

Italy by Bicycle



Don and Doug cycled around the north of Italy for over three weeks in September 2008. This is their illustrated journal.

We arrived at Rome airport at six o'clock on Tuesday 9th September, 2008. Got through immigration in no time and then spent twenty minutes waiting beside the wrong oversized luggage door for our bikes. Found the right one and there they were. Walked through customs, no check, and wheeled our bike bags to the stazione. There were queues for tickets, but my Italian speaking mate managed to buy two tickets to Rome from the automatic machine. Train took about forty minutes get to stazione centrale, Rome, where we stuffed around for an hour or so having coffee and buying our tickets to Florence. There are fast trains and slow trains to Florence. EuroStar and Intercity are fast, take just over an hour, but they don't carry bikes. The Regionale does, and takes three and a quarter hours, which had us arrive in Florence about lunchtime. Was quite a fast train anyway, by our standards. We and our bike bags had a compartment to ourselves. Very nice ticket checker. She wrote stuff on our tickets, which turned out to be the time and date. We were obviously supposed to validate our tickets, and rather than give us grief for missing this step she did it herself with no comment.



From Florence central stazione to the hotel Archi Rosso was a ten minute push of our bike bags. This is an excellent hotel. Not cheap: E80 per night for the two of us, but the room was nice, own bathroom, bike bags nicely stored, good breakfast, plus young and friendly staff.

Highlights in Florence: gelatis, climbing the dome of the Duomo (cathedral), the Uffizi, in particular the ceilings and the ceiling trusses. Lots of art around, too much to see and I saw more than I absorbed. But what did absorb me in particular was the obvious struggles circa thirteenth century artists had with perspective – which resulted finally in the breakthrough: I gather it was in Florence that the principles of perspective were discovered. But in terms of art the dominant experience was Michelangelo's David. Fair

dinkum, this is a sculpture like no other. It has a powerful emotional impact. You stand in front of it, you walk around it, and you don't want to leave it. I might even have had a tear in my eye. You don't have to be an expert to be knocked over by this lump of marble.

Florence is a graceful town and full of life. Lots of tourists and lots of things for tourists to see, but it still seemed a real place, with people living there and zapping around on scooters and talking on the pavements. Traffic was incredibly polite by Australian standards. Even though there was quite a lot of it on narrow streets often shared with pedestrians, I never saw any sign of impatience, but lots of concentration.



Had a pizza marguerita, very plain but really nice, made me think there's no need to add lots of ingredients.

Anyway, we stayed in Florence on Wednesday, and set off for Greve on Thursday morning. It was good to get on the bike, and fun to ride in the Florentine traffic. We had more fun than we intended, because Doug thought he could improve on the Lonely

Planet route out, which resulted in the odd circle around the one way street system. But we eventually made it into the Tuscan countryside. This was actually quite a hard ride, not because the ride itself was hard, but because the weather was hot and humid, and unlike the rides I'm used to the road is mostly exposed, without the big overhanging trees. I'd cough my way up the hills, and I suspect I didn't drink enough, but we survived. What this ride had that Aussie rides don't is the stone villages and the castles on the surrounding hilltops. The villages are like little canyons formed by interesting buildings up against both sides of the road, and they punctuate the ride very nicely.



We got to our B&B in Greve just after lunch, completely stuffed. This was because to get there we had to climb this particularly nasty slope. I measured it afterwards at eighteen percent. With panniers on, any steeper and I would have had to walk. Doug was OK with his lower gearing, but he was much slower of course. This B&B was called the Casa Nuova, and it is very lovely. Just a short walk from the centre of Greve, but it's a stone farmhouse where the business of the farm appears to be growing grapes and making wine. Beautiful garden, breakfast under the verandah. If you wanted to vege with books this would be the place to do it, or it would be a most congenial base for a

holiday.



Greve was a pleasant place – half a litre of the house red and great antipasto made a good late afternoon snack. And as it became later we just added Lassagne, and that was eating all done for the day.

