Crankers d’Italia
A Cycling Vacation
May 10 – 23, 2007

by Robert A. Beezer
Crankers d’Italia
A Cycling Vacation
May 10 – 23, 2007

by Robert A. Beezer
Preface

In late fall of 2006, Western Washington had a few days of abnormally heavy rain. The overworked streams and rivers on the slopes of Mt. Rainer washed out roads and entire campgrounds. Ed Josberger’s research colleague was visiting from Michigan in mid-December, so Ed had invited a few of us over for dinner. An abnormally strong wind storm was predicted for that evening. In previous summers, a group of us had ridden our private version of RAMROD, known to us as CRAMROD — Crankers Ride Around Mt. Rainier in One Day. But it was clear from the road damage that the 2007 edition of CRAMROD might be doomed.

The wind storm came as predicted, and Ed’s house was one of the first to lose power. Sitting around in the dimly lit house, sipping wine, Ken suggested we ride Mt. Ventoux, the Giant of Provence in southern France, and frequently a critical stage of the Tour de France, as an alternative to CRAMROD. In jest, or in seriousness, we couldn’t be sure.

Some emails ensued and Rick ran with the idea. The classic climbs of the Tour de France could well still be snowbound in southern France in May, so the trip you’ll read about now is the result.

Rick is a lawyer in downtown Tacoma — a litigator to be precise, with several high-profile verdicts to his credit.

Ken is a professor of chemistry at the University of Puget Sound — more precisely the University Professor of Natural Sciences. Oldest in the group at 59.

David is an anesthesiologist. Also resident art collector, wine enthusiast, encyclopedic historian — more precisely, a Renaissance Man.

Rob is a professor of mathematics at the University of Puget Sound, and your scribe.

Tony is the Chef at Auburn Regional Medical Center (aka “the chief”). Born in the Philippines, he’s a marathon runner and weightlifter and formerly spent 19 years as the Chef of the Tacoma Club. Youngest in the group at 44 years.

Robert A. Beezer
Gig Harbor, Washington
June, 2007
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gig Harbor to Dallas (Thursday, May 10, 2007)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas to Bologna, Belvedere Bike Hotel (Friday, May 11, 2007)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Bikes to Mondiano (Saturday, May 12, 2007)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foglia River Valley Road Tour (Sunday, May 13, 2007)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of San Marino (Monday, May 14, 2007)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer to Tuscany (Tuesday, May 15, 2007)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chianti Ridge Ride (May 16, 2007)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine Country (May 17, 2007)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Towns of Tuscany (May 18, 2007)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giro d’Italia (May 19, 2007)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrivederci David and Tony (May 20, 2007)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Ride (Monday, May 21, 2007)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firenze e Bologna (May 22, 2007)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrivedercci Italia (May 23, 2007)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

1. Rick, David at Sea-Tac Airport ........................................... 2
2. Ken, Tony at Sea-Tac Airport ........................................... 2
3. Marina ................................................................. 4
4. Nadia and Christina ................................................... 4
5. Hotel Belvedere Patio .................................................. 4
6. Ken, David, Rick, Tony on the Adriatic Coast ..................... 5
7. Bar Mario, Riccione ..................................................... 5
8. Bar, Mondiano ........................................................... 7
9. Arches, Mondiano ....................................................... 7
10. Coffee Stop, Mondiano Loggia ........................................ 7
11. Tony, Mondiano .......................................................... 8
12. Ken, Mondiano ........................................................... 8
13. Liam, Mondiano .......................................................... 8
14. Rob, Mondiano ............................................................ 8
15. Rick, Tony, Hotel Belvedere ........................................... 9
16. Tavullia Castle ........................................................... 9
17. Dinner Menu .............................................................. 11
18. Viewpoint above Cattolica ............................................ 13
19. Glen and Daniel .......................................................... 13
20. Taveletto ................................................................. 14
21. Countryside ............................................................... 14
22. Coffee Stop, Montecchio ............................................... 14
23. Breakfast, Hotel Belvedere .......................................... 16
24. Breakfast, Hotel Belvedere .......................................... 16
25. Early Morning Coffee, Riccione ..................................... 17
26. Jonathan ................................................................. 17
27. Maya and Sarah ........................................................ 17
28. Coffee Stop, San Marino .............................................. 18
29. Lunch, Hotel Belvedere Patio ....................................... 18
30. Tony and Bike ........................................................... 20
31. Ken and Bike ............................................................ 20
32. David and Bike ........................................................ 20
33. Rob and Bike ........................................................... 20
34. Riding ................................................................. 21
35. Riding ................................................................. 21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Wheatfield</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Ken and Rob</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Loggia, Mondiano</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Rick, Shaving</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rick, Clean-Shaven</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Daniel and Rick</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Trafico Van, Riccione</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Pasta Factory, Greve</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Pasta Factory, Greve</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Ken, Greve Cantina</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Tony, Greve Cantina</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Rob, Greve Cantina</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>David, Greve Cantina</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Via Roma, Greve</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>The Arch, Greve</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Via dell'Arco, Greve</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Alimentari, San Casciano</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Lunch, San Casciano</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>David and Rob, Chianti</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Tony, Rick and Ken, Chianti</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Climbing out of Greve</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>David, Rick and Ken, Giotto's Tower</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Coffee Stop, San Giovanni d'Asso</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Bikes, Montelcino</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Lunch, Montelcino</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Siena at Sunset</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Panini Shop, Volterra</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Lunch, Archaeological Park, Volterra</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Ken, San Gimignano</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Tony, San Gimignano</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>David and Ken, San Gimignano</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Tony, Albergo Il Latini</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Dinner, Ristorante Il Latini</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Roadside Poppies, Chianti</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Pork Sandwiches, Greve</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Rob, David and Ken, Dicomano</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Giro d'Italia, Dicomano</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Basketball Court, Sugame Winery</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Sugame Winery</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Wine Cellar, Sugame Winery</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Rick, Ken, Lunch, Lecchi</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Lunch Plates, Lecchi</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Vineyard, Chianti</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Van, Radda in Chianti</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Street Corner, Greve</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
81. Ramuzzi Bike Shop, Greve ........................................... 49
82. Coffee Stop, San Polo ................................................. 49
83. Apartment, Pasta Factory ........................................... 50
84. Pasta Factory ........................................................ 50
85. Piazza Majorre, Bologna ............................................. 53
86. Rick, Bologna ......................................................... 53
87. Ken, Bologna ......................................................... 53
88. Rob, Bologna ......................................................... 53
Gig Harbor to Dallas

Thursday, May 10, 2007

We gathered at Rob’s at 4:30 AM, Rick’s wife Theresa driving with all our luggage, and Rob driving the van with four of the bicycle boxes packed inside the cabin, which had been emptied of all the seats. Ken’s wife, Mary, rode along in the van so as to return it to Gig Harbor. We met Tony and his gear at the airport, since he lives close by.

Check-in was straightforward and there were no excess charges for our bicycles. So in the end, we did not need to employ Ken Fielding’s advice on navigating the check-in agents. We carried our bikes around to the “oversize baggage” window and we were done with them until Bologna.

Our three-hour flight to Dallas was uneventful. Our three-hour layover in Dallas began with a visit to a wine shop very near our gate, where David began educating us about wine, with a primer on three of the wines of Texas. We imagined our Mexican lunch to be the last non-Italian meal for a while. With the check for lunch, we also decided on how to handle communal expenses. Rick and Rob have some up-front deposits, and will continue to cover these expenses. David will pay for meals while we are a fivesome. In the end we’ll have a grand settling-up.

Dallas to Bologna, Belvedere Bike Hotel

Friday, May 11, 2007

The next leg of our journey took us overnight from Dallas to London, so we all tried to get some rest on the nine-hour flight. As may be typical, we were late departing Dallas, and arrived at Gatwick airport forty minutes late. With only about an hour scheduled for changing planes, it dawned on us only on touchdown that it was going to be a very close connection. Only a few minutes later, the cabin crew announced that Bologna passengers were to meet the gate agent at the end of the jetway. I took it as a good sign that they were aware of us.

