (N)	Percentage %
Religious	Yes	94	45.2%
	No	106	51.0%
	Prefer not to answer	8	3.8%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>100%</i>
Religion Practiced	Christianity: Roman Catholic	62	66.0%
	Christianity: Protestant	22	23.4%
	Christianity: Orthodox	4	4.3%
	Christianity: Other	2	2.1%
	Buddhism	2	2.1%
	No Faith Path	2	2.1%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>100%</i>
Service Frequency	> One time/week	11	11.6%
	One time/week or more	27	28.4%
	2—3 times/month	8	8.4%
	Once/month	9	9.5%
	Several times/year	9	9.5%
	Few times/year	25	26.3%
	Once/year	4	4.2%
	Never	2	2.1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>100%</i>	

Examining religion for travelers from Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom—the most frequent countries in the sample—those who most often answered “yes” to this question were from Italy (60%). One-half (50%) of the travelers from the United States indicated that they thought of themselves as religious, along with more than half of the British traveling choosing a “yes” answer.

The study analyzed 18 possible motives for traveling the *Via Francigena*. A correlation analysis determined the relationship between the motives to assess whether each fell into a

“secular” or “sacred” category. The “secular” category captured motivations that have no religious association and deal with material aspects of the *Via Francigena* journey. Motives connected to God (or gods) or dedicated to a religious or spiritual purpose fell into the “sacred” category. On a scale of 0–10, (0 represented “not at all important” and 10 “extremely important”), respondents rated to the degree the motive influenced their decision to travel the route. Mean values for each motive provided an understanding of the motive’s effect (Table 5).

Table 5  
*Motivation Ratings*

Category	Motivation	Mean (scale of 0–10)
Secular	The scenery along the route	7.9
	Adventure	6.6
	Physical and mental challenge	6.6
	Accessibility of <i>Via Francigena</i> travel information	6.3
	History and cultural education	6.2
	To escape one’s usual surroundings	5.6
	To meet people with a common identity	3.3
	Conveniences along the route	2.4
	<i>Mean of secular motives</i>	5.6
	Sacred	To add meaning to life
Self-discipline		5.6
To become closer to God(s) or divine forces		3.7
To bond with family and friends		3.3
To participate in religious or cultural events along the route		2.7
To fulfill a promise or vow		1.7
To commemorate a dead person		1.5
To gain salvation or show penitence for sins		1.3
Religious obligation		.9
A desire for physical healing or miracle		.8
<i>Mean of sacred motives</i>	2.7	

The secular motives proved considerably more influential with an inclusive mean of 5.6, more than twice the strength of the sacred motives' mean (2.7). Of the 18 reasons for embarking on a *Via Francigena* journey, the opportunity to experience the route's scenery exhibited the highest mean ranking, followed by the possibility for adventure. The desire for physical healing or a miracle, a sacred motive, received the lowest ranking.

For a more in-depth analysis of the motives, t-tests were conducted within demographic pairings to determine if statistical evidence indicated meaningful demographic differences in motives to travel the *Via Francigena*. These pairings included a comparison of (1) males to females, (2) Europeans to non-Europeans, (3) those aged 50-plus to those younger, (4) the employed to the unemployed, (5) those married to those not married, (6) those traveling alone to those traveling with another, (7) those who previously experienced a pilgrimage to those who had not, (8) the religious to the non-religious, and (9) pilgrims to tourists. The t-tests indicated that nine of the demographic pairings revealed statistically significant differences among the 18 motives (Table 6).

Table 6

*T-test Summary for Motives (variables significant at .05 level or below)*

	Secular Motives								Sacred Motives									
	Scenery	Adventure	Physical & Mental Challenge	Accessibility of information	History and Culture	Escape Usual Surroundings	Meet those w/common identity	Route Conveniences	Add Meaning to Life	Self-discipline	Become Closer to God (gods)	Bond w/family & friends	Religious events	Fulfill a vow or promise	Commemoration of the dead	Gain religious salvation	Religions obligation	Physical healing or miracle
	Mean on 0—10 Scale (N=208)																	
Total Sample (N=208)	7.9	6.6	6.6	6.4	6.2	5.7	3.3	2.3	5.8	5.6	3.7	3.3	2.7	1.3	1.6	1.3	.08	.09
Male (n= 92)	<b>7.2</b>	6.2	6.1	5.8	5.7					<b>4.9</b>		2.7						
Female (n=116)	<b>8.4</b>	7.0	7.0	6.8	6.6					<b>6.2</b>		3.9						
European (n=128)			<b>6.1</b>		5.9						3.2	<b>2.8</b>						
Non-European (n=80)			<b>7.4</b>		6.8						4.4	<b>4.2</b>						
< 50 (n=71)			<b>5.7</b>					2.6										
≥ 50 (n=137)			<b>7.1</b>					3.7										
Employed (n=120)						<b>6.3</b>												
Unemployed* (n=85)						<b>4.4</b>												
PNTA (n=3)																		
Married (n=117)			<b>7.2</b>															
Not married (n=91)			<b>5.9</b>															
Traveling solo (n=86)	<b>7.2</b>			5.8						<b>6.4</b>	4.3	<b>1.9</b>		1.8	<b>2.1</b>	1.9		<b>1.3</b>
Travel others (n=119)	<b>8.3</b>			6.6						<b>5.0</b>	3.2	<b>4.4</b>		1.0	<b>1.2</b>	.9		<b>.4</b>
Missing (n=3)																		
Past route (n=146)		<b>6.2</b>						3.6										
No past route (n=62)		<b>7.5</b>						3.1										
Religious (n=94)	7.5	5.7	<b>6.0</b>							<b>6.8</b>	<b>5.9</b>		<b>3.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.2</b>		
Non-religious (n=106)	8.3	7.4	7.2							4.3	1.7		2.0	.08	.08	.05		
PNTA* (n=8)																		
Pilgrim <sup>++</sup> (n=86)			<b>6.0</b>					1.5	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>4.9</b>							1.7
Tourist <sup>++</sup> (n=33)			<b>7.5</b>					3.4	<b>3.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>							.07
Missing <sup>++</sup> (n=89)																		

\*Includes unemployed, homemaker, and retired categories; NA=no answer; Bold = .01 level or below

\*Prefer Not to Answer

Within the eight secular motives, the incentive to embark on the *Via Francigena* to overcome physical and mental challenges displayed a notable difference among six of the demographic pairings. This motive's most noteworthy variances occurred within five of demographic pairings. The Europeans were more motivated by this motive than the non-Europeans were. Also, travelers aged 50-plus found overcoming physical and mental challenges more of a reason to travel the route than did the younger travelers. Furthermore, this motive was more inspiring to those married versus the unmarried, as well as to those who had never traveled a pilgrimage route as opposed to those who had, and those who considered themselves non-religious as compared to those who stated they were religious.

Not surprisingly, the employed travelers displayed a meaningful difference over the unemployed in how much the ability to escape their usual surroundings influenced their decision to travel the route. Likewise, the opportunity to view the scenery, the motive that the general population gave the highest ranking, showed a meaningful difference between those who traveled alone and those who traveled with others as well as a difference between the male and female travelers. Those who journeyed with others viewed the scenery as more of an impetus to travel the *Via Francigena* than those who traveled alone, and the female travelers were more motivated by the scenery than the male travelers in the study were.

Also remarkable within the secular motives was the degree to which two demographic pairings were driven by the opportunity for an adventure. Those who had not experienced traveling on a pilgrimage route were more inspired by adventure than those who had previously taken such a journey. Also, for this motive, the subjects who considered themselves as non-religious viewed

adventure as more of a motivator than those who considered themselves religious. The final secular motivator, the route's conveniences, was more of an impetus for the travelers who thought of themselves as tourists than those who referred to themselves as pilgrims.

Seven of the 10 secular motives revealed significant differences among demographic pairings. The opportunity to practice self-discipline showed meaningful differences within four demographic pairings: male/female, traveling alone/traveling solo, religious/non-religious, and pilgrim/tourist. The t-tests indicated that practicing self-discipline was more of a motivator to the women, those traveling alone, the religious, and the pilgrims.

The second sacred motive indicating a significant variance was the opportunity to bond and strengthen relationships with family and friends. The data revealed that this reason was significantly more of a motivator for the non-Europeans than it was for the Europeans. Furthermore, those traveling with others found this motive statistically more of an impetus for traveling the route than did those traveling alone.

A meaningful finding occurred within the tourist/pilgrim pairing in which the data indicated that the tourists were significantly more motivated to travel the route to become closer to God or gods than were those who considered themselves pilgrims. However, a statistically impressive difference in choosing the route to become closer to God or gods was observed within the religious/non-religious demographic pairing, in which the religious were five times more motivated by this reason than were the non-religious.

As expected, the religious travelers were significantly more motivated by becoming closer to God or god(s), religious events, fulfilling a vow or promise, commemorating the dead, and

gaining religious salvation. In addition, those traveling alone were more inspired to travel the route to commemorate the dead or to obtain physical healing or a miracle than were those traveling with others.