The following morning we set off for Siena. A little later than we would have liked because the Casa Nuova breakfast, enjoyed under a leafy pergola overlooking the Tuscan hills, was not only lovely but a little late. Unlike the previous day, the ride out of Greve was through forest, with quite a lot of shade on the road. Very pleasant. Rode through a large-ish town called Radda, and next came to a very charming village called Castellini in Chianti. Note that Greve is “Greve in Chianti” also. Locked our bikes to a tree and wandered around this gorgeous hilltop town. Had an espresso each and shared a bruschetta pomodoro and a crustini misti. 'Pomodoro' is the usual tomatoes, and the other was bits of toasted Tuscan bread with a variety of Tuscan sauces or dips on. I bought an apron – not sure at the time whether it was mine or Fiona's. This was probably a silly idea, because now I'll be carrying it all over Italy. It turned out to be Terry's!

As we approached Siena it began to rain. And we got lost, maybe not covering much extra distance but we did go up the odd extra hill. The rain got heavier and heavier, and so did the traffic. And then it began to hail. This was quite big hail. I was glad I was wearing my helmet, and it stung when it hit my back. You could hear it smacking onto the road – as well as my helmet. This hail was not as big as golf balls, but maybe it was

the size of half golf balls. Man, gotta love these Tuscan summers!



We finally got to our hostel, which turned out to be a bit of a comedown after Florence and Greve. Stalag-luft 17 we called it. Guy on the desk, the Kommandant, had had a personality bypass, and the room was reminiscent of a cell. Double bunk, chair, wash basin, wardrobe. Breakfast is bread and jam, cordial and coffee or tea. First morning I accepted the offer of 'cappucino'. It was instant. Instant coffee!!

Anyhow, we were in the historic town of Siena, where we were scheduled to spend two nights, so we could relax and experience the place. We are in the process of doing that as I write. Mostly under umbrellas, which we purchased for E5 each, because the rain continues. Now it's Sunday morning, day we were due to leave, and more rain is forecast, so we're staying. Sad, because I've really done enough of the tourist walking about stuff. Not that it wasn't interesting, I hasten to add! Everything dates from the 13th and 14th century, including the town hall, which has a magnificent tower, which we climbed – for E7, and a museum, which we walked through. Very interesting, but also was a way of keeping dry. Visited the Duomo also. This is huge and excessive. Any opportunity to decorate and they doubled it. Huge numbers of artisans and artists must have been employed for a long time to build it. But to me Siena seemed a bit like a dried arrangement, not graceful and alive like Florence. The main square, the Piazza del Campo, is huge but quite severe. This is the place where they still have an annual horse race, where horses represent local families, competing for honour. Winner is the first horse to finish, with or without rider. Sounds brutal.

But I prefer riding my bike to walking round the square, I tell you!



Sunday 14th, 11pm. Journal update after wet day 2 in Siena. Just heard the news that Mum is back in North Park. Feels not quite right to be this far away. Still, considering it was wet and all we did was walk around looking at things, not a bad day. Followed a tourist brochure around a route which got us out of the main tourist walkways, and it is a fascinating place. Narrow, twisting, steep streets lined with veritable thickets of 3 and 4 storey buildings. Buildings all over the place. Buildings constructed against the back of the 13th century cathedral, for heaven's sake! Ran into Laura and Shaun, a couple from Canada, and had lunch with them. The heavens opened during lunch and we got wet under the restaurant's umbrellas.

Just turning in now, looking forward to some hilly cycling tomorrow, to Montalcino. Had an enjoyable meal at a popular restaurant just down the road from the prison camp. I started with minestrone, which was fine, but quite oily, and followed with an omelette, accompanied by a separate plate of spinach.



Monday 15th. Time to take our leave of Stalag-luft 17 and Siena. But first we had breakfast and made our way to the nearby service station to phone Mum in North Park. Handed our sheets in to the Kommandant, oiled our chains – mine had become rusty in two days in the Sienese rain – and set off into the morning peak. After a little bit of backtracking we managed to get on the road out, and just kept pedaling. Weather was cool and cloudy. Navigation was occasionally fraught, and our route was in one part not quite Lonely Planet. Had an issue with Doug's bike: the chain fell off the little ring, and then started jumping erratically from cog to cog. Upon inspection three links turned out to have been quite significantly bent. Ivanhoe Cycles reckon there's nothing you can do to fix this problem other than a new chain, but we managed to straighten it using a chain breaker and the little spanner I had to tighten my pannier rack – just lucky it was a useful size. Lesson here: take more than just the bare minimum of tools. The fix has held so far, albeit with Doug being very, very careful with his gear changes. Will be tested tomorrow, which has some significant climbing. When we got to Asciano, not a small town, we thought we'd have lunch, but everything was shut. Everything! There were a few people standing about, either on holiday or unemployed, who knows which? Oh,

