

Germany to Rome
in 64 days
Our Pilgrimage

by

Mike Metras

with notes by

Petra Wolf

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Forward

This book is about our pilgrimage walk from Kisslegg, Germany to Rome. It's about how my wife, Petra, and I, interacted with the people we met and the places we walked through. It's also the story of our internal pilgrimages through our souls, minds, hearts, and spirits as we walked that external path through Germany, Austria, and Italy.

To put it in a broader perspective, this book is about how we celebrated this ten weeks of the of our lives and some of the things we want take from it to enrich our ongoing pilgrimage of life.

Along the way of telling our story, we drop a few hints on how you might use some of what we learned when you integrate a similar pilgrimage into your life.

Who do I thank for helping make a book like this possible? I'll start with Petra. We have walked this walk. And we have spent hours walking and talking about the thoughts and conclusions I have written here. This book is as much the product of her input as it is mine. I thank her for her companionship, support, help, and understanding. We walked through beautiful landscapes and deep emotional experiences along the road both to Rome and in front of my computer preparing this book.

Beyond Petra, I thank the many, many wonderful people we met along the route to Rome. They have made our pilgrimage truly memorable. I name no one else because every person who has walked into my life whether physically or through his or her writings or teachings has in one way or another helped make me who I am today. Thanks to you all.

And thanks to the Universe for making it all possible. For some crazy or not so crazy reason I have been walking the pilgrimage of my life for more than 65 years now. If the Universe had not put me here, you would not be reading this book.

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Introduction

A graying man with a beard walked up with a donkey and a dog. I was sitting outside the refugio in Burgo Ranero, Spain. Except for the donkey he wasn't very different from the other pilgrims I had been seeing every day.

I asked him the same opening questions that I was asking others I had met the previous 20 days on the Camino de Santiago. "Where did you start your walk?"

"In France."

"How long have you been walking?"

"Two months."

"Why are you walking?"

"To raise money" for some charity I don't remember. *A different answer.*

"And why the Donkey?"

"The donkey is my introduction into the towns I visit. The kids come to see the donkey. The mothers follow to watch the kids. Then the fathers come to see what's going on. In the end I get to talk to them all, thanks to the donkey."

"Are you going back to France after you get to Santiago?"

"No. No. I'm moving on through Portugal, Spain, France, and down into Italy and Rome. And then I'm continuing to Jerusalem."

"Oh. And how long do you expect to be on the road?"

"Four years or so."

That was my first encounter with someone walking farther than Santiago. He was walking to Rome and Jerusalem. That was 2003. I was making my way to Santiago de Compostela. I planned to stop when I got to the Atlantic after 40 days walking. This guy planned on walking four years.

In time I forgot this guy with his dog and donkey though I spoke with him again a few days later in Astorga. His goal of walking to Rome also receded from my memory though it came forward once

Introduction

after the end of my time in Spain. I visited fellow pilgrim and soon-to-be wife, Petra, in Germany. At one point we brought up the idea that it would be a fascinating idea to walk over the Alps to Rome. Rome seemed so remote. That was summer 2003.

After that Rome was nowhere in our thoughts for a long time. But it seeped back slowly as we lived in southern Germany. We saw the foothills of the Alps from the walking paths near home. We were introducing others to walking the Camino de Santiago with slide shows and workshops. We were urging others to hear the call of their heart and follow them. Rome began calling more loudly to us. It was time to heed our own advice and follow the call of our own hearts.

After living in Germany less than a year, we were already thinking about our next destination. Where did we envision going next? What is our next project? Rome flowed into our conversations. A pilgrimage, a walking pilgrimage to Rome would be a good next step and good way to seek answers to what would come after Germany. For us walking helps us sort out our feelings and thoughts. We were walking 5½ miles (9½ km) a day often and we had walked pilgrimages before. We could walk to Rome. We had the time.

Why Rome?

Indeed, why walk to Rome? After walking the third most important Christian pilgrimage route, to Santiago, thinking of doing the second most important, to Rome, is logical enough. The walk from Germany brings the chance to walk over the Alps, across the Po River plains, through the hills of Tuscany, and on into the Eternal City itself. Yes, walking to Rome was a worthy endeavor.

If the walk were only this, it would be enough. But it is more.