### **Travelers' Activities and Behaviors**

To determine the activity patterns of the *Via Francigena* travelers, the questionnaire asked the subjects to respond to five questions. First, they specified how they initially learned about the route. Secondly, the respondents indicated where their journeys began and ended. The third question asked about their modes of travel (foot, bike, automobile, and horseback). The final two questions inquired about three specific behaviors: acquiring a souvenir, the duration of travel, and commemoration of the completion of their journey (Table 7 and Table 8).

Table 7

*Travelers Activities: Method of Learning, Beginning & End, Modes*

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
How traveler learned about route	(n = 204)	
Friends & family	48	23.1%
Other	48	23.1%
Books & literature	46	22.1%
Social media	37	17.8%
Travel organizations	11	5.3%
Do not remember	11	5.3%
Religious organizations	3	1.4%
<i>Total</i>	204	100.0%
Where travel began: Country	(n = 204)	
Italy	96	47.1%
United Kingdom	45	22.1%
Switzerland	32	15.6%
Other	26	12.7%
France, Belgium or Germany	5	2.5%
<i>Total</i>	204	100.0%
Where travel ended	(n=197)	
Italy (Rome)	159	80.8%
Italy (Other locations)	35	17.8%
Israel, Spain, United Kingdom	3	1.4%
<i>Total</i>	197	100.0%
Modes of travel	(n=208)	
Hiked on foot	194	93.3%
Bicycled	11	5.3%
Drove automobile	2	0.9%
Rode horseback	1	0.5%
<i>Total</i>	208	100.0%



Italy, followed by the United Kingdom (22%), and Switzerland (16%). Less than 3% started their trip in France, Belgium, or Germany.

Of the 41 locations provided, almost one-fourth of the respondents (23%) began in Canterbury, England. Following in popularity were Lucca, Italy with 13% and the Gran San Bernardo Pass on the Swiss-Italian border, with 10%.

The majority of travelers, 81%, finished their journey in Rome. Other Italian towns throughout north, central, and southern Italy, such as Lucca, Siena, and Brindisi, were the final destination for almost one-fifth of the sample (18%). Interestingly, one traveler took the route of Sigeric from Rome to Canterbury, making the journey more difficult since no trail markers exist as one travels north. Another traveler indicated that he stopped in Rome and then journeyed on to Jerusalem, and another connected with the *Camino de Santiago* and recorded *Santiago de Compostela* in Spain as his final stop.

The vast majority of the travelers (93%) hiked the trail, while very few cycled the route (5%). Two respondents drove, and one person rode horseback.

Tourism literature suggests that acquiring a souvenir holds strong symbolic value related to a pleasurable travel experience (Litirell et al., 1994). An examination of souvenir acquisition behaviors helped better define the *Via Francigena* traveler. The survey asked respondents to answer “yes” or “no” if they acquired a souvenir. If the answer was “yes,” the traveler clarified whether the souvenir was a purchased, a gift from another individual, or an item they acquired at no cost. More than two-thirds (67%) responded that they acquired a souvenir during their *Via Francigena* journey

and listed 170 items. Using text analysis, I grouped the responses into nine types of souvenirs (Fig. 21).

The most popular souvenir, which came free-of-charge, was the Testimonium, a document certifying that a traveler completed the final section of the route. For those who traveled for a religious purpose and walked the last 93 miles (150 km), a Vatican office in the Sacristy issues the certificate (Fig. 22 and Fig. 23). For those who traveled the last 63 miles (100 km) for a non-religious purpose, the travelers obtain the document from the Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi outside the Vatican’s walls. Wearables (pins, badges, and pendants) were the second most popular souvenirs (Fig. 24). Novelty items (keyrings, magnets, and figurines) followed in popularity (Fig. 25). Body tattoos, a favorite “souvenir” of the *Camino de Santiago* travelers (Hesp, 2017), merely received two references. Photos were mentioned only twice and only one listing for a travel journal.

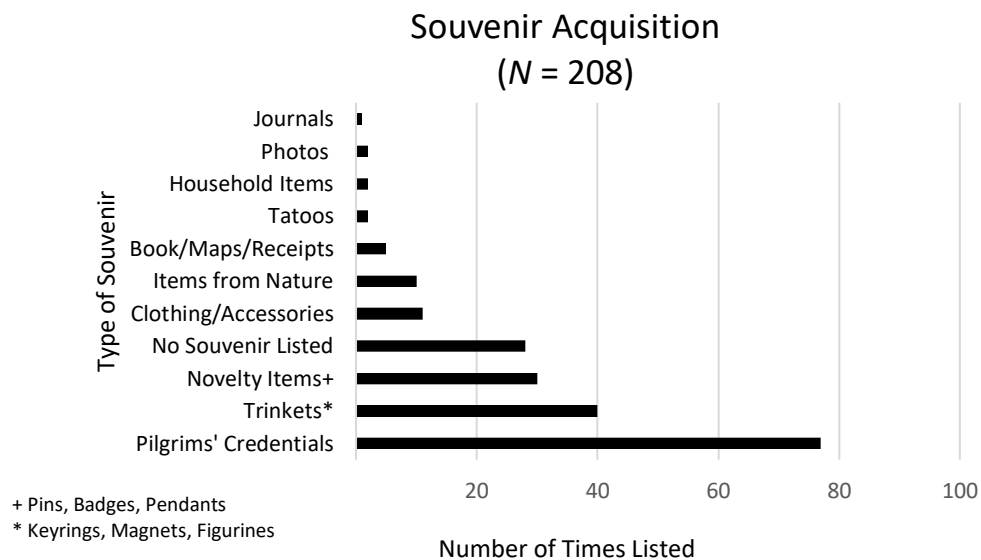


Figure 21. Types of souvenirs acquired.



Figure 22. Vatican office that issues the Testimonium, September 12, 2017.



Figure 23. Via Francigena Testimonium issued by the Vatican.



*Figure 24. Via Francigena souvenir, a small wearable pendant spotted in San Quirico d’Orcia, Italy, March 21, 2018.*



*Figure 21. Vatican magnet purchased in Rome, March 24, 2018.*

Of the 75 souvenirs purchased, two-thirds cost less than 10 euros. Items with prices of 10–50 euros accounted for one-fifth (20%) of the purchased goods, and souvenirs costing above 50 euros accounted for approximately a tenth (13%) of the items.

The subjects obtained souvenirs for a variety of reasons, and they provided 110 explanations for acquiring an item. The majority said they wanted a souvenir to remind them of their time on the trail. Other travelers responded that they received souvenirs as gifts from individuals they met in the

villages. Additional reasons given were that the item was easy to acquire, they desired proof of their achievement, or that they traditionally purchased a souvenir when traveling (Fig. 26).

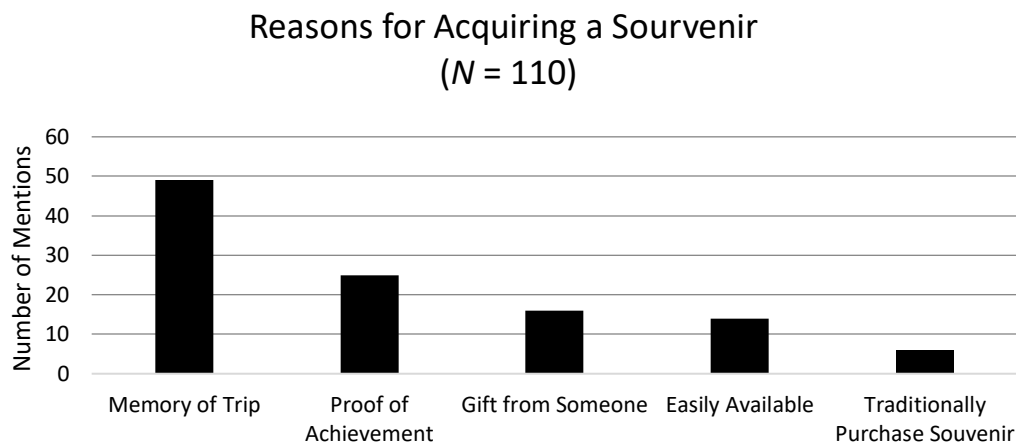


Figure 26. Travelers' reasons for acquiring a *Via Francigena* souvenir.

The entire *Via Francigena* walking route from Canterbury to Rome takes at least 90 days to travel, and 14 of the 208 study subjects indicated that they traveled on the route for over 90 days. As expected, the most common time-period segment was 0–19 days, since more than half of the sample indicated they worked full- or part-time. Of those who traveled 0–19 days, the majority (92%) walked an Italian section of the *Via Francigena*.

Since the earliest times, people have looked for ways to celebrate an accomplishment, and every society finds reasons for ways to celebrate. Likewise, most of the *Via Francigena* study subjects discovered ways to celebrate the ends of their arduous journeys. The questionnaire asked the respondents whether or not they chose to celebrate the completion of their journeys. Over two thirds (80%) responded “yes” and explained how they celebrated. Through qualitative text analysis,

the answers were grouped into six “celebration” categories: family and friends, food, religious event, personal, documentation, tourism. Tourism, which for most people involved touring Vatican City or Rome, and food proved the most popular ways of celebrating, followed closely by religious practice (Fig. 27).