and it started raining. Not a lot, a sort of light drizzle. And cooler. We stopped and had a slap up lunch consisting of an apple, 2 biscuits and a swig of apricot juice each. Continued without stopping other than for bum recovery till Montalcino. Final few kilometres were a steady climb to this hilltop town, about the same height as Kinglake. Found our hotel after a couple of 'scuzzi's' to ask directions. Bikes ensconced in a rear courtyard, and we had a shower, got dressed and found a place to have an espresso and a foccacia thing. Did I mention the rain had got heavier? This was Sieneese rain, and we employed our by now ragged Sieneese umbrellas. Not feeling like exploring this picturesque and touristy town in the bloody rain we returned to our room for a bit of a nap.



It's now post nap, and we set off in search of food. We settled on a Lonely Planet recommendation called Taverna il Grappolo Blu. It was full, and the only way we could get a table was by combining with a waiting couple. We had a bit of an expensive meal – Doug's main meal was wild boar and mine was rabbit shanks, plus we had a half bottle of Brunello, the best wine of the region. It's made from Sangiovese grapes, and I must say it tasted very similar to the Pizzini Sangiovese in my cellar. Our dining companions

were very satisfactory also. Australians from Elsternwick, John and Lynne Bye. About our age, and John was semi retired from the music business, a Python enthusiast and a habitual writer of letters to the age. He ran a record label and produced cds for such people as Tim Wilson and Michelle Nicolle.

Next morning we ate a breakfast of muesli and yoghurt in our room – having picked up the ingredients from the supermarket. I also made a couple of jam rolls to take on our day's ride, along with some bananas and some biscuits.

Weather for the ride was close to perfect, maybe a little cool later on. Stirring descent from Montalcino, though nothing too hair raising. Then a long undulating ride as we approached the village of Pienza. Pienza is another hilltop town, but because of the surrounding terrain it was in high up ahead of us for a long time, slowly getting closer. It was like riding in a postcard, or possibly one of those Japanese anime movies. Just beautiful.

We stopped for a coffee in the town, and then continued on towards Montepulciano. This was hilly but not hard riding, but I was beginning to feel weak. Haven't quite sorted the body fuel issue in this country. No gels available. Lonely Planet had said that the last 500 metres was 'brutal', and I was dreading it, but it was a false alarm. Montepulciano is another tourist jewel, not huge in area but must have lots of rooms. The buildings are cheek by jowl on narrow, steep and twisting streets. Had a nice meal, cheap and cheerful after last night's effort, and plenty of carbs: we each had pasta followed by a pizza, accompanied of course by a half litre of vino rosso between us. Hotel is the ..Borghetto, E105 (gulp). Not as nice as the one at Montalcino: had a view but below the window was the main road in, not the piazza of the Giardino. It did have a lock up garage for our bikes though.

Thursday 17th. Bought our breakfast at the local excuse for a supermarket. A small packet of muesli costs E3.50, and it jus about does for the two of us. At checkout their credit card machine wasn't working so we paid cash. Perfect weather, lovely downhill out of the town, then some easy riding till we got to the fiercest hill so far, then a picture postcard approach to Cortona, another hill town, but we didn't ride up to it: we cut the ride at the stazione, which was at the bottom of the hill, and took a train to Bologna. We had decided to skip the Umbria ride because after dropping a day in Siena we didn't want the lakes ride to end with a frantic rush to get back to Florence and Rome.

Taking a train to Bologna wasn't entirely straightforward: first we took a train from Camucia, which was the stazione below Cortona, to Florence. Then at Florence all was confusion. There were several information offices at the stazione which had notices outside saying 'No train information'! But Doug found a man in a green uniform who told us the secret: we had to get a train to Veraggia but get off at Prato, then take a train

to Bologna Centrale. We got to Bologna at about 6 pm, and then had an exciting time riding in the big city evening peak to our hotel, which was right in the centre but extremely hard to find. The Hotel Panorama was on the fourth floor, and they'd said we could take our bikes up to our room – very unusual. We managed to get them, upright, into the vintage lift. Then they wanted us to carry the bikes so the wheels didn't run on the floor! Most unfortunately one of Doug's bottles was dripping water, and there was this blonde dragon chattering away about the acqua, and fussing about with a rag wiping up Doug's drips.