A young couple, and the five of us, eventually congregated with a British Airways gate agent, and off we went at a fast trot. It was a good thing, as the young Pakistani woman brought us to the head of the lines in the security screenings, and knew the circuitous route to our gate. We had trouble keeping up with her, despite the high heels that must have made it difficult for her to jog faster than us. Up and down long escalators, and jogging down moving sidewalks, constantly encouraged to keep moving, we reached our gate in plenty of time. However, the gate agents were not as optimistic about our luggage and bicycles getting onto the same flight.

It seemed a short flight from London, over France, and into Bologna. It was interesting to contrast the vivid green, irregular fields of England, the more straight-sided fields of France, and the hilly and mountainous topography of northern Italy. We promptly filed the paperwork with British Airways in Bologna for our delayed luggage, and as Tony was the last to leave (a shortage of pens prevented us from filling forms simultaneously), two of our suitcases arrived with high-priority tags. But no bicycles.
1. Rick, David at Sea-Tac Airport

2. Ken, Tony at Sea-Tac Airport
We were met by a taxi service arranged by the hotel. There was plenty of room for bikes in back of the van, which was now unnecessary. About an hour and a half drive on the autostrada brought us past Rimini to Riccione. The Belvedere Bike Hotel is about two blocks off the beach, with a small pool (with swim-up bar) right in front, along with an adjacent patio for outdoor seating. Nadia and Danielle warmly greeted Rick, recalling his phone calls arranging the details of our stay. We sat outside, in the warm sun, drinking fizzy water and cappucinos. Soon riders began to arrive from the day's rides, and we had discussions with a few of them, in addition to one of the guides. Shortly, the post-ride buffet was served, so we had an excellent Italian lunch of salads, cold meats, cheeses and pasta.

Rob and Ken are sharing a room in the adjacent Hotel Bristol for the first night, and David has a single room in the Hotel Bristol, since we arrived on the last day of most guests' Saturday-to-Saturday stay. Rick was encouraged by the staff to take the one room in the main hotel since he made the arrangements, and is bunking with Tony.

Once situated we walked down to the beach and turned southward to walk along the water's edge on the Adriatic. Workers, armed with bulldozers or rakes, are grooming the beaches in preparation for the summer season, which seemed imminent. Preparations are being made for shaded areas on the beach, within the confines of each hotel's allotted section of beachfront. We watched a rookie experimenting with a sea kite, and David used the occasion to explain the mechanics and dangers of the sport. At the southern end of our walk, we stopped at Bar Mario for a beer, and then walked the main waterfront street back to the hotel to prepare for dinner.

Riccione is very clearly a seaside resort town, a second city to the larger Rimini just to the north on the Adriatic Coast. As the weather warms, the hotels will be very busy with Italian families on vacation at the shore. However, a group of about fifteen hotels have hit on cycling vacations to fill the beds during the spring and fall. This is amply demonstrated by noting that the bicycle storage room has wallpaper appropriate for a toddler's bedroom, and must be some sort of daycare facility in the summer. There was just one such family in the hotel while we were there, and everybody else was a cyclist. It is hard to tell just where the Hotel Belvedere fit into this group, but they seemed to appeal to the more serious cyclists.

Shortly before dinner we learned that our bicycles and luggage would not arrive today. And on Sunday there is no flight from London to Bologna, leaving Saturday as the only reasonable option for them to arrive. This bad news cast a pall over the remainder of the evening.

Dinner was at 7:30 PM. We arrived a few minutes past the start and the group of 40 or so Austrians had devastated the buffet. Replenishments came eventually, and we had a great meal, featuring lots of seafood dishes. Saturday is the changeover day for most of the guests, so the Austrians gave speeches and awards after dinner, including a rendition of "Happy Birthday" in English.

The guides and mechanics were finished with dinner about 9:00 PM and set about getting us into rental bikes. Eventually pedals and frame sizes were sorted out, and by about 11:00 PM we all had satisfactory bikes for the next day, ensuring that we could ride.
6. Ken, David, Rick, Tony on the Adriatic Coast

7. Bar Mario, Riccione
Most of us had a good night’s sleep and any thoughts of jet lag are behind us. Breakfast featured strong coffee, eggs, meats, cheese, yogurt, cereal and pastries. We learned last night that the hotel does not provide helmets (they aren’t worn here much), so we intended to head to the bicycle shop first thing before the 9:45 AM ride departure. My email to Pat about our bikes had reached Mary, and she was ready to pursue the whereabouts of our bikes from a distance.

Only two tours are offered on a changeover day, an “easy” and a “hard.” The hard featured over 6,000 feet of climbing, so we opted for the easy at 35 miles and just 3,000 feet of climbing. Liam, an affable 21 year old from the English Isle of Wight would be our guide. Last night he was our mechanic. Those needing helmets set out for the shop, and the group would pick us up on their way out of town.

We located the shop with the tourist map and the entire patronage of the tabacchi shop simultaneously pointing to the south-west of the small business district. Helmets, bottles and gloves were purchased, and off we went. Our group was the five of us, plus a couple from Ireland, though they claimed Scotland as home and she had been born in Port Orchard, Washington.

The route was steadily upwards, but almost always at a gentle grade. I never felt the need to leave my big chainring, though it meant some severe cross-chaining on my rental DeRosa King. The views and panoramas steadily improved, and were punctuated by screaming descents. Early on, a wedding procession passed us by, every car honking madly and continuously in celebration. Some of the later descents were extremely technical, especially on unfamiliar bikes. And often the road was so narrow that an ascending car (or farm equipment, or school bus) left very little room for the descending cyclist.

A half-hour into the ride, Liam received a call on his cell phone from Marina, the owner of the hotel. Our bikes were at the hotel! Some how, this bit of welcome news improved the ride. Seems the hotel has a contact at British Airways in London. She came to ride at the Belvedere but could not get anyone to come with her. So the hotel arranged a riding companion for her and now the two are romantically involved. So she feels a debt to the hotel and is always willing to help. Lucky for us.

The day’s coffee stop was in Mondiano. At the top of the hill, a round plaza was enclosed seven-eighths way around by a tall structure featuring a wooden roof over outdoor seating, known as a “loggia” (something akin to a porch or balcony, though more substantial). While the structure contained city hall, it also had a bar where we got espresso, water and pastries. Radiating from the plaza was a typically Italian cobbled street, narrow and hemmed in by residences on each side. At the far end was the church. The Turkish toilet in the bar elicited much comment. This being the day’s easy tour, there was no rush to depart, and the leisurely stop felt like the culmination of all our planning and preparation.

The route finished with a few kilometers on the main road, which, while not pleasant, was no worse than some of the roads at home, both in terms of disrepair and traffic. We returned just in time for the 2:30 PM buffet lunch. Cold meats, pasta salads, cheeses and a beer made for a great conclusion to our first ride.
8. Bar, Mondiano

9. Arches, Mondiano

10. Coffee Stop, Mondiano Loggia
Rental Bikes to Mondiano

15. Rick, Tony, Hotel Belvedere

16. Tavullia Castle
Ken and Tony set out after lunch for another ride, doing about 24 miles round-trip to the to a castle in Tavullia, due south of Riccione. Rob, Ken and David relocated from the Hotel Bristol next door to our permanent quarters in the Belvedere Hotel, especially now that the rest of our luggage had arrived. While we are a couple blocks off the beach, our rooms have a partial view of the Adriatic Ocean. Eventually everyone re-assembled their bicycles in the courtyard of Marina’s home across the street. None seemed to suffer any damage and came back together without too much fiddling.