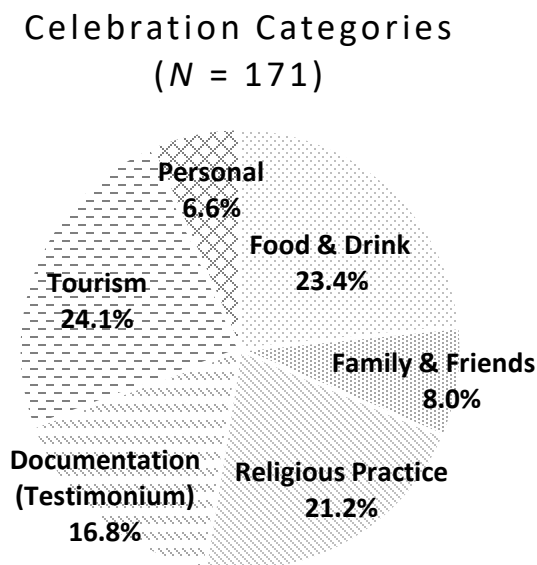


Figure 27. Ways Via Francigena travelers celebrated the ends of their journeys.

### **Travelers’ Assessments: Expectations and Safety**

Travelers’ level of satisfaction is a useful indicator of how favorably they will speak of their experiences once they return to their daily lives and how likely they are to make a return trip to the same locations (Ruzic et al., 2008). Thus, the questionnaire’s next section asked respondents to assess their experience on the route and indicate how safe they felt traveling the *Via Francigena*. Both questions used a sliding scale of 0–100, with 0 signifying “not at all” and 100 meaning “exceeded.” The results suggested that for the almost three-fourths of the travelers their

expectations were met or exceeded. Less than 4% indicated that their expectations were not met (Fig. 28).

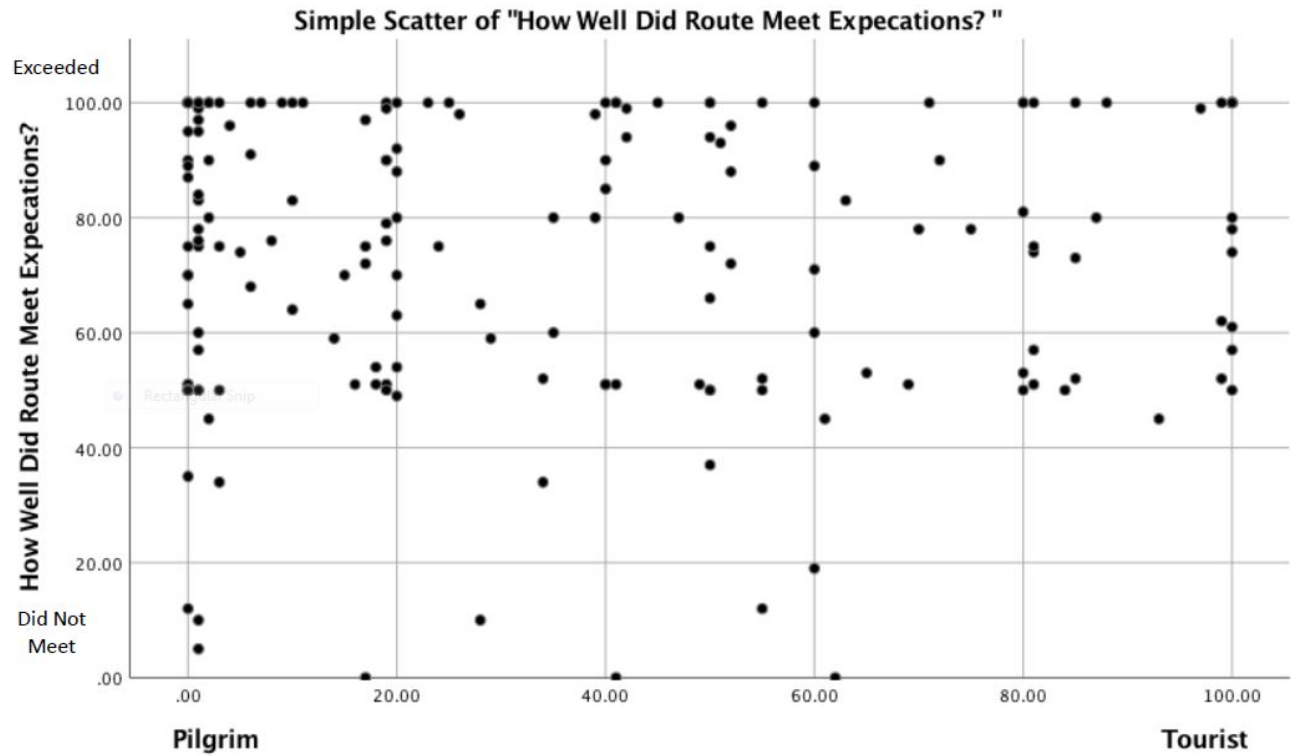


Figure 28. Scatter diagram of how well the *Via Francigena* met the pilgrims' and tourists' expectations.

Although a small minority of travelers seeks danger when traveling on an adventurous trip, studies show that most travelers want to feel secure and safe (Tarlow, 2014). As an additional data point, travelers were asked to indicate how safe they felt while on the *Via Francigena* route. The mean for this rating for safety was 82.1, with over two-thirds providing a rating of 90–100, indicating that the majority of the travelers, even the ones traveling alone, felt very safe (Fig. 29).



## Reflections on the Journey

To ascertain how the travelers thought of themselves on this route, the questionnaire asked if the subjects if they thought of themselves as pilgrims or tourists, a topic that is highly debated in the tourism and pilgrimage literatures (Eade, 2015; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, Padin et al., 2016; 2015; Triantafillidou et al., 2010; Turner, 1978). A second question focused on the feelings the traveler experienced on their journeys, and participants were asked to provide one word that described their experience. Additionally, the travelers had the opportunity to submit any additional comments about their journeys.

When asked if they thought of themselves as pilgrims or tourists, most *Via Francigena* travelers responded that they saw themselves as pilgrims (72%), and less than one-third (27%) viewed themselves as tourists. The subjects provided their descriptions of “pilgrim” and “tourist.” The most mentioned words for pilgrims included “spirit/spirituality,” “walk/walking,” and “religion/religious.” For the definition of tourist, the most popular words used were “place,” “pleasure/holiday,” and “culture/cultural.” It is noteworthy that study participants used several of the same words for each definition, indicating that participants shared a common understanding of the term, no matter their culture (Fig. 30 and Fig. 31). The questionnaire also asked participants to provide one-word descriptions of their journeys, and 82% responded. Again, several offered similar words. “Peace” was the most frequently used word, followed by “freedom,” “beautiful,” “amazing,” “joy,” and “adventure.”

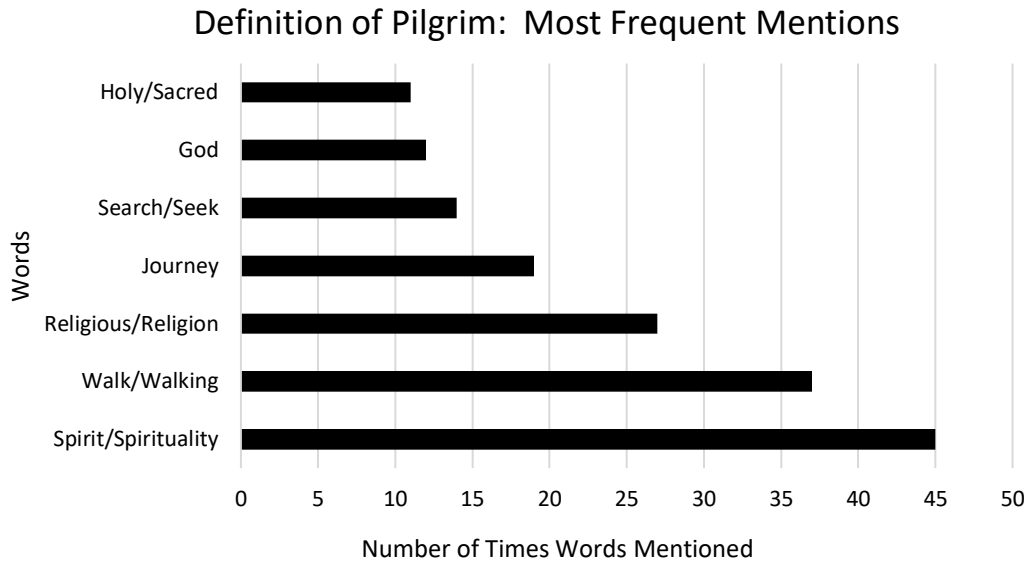


Figure 30. Words used most frequently to describe “pilgrim.”