Had a pasta and a pizza and shared a bottle of red, marched up and down the square a bit and went to bed.

Thursday 18th. After quite a decent breakfast provided by the hotel we did a bit of marching up and down the square in Bologna. A handsome and impressive city. We then made our way to the stazione, took a train to Modena, did a bit of walking about in Modena as we attempted to find out how to get to Maranello. Took the bus and visited Museo Ferrari. It was all an adventure, of course, but don't do it. If you have no interest in Ferraris of course there is no point, and if you have, there are not enough Ferraris in it, and there particularly are not enough old Ferraris, which are really the only ones we're interested in. This non bike travel is a time consuming and expensive, and I find it tiring. Look forward to getting on the bike. That won't be till the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow we have a busy day of train travel – to Sondrio, which is the start of our lakes ride. It will involve three different trains, with a move of bikes at each transfer. Doug's

getting good at booking hotels in Italian – just booked the Gembro in Sondrio, a lonely planet recommendation.

Friday 19th. Took our leave of the Hotel Panorama, after eating its breakfast. Blonde was still rabbiting on about aqua. Cycled in light rain up the Bologna stazione, to start our day of training. Bologna to Piacenza. Piacenza to Milano. Milano to Sondrio. Booked in to the Hotel Gembro, then went out and did some marching round the square. Picturesque little alpine town. Bought some supplies for the morrow at a little supermarket. Couldn't find a likely restaurant, so ended up buying a couple of pizzas and eating them in our hotel room. One of them was called a Bismark and had a runny egg in the middle, which soaked through the box and some ran onto my riding jacket. Cheapest evening meal so far, at E9.88.



Saturday 20th. Hotel person put on breakfast for us especially early: 8:45. Made our way out of town for the start of the day's ride, destination Lecco. The ride starts beside the river Adda, and continues beside Lake Como. The Lonely Planet instructions for the first part of the day were complicated and impossible to follow, and we reckon they were off beam. But the early part of the ride was enjoyable nonetheless. Mostly flat – not a plus for us – but good cycling tracks and roads, alps on both sides and the turquoise Adda beside us. Highlight was a coffee stop at Sirta. A tiny village at the foot

of a mountain, a coffee shop full of chattering local men, lots of good humour. Last part of the day, mostly along the shores of Lake Como, was a pain in the arse. Main reason was the traffic – lots of it. We were on main roads most of the time, often going through tunnels, and it was single file concentration all the time. Not that it felt dangerous: Italian drivers continued non-threatening. Second reason? The scenery was beautiful, but it was a cliché. We've all seen it in books. Not particularly Italian looking, could have been anywhere in Europe. But some people have more to complain about! Was a long day. Supposed to be 88km, but we did about 100 due to navigation issues.



Anyhow, got to Lecco, which was tourist busy like Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula. No beach, but lakeside and alps behind. Found the tourist office, who booked us in at the Hotel Moderno, a Lonely Planet recommendation. Nice hotel, own bathroom. After a shower and a bit of a nap we headed off, walked in an inadvertent circle round the town before settling on a restaurant tastefully decorated in red with gold stalactites and fairy lights on the roof. But the bruschetta and the pizza were both excellent, and the cheap bottle of wine got better by the glass.

Had to lube our chains as we left town. I dripped some lube on the footpath, but cleaned it up with a tissue! That's the sort of place it was: picture postcard all over..



Sunday 21st. More picture postcard, but a much more pleasant ride than the previous afternoon. The road from Lecco to Como is not a major route to anywhere else, plus we set off a little early. Narrow road, nearly all lakeside, some long tunnels, and going up and down a bit. There were some quite exciting-feeling bits where the road was a couple of hundred feet directly above the lake. We did have one major issue though: Doug needed a leak, and this part of Italy is a bit Swiss: there's nowhere to do it. We eventually found a spot, but had to wait till people walked past, and I made Doug put my dull blue jacket on over his bright yellow one.

There were hordes of cyclists on this road, all in lycra and on fancy road bikes. We followed a few, which was good fun. And as the morning progressed there were ever bigger swarms of big motorbikes, mostly hammering along, dicing with each other and the traffic. Didn't really add to our enjoyment. We arrived at Como at around 11, and had a nice salad and a glass of Sicilian red at a lakeside ristorante. Life felt really tough!