Dinner was a bit more relaxed without the Austrians, though we knew to dig in to the buffet early before all the new arrivals had finished their welcome drinks at the evening reception. More meat and less seafood, and a wonderful chocolate tart for dessert. David ventured the table wine, and it was not a success, and the guides were encouraged to finish the carafe.

After dinner, we set off in the direction of the pedestrian mall a short walk to the north. Everybody was out on a Saturday night — young couples, families, teenagers, older couples for the evening passeggiatta. Walking or dining in open-air pizzerias. The promised Internet cafe lacked what I needed, while David never did locate the wine bar. The road parallel to the coast, and about three blocks off the shore, was basically closed to traffic, and at one location a wide pedestrian mall intersected, running several blocks in each direction. We must have walked for at least a mile, crossing the river just upstream from its mouth. With a fleet of very small boats tied up along the stone banks of the river, and several consecutive bridges in view, some tried jokingly to compare the scene to Venice. Once the pattern of pizzeria, photo shop, bar, t-shirt shop, jewelry shop repeated itself for the hundredth time, we turned around for home and some more sleep.

---

**Foglia River Valley Road Tour**

Sunday, May 13, 2007

I woke about an hour before I needed to, still adjusting to the time difference. But I got up and sat by the pool in the early morning quiet and wrote about the day before.

Breakfast was not dissimilar to the day before, except perhaps that the scrambled eggs were even yellower. Four choices of tours: panorama, easy, road tour, racing tour. Liam had responded to the question politely the day before and let us know we might find the racing tour too much. And the road tour description seemed just fine.

We collected our bikes and met at the hotel’s cabanas at #58 on the beach. The route left town along the coast, eventually heading upwards at Cattolica and following a high coastal road southward with great views of the ocean. After a long descent into Pesaro, we regrouped for the run through town. At a stoplight, our guide Daniel, pulled up to a large piece of farm equipment, at three times his height. Daniel motioned our intent to go forward, and the driver pulled left quickly and then back right again. With the steering pivoting in the midsection of the machine, the maneuver caused the entire machine to shudder violently in place. A strong laugh rose up from the group.

We followed the Foglia River up a long valley, in a double paceline at about 20 mph on a red road, finally making a coffee stop at a “cozy” bar in Montecchio. Shortly thereafter, we turned uphill for a 3 mile climb at 5 or 6 percent with sections at 8, 9, 10 percent. Given
SATURDAY 12TH MAY 2007

APPETIZERS
Salad buffet
Steamed vegetables
Plate of cold meat
Spoon of tomato gel and mozzarella
Cold meat with cheese
Plate of cheese
Pepper filled with anchovies and tuna fish
Fennel and carrots with mustard sauce
Smoked tuna fish
Smoked salmon with peach
Crayfish with rocket and lemon
Sliced apple with goat’s cheese
Greek salad

FIRST COURSE
Ravioli al ragout
Risotto alla marinara
Pasta with courgettes
Soup of carrots

SECOND COURSE
Battered sole alla romagnola
Escalope alla valdostana
Grilled lamb

SIDE DISHES
Cabbage alla calabrese
Potato alla greca

SWEETS
Strawberry cavarese
After eight
Puff pastry with chantilly
Chocolate tracts
the hour, it was quite warm. The top of the climb was Taveleto, which we recognized as the town we road through yesterday. Today we stopped for water from the tap along the defensive wall of the ancient municipal building. The structure reminded me of the municipal building in Sienna at about half the grandeur.

Yesterday, we arrived by a more gradual route, and today we bypassed the screaming descent for a different route home that was again more gradual. Once back to the main roads into town, we formed into a group again.

Back into town, and as we neared the complicated intersection near the bike shop, the light just around a curve turned red. Only a few riders in front signaled the abrupt stop, and Rick found himself having to make a hard sudden stop in the back of the group. He went up and over the bars, slowly, and simultaneously the sudden tenseness caused him to cramp up in his leg. When I looked back to see what had happened, Rick was in the gutter, curled up (clutching the cramp which was his greatest concern). Despite appearances, Rick only got minor cuts on his knee and elbow and rotated his seat askew. As we reformed and prepared to ride again, two ambulances arrived and we waved them off.

The guide's timing is uncanny - we arrived back just a few minutes before lunch. We ended up with 60 miles and 3500 feet for the day. David inspected Rick's road rash and made sure it was clean, that it saw some antibiotic, and dressed the knee. David set out for some windsurfing, located the club very far up the beach, and contracted for a 4 PM lesson the next day. Tony headed for the beach, fell asleep on the sand, and never did get into the water. Rick slept off the day's excitement with a short nap.

Rob and Ken cleaned up and watched the final half-hour of the second stage of the Giro d'Italia. Robbie McEwen bested Paulo Bettini in the final sprint with Alessandro Petacchi giving up in the last 10 meters. It was interesting to see McEwen (an Australian) struggle to provide a few words of Italian for the interview.

I wandered out to run an errand before dinner, and walking back with my shopping bag a local stopped to ask me for directions. She realized her error before I could say "No Italiano" and she was quite embarrassed to have been fooled like that.

Dinner began with an Italian version of a quesadilla that was more like a soft taco, cooked on the patio. Then we moved inside for the remainder of dinner in the more usual style. Our table has now moved out of the far corner, and we are closer to the food than the guides.

Tomorrow the plan is to visit a whole 'nother country.

Republic of San Marino

'Slang and I woke a bit early and wandered out for a coffee with the locals. Very civilized.

"Easy tour" today, the main attraction was the destination (and climb) — the Republic of San Marino, a city-state to this day, whose history I should learn more about. (I learned later that it is the fifth smallest country in the world.) Our guide Glen assuaged our egos by telling us that this was the hardest of the easy tours. We began with 14 miles of flats, in a group of about 13 riders. Two new arrivals are Sarah (18 years old) and Maya (15 years
18. Viewpoint above Cattolica

19. Glen and Daniel
20. Taveleto

21. Countryside

22. Coffee Stop, Montecchio
old), traveling with their parents. They are both national-level Nordic skiers from Alaska, and so are very fit.

We entered the country with a variety of large trucks, headed for warehouses at the base of the rock. No customs, no passport control, but a few semi-observant polizia along the roadside in the first half-mile or so. We passed the national Olympic training center immediately within the border.

The road kicked up in the first of three steps. Quite quickly, the Alaskan girls headed off, even though for one it was only her second road ride ever. After a break in the shade at a gas station, we headed up the second step which had the steepest sections. Another two miles and we regrouped for the last time at a junction. Then we headed down a dip, and around the other side of the rock to switchback our way up the remainder. The final sections included businesses and parking lots for tourists, as the road got narrower and finally became a cobbled tourist’s pathway past shops and up to the castle.

We headed off to a restaurant with a view and outdoor seating just below the main castle. Despite appearances it was not the coffee stop the guide had suggested from below. So we dined in two groups, with ‘Slang in the other, and the Alaska girls with us. Coffee, ice cream and pandini (sp) and water. The views were incredible and it was a great break. Postcards with San Marino stamps were procured and mailed with a local postmark.

The descent was as expected. Twisty and fast, with decent roads. On the flats back below the rock we had a tailwind, so our guide, Glen, allowed some pacelines to form up at 24 or 25 miles per hour. Back at home at 2:25 PM— you could set your watch by it. 40 miles, 2500 feet.

This afternoon’s errand was picking up the rental van in Rimini. Eventually we found the bus stop, and rode for about a half-hour along the coast through 40 stops, disembarking near the center of town. We found the Europcar office directly and made the arrangements for the van. Rick masterfully drove the coastal road back home. His mantra was, “Drive like an old lady.”

The van is a grey Renault “Trafico.” Fortunately, the rear seat folds flat and rolls forward, so we can stack our bicycle boxes in back. Harrington’s rack looks like it will hold two bikes on front, so we’ll throw three in back on top of the boxes, and stuff luggage into the nooks and crannies. Oughta work.