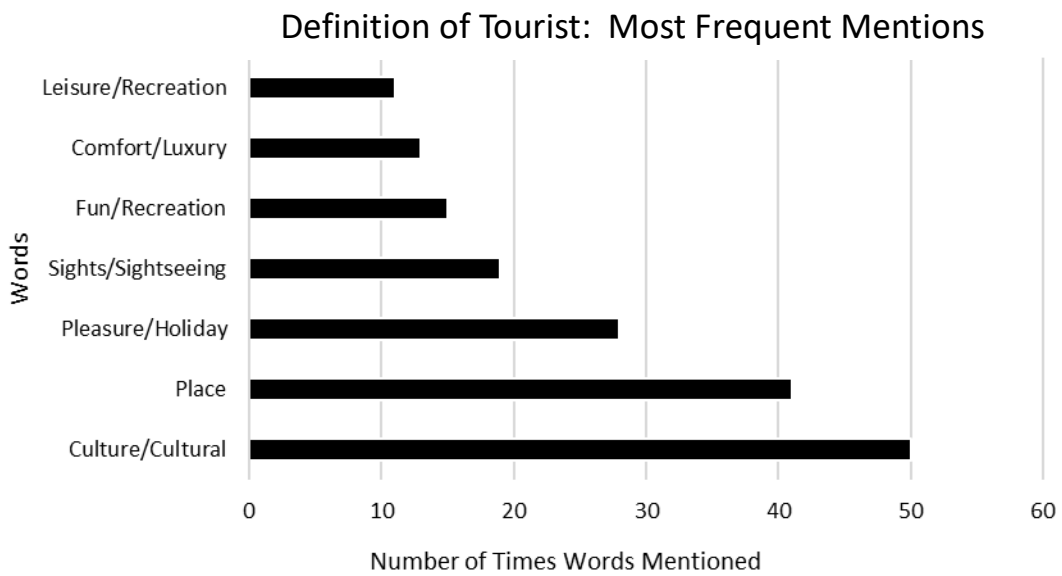


Figure 31. Words used most frequently to describe “tourist.”

When asked to offer a memorable experience, the majority (66%) of the subjects remarked on an extraordinary experience or feeling they underwent on the trail. Most comments were positive; however, some respondents took this opportunity to voice issues. Many spoke of the transformation they felt on the trail. For example, one person wrote, “The experience was transformative in many ways—physically challenging and empowering emotionally, soothing and joyful spiritually.” Other positive comments reflected on the route’s beauty and the memories the travelers bring home: “I am so pleased to have taken this incredible journey through a beautiful, stunning and remarkable country. The *Via Francigena* was so much more than I expected, and the memories of the journey will stay with me.”

The few negative comments spoke about the lack of accommodation, the extreme heat, poor signage and the danger of walking on roads. For instance, one frustrated traveler wrote:

The main concern was never whether I could walk the distances needed each day, but in France in particular, the question that tormented me every day was, “will I be able to find somewhere (safe) to sleep tonight?” Despite the fact that I speak fluent French and have a reasonable knowledge of Italian.

Other responses included both positive and negative comments. Many travelers compared the Camino de Compostela to the *Via Francigena*:

The scenery was stunning. The people we met and the food we ate were amazing. However, this wasn’t as much of a spiritual journey for me as was the *Camino de Santiago*. Not sure why exactly. Maybe the hype surrounding the trek?

Another mixed comment spoke about the differences between sections of the trail:

Absolutely loved the *Via Francigena* in Italy from Aosta to Rome. Beautiful scenery, wonderful cathedrals, friendly pilgrims,

adequate accommodations (including some wonderful monastery stays), and just being in Italy—Roman roads, art in the churches, fresh food, and delicious coffee. The *Via Francigena* in Northern France was not as well developed. We stayed in some great places, but at times, the days were too long (19 miles) for us.

The final question asked the travelers to share any additional thoughts they had about their journeys. The response was tremendous, with 75 people offering comments, and their words were moving as well as enlightening. A selection of the comments appears in Appendix B. One remark sums up what many people said about the *Via Francigena*: “Positive: Discovered parts of my country I didn’t know, met nice people, made a great experience on my own. Negative: Sometimes very bad conditions on the route (no signs and local people didn’t know anything about the route).”

The study offered the participants the opportunity to receive the research results. The majority of the study subjects requested the final findings, and 75% of the participants asked to receive the study’s outcomes. The results were posted on the study’s website, and an email to these participants provided the link to the study’s website.

## **Interviews**

The online study recruitment website offered travelers the opportunity to participate in an unstructured interview. The interview process ( $N = 6$ ) provided additional qualitative data that helped further develop the *Via Francigena* traveler profile.

The interview process revealed that *Via Francigena* travelers appreciated a chance to talk about their journey, as the invitation generated numerous requests. However, logistical and timing issues limited the number of possible interviews. During a 3-month period, I interviewed six

previous *Via Francigena* travelers: three subjects resided in the United States, one in the United Kingdom, and two in Italy. For the subjects from the United States, one discussion transpired via telephone, and two were carried out face-to-face. The interview with the British traveler occurred via Skype, while both interviews with each Italian took place in person. The average time for each interview was one hour.

The interview session began with the same demographic questions used in the online survey. As part of the analysis, I developed traveler profiles based on this demographic information. (Table 9).

Table 9

*Profiles of Interview Subjects*

Profile	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6
Country of Origin	U.S.A.	U.S.A.	U.S.A.	U.K.	Italy	Italy
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	65—74	45—54	55—64	45—54	45—54	35—44
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Employment Status	Retired	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time
Education	Post-grad	Post-grad	Post-grad	College grad	Postgrad	Post-grad
Religious Yes/No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Religion Practiced	NA	NA	Protestant	NA	Protestant	NA
Religious Service Frequency	NA	NA	> 1x/week	NA	> 1x/week	NA

Using the interview technique described in Chapter 2: Methods, the subjects answered an initial narrative-inducing question: “Why did you decide to travel *Via Francigena*?” As discussed, this format permitted the study subjects to comment on any aspect of their journeys (see Methods, p. 32).

It is significant that all six individuals began their stories by explaining how they learned about the route, and where they started and ended (Table 6). A few detailed the trials preparing for their journeys and arriving at their starting locations, and one person explained how an injury ended his or her trip earlier than expected. The six individuals shared the same discussion pattern: they spoke of feelings experienced during and at the end of their journeys.

For instance, one person, who referred to herself as a pilgrim, spoke of the numerous fellow pilgrims she met along the *Via Francigena* and believed the route’s greatest gift was its ability to be an “equalizer.” She stated that the pilgrims she spent time with while on the trail recognized the “true you.” She continued, “No one cares about your profession, if you are wealthy or not, your

education, your politics; people want to learn about you as a human being and share the trail's experiences with you.”

One male traveler explained that he thought of himself as a pilgrim when he began his journey, but as the days passed, he recognized he was indeed a tourist. He became frustrated with the poor signage and getting lost almost every day. After several occasions of walking in the wrong direction and becoming angry with himself, he recognized he must not possess the fortitude of the medieval pilgrims.

Five of the interview participants had previously walked or cycled the *Camino de Santiago*, and all commented on dissimilarities between the two routes. For example, the participants mentioned the distances between the villages were much longer on the *Via Francigena*, which made the *Via Francigena* journey more draining. In addition, the cyclist commented that the *Camino de Santiago*'s popularity makes it difficult to find lodging. On the *Via Francigena*, he never needed to reserve a room ahead of time; however, he needed to book accommodations several days ahead when traveling the *Camino de Santiago*. He appreciated the flexibility of not needing to be at a specific point and a specified time on the *Via Francigena*.

Several themes emerged from the six transcripts. All participants spoke about the sense of freedom and independence felt when they discarded their at-home routines and comfortable surroundings. Each interview participant mentioned how liberating it was to know his or her sole mission was traveling from “point A to point B” or from one village to another. One of the interview subjects paralleled the route by car because he was not physically fit to walk or ride a bike; yet, he still spoke about the liberation he experienced. This man supported the Italian cyclist

who was traveling the route, and even he expressed sentiments similar to those of the people who were walking or cycling.

All persons interviewed expressed a desire to return to the *Via Francigena* or another ancient pilgrimage route in Europe or on another continent. Everyone expressed an appreciation for the financial means to undertake this type of journey. The love for the Italian hospitality came up quite often, as did the disappointment in the pathway through France.

The respondents' motives to embark on the *Via Francigena* journey emerged as I re-read the transcripts multiple times. All travelers experienced intense feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment when they completed the *Camino de Santiago* pilgrimage, and all expressed a desire to recreate this sensation. These feelings appeared as the primary motive that led them to the *Via Francigena*.

The Italian cyclist traveled both the *Camino de Santiago* and the *Via Francigena* with prayers tucked away in pieces of penne pasta. At each stop, he left a "pasta prayer" for a deceased loved one or a person in need for whom he had vowed to pray. A female participant, who considered herself a veteran pilgrim, repeatedly embarked on pilgrimages with her husband to strengthen the bond between them. Five of the interview subjects appreciated the physical and mental challenges they faced while on a pilgrimage. These five subjects also mentioned that the challenges motivated them to begin planning another pilgrimage once they return home. In addition, everyone spoke of enjoying the scenery and appreciating the history and culture. Through a qualitative analysis of their stories, I mirrored the information gathered in the interviews with the

motivating factors established for the survey (Table 10). The results indicate secular motives received more mentions than did sacred motives.