But.. we decided that enough was enough: we wouldn't continue the lakes ride. I would have liked to try the odd alp, but we decided the weather wasn't dependable enough. Alps in rain or fog not so much fun. So we decided on more Tuscany – meaning more trains. We caught a train out of Como at 1454, and got into Pisa at 2012. We had no accommodation booked, but we cycled in light drizzle (@#\$%^&!!!) to a Lonely Planet hotel recommendation, which took us in!

Riding about in Italy on trains, with bicycle, is a little bit demanding. Not all trains allow bicycles. Those that do have a bicycle carriage or compartment at either the back or the front of the train. First issue is, which is it? There is no rule, and since trains don't usually wait in the station for very long, you need to quickly get to whichever end of the train has the bicycle compartment. So you wait at about the middle, and when the train comes in, if the compartment is visible at the front you cycle along the platform to the front, otherwise to the back. The compartments themselves vary. Usually there is a row of hooks at eye level for the front wheel, and a steel guide to insert the rear wheel into. Some of these work well, but others didn't. One of them scratched my rear wheel.

Damn!! Railway staff are nearly always helpful and nice often female. On our long trip from Como to Pisa, one of the conductors warned us that the next station was Pisa, and suggested that we make our way to the bicycle end, where her colleague would help us – which we and she did.

Sunday 22nd.

Hotel in Pisa, the Royal Victoria, was excellent, and served a good breakfast. After checking out we rode up to the square which hosts the duomo and the leaning tower. Stunning, spectacular, most impactful historical artifact for me since the David in Florence. It's not just the leaning tower. The cathedral is magnificent. Ornate, but not the over the top decoration of the Siena duomo. It was crammed with tourists – they came in waves – but you could see why. Definitely a unique place.



Then we moseyed along to the stazione, trained it to Certaldo in two stages, the first one to Empoli. Got to Certaldo just in time for elevenses: a sandwich a glass of red and an espresso in a pleasant sidewalk cafe. Life continues tough. We cycled up to the historical centre of Certaldo. Very steep in parts. Steepest part I made without getting out of the

saddle, but only just. We then cycled to San Gimignano, then on to Volterra. It was great to be back in Tuscany. What a beautiful place. The weather was perfect, the hills went up and down – or perhaps that was just us – and the vistas were wonderful. But this was one hard half day. The pull up to Volterra was very engaging, and it just kept going. By the time we got to Volterra, at about 5:30 we were about ready for a lie down. But.. Volterra was packed. Hordes and hordes of tourists. We thought we'd never find a bed. But Doug walked to the tourist office – it was so crowded even walking with bike was difficult – and discovered that the tourists were all Italians from the vicinity who were there for the Volterra market, lots of stalls selling sweets, deli type foods, toys and clothes. Got an excellent hotel, the Albergo Nazionale. Had a shower, felt refreshed, and set off amongst the throng. We bought a bag of chip like things out of curiosity. We think they were made of corn, but they tasted of aniseed. Not a success. We also bought a bag of orange flavoured biscuit things as ride food, and they turned out to be delicious: you'd pay a lot for them in Carlton.