We’ll ride here tomorrow with a guide, then pack up and head for Tuscany.

---

**Transfer to Tuscany**

**Tuesday, May 15, 2007**

‘Slang and I repeated our morning coffee at the bar down the street, where she remembered our drinks. After breakfast, we packed up our belongings, and transferred them into a single room where we could shower on our return.

We opted for the easy tour again today, given that we had a busy afternoon planned and could ill-afford a late return, or exhaustion. Yesterday’s road tour had been especially punishing, and dropped one or two riders. So with the word out on the road tour, we had thirty riders in our group. Glen was leading, and Liam transferred off the road tour and onto the easy tour. Our destination was Mondiano, the picturesque coffee stop from
23. Breakfast, Hotel Belvedere

24. Breakfast, Hotel Belvedere
28. Coffee Stop, San Marino

29. Lunch, Hotel Belvedere Patio
the first day. We took a different route, but with no less climbing. We caught up with the race tour, having a quick banana in the car park outside the piazza. The Swiss mockingly cheered a couple of their female riders grinding their way up the street to the high point. We entered to the central square, and again lingered for a good long time at the loggia.

With this many people in the group, the stops to reform were more frequent. I would stop to take a picture of the scenic vistas, then work my back to the front, so I could take another short unsanctioned break. It also gave me some time to chat with the guides in the back about techniques they used to keep the group together. The route home was the most enjoyable of the approaches to Riccione we’ve had. Jonathan had his legs back, and the Alaska girls were again in our group. The weather was very warm. 36 miles, 3000 feet.

Atypically, we got back an hour before lunch. Which was in our favor, since we had to pack the van and drive to Tuscany. Everyone took turns showering, while Rick emulated our guides and shaved his head. This was the source of much hilarity at lunch, with a direct comparison to Daniel’s scalp. With a single gold earring, Rick would be indistinguishable from Marco Pantani, the deceased Italian Tour de France star. It was even more comical when Nadia decided to improve on the shave job and touched up Rick’s head with a disposable razor, rinsed frequently in his water glass at the lunch table.

Before and after lunch we tackled the packing of the van, along with interested assistance from Jonathan. Wheels came off all five bikes, most of which went into David and Tony’s empty cases. The five boxes (three being the broken down plastic boxes from Crate-works) were stacked in the rear compartment. Three frames went on top of this stack, layered with foam padding that had been used in David’s soft-sided case. Two bikes went on the front of the car, supported by Jim Harrington’s minimalist bike rack we had brought along in Rick’s luggage. Tennis balls, bungee cords and used shop rags kept the rack secure and the bike frames protected. Luggage went into the interstitial spaces, with ‘Slang’s suitcase riding up front, buckled into the middle seat, and daypacks stuffed under seats. A smaller van, or an additional rider might have been an impossible situation.

We said our goodbyes to Marina, the guides, the office and wait staff, tipping them for their warm hospitality and assistance. Our bike rentals from the first day ended up being a present from Marina. Jonathan saw us off, helping out with a group photo. We made it about five blocks, blew a turn, and realized David had left his wallet and Rick had left something else. Back to the hotel and we set off once again. We all wondered if our self-designed Tuscan segment would be as wonderful as the fully-supported stay at the bike hotel.

We left Riccione flawlessly on the second attempt, and gained the autostrada south, parallel to the coast, towards Fano. Rick was driving, with Rob as co-pilot, and three in the back seat. At Fano, we left the autostrada and turned inland on a red road, up over the 600 mile long mountainous spine of Italy that is the Apennine Mountains. After about two hours, we stopped at a bar for coffees and a break.

We rounded Gubbio, then Perugia, only missing one turn, which was corrected via a couple of white roads without any backtracking. We tried to imagine these two scenic backroads on bicycles. As we Rounded Lago Trasimeno, we caught up on history and culture with a reading from Rick Steves’ Italy book on Saints Francis and Catherine. At issue were the peregrinations of St. Francis and the locations of the relics of St. Catherine. After hearing of the simple and troubled lives of these two saints, David remarked, “With
34. Riding

35. Riding

36. Wheatfield
37. Ken and Rob

38. Loggia, Mondiano
39. Rick, Shaving

40. Rick, Clean-Shaven

41. Daniel and Rick
Given the confluence of many roads around Sienna as we approached from the east, we tried to cut the corner to the north, taking minor roads towards the heart of the Chianti region. We blew the first turn off the main road, but with a few miles of backtracking then managed to find our way to Greve as darkness fell. We had been hustling to make the 9:00 PM arrival time when the reception closed.

We parked in the main square of Greve, to set out on foot for Via Roma, and Via dell Arco, which the map showed as very close. Via Roma was a narrow one-way cobbled street exiting the widest part of the square, to the north. A few storefronts down, a narrow opening in the wall provided an archway, followed by a bridge and a short narrow street. At the end we located the Antico Pastificio Ulisse Mariotti, the renovated pasta factory that now holds “self-catering” rooms and apartments. We located Monica, our hostess, and learned that we had been expected at 8:00 PM, reception closed at 9:00 AM in the morning, so there had been some miscommunication when I’d had the Belvedere call ahead for us.

Monica showed us our rooms, and how to remove the metal barriers in the road to allow a greater turning radius for the van to enter through the arch. Tony and David have a small room with two beds and a bathroom to share, since they will be leaving early. Rob, Ken and Rick are sharing a larger apartment, with a kitchen and a patio area that we will all five use. Ken is on the fold-out sofa, Rick is in a double bed in the loft, while Rob has a small cot also in the loft. It seemed like this arrangement would work well for us, and with no daily maid service, or much else in the way of services, the price is very reasonable.

Monica told us that the Cantina a bit further down Via Roma served dinner late, and we could pay for a dinner with two plates, and a simple breakfast the next morning for 17 euros each. We walked down to the Cantina, which was still quite busy at 10 PM, were seated and inquired about the meal deal. Turns out they do not start serving breakfast until 10 AM, which would be too late to accommodate our cycling plans, and most of the plates ran 7 or 8 euros. So the deal was not that much of a deal, and we just ordered dinner straightaway. Everybody had a salad, followed by a pizza, which made for an extremely filling meal. Afterward we were brought open bottles of grappa, “holy water” and limoncello to complement our desserts. The waiters and waitresses began to close up for the evening, and helped themselves to large plates of pasta at an adjacent table. When we finally left, we may have been the last patrons to leave. Despite what seemed a chilly reception on our arrival, the owner and waiter seemed to warm up to us as the evening progressed.

**Chianti Ridge Ride**

May 16, 2007

We awoke about the usual time (7 AM) and wandered out for sustenance. Of course, in Italia this is futile at breakfast time. Stopped into the first bar inside of the piazza and ordered coffee, pastries and small meat sandwiches. It was a pleasant enough place for breakfast, but not economical. Tony’s Fanta (aka “bibette grande”) was several euros, which was even more shocking when translated into dollars and ounces.

Got general directions from the waitress and located the Coop (supermarket) on the main road bypass just a block or two off the main piazza. Breakfast items, water, fruit,
42. Trafico Van, Riccione

43. Pasta Factory, Greve

44. Pasta Factory, Greve
26 May 16, 2007

45. Ken, Greve Cantina

46. Tony, Greve Cantina

47. Rob, Greve Cantina

48. David, Greve Cantina
snacks and scotch (Lagavulin!) were procured. Our only faux pas was forgetting to weigh and label our produce. The checker suggested we do it, we all missed the cue, and she ran off to do it for us. The first in line accepted my apology with a smile, the second was not amused. Slang was smitten with the one euro deposit on the shopping cart.