Table 10

*Via Francigena Motivating Factors for Interview Subjects*

Category	Motivation	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6
Secular	Scenery along the route	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Adventure		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Physical & mental challenge	✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Accessibility of information						
	History & culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Escape one's usual surroundings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Meet people with common identity						
	Conveniences along the route						
Sacred	To add meaning to life	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Self-discipline	✓	✓		✓		
	To become closer to God(s) or divine forces			✓			
	To bond with family and friends	✓		✓		✓	
	To participate in religious or cultural events						
	To fulfill a promise or vow		✓	✓		✓	
	To commemorate a dead person					✓	
	To gain salvation and/or show penitence			✓		✓	
	Religious obligation			✓		✓	
	Desire for physical healing or miracle						

Based on transcripts and field notes from the interviews, I gleaned considerable information about the interview subjects' characteristics. As a method of analysis, I tracked their behaviors in the same manner that I captured survey participants' characteristics (Table 11).

Table 11

*Characteristics of Interview Subjects*

Characteristic	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6
Learned about route	Friends	Books/lit	Friends	Books/lit	Friends	Friends
Where travel began	Canterbury	Lucca	Canterbury	Bernardo Pass	Canterbury	Canterbury
Where travel ended	Reims, FR	Rome	Aosta, IT	Rome	Aosta, IT	Rome
Mode of travel	Foot	Foot	Auto	Foot	Bicycle	Foot
Souvenir acquisition	Obtained	Obtained	Obtained	Obtained	Obtained	Obtained
Days traveled	20—39 days	1—19 days	20—39 days	20—39 days	1—19 days	20—39 days
Celebration at end	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Similar to the survey participants, the six interviewees learned about the *Via Francigena* from friends and family or through books and literature. Dissimilar to the survey group, the majority of the interview subjects began their journey in Canterbury, and all subjects spent more days on the trail than did those who participated in the survey. Half of this small group ended their journey in Rome, compared with the more than 80% of the survey sample. In line with the survey group, these six participants all obtained a souvenir and participated in a celebration at the end of their journey.

The qualitative approach of the interview allowed me to experience six different *Via Francigena* journeys through listening to these individuals. Their voices and stories complement the quantitative data and written comments provided by 208 of their fellow *Via Francigena* travelers. Together, the two sets of data bring into focus the reasons all types of individuals commence traveling on foot, bicycle, automobile, or horseback the route traveled by Sigeric the Serious over 1,000 years ago.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

There is no path to happiness. Happiness is the path.

—Gautama Buddha

The quantitative and qualitative data collected during the seven sampling months help uncover reasons for the rebirth of “pilgrimage” along the *Via Francigena* route. The results of the survey provide a profile of the modern-day *Via Francigena* traveler and reasons why an increasing number of people throughout the world choose to embark on this journey.

#### **The Contemporary *Via Francigena* Traveler**

Now that the study’s data analysis is complete, the question of “Who is the modern-day *Via Francigena* traveler?” can be answered. An analysis of the quantitative data indicates that the most typical traveler is a European woman, probably from Italy, who is aged 50 years or older, well educated, and working either full- or part-time. She has previously traveled a pilgrimage trail, in all likelihood the *Camino de Santiago*; however, she does not consider herself religious. Learning about the *Via Francigena* through friends and family, she is driven by secular motives, such as the route’s scenery, an opportunity for adventure, the desire for physical and mental challenge, and an interest in history and culture, to embark on the trail. She also discovers the sacred motive of practicing self-discipline as an impetus for traveling the route.

This woman's journey commences somewhere in northern Italy, and she spends approximately two weeks walking the trail. While on the *Via Francigena*, she thinks of herself as a pilgrim rather than a tourist. She mentions the words "spiritual," "walk," and "religious." When asked to describe a tourist, she responds with the terms "culture," "place," and "pleasure."

She walks the trail alone; yet, although by herself, she feels very safe on the trail and in the villages. Ending her journey at St. Peter's Basilica, she receives her "testimonium," which becomes her souvenir, a memento that serves to remind her of this period in her life. She celebrates her accomplishment by touring Rome and is extremely likely to return to the *Via Francigena* in the future.

An assessment of the quantitative data supplies additional information about the contemporary *Via Francigena* traveler. The one-word descriptions and free-text remarks indicated that today's "pilgrims" appear to navigate the trail for reasons similar to those of Sigeric's time: they all travel the route for a sense of freedom and a yearning for adventure. Furthermore, although the study's empirical data indicates that the majority of the travelers did not walk to Rome with the same religious fervor as those who traveled with a jug and a stick 1000 years ago, the comments offered by the study's subjects suggest that they perceived the trail as possessing a spiritual quality. Similar to the medieval pilgrims, the contemporary travelers also experienced feelings and emotions not understood by the intellect.

## **The Social Bond**

Also apparent through this study is the importance of the social bond created among the *Via Francigena* travelers, which is reminiscent of Victor Turner's perception of "communitas," whereby the trail's travelers express a "feeling of affinity" that is related to neither blood relatives nor nationality (Turner, 1974, p. 201). The phenomenon was evident in the willingness of strangers from various cultural backgrounds to share with me, a total stranger, their innermost reflections about their journeys. Utilizing the data from the survey and interviews, I recognized that the *Via Francigena* travelers appreciated the opportunity to share freely the physical and emotional challenges they encountered and the significance of their journeys.

The connection between the "pilgrims" is also apparent in the advice and guidance offered on the *Via Francigena* social media platforms by those who have experienced the route to those considering such a journey. Once on the trail, these travelers offer daily accounts and images of their experiences. Additionally, through this study's interviews and free-text entries, many subjects commented on cherished friendships with those from other cultures established during the *Via Francigena* journey. Some of these bonds grew out of spending time with other travelers. Other connections occurred with travelers and the *Via Francigena*'s villagers, such as Silvani Cesaretti, a Radiconfani shopkeeper who makes certain the pilgrims have provisions for the next day's lengthy journey to Acquapendente (Fig. 32).



*Figure 32.* Silvani Cessaretti, owner of Pane e Companatico, a bread and sandwich shop that caters to pilgrims, in Radicofani, Italy, March 23, 2018.

Victor and Edith Turner described the pilgrimage tradition as a “cultural magnet,” (1978, p. 27), and this is clearly the case for contemporary *Via Francigena* travelers. For example, the numerous countries represented in this study demonstrates that the *Via Francigena* attracts diverse populations who connect and share the common goal of completing that day’s journey. As uncovered in the study’s interviews, many regarded the journey as a great equalizer, “not unlike birth and death” (R. Walker, personal interview, October 11, 2017). Getting lost was a universal theme in participants’ responses when asked about memories. Even though the subjects carried detailed maps and manipulated the latest GPS apps on their phones, at some point on the trail almost everyone—no matter their experience education, age, or cultural background—confessed to

missing at least one turn. However, each traveler recovered and eventually found his or her way to the next village.

Worthy of comment is the spiritual connection of social bonding that is apparent in this study. The majority of the study's travelers regarded themselves as pilgrims and in their definition of a "pilgrim" frequently used the term "spiritual." Additionally, numerous study subjects commented on the transformative nature of the trail. Reflecting on these data, I believe this study reveals that the *Via Francigena* journey enables travelers to expand their awareness of humanity. The experience allows them to focus their attention outward and more be receptive to external stimuli, including their surroundings and their connection with the unknown, including human beings from different cultures. This occurrence appears to unite and equalize pilgrims in addition to uplifting them. The empowering encounter produces a sensation of peace and gratification, which generates the desire to embark on another pilgrimage.

Likewise, an inner component to the pilgrimage experience compels pilgrims to return to the trail. Through the qualitative and quantitative data, the travelers show that they learned a lot about themselves while on the *Via Francigena*. Many travelers indicated that their journeys involved mental and physical challenges, which led to trust and belief in oneself. Perhaps, when the pilgrims return to their every-day lives, this resilience provides them with the ability to cope with stressful situations and learn to accept change. When life's pressures overcome them, they sense a need to regain this confidence in the universe, which becomes the motivation to return to a spiritual pilgrimage trail.

## Personal *Via Francigena* Journeys

To conclude the analysis of the 21st century *Via Francigena* traveler, I offer comments and observations from my 200-mile *Via Francigena* trek from Siena, Italy to Rome. I initially became intrigued with the concept of a pilgrimage 8 years ago, when the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) aired an episode that featured contemporary pilgrims walking through Scotland. The euphoria of the pilgrims' accomplishment caught my attention, and I intuitively knew I would someday undertake such a challenge. Five years later, while studying in Rome, I noticed a sign with the image of a pilgrim. At that moment, Jupiter aligned with Mars, and my exploration of the *Via Francigena* began (Fig. 33).



Figure 33. *Via Francigena* trail sign near Acquapendente, Italy, September 5, 2017.

Upon investigating the ancient pilgrimage route, I learned that every year thousands of people walk or cycle all, or part of the route, from Canterbury to Rome. The notion of walking on the same roads and paths that carried the medieval pilgrims was captivating, and as part of this

research study, during two separate occasions, I walked a 200-mile segment of the route from Siena to Rome.

When comparing my motivation factors with those asked of the study subjects, my impetus for embarking on the journey aligned with those of the majority of those participating in this study (Table 12). The opportunity to challenge me physically and mentally topped this list. Trekking in Nepal, cycling long distances, and competing in numerous marathons had occupied my leisure time for 30 years. Consequently, the challenge of walking 200 miles (322 km) by myself in a foreign country inspired me to tackle the *Via Francigena*.