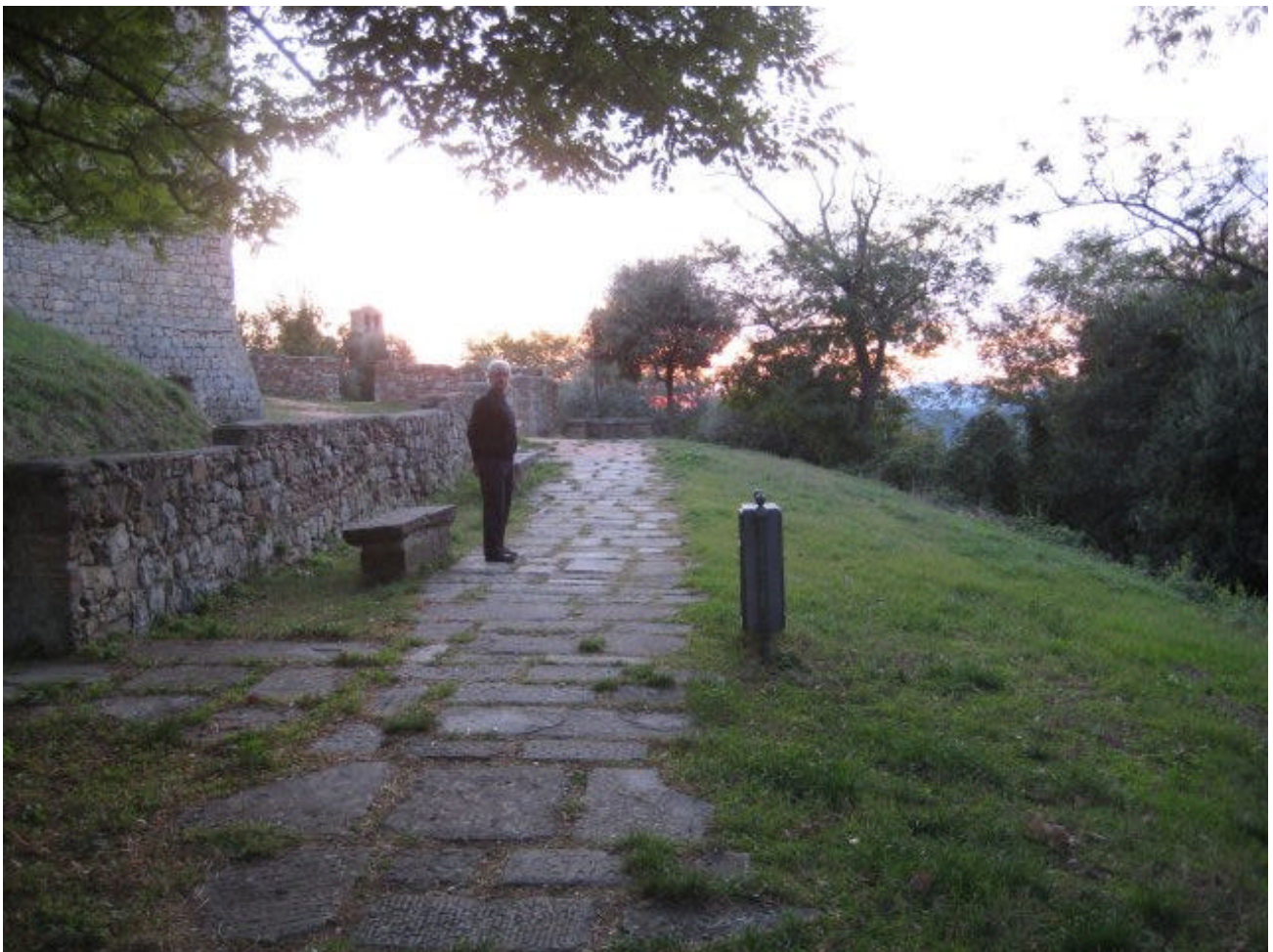
Tuesday 23rd.

Had a nice buffet at the hotel, including pocketing some ride food. Set off in the direction of Massa Marittima. Man, this was the toughest day. After the downhill out of Volterra there was this long, long climb, with periodic very steep bits. Day was perfect though. Country was a bit different from previous Tuscan. More woods, scene looked less patchwork and more Victorian. Had quite a few stops to rest our bottoms. Lunch stop was at a rare roadside table, consisted of toast, ham and cheese souvenired from the

buffet breakfast, plus fruit. Bit of a snack, really. Nearby tree supplied apples, which were edible but completely tasteless.

Truth be told, by this stage we were both a bit sick of all bicycling. It wasn't just the tender bottoms, it was psychological. Just felt like we'd had enough! But of course we pressed on. Destination Massa Marittima, a town we new nothing about, except that the Lonely Planet said there weren't many hotels, they were expensive and we might be unlucky.

But.. we weren't. Tourist office wasn't open, but we oozled up to the first Lonely Planet recommendation and scored. E95 per night: second most expensive hotel we'd stayed in, after Montepulciano, but this was excellent. A garage for the bikes, a room with a fabulous view of a town which turned out to be a striking, charming and enjoyable place to explore. Ended the exploring day with a walk along a grassy path along the side of this hill town, at sunset. Just perfect.



Wednesday 24th.