Next stop — the bike shop. We found it directly, just a few hundred meters further distant from the center of town. They also work on motorcycles and scooters, and were just putting out the display models in the parking lot. After some discussion, a xeroxed map was produced, and we had two new suggestions for rides, and confirmation on a third we had been contemplating over breakfast. David was smitten with a bright blue Colnago frameset, with exquisite chrome lugs on the steerer tube. He went so far as to investigate pricing, and options for forks, until the mechanic told him it had already been purchased for another customer and was waiting to be built-up.

Back to the Pasta Factory and we unloaded bicycles and wheels and prepared for the day's ride. Our route is south out of Greve on the main road for the climb up to Panzano. From there we will cut back northwards on a ridge road, heading towards Firenze on the backroads. A return to Greve will complete a skinny loop with a north-south major axis. We departed about 11 AM.

The climb out of Greve was at a steady 5% with adequate room and generally careful motor traffic. We gained several hundred feet in a few miles. We cruised to the historical center of Panzano, visiting the relatively new church at the highest point of the town. Leaving Panzano, we headed north on a very small road with little traffic. The road crept upwards in sections, with a few dips downwards, eventually cresting at 450 meters on a named Poggio that I cannot remember. Somewhere on the ridge, we hit a 16% grade, and 13% was not uncommon. Downwards we flew into Mercatale, where our search for lunch was not sufficiently successful to keep us from pressing on to the next town. All along our route, David noted famous Chianti wine producers, many of which he had drunk.

In San Casciano, we found several narrow streets in the center of town and settled on a pasticceria/alimenteria/forno, in hopes of getting Rick some pasta. It turned out to be more of a delicatessen, but Rick and Ken arranged five large ham, salami, cheese, and tomato sandwiches. Along with waters and Cokes, Tony procured some oranges and apples, and David added some fresh olives. The tomatoes may been the star of the show, but everything was delicious and satisfying, and the cost may have snuck in beneath that of breakfast. At 2 PM the shops were all closing, but we moved over one storefront to have quick coffees at the bar.

A delightful descent out of San Casciano dropped us into the valley and within twenty kilometers of Firenze. Here we headed back south to Greve with 500 feet of elevation to gain back. Traffic was again back with us but even an overtaking truck, confronted with a wide-turning truck entering the road ahead, followed quickly by an oncoming ambulance on a call, did not engender any panic. Soon we passed an older gentleman on a road bike, wearing a full kit, and he latched onto the back of our train. We held a steady 18–20 mph for six or seven miles, picking up yet another rider towards the end. At a turn within two kilometers of home, Rick dropped a bottle and our new companions deserted us rather than waiting. Shortly, we saw the older man riding back the other way with a very young rider. The 500 feet of elevation came back almost imperceptibly. 32 miles, 2600 feet. More elevation gained than on the San Marino climb.
49. Via Roma, Greve

50. The Arch, Greve

51. Via dell’Arco, Greve
52. Alimentari, San Casciano

53. Lunch, San Casciano
54. David and Rob, Chianti

55. Tony, Rick and Ken, Chianti
56. Climbing out of Greve

57. David, Rick and Tony, Giotto’s Tower
We arranged to take part in a dinner hosted at the hotel, which will be served at 8 PM. With five spare hours Rick arranged a drive to San Gimignano, which evolved into a drive to Florence since it is closer and time is tight. Rob chose to stay back to do errands and get caught up on the journal. A huge thunderstorm rolled in, dropping heavy rain and a bit of hail onto Greve. Tourists were pinned under the arcades of the two long sides of Greve's square with water pouring off the awnings of the cafes and the porches of the hotels. It is the only spot of inclement weather we have seen yet.

Rick et. al. did Florence in four hours, driving up to the walls of the old city and walking into the heart of the historic district, and even summitting Giotto's Tower. They were allowed into the Duomo on the condition that they were really intent on attending the mass that was being conducted at that time. Tony wasn't buying it.

Dinner was advertised as local Tuscan cuisine, catered in the hotel. Since our accommodations are “self-catering,” it is not really a hotel and there are no real facilities for preparing food. So everything was brought in, and warmed in microwaves. The setting (the common rooms in the bottom of the building next to us, where we store our bikes and their boxes) was nice enough, but the lukewarm food and paper plates were not consonant with the price we paid. Our group showed up at exactly the last minute, so we were split across the two tables. Tony, David and Rick found their dinner companions good company, while Rob (and maybe Ken) had the opposite experience. They dined with a British family, he an insufferably pompous Brit who began the conversation by lambasting US politics. She was Swedish by birth, and only perked up when her husband took a break from US-bashing to say something derogatory about Sweden. A woman I assumed to be his mother seemed mute, but did force a simple, sweet perfunctory smile at a few points in the evening. The college-age son seemed to alternate between being embarrassed by his father, and trying to initiate a more relaxed conversation of his own with us.

Excusing ourselves at the earliest opportunity, and breaking open the scotch back in the room, was the only salvation of the evening.

Wine Country
May 17, 2007

With our fixin’s from the Coop, Rick made us huge omelettes with ham, cheese, garlic, and asparagus, which we ate outside our room at the outdoor tables. Then we loaded up the bikes and headed southward toward Sienna on the back roads. The Sienna-Firenze autostrada is not far to our west, but there is no direct route west out of Greve that hooks up with an interchange. Rather than trying to avoid Sienna, we pointed right at it, staying just outside the city walls on the eastern edge, guessing our way out of one roundabout after the other. Eventually we picked up the main road south from Sienna towards Rome. Our destination was Montalcino, one of the great wine towns of Tuscany.

We planned to do a loop out of the Tuscany cycling tour book Rick had bought several months ago, but rather than start (and finish) high in Montalcino, we hit the midpoint of the book’s loop, which was closer, and lower. So lunch in Montalcino would be our midpoint respite. We parked along the road near the Abbey at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. Within five miles, we passed through the small town of San Giovanni d’Asso. David called
for a coffee stop, Rob concurred, and we set a record for minimum distance to the first stop. Recaffeinated, we turned southward through fairly flat terrain. Eventually, the road kicked up for the climb up to Montalcino.

On the climb upwards, it seemed that every 200 feet David would see another winery and exclaim, “That is a very famous wine!” Eventually we reached the outskirts of town, and regrouped to quickly find a restaurant Rick Steves recommended. Bikes locked all together outside, we took up one of the nine tables. The waitress made sure we really knew this was a “ristorante” and not a bar or sandwich shop. Yes, we told her, we were ready for a full meal. David ordered a wine he knew, produced by a female vintner in the vicinity. The owner of the restaurant approved. I had boar stew, and Ken had the same as a sauce over noodles. Sweet wine, biscotti and the local “osso di morte” cookie (“bones of the dead”) made for a nice dessert. I enjoyed my meal, though reviews were mixed within the group.

We checked out the nearby fortress, which completed the significant sites for the town. I followed the guidebook’s description for getting out of town (which would be the starting point of the book’s tour) and ended up at the fortified gate at the north end, where a dirt road plummeted straight down the hillside. Something was clearly not right, and an entering motorist confirmed that the road was “strada bianchi” for some distance down the hill. Eventually my confusion became clear, the guidebook had one entering town on the previous day’s tour and so assumed you knew your way back out, and I was reading about how to exit the next town of the tour down the road (Buonconvento). Meanwhile, Rick Steves map matched many of the descriptions in the guidebook, mistakenly confirming my insistence on the guidebook’s description. With perhaps fifteen minutes delay, we got back on course and a great descent down off the hill, and a nice flattish ride back to the van. 31 miles, 2900 feet.