Table 12

*Personal Via Francigena Motivating Factors.*

Category	Motivation	Me
Secular	Scenery along the route	✓
	Adventure	✓
	Physical & mental challenge	✓
	Accessibility of Information	
	History & culture	✓
	Escape one's usual surroundings	✓
	Meet people with common identity	
	Conveniences along the route	
Sacred	To add meaning to life	✓
	Self-discipline	✓
	To become closer to God(s) or divine forces	
	To bond with family and friends	
	To participate in religious or cultural events	✓
	To fulfill a promise or vow	
	To commemorate a dead person	
	To gain salvation, show penitence	
Religious obligation		
Desire for physical healing or miracle		

Furthermore, the scenery along the *Via Francigena* became another principal stimulus for the walk. Additionally, as a student of history, I eagerly anticipated visiting historical and cultural sights, and I recognized that the beauty of travel is to encounter unusual surroundings.

The journey represented both a way to add meaning to life and a test of self-discipline, knowing that I could always take the bus or train to the next town. Participating in religious and cultural events in the small villages also intrigued me. However, similar to the survey respondents and interview participants, secular factors motivated me more than sacred ones.

With much physical, mental, and material preparation, I enthusiastically began my initial *Via Francigena* journey on September 3, 2017, at the Basilica Cattedrale di San Sepolcro in Acquapendente, Italy (Fig. 34 and Fig. 35). Throughout the 9 days of walking, I did not encounter another tourist or pilgrim on the trail until I entered the walls of the Vatican on the final day.



*Figure 34.* Basilica Cattedrale di San Sepolcro on the *Via Francigena* trail, Acquapendente, Italy, September 3, 2017.



Figure 35. *Via Francigena* map Acquapendente to Rome. Copyright studio-haverstraat.nl, 2017.

During the first few hours of the first day's walk, I thought of myself as a dedicated pilgrim tracing the footsteps of pious medieval men and women (Fig. 36). However, later in the day, merciless heat and annoying insects soon interrupted any spiritual reflections, and my sacred pilgrimage turned into a daily expedition of physical and mental endurance. For the remaining days, the fervent pilgrim never returned, and I reconciled myself to the realization that I was merely a tourist struggling to assimilate into my new environment. Nevertheless, every day I enjoyed a sense of protection and contentment and discovered that all villagers viewed me as a "pilgrim."

In my daily journals, I referenced an experience that I associate with the spiritual aspect of the *Via Francigena*. I referred to these occurrences as "synchronicity," which Carl Jung (1960) defined as a string of "meaningful coincidences" of which the apparent connections could not be

explained. For example, when I was lost and feeling very isolated, a villager, who spoke perfect English, appeared and provided explicit directions. Another coincidence emerged when a cyclist, traveling behind me, caught up with me to return travel documents that had fallen out of my pack several miles back. Regardless of the cause, these consequences of this serendipity enriched the journey for others and me. Perhaps when arriving in Rome, it is the path's synchronicity that contributes to why the majority of the *Via Francigena* travelers express that the journey surpassed their expectations (Fig. 37).

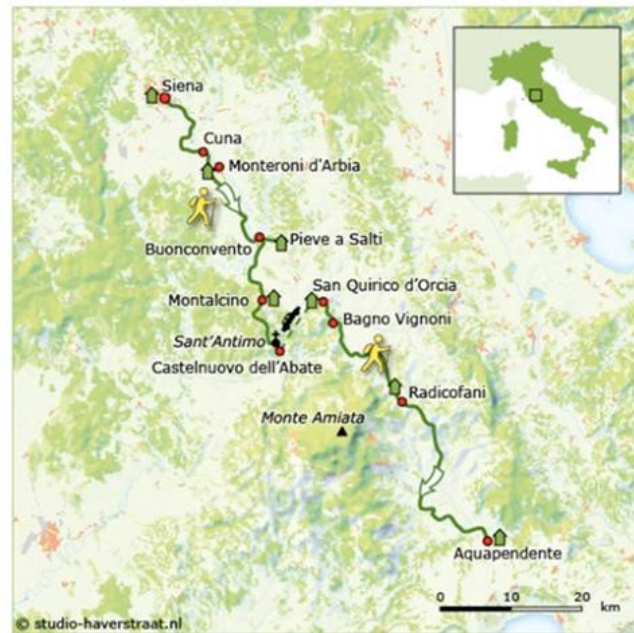


*Figure 36. Pilgrims' shrine on the Via Francigena trail near Viterbo, Italy, September 4, 2017.*



*Figure 37.* My celebration St. Peter's Square, Rome, September 12, 2017.

Akin to the study subjects, I sensed a call to return to the *Via Francigena*. In March of 2018, I tackled another section of the trail and walked from Siena to Acquapendente (Fig. 38). During this return journey, gusty winds and chilly temperatures replaced the annoying insects and intense heat experienced during the September adventure (Fig. 39). Additionally, I was fortunate to meet another pilgrim in the middle of this 10-day walk, and we traveled together for 2 days (Fig. 40).



*Figure 38. Via Francigena, Siena to Acquapendente, Italy. Copyright studio-haverstraat.nl, 2017.*



*Figure 39. Via Francigena trail walking towards Radicofani, Italy, March 22, 2018.*



*Figure 40. Another Via Francigena pilgrim walking to Acquapendente, Italy, March 21, 2018.*

Reflecting on my *Via Francigena* experiences, I realized that the relationships I made with the surroundings, the Italian culture or other individuals were the highpoints of my journeys. With my pilgrim friend, the shopkeepers, the breathtaking scenery, and the over 200 travelers who participated in this study, I recognize how these relationships guided me to Victor Turner's "communitas" (1978) as I lost identity and freely and spontaneously encountered the "Other" while on my pilgrimages. I now understand why over half of the *Via Francigena* Study subjects stated that they were extremely likely to return to the *Via Francigena*.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Although this research was carefully prepared and reached its aim of understanding the modern-day *Via Francigena* traveler, there were some unavoidable limitations. First, because of relatively short time limit for a traveler's access to the on-line questionnaire, many who desired to participate in the study were in the middle of the *Via Francigena* journey and would not have access to a computer or a reliable internet connection until after the questionnaire deadline. This short time frame reduced the size of the study population. Second, I anticipated interfacing and recruiting study subjects while on the Acquapendente-to-Rome segment of the *Via Francigena*; however, because I walked the trail during the times of year of reduced activity on the trail, I never met another traveler during the day, and encountered very few *Via Francigena* travelers in the villages during the evenings. Third, employing social media services (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) as the principal method of recruitment limited participation to those *Via Francigena* travelers comfortable with using on-line communication forms. Finally, more individuals than anticipated requested one-on-one interviews. Many of those wishing to be interviewed lived abroad, which made the logistics of this type of qualitative research problematic.

## **Conclusion**

One thousand years ago, Archbishop Sigeric's journey ended, but the possibility of following his steps continues to captivate the interest of those desiring both an inner and outer adventure. The *Via Francigena* Study compared the secular and sacred motives for traveling the *Via Francigena*, and the quantitative and qualitative research methods indicated that secular reasons

proved to be the most compelling stimuli. However, all *Via Francigena* Study subjects—no matter their motives for attempting this journey—shared, in one way or another, a heartfelt desire to embark on a journey to the unfamiliar that carried them to a special time and a special place. This study demonstrates why individuals from all corners of the earth will continue to embark on meaningful journeys, such as the *Via Francigena*, to expand awareness of themselves and to engage with the unknown. To what degree could the world be a better place if eventually there will come a day when everyone decides to choose such a journey?



## Appendix A

### Online Questionnaire—English language

#### (Questionnaire was also available in French and Italian languages)

Thank you for your interest in participating in a questionnaire that will help determine why individuals travel the *Via Francigena*. The questionnaire takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Before beginning the questionnaire, please read the terms of consent

Consent form

Buon Cammino!

I have read the consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Yes

No

Indicate your experience traveling on the *Via Francigena*:

I have previously traveled the *Via Francigena*.

I am currently traveling the *Via Francigena*.

I plan to travel the *Via Francigena* within the next 24 months.

I have no plans to travel the *Via Francigena* within the next 24 months.

Prior to your most recent, current or future *Via Francigena* journey, have you traveled a pilgrimage route?

Yes

No





If YES, which pilgrimage route(s) did you travel? (*Select all that apply*)

- Austria: The Route of St. James
- England: Glastonbury Tor
- England: The Augustine Camino
- England: The Pilgrim's Way
- England, France, Switzerland, Italy: *Via Francigena*
- Greece: The Cyclades
- India: Bodh Gaya
- India: The Char Dahm
- Ireland: St. Patrick's Footsteps
- Italy: St. Francis of Assisi
- Japan: Kumano Kodo
- Mexico: Sanctuary of Atotonilco
- Middle East: The Abraham Path

- Norway: St. Olaf's Way
- Peru: The Huarungas
- Portugal: El Camino Portuguese
- Saudi Arabia: Mecca
- South Africa: Moffat Mission
- Spain: El Camino de Compostela
- Sri Lanka: Adam's Peak
- Tibet: Mount Kailash
- Turkey: St. Paul Trail
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How important were (or are) the following items in your decision to travel the *Via Francigena*?