I fear heights more than I want to. I would walk over the Alps challenging that fear, facing it squarely on, crossing its border, and learning to live with it. That excited me.

Beyond that, I have had a life-long desire to walk Italy's hills and back roads, to learn about Italy and its people from its villages and countryside. That would happen on this walk. That, too, excited me.

Like the walk along the Camino de Santiago, the walk itself is *the* important component of any pilgrimage. *The walk is the destination.* Yes, we would be walking *to* Rome. But the important aim of the

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walk to Rome would be to give ourselves the time and opportunity for just enjoying the whole walk and discussing and meditating on why we are here in the Universe and what we are here to do and be. This part excited me the most.

Pilgrimage?

We're calling our walk to Rome a "pilgrimage." What's this thing called pilgrimage? For a long time I have fought with the distinction between "pilgrimage" and a plain old walk because my walks always have been more than "just" walks. Pilgrimage is a subset of walk; it's a special kind of walk. On a pilgrimage one walks with purpose and asks, "What's happening?" Why is it happening? What can I learn from what's happening to me just now? Why am I here? A walker goes from place to place and experiences what's along the way. A pilgrim does the same but tries to learn more about him/her self and his/her place in the Universe. And beyond our aims, a traditional pilgrim walked for the grace available upon arriving at the destination.

A pilgrimage is purposeful walking. Lessons learned help the pilgrim to see who (s)he is and how (s)he can deal with life. Our pilgrimage to Rome has specific goals: (for both of us) to decide what to do and where to go next; to feel the Alps, the Po, Tuscany, Rome, the spirit and place of Italy; and to be open and seek out whatever other lessons we can integrate into our life pilgrimage; (for me) to face my fear of heights; and (for Petra) to find Peter's keys to heaven.

God and the Universe

Universal ideas permeate this book. In my Catholic upbringing and that of many other religions, the word "God" is used to name the ultimate being. Using the word "God" and its connotations imply we know something about him/her when we know nothing. We have attached the superlatives of every good human attribute to this being we call "God." I seldom use this word any more because of these implications. Instead I use "Universe" to refer to the ultimate, the essence of all, the One who we all are, the One responsible for lining up and executing the hundreds of synchronicities that enliven us all too often to be only "coincidence." And in using "Universe," I also say nothing because it too is beyond comprehension. That's the "Universe" I mention often in this book. If you are so inclined, translate it to "God."

Tentative first steps

Tentative first steps

By late May or early June 2006 we know we want to walk to Rome. We have talked about it long and know we are going to make this pilgrimage. What we don't know is what route we'll take or when we'll go.

We're leaning toward walking on the European long-distance walking trail E5 (See p. 277), a popular walking path over several high, mountain passes. It would take us across Austria and into Italy to Verona. The "high mountain passes." scare me.

Walking from our front door has a lot of appeal. We have walked some of the path before and do not want to repeat those steps. So we decide to count one of our many walks to Wangen and another we made to Mellatz as part of the walk without re-walking them.

As we talk more about this, we ask ourselves if we still have it in ourselves to walk long. After all, it has been more than a year since we took 34 days to walk the Via de la Plata 450 miles (725 km) from Sevilla to Santiago in Spain. We are walking almost daily our 5 miles, but that's different. So we decide to try out a 17-mile (27 km) day in the foothills of the Alps south of us. By walking from Mellatz to Oberstaufen we also lengthen our already-walked path should we decide to continue.

Those 17 miles are easy. The walk convinces us that we can walk the distance. But what about the mountain tops? Although the Oberstaufen walk is over high hills and deep valleys, we walk over no real mountains. I have to have a foretaste to experience my fear of heights in this mountain environment.

The gateway to Austria from Germany is Oberstdorf. E5 is there. If we decide to walk E5, we will start there. The Allgäuer Alpen (the Allgäu Alps), a couple ridges of higher peaks in the German Alps, stand between Oberstaufen and Oberstdorf. We decide to walk over them to put my fear to the test. Petra has no problem with this part, she is ready to walk E5. Mountain walking is nothing new to her. These three days will be mainly for my benefit though we will also be looking at our endurance.

The second day of these last three is not easy for me. I wrestle with fear that almost beats me