We intended to bag Sienna on our ride home. Our first probe from the south took us too far east of the tourist center of town. We retreated, slid west and probed again, this time locating a very modern parking garage signed as being located close to Il Campo, the main plaza (and site of Sienna’s famous intramural horse races). The 2.05 meter height clearance gave us pause, but the van left several inches of extra clearance to spare. We walked quickly to the amazing Cathedral, decided to pay the entrance fee, and discovered it was closing. So we walked past the Baptistry and down to the main plaza and Civic Building. Then we wandered the streets for a while along with the other tourists. David found a new wine shop and spent considerable time examining their stock, eventually settling on a bottle to purchase for one of our meals. Eventually on our way out we paused for coffee on a fairly quiet side street.

Leaving Sienna, we gained the autostrada along the western side of the city and headed north towards Firenze as dusk fell. Eventually, an exit was signed for Greve, but as suspected, we would need to backtrack 10 kilometers or so to actually reach home. By the time we returned it was getting late, and we ventured the Moro restaurant, on the main road that skirts around Greve’s piazza. They hesitated, but then decided to take us in for a relaxed evening meal.
58. Coffee Stop, San Giovanni d’Asso

59. Bikes, Montalcino
60. Lunch, Montelcino

61. Siena at Sunset
We got organized early and headed out for a drive to the west. Our destination was the Il Latini Albergo and Ristorante, where Pat, the boys and I had spent ten days in 2004 as a base for our Tuscany explorations. We came into town from an unfamiliar direction, but by following signs to San Gimignano, I was able to get on the right road leading out of town.

I was delighted to find Chiara Latini behind the counter at the desk, and she quickly remembered me. She had received my email inquiries from a few months back, but only after significant delay, and said she was embarrassed to reply. I introduced her to the crew, and she invited us into the restaurant for cappuccinos, water and biscotti. I renewed acquaintances with two of the waiters I remembered from our trip, and Chiara told me Giovanni would be around in the evening. We made a reservation for dinner, and arrangements for post-ride showers.

Our route led out of town, quickly onto a steep section at the base of a 1200 foot climb up to Gambassi Terme and through town while still moving upwards. From the ridge, we could see the skyline of Volterra across a valley. A nice descent carried us into the valley, back to about our original elevation, and then to the base of the 8 kilometer ascent to Volterra. This 1200 foot climb might have been our longest sustained upward run.

We entered Volterra at the northern end, and quickly located the Roman amphitheater and the 2400-year-old Etruscan arch. Making our way to the main plaza (very Sienese), and the fort and park at the southern end of the town, involved considerable difficulty on the bikes, with Tony taking a very slow speed tumble at a pedestrian intersection atop a short steep section.

While trying to walk our way up a particularly steep section of cobbles, we ducked into a small panini shop to get the first part of lunch. We found the business district at the southern end of town, and acquired accompaniments for the rest of lunch, which we ate on the grass in the Archaeological Park, shadowed by the old fortress, which is now a working prison. Rick purchased some textiles, which had been woven by the woman he bought them from.

We backtracked another 12 miles, first descending, then climbing back up to the ridge from Gambassi. At a junction we turned towards San Gimignano, which at this point would be at a lower elevation. Eventually we descended some more, and the towers of San Gimignano came into view below us, and finally we rose slightly to the southern gate of San Gimignano.

Ken bought a scarf along the narrow main road, while David explored another wine bar. We converged on the main plaza where it was time for a coffee, plus we added some gelato. We paid dearly for the goodies, given the location at the center of the tourist universe.

Out the north end of town, the 13 kilometers of curves through the vineyards were particularly enjoyable after all the climbing. Rob had driven this road several times before, and particularly enjoyed the chance to ride it. 52 miles, 4800 feet. Half the elevation of RAMROD, in a third of the distance.

Back at Il Latini, we were given a room to shower in, and we prepared for dinner, including time spent on the balcony recovering from the ride.
62. Panini Shop, Volterra

63. Lunch, Archaeological Park, Volterra
64. Ken, San Gimignano

65. Tony, San Gimignano

66. David and Ken, San Gimignano
Hill Towns of Tuscany

67. Tony, Albergo Il Latini

68. Dinner, Ristorante Il Latini
Dinner was the usual Il Latini affair. We were early at 7:30 PM, but by 9 PM, Chiara was squeezing in extra tables. We began with short glasses of panseco, while David examined the wine selection and chatted with another wine connoisseur, this one from Switzerland. We had antipasti, followed by pasta, with most choosing the wonderful pici noodles with sausage. Main courses followed, with Tony having a sea bass, that was skillfully deboned tableside. David told the waiter he had the hands of a surgeon, to complement his already skillful job as a waiter.

Dessert followed, with complimentary vin santo with biscotti, and then open bottles of limoncello and grappa. We said our goodbyes to Chiara and she presented us each with a bottle of the house wine to take home with us.

Giovanni had remained in Firenze at his new restaurant, so perhaps we will have to track him down there in the next few days. It was a long ride home in the dark on the twisty roads, but with the help of his iPod, Rick got us home quickly and safely.

---

**Giro d’Italia**

May 19, 2007

I slept later than the early cycling crowd and ran some errands around town. Visited the bike shop once it opened, where they told us that the best information on the Giro d’Italia could be found in the Gazetta dello Sport, the pink-paged sporting daily that sponsors the race. Made a jesting inquiry about the blue Colnago frame with the chromed lugs. Then located a news agent next to the Coop, bought a copy of the sporting paper and managed to locate the needed info about the race route and likely timing.

Rick, David and Tony arose early for a short ride, first driving to Panzano, then doing a short loop through Radda and Castelettina. The roads were fairly empty, and one of the descents featured new pavement and tight turns perfect for bicycles. They even managed to pass a large tourist bus, since it had pulled over to allow one tourist to deposit her breakfast on the side of the road. When Rick returned to the car, he discovered he didn’t have the car keys. He thought backwards and remembered they were in his saddlebag, and discovered it was wide open. He’d been into the bag a little ways back to get out his camera for a picture of the poppies in the shoulder. He cycled back about a half-mile, and there they were on the shoulder of the road. Disaster averted.

The group got back to Greve early, since it was a short ride. David went into the bike shop and made a serious offer to buy the Colnago frame, even offering a premium to sneak it away from the customer who had ordered it. No luck.

David and Tony discovered their room had been cleaned up, and they were expected to move out. Turned out that the room reservations had been made on the assumption that they would be traveling to Milan tonight for tomorrow’s airplane flight. Instead they have a flight out of Firenze early in the morning. Eventually we understood how we made the mistake, and Monica arranged for us to have a small cot moved into the bigger room, along with the double bed already there.

We headed into the square for lunch, procuring pork sandwiches from a trailer, where the entire roasted pig lay on the counter, and was being sliced directly onto the bread. Fruit and cheese from two other vendors rounded out the meal.
69. Roadside Poppies, Chianti

70. Pork Sandwiches, Greve
71. Rob, David and Ken, Dicomano

72. Giro d'Italia, Dicomano
73. Basketball Court, Sugame Winery

74. Sugame Winery

75. Wine Cellar, Sugame Winery
Back into the car, and we headed east out of town onto another strada bianchi we had not traveled. Up and over in about 20 km and we turned north along the Arno River, towards Firenze. We were aiming to intercept the Giro d’Italia, which was running even further east, out of Arezzo. We passed the junction on the far end of the day’s only hill, and three km later we found the 35 km marker, which may have been a sprint location, on the edge of the town of Dicomano. A little further, and we found the park in the center of town.

Uncertain of when the roads were closed, we were about two hours early. But the spectacle, and the slowly amassing crowds were worth the wait. We bought the 5 euro t-shirts from the vans going through town, discovering later that the “official” t-shirts were 10 euros. As expected the race eventually roared through town, preceded by the publicity caravan. The speeds were high, as presumably the race was just beginning to heat up. The lead group was rather large, and teams seemed to be all together. A couple smaller groups followed a minute or two behind, then a few stragglers. The more distant the competitor, the greater the applause.