Accessibility of information about the <i>Via Francigena</i>	
Adventure	
Becoming closer to god(s) or divine force(s)	
Bonding with friends/family	
Commemoration of a deceased person in your life	
Convenience along the route	
Desire for knowledge about history, culture or religion	
Engaging in a period of self-discipline or spiritual improvement	
Escaping one's usual surroundings	
Events (religions or cultural along the way)	
Exercise/physical challenge	
Fulfillment of vows or promise	
Gaining salvation for penitence and sins	
Meeting people with a common identity	

Opportunity to add meaning to your life	
Physical healing or miracle	
Religious obligation	
Scenery and landscape	

Thinking about your prior, current, or future *Via Francigena* journey, where did you begin or plan to begin your travel on the *Via Francigena*?

(Type answer in box) \_\_\_\_\_

What was, or will be, your final *Via Francigena* destination?

(Type answer in box) \_\_\_\_\_

How many separate times have you traveled any section of the *Via Francigena*?

(Choose from drop down menu)

▼ Have not traveled on the *Via Francigena* ... More than 10 times

If you traveled, or are currently traveling the *Via Francigena*, how would, or do, you define yourself during your travel?

Pilgrim or Tourist?



What is your definition of a pilgrim? (Type answer in box)

What is your definition of a tourist? (Type your answer in box)

How likely are you to return to travel any portion of the *Via Francigena*?

- Extremely likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Extremely unlikely
- Undecided

Did you, or will you, return home with a personal souvenir as a remembrance of your most recent *Via Francigena* journey?

- Yes, I obtained a souvenir.
- Yes, I plan to obtain a souvenir.
- No, I did not obtain a souvenir, nor do I plan to obtain a souvenir.



Describe your souvenir and your reason for choosing it.

- Souvenir \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason(s) for choosing the souvenir \_\_\_\_\_

How did you acquire your souvenir?

- Souvenir was a gift.
- Souvenir was obtained free of charge.
- I purchased a souvenir.

If you purchased a souvenir, what was the cost, or if you plan to purchase a souvenir, how much do you plan to spend?  
(Slide bar to indicate approximate souvenir price)



Euros	
I have not begun my journey	

Did you receive, or do you plan to receive, the *Via Francigena* Testimonium Peregrinationis ad Limina Petri (certificate of pilgrimage) in the Vatican City?



- Yes
- No
- Undecided (current or future travelers)

How did you, or do you, plan to commemorate the end of your *Via Francigena* travel? (Type answer in box) \_\_\_\_\_

Thinking about your most recent travel on the *Via Francigena*, how safe did you, or do you, feel along your journey? (Slide bar to indicate your concern for personal safety)

Concern for personal safety	
I have not begun my journey	

Thinking about your most recent *Via Francigena* travel, how well did the route, or does the route, meet your expectations?

Expectations	
I have not begun my journey	

In what way(s) did the *Via Francigena* not meet, or is not meeting, your expectations? (If you have not begun your journey, leave blank)

Thinking about your most recent *Via Francigena* travel, what is your favorite memory? (If you have not begun your journey, leave blank)

Thinking about your most recent *Via Francigena* travel, what one word describes your experience along the trail? (If you have not begun your journey, leave blank \_\_\_\_\_)

Please share any additional comments (positive or negative) about your *Via Francigena* journey.

---

23 What is your age?

- 18 - 24
- 25 - 29
- 30 - 34
- 35 - 39
- 40 - 44
- 45 - 49
- 50 - 54
- 55 - 59
- 60 - 64
- 65 - 69
- 70 - 74
- 75 - 79
- 80+

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Country of Residence (*type in country*)

---

Country of Origin (*type in country*)

---

What category best describes your employment or student status?

College or University Student

Employed full time

Employed part time

Homemaker (Housewife/stay-at-home-father)

Unemployed, looking for work

Unemployed, not looking for work

Retired

Other

Prefer not to answer

What is your marital status?

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married
- Prefer not to answer

What is your highest level of education?

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college or university
- Graduated university or college
- 2 year degree
- 4 year degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate
- Prefer not to answer

Do consider yourself religious?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

What religious faith do your practice?

- Buddhism
- Christianity: Catholic
- Christianity: Orthodox
- Christianity: Other
- Christianity: Protestant
- Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Shintoism
- None
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer Not To Answer

How often do you attend religious services?

Never

Once a year

Few times a year

Several times a year

Once a month

2-3 times a month

Every week

More than once a week

Prefer not to answer

Would you like to receive a copy of the results of this questionnaire?

Yes

No

To receive a copy of the final results, please provide an email address. (*Email address will not be associated with your answers and will not be shared*)

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Selected Comments from Study Subjects

#### Comparisons to *Camino de Santiago*

- Nice countryside, monuments. Welcoming people. Great food. Arrival in Rome, a unique place. Less spirituality than expected (as compared to the *Camino de Santiago*). Rather high budget needed, could be a problem.
- Few people walk this route, though it is its very beautiful. It is not at all like the path of Santiago.
- It is such a different trail than the Camino Frances in Spain. I guess I thought it would be similar. There we were able to go to mass every night and received special pilgrim blessings from each priest.
- The *Via Francigena* is a lovely walk and could be developed more fully like the Camino to Compostela. We walked the French Way (500 miles) in 2015. With more markers (in several places there were competing markers from different groups),
- For introvert, a solitary traveler, and me the *Via Francigena* was an obvious pilgrim's route. Unlike the way to Santiago de Compostela, the path is not at all well known, and consequently I enjoyed peace in the Italian countryside.
- Go with an open mind. Do not expect it to be along the same lines as the *Camino de Santiago*.
- The people we met along the trail were very welcoming, the countryside is beautiful, the depth of history is amazing for someone from North America, and the route is not as well developed as the Camino, so the collection of stamps was less interesting.
- 
- The *Via Francigena* now is what the Camino was like 30 years ago. Route marking and accommodation has improved a lot in 10 years, but the towns and villages are not as pilgrim savvy as on the Camino.
- Although my friends and I always had a place to stay, there are fewer choices than say on the *Camino de Santiago* in Spain. There is a greater need to have water and good with you at all times.
- The journey is a true pilgrimage unlike the Disneyworld tourist environment of the modern *Camino de Santiago*. However, the lack of pilgrims also means that services and resources.
- This was my second pilgrimage; I walked the Camino in 2014. The experience of the VF is different to that of the Camino - although similar in nature, it's a more rudimentary walk in terms of facilities for pilgrims, and a lot more solitary.
- The scenery was stunning. The people we met and the food we ate was amazing. However, this wasn't as much of a spiritual journey for me as was the *Camino de Santiago*. Not sure why exactly. Maybe the hype surrounding the trek?
- The great thing about the VF (especially compared with the *Camino de Santiago*) was the lack of other walkers, so that I could enjoy the silence, the countryside and the contact with the local people. I met five other pilgrims during the 3 weeks that I walked.
- I felt a true spiritual involvement, but in Spain, you breathe another atmosphere, the people you meet, and willing to do anything to help you in some way. In Italy, you do not find the same participation.

## Sense of Achievement, Reflection, Experience

- This was the trip where I achieved a 50-year goal to visit Italy and see Michelangelo's works.
- Developed deeper insights about myself
- The journey was difficult at times but also wondrous at times. It was life enhancing.
- I advise everyone to take the *Via Francigena* at least once in their life. A different person will arrive at the destination than the one who began. Different in spirit and soul.
- It was just an amazing experience.
- The experience was transformative in many ways... physically challenging and empowering emotionally soothing spiritually joyful.
- Because it is impossible to remember pain, I look back on it (2016) with unalloyed pleasure. I was always "looked after", quite miraculously, and this has helped me learn to trust.
- We walked in July -October 2015. On return back to New Zealand, I realized how half asleep we are living in our society. I felt truly awake on the V.F.
- I enjoyed the outer journey so much that two years later I flew back to Rome in order to walk it in reverse.
- It was peaceful and stressful at the same time. When I went the first time by myself, I did not use any electronic devices to find my way strictly a route map. It was stimulating in the sense that I was exploring a new country for me.
- The experience was much different than I anticipated and much more difficult.
- My last walk ended badly which is reflective of me and not the Via. My first Via was euphoric and was reflective of the whole experience. The Via essentially stays the same, we change as we walk.
- It is wonderful. It must be traveled at least once in life to experience the emotions you feel during the journey.
- For me, a non-believer but brought up as a Catholic and with family connections to Rome, this was an experience that I will never forget. I established remarkable relationships with my companions and learned about other cultures.
- I recommend the route to everyone. Going through the VF is a must-do life experience.
- The experience helps dealing with life.
- To be experienced at least once in a lifetime.
- A fantastic path, one for one's own spirit but with limited hospitality and poor signage.
- I am desperate to get back to Italy! I fell in love with it all over again and would love nothing more than to do the *Via Francigena* again.
- A spirit of Christian hospitality and friendliness pervades the path.
- Everyone, at some stage in their life, should walk a pilgrimage path.
- A wonderful journey inside and out. I met "Pellegrini," and developed close deep friendships, shared frugal meals, laughter, fatigue, fears, crying, joys and rebirths.... the Francigena marked my life in an indelible way.
- It was everything I had hoped for, both spiritually and culturally. It was the trip of a lifetime for me.
- The time of my life!
- A walk that allows you to start breathing again.
- I would also recommend to everyone at least a short journey on the path for all the emotions that you feel, both within yourself and with nature.
- Great calm, disconnected from a thousand things to do in contemporary life. I can focus on the present moment.
- My girlfriend and I walked the *Via Francigena* together. By the end of the walk, we had decided to get married.