Doug's birthday. We decided this place was so nice it was the ideal place for a lay day, so no riding. Wandered off to the supermarket to buy some edibles to eat in the room and for ride food, found a public phone and did some phoning, checking up on Mum. Lots of visual highlights, as can be seen in the photographic record. But what was special was a musical museum run by a wonderful Italian gentleman whose baby it was. He had restored all the harpsichords, organs and pianos himself, and could demonstrate all of them with love and enthusiasm. He was also humorous about Italian politics. Doug had been to this museum on the previous afternoon, while I was having a bit of a lie down, and when we visited together this day he refused to charge Doug again. Most memorable to me were the Mozart and Beethoven era pianos, and his playing of them. Must write and thank him when we get home, just to let him know what a thrill he'd given us.



Finished off the day with supermarket antipasto in our room, followed by a café pizza and half a litre of red – served by a moonlighting thug. Oh, and followed by a bit of marching up and down the square, with a gelati.



Thursday 25th.

Today we rode a Lonely Planet circuit, about 70 kms. It was a beautiful day's riding. Perfect weather, lovely country, and for the most part no traffic. It also included the most extreme climb, not only of this trip, but of my entire experience. It was signposted as 4.4kms of 20% gradient. I don't know whether 20% was supposed to be the average or the maximum, but it required maximum effort from me. One extra wafer of gradient and I would have been off. Doug handled it fine with his lower gearing, and actually got to the top before I did. That was because I had to take a rest every kilometre or so, to suck in some oxygen. Just as well it was a circuit, because that meant we weren't carrying a full load: just the one pannier containing lunch and maps.

We had lunch in a little square at the top of a little town called Roccatederighi. Beautiful little place with a 10th century church and not a tourist in sight. After that, on our way back to Massa Marittima, we had an espresso at Gabellino.



Another good thing about Massa Marittima, by the way, is that for a hill town it's not very high. We like that!

On our last night at Massa Marittima we had a pizza at Liugis, followed by a gelati on the way back to the hotel. Hard life.

Friday 26th

Rode back to Siena. Beautiful forested country for the most part, the usual long climb followed by quite a lot of flattish main road – but enjoyable anyway. Rode right back to the Piazza del Campo, had a gelati, then continued on to the stazione, where we hopped a train to Firenze (Florence to you)

That evening we went to Doug's favourite restaurant and had Florentine steak. It's like a really big, really thick, rare t-bone. Meat tastes quite sweet. We saw this steak at the market the following day for E22.

Saturday 27th.

A day of marching up and down the square. Highlight was the Medici tomb. Impressive was the workmanship on the marble floors and wall decorations, some sculptures by the inimitable Michaelangelo, and the complexity of the restoration activities that have been completed and were still underway.

In the evening we had a pizza at a trattoria just down the street from our hotel. Best pizzas of our trip. Beautiful thin crusts, flavoursome and a warm environment. If you're in Florence, go to Trattoria Nevrone at 95 Via Faenza.

Before the meal we packed up our bicycles. Took us over two hours. That was after we had spent an hour or so repairing the wooden frame supports which had split on the way over.

Sunday 28th

Did a last walk up and down the Florence square – I bought a belt for me and a handbag for Fiona – before lugging our bagged bicycles to the stazione for the trip to Rome.

The Hotel Rubino was only 50m or so from Roma's Stazione Centrale – convenient, if not in a particularly salubrious part of town. Hotel was on the 3rd floor, but there was a lift, albeit it could only handle one bagged bicycle at a time. But then there was another narrow and steep staircase to our room. The hotel person was super keen in assisting us get them up – I suspect he's had guests who've buggered off when they saw these stairs.

Anyhow, after checking in we wandered a few kilometres till we got to the coliseum, and the adjacent Palatine something or other. They have an awful lot of Roman ruins in this town, strangely enough. As Doug observed, seen one Roman ruin, seen 'em all. But this was but the entree. The main course would be on the morrow.

Monday 29th

A black day. Top deck of a double decker bus. Got off near Piazza Navone, where there was a Bernini elephant, and a nearby church which had an excellent Michaelangelo statue of the Madonna holding the crucified person. Walked to the Trevi fountain. Back on the bus to the Vatican. Went into St Peters. Walked a long way to the Vatican museum to see the Sistine chapel. Walked a very much longer way in an incredible crush of people inside the museum to get to the SC, after paying these guys E14 each. Sounds good? Not to me. The very worst of walking up and down the square. Weary and

worn at the end of it. Odd man out in a cycling holiday.