On the car ride back we crossed over the pass atop the ridge that separates the Arno River from the valley with Greve, and finally satisfied David’s desire to visit a winery. Sugame Winery is a very old location for a vineyard (buildings dating to the 11th century) and its current caretaker is a young couple. He is Italian, raised in South Africa and he runs the winery. She is English and runs the agriturismo, a sort of state-subsidized bed-and-breakfast that encourages small agricultural enterprises to stay in business. We sampled the wine, toured the cellars and received an extensive education from the owner while enjoying the vista down the hillside from the porch of his house. His specialty is organically grown wine, which is an easy sell some places (Scandinavia), but a tough sell elsewhere (restaurants in Italy). We learned that the Giro d’Italia had passed over this pass in recent years, with Alessandro Pettachi (the sprinter) crashing on this very stretch of road.

Dinner was back at the Cantina from the first evening, where we were greeted as old friends. We again mostly did salads followed by pizza, though Rob had a calzone that was as big as a 12 pound red snapper, though it was mostly air. A crowd of very young Italian boys and girls were at the table next to us, acting like teenagers do everywhere.

David and Tony were in the main apartment, both on the small cots like Rob’s. David’s would collapse every time he sat on it, dropping to the floor in the middle, while the ends flew up. This was the source of great hilarity, until David put a gash into his foot on the third attempt. He then settled for just placing the thin mattress on the floor.

---

Arrivederci David and Tony

May 20, 2007

David and Tony woke up at 4:30 AM for the trip to the airport for their flight home. Rick drove, sans co-pilot, making very few errors on the trip.

Once Rick was back, the morning was spent getting coffee, running errands, and checking out the Giro d’Verrazano. This is a bicycle race for what appeared to be high school aged boys, maybe the age limit was 17. They amassed in the piazza from about 8 AM, complete with coaches, team cars and the necessary race officials and equipment. At 10
AM they rolled out of the square, and turned north on the main road for a few circuits on local roads, totaling 57 kilometers.

Rick designed a route down near where he, David and Tony had ridden the morning before by consulting the detailed Chianti wine tour map. About 11 AM we drove south and east about 20 kilometers to park in Radda in Chianti. We descended about two miles, and discovered our first turn would take us onto a dirt road. Both roads generally ran south, so we stayed on the paved one. Back up out of the valley we ran on a ridge briefly then descended some into Lecchi. We’d been on the lookout for lunch, so at 6 miles into the ride, we stopped at Ristorante Marlborghetto, which looked inviting. We sat outside in the shade next to a group of Italian mountain bikers, with one couple sporting his-and-hers matching kits from Lucca. Salads and pasta made for a very nice meal, with courteous English-speaking service.

Out of lunch, we descended again. Eventually we reached a long stretch of road that looked flat, though in truth descended just slightly. Rousslang lead at 25 mph, while Rob and Rick just freewedled along happily in his wind shadow. The far point of our route was Castlenuovo Bergendendra, the town we had driven by when first driving to Greve. We shortcut the main road around town, and cut directly through the middle of the old part of town. Out the other side, we turned north, continuing to climb and drop, in a sequence I can’t remember, though some of the descents were very nice, and the roads all day had very little traffic. We passed through fields, vineyards and forests alternately the whole ride. The finish involved about 500 feet of climbing back up to Radda in Chianti. 38 miles, 3200 feet.

Loading up the car, Rick discovered accidentally that he could leave the front wheel on his bike and still fit it cross-wise in back, and so it was for the other two bikes as well. Probably never would have worked with five bikes, though. We wandered through Radda in Chianti, eventually settling on a bar next to the central hotel, where we had coffee, beer, water and chips.

Back home, we swam and showered, then headed back to Moro again for dinner. Shortly into our dinner, an American couple near us finished their dinner and approached us saying in a friendly way, saying hat they “didn’t recognize our Italian.” They were touring through Italy, and we turned them on to Il Latini since they were headed that direction. Dinner conversation centered on very spiritual topics, colored by Rick’s involvement with the Church of Christ on Fox Island, and Rob and Ken’s experience with the Catholic Church. It would have been hard to have not overheard our conversation, and eventually another couple, probably very close to our average age, couldn’t resist injecting their own views. He had spent the prior five years earning some sort of designation within the Catholic Church to be some sort of a lay minister, perhaps akin to what other churches might call a Deacon. In short, I think he was imploring us to get in touch with our faith. Tomorrow night we will discuss politics at dinner.
76. Rick, Ken, Lunch, Lecchi

77. Lunch Plates, Lecchi
78. Vineyard, Chianti

79. Van, Radda in Chianti
We planned some sightseeing in Firenze later in the day, so we started early for a short local ride. After espresso and a pastry, of course. We are now a known quantity at the bar we prefer in the main plaza.

On our bikes, we headed east out of the main intersection in Greve, for an initial climb up to Sugame Pass, the site of the winery we'd visited the day before. The road kicked up just across the main road as we exited the square and continued at a steady pleasant pace, with light traffic on a weekday morning. About 4 miles later, after the pass, we had a nice descent, and then turned northward with more elevation to give up. We climbed a bit at first, then had one of the most pleasant descents of the whole trip, with nicely banked turns on good roads. This was interrupted only by a bit of a flat section through the town of Cintoia. We then headed out to the east, on an out-and-back six-mile section to the town of San Polo. We dropped a few hundred feet, passed an industrial complex set in the wooded valley, then climbed back up a few hundred feet to San Polo.

It was a small town, but there was a nice bar for coffee. Of course, the smaller the town, the less English spoken, and the friendlier the populace. The barristas were especially entranced with Rick’s rear-view mirror mounted on his eyeglasses. Refreshed, we retraced the last few miles, then hit the main road southward back to Greve. 25 miles, 2250 feet.

Done with riding, we returned our bikes to their boxes for the trip home. Doing it for the second time, we each were much more proficient. So far, we have had no mechanical difficulties (not even a flat tire), on the road, or in shipping the bikes. We had a utilitarian (hardly!) lunch back at the Cantina, and given our dinner plans we probably ate too much. Rob tried to secure a reservation in Firenze for touring the Accademia, where Michelangelo’s David is displayed. No luck, they were booked several days out.

We drove into Firenze, parking by the Roman gate as on the previous foray. It was a bit of a hike into the center of town, but we were in no rush. We passed the huge Pitti Palace, then crossed the Arno River on the Ponte Vecchio, passed the Uffizi (closed on Mondays), and made our way to the Science Museum. I’d been there before, Rick may not have been as interested as the scientists, but Ken needed to see Galileo’s original telescopes, and recreations of early physics experiments. It seemed Rick was really bored, but we soon learned that he was not feeling too well. Some combination of heat, dehydration, too much coffee, too much driving, and too much food had taken its toll. A quick power nap in the lobby and some water from the bar across the street seemed to revive him.

As Rick Steves says, all the “biggies” are closed on Monday. And Rick and Ken had toured a few places already. And some of the sights had early closing hours. So our options were limited. We visited the Ricardi/Medici Palace, and so late in the day we were free to spend way more than the official 7 minutes in the small decorative chapel. We also visited the Duomo Museum, repository for several relics and one of Michealangelo’s Pieta. Along the way we had some gelato, since we’d be having a big dinner in just a little while.

One of the main reasons for wandering into Firenze again was to take in dinner at Osteria Giovanni. This is the new restaurant started by Giovanni Latini, who had been my family’s gracious host at Il Latini on our trip three years earlier. We found the restaurant on
80. Street Corner, Greve

81. Ramuzzi Bike Shop, Greve

82. Coffee Stop, San Polo
83. Apartment, Pasta Factory

84. Pasta Factory
Via Moro, just a couple blocks off the Arno River, and in the process spied the original Il Latini restaurant very nearby, just around the corner.