- No negative thoughts. Just positive. Before starting, I was hoping to expand in these three areas: friendship with God, cultural understanding, understanding my physical limits. I expanded in all three.
- This is a tough road to travel, during which you will meet and be heartened by so many different people, all of whom will offer you amazing hospitality ... reminding you of the wonderful people who exist in the world!! It requires resilience and determination.
- I am so pleased to have taken this incredible journey through a beautiful stunning and remarkable country. The VF was so much more than I expected, and the memories of the journey will stay with me forever.
- I had a wonderful trip with my friend. I loved the daily walk and felt like it was meditating every day. I enjoyed the beauty of Tuscany and the friendly Italian people.

### **Route Conditions and Signage**

- Harder than expected.
- From 72 & 70 year olds, some days were very long for older walkers.
- Difficult to complain about a journey that I could have chosen to end at any time.
- The northern France section is not supported very well. I will restart from Lausanne next year.
- Turned away from a hotel that I had prepaid for because I was a pilgrim.
- The main concern was never whether I could walk the distances needed each day, but in France in particular, the question that tormented me, every single day, was "will I be able to find somewhere (safe) to sleep tonight"?
- Fortunately, I had a GPS; it would have been very hard to find my way without a navigator.
- The route does not have a direct way; it does not have a distinct signage. Too much asphalt.

- Accommodation usually good and at a pilgrim price. Not really a walker's path in most stages between Milan and Siena. The Italian's love their cars, which were usually, too near. The journey was almost ruined for me by the roads and traffic.
- Only times I felt unsafe was in relation to car traffic in sections on roads. So many drivers are fast and frequently on their phones. Substantial efforts have been made to get the route off busy, but some parts were still hazardous.
- Only 3 days, will go back. Need improvement on some parts. Some roads dicey because of traffic. Need more places to get water. Signage pretty good from Altopascio to San Gimignano. Distances too long, arranged a ride to shorten some.
- Some of the changes in the trail, meant to keep us off the main roads, were a bit isolated for a solo female traveler. I generally loved all of the country roads and beautiful scenery but a few of the trail cuts that went into heavily bushed areas, and this concerned me.
- For my own part, I can say I'm a dreamer, which means that I often forget to look for signposts. So now and then, I have got lost, never though getting scared or nervous.
- Positive: discover parts of my country I didn't know, meet nice people, made a great experience on my own. Negative: the sometimes very bad conditions of the route (no signals, people didn't know anything about the route).
- The southern half is filled with religious sanctuaries, relics and holy spots. Travelling through France was filled with cemeteries. Signage was not always the best. It was easier to find food and lodging on the southern half.
- The signs are not constant and the route not direct; some days we walked in circles. Not enough water fountains on the long stretches.
- Travelling alone with minimal knowledge of Italian during the off-season (Oct to Dec) made finding lodging difficult at times. (But, that's my

own fault, and my Italian did improve!) The signs in the Aosta Valley region were extremely frustrating.

- Pleased with the genteel French people. A better appreciation for Switzerland and the Swiss. Enjoyed interacting with locals in their language. Nasty run-in with bedbugs in Vetralla, Italy. Italy could be more beautiful without the garbage dumped along the way to Rome.
- I wanted to see the path through Italy, whatever it was like. Was hoping to see more of the roman roads. From Rome to Brindisi, there were far too many protective farm dogs that were acting aggressive. Almost no dogs had a leash, but most were fenced in.
- Signage needs improvements especially in the south branch from Rome to Brindisi.
- Walking the *Via Francigena* was a very positive experience. As for the physical journey, the route through Tuscany and Lazio was very well signed, and the trail conditions were mostly excellent. The pilgrim's accommodations were easy to find.
- I had a great journey. I stopped in Arras because I did not see another hiker and it rained and rained and the journey was no longer any fun.
- The route is locally very well supported but maybe not a coherent whole.
- Accommodation in rural France is difficult without speaking French.
- Well-marked and easy to follow in the half that I did - did not meet many other pilgrims at all.
- It was more "off the beaten track", sometimes literally, than expected. Also, we went in early June, which was WAY TOO HOT. Many in our group experienced various heat-related minor issues. We really enjoyed seeing the ancient antiquities and artifacts.
- It was so hard...we wild camped in France and camped wherever we could later on, we got lost so many times.
- Lack of signage in France was a challenge, and I got lost several times. Marvelous signage in Italy. Loved the signs in Switzerland, which gave the approximate length of time to the next place, and I managed to beat all of those times!
- Some parts were not well signposted or a too many roads.
- Very hot in July. Always a concern accommodation may be full, though it never happened.
- This was an amazing opportunity to cast aside normally life and simply focus on walking, eating and sleeping. It was very tough with bad weather and awful blisters in France. The Italian section is really well developed and potentially over used by tourists.
- Too many unnecessary hills. Too many dangerous roads. Very friendly people. Beautiful scenery.
- It was a very positive experience on very busy roads. It would be a good safety to protect the pilgrims from the cars (put in a pedestrian path out of the roadway, with guardrail).
- Positive: The nature, the cities, easy paths for the most part, changing landscapes. Negative: Overprotective dogs, dangerous paths to some cities (arrival to Rome, to Siena), the heat after 12pm.
- We traveled as a couple and a dog from Nuremberg to Rome. We wanted to do from Canterbury but the information on the French section said there was a lot of road. Since it was not ideal with a dog, we decided to leave from Germany.
- I was almost raped when I was between Viterbo and Vetralla, and I was very lucky to get out of it. The next day, during the next stage, while I was trying to recover from my emotions, a man attacked me near a waterfall where I was taking photos.
- Little traveled, poor signage, and not organized as one route. Beautiful memory that I will always carry with me.

- Too much trash left on the streets in Lazio.
- Sometimes I found way markings difficult and confusing. I had guidebook to St Bernard pass but couldn't get one to Rome. I didn't rely on GPS or google too much and therefore I had many human contacts asking for directions.
- A path, growing in popularity that must be managed by competent people so that they can keep the experience authentic for the "Pellegrini" and not for the institutions that want to earn money from it.
- Poor indication in France. Little frequented and therefore more livable. Many beautiful welcomes. A bit too expensive in Switzerland.
- The VF in Italy is 'incredibly well marked and offers the opportunity to see the beautiful Italy outside the main tourist destinations.

### History, Customs and Culture

- The best part was learning the history of Umbria, which I was not as educated about, particularly the Etruscans.
- People interviewing me about my book often ask why I would encourage others to walk this route. I think the route is particularly alluring for those who appreciate connecting with rich traditions of western civilization.
- There is so much history that I was overwhelmed, but in a good way. The down side was the heat. Walking in 90+ degree weather was very difficult.
- I did not like Lucca-Altopascio! I suffered from lack of water and shade. The marked kilometers do not correspond true and the signage in some points and need to be improved. Not enough water available.
- I had high expectations, but the *Via Francigena* proved to be very interesting, I thought, in terms of history, landscape and people I met.
- I believe that the *Via Francigena* I to be experienced at least once in life. The V.F. scenic

beauty, archaeological, cultural history, not least in food and wine, are not to be missed.

- The Tuscan stretch I crossed has beautiful landscapes rich in history and nature. It is well marked and easy to follow, suitable for most people. We often met interesting people.
- As a 72-year old woman, I felt safe and thoroughly enjoyed the variety, history, and beauty of this trail.
- Loved the historical points of interest in the medieval cities and the lush landscapes. The meals and wineries in Tuscany were awesome too.

### Scenery

- It is a trail of much beauty through golden gently hills. The views are splendid. Many small towns along the way, each with something special just awaiting discovery.
- I visited some beautiful places. I loved being able to visit places calmly and in silence.
- Bad vibes amongst WWI battlefields and graveyards in France Good vibes throughout Italy, except perhaps the rice fields. Mostly good food Inspiring ecclesiastical sites. Mostly solitary crossing the Alps. Maybe I should write a book!
- Walking is a pleasure; you do not worry about the weight on your shoulders and you can always go ahead to see all the beauty that is there after the next corner.
- A tougher route than the other two I have done but so worth it for the beautiful scenery and delicious food!
- Landscapes, nature, villages, all fantastic ... track not always clear.
- Absolutely loved the VF in Italy from Aosta to Rome. Beautiful scenery, wonderful cathedrals, friendly pilgrims, adequate accommodations (including some wonderful monastery stays), and just being in Italy...Roman roads, art in the churches, and fresh food.

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