Giovanni greeted us and I introduced Ken and Rick, and we were shown a table in the back room. It was good to see Giovanni again, but I’d forgotten how difficult it was to speak with him, since his English is not really conversational. On our previous trip, Chiara had always been close at hand, but I also recalled many delightful conversations with Giovanni (about grapa, and Micheangelo vs. Brunelleschi, etc.). We were introduced to Carina Latini, Chiara’s sister, whose English was as impeccable as her sister’s. I inquired about Giovanni’s son (the mathematician), and wondered out loud when I would meet the matriarch (Carol).

Dinner was very similar to our Il Latini meal, panseco immediately, and a delicious soup prior to ordering. I couldn’t pass up the pici and sausage again, and another sea bass appeared, though the tableside deboning was not as gracious. The salad was also tossed table-side. I finished with a chocolate dessert (made by Carol I was told), and then Giovanni brought us all some more dessert, gratis. Rekindling memories of our earlier trip, I enjoyed a glass of chilled muscato. We tipped the waiter commensurate with the value of our meal (which was not what we were charged) and he finally warmed up to us. Another memorable meal. We navigated the long walk back to the car in the dark along streets that were mostly new to us, and drove home without any miscues.

Firenze e Bologna

May 22, 2007

Rick hit the store first thing, getting supplies for his scrumptious omelets, (6 eggs or 12 eggs, to go three ways?), while Rob hopped on the Internet to plot the route to Bologna.

We packed up the last of our belongings, and the second room key reappeared, along with Rob’s sweatshirt, and maybe one of the walkie-talkies. We hit the road for Firenze well before the 10 AM checkout time. By now, the trip into town was routine for Rick and we navigated to the Roman gate with ease, grabbing a free parking spot very near to the gate. We walked a new road to the river, then past Osteria Giovanni where I spied Giovanni arriving for work. Closer to the tourist center we watched the motorcycle police play cat and mouse with the unlicensed street vendors.

Skirting the leather goods market, we finally reached the line at the Accademia where we could view the David. For the first half-hour we had a sliver of shade as the line inched along in what seemed to be five-minute intervals. After about an hour, Rick investigated the head of the line. The report was an estimated three hour wait from our location. We cut our losses and bailed out.

Stopped to refuel on the way out of town. Another 50 euros bought us a similar number of liters of diesel fuel. Ken was impressed by the mileage we had obtained through the week, consuming only on the order of 25 gallons. We grabbed another coffee, some sandwiches for the road and used the bathrooms. Rick earned the ire of a pink-shirted young Italian man driving a fast black car, as the van was left blocking the pump after Ken filled it up. I only shrugged my shoulders since the key and driver would not be emerging from the bathroom any sooner if he honked any more.
The trip to Bologna was quick and easy, passing long lines of large trucks in the slow lane, making their way up over the mountains. Our first stop was the airport, since we needed to return the van by 5 PM, as we had rented it for a week. But it would be more convenient to store (or check) our bike boxes now. We learned there was no storage, and as I tried to locate the local agent for British Airways to inquire about early check-in, I discovered that some aspect of the airport operations was shut down due to a strike. No wonder Ken had thought it was odd there were no planes flying in and out, and the terminal was so peaceful. Plan D was seeing if we could keep the van an extra 12 hours. Sure enough, for about the cost of a taxi ride, we could return the van in the morning for an extra 35 euros. Perfecto.

We found Hotel Astor rather easily as well, as much by happenstance as by planning. We have a very comfortable room with three single beds and air conditioning, though at twice the price of the apartment at the Pasta Factory. The long walk in Firenze, the drive and the heat had all taken their toll. We switched on the Giro d’Italia and alternately napped and watched the race for a couple hours.

The Giro was passing through some spectacular coastline near Genova, and there were short clips of the scenery in and around Cinqueterre. Between the conversational terms, the words relating to roads, bicycles and races, and the names of the riders, I almost felt like I was getting useful information from the Italian commentary. With an uphill finish it was an interesting stage to watch, as it really split the field and both George Hincappie and Danielo DiLuca were in contention at various points in the race.

Refreshed, Rick wandered out to top off the gas tank, ultimately successful after returning for more cash and a second trip. Then we set off on foot for the old city, passing through one of the numerous city gates and walked towards the main town square. There seemed to be very few tourists (Rick Steves does not even mention Bologna at all) though there is still an abundance of old buildings. However, any historic ambience this might create is negated by a graffiti problem the city seems unable, or unwilling, to control.

We found the main square with its civic buildings and extremely large cathedral. We had seen in Firenze the debates about the facade of the Duomo there, and the debate appeared to be ongoing in Bologna. The bottom third was constructed of the pink and white marble we had seen in Sienna and Firenze, while the remainder was constructed of the plainest brown brick.

Off the square we happened onto the main district for selling produce, fresh meat and fresh fish. We eventually settled on a cafe nearby with outdoor seating, and a limited menu, since it was still well before restaurants began serving dinner. We each had lasagna bolognese and enjoyed the people-watching with a few beers. We finished our last meal with a gelato stop on the main plaza, where the owner offered that we could sit in the chairs on the plaza for no extra charge. I suspect this gesture was motivated more as a means of populating the area so other customers might also drop in. Still, it was a welcome change from Firenze. We each had seconds. After three long, hot, city walks in one day, we treated ourselves to a taxi ride home for an early bedtime.
85. Piazza Majorre, Bologna

86. Rick, Bologna

87. Ken, Bologna

88. Rob, Bologna
We awoke extremely early, packed up and headed out to the airport. We navigated to the airport in the pre-dawn darkness, as much by feel as by map. The labor action had been planned to be of limited duration, ending at 6 PM the previous day, and sure enough, everything was running smoothly. Rick returned the van to the parking garage, while Rob moved bikes and Ken kept an eye on our pile of goods. The trip to London was uneventful and we searched for a meal in the airport, while Rick searched for a means of recharging his iPod. We found a very British sort of bar serving breakfast, if you call every possible combination of potatoes and fried eggs breakfast. We ordered some food, despite the predominance of smokers in the room. Eventually our food arrived, yet Rick was still absent returning the converter plug he’d purchased for his iPod that didn’t allow the large iPod to physically fit. Ken and I ate, growing more concerned about Rick’s absence. Finally, we abandoned his food and headed for the gate, checking with British Airways agents to see if he had checked-in yet. Eventually Rick surfaced at the gate — he’d been charging his iPod at the Apple Store and then returned to eat his breakfast that was still there waiting for him.

In Dallas, we reclaimed our bikes and put them all onto one cart for the trip through Customs. The agent seemed a bit intrigued that they were all in identical cartons and made sure we had not just purchased them. Then they were back onto the conveyor belt for the trip to Seattle. Walking through the airport, Ken and Rob ran into Tom and Jane Rowland, Tom being Ken’s longtime colleague in the Chemistry Department. So we got caught up on their Caribbean vacation, and news about the Thompson Hall remodeling project, while grabbing a BBQ sandwich for a meal.

The flight to Seattle was also uneventful, and our bikes made the trip home unscathed.

Epilogue

Roughly 350 total miles of riding, with 28,000 feet of elevation gained. With very little flat terrain, the elevation seems to accumulate about 50% faster than at home on the hilly Gig Harbor peninsula.

Always worth mentioning finances. Airfare was roughly $1,000. For those who traveled the full 13 days, we had 10 days of riding at a cost of about $1,700 for food, lodging and transportation. The rental van and the rooms at the Pasta Factory were about equal in cost at roughly $35 per person per night/day, while the Belvedere ran a little over $100 per person per night. With incidentals, I spent just about $3,000. Comparing with some guided European riding tours, we would appear to have done the non-airfare portion at about half the rate.

It was a great trip, everything we had hoped it would be. We thought the Belvedere Hotel was the greatest setup, and appreciated the couple who had come for a two week stay. But traveling on our own in Tuscany, to our own schedule and desires, had its charms as well. In the end, I could not say which I would prefer. So perhaps it was good that we did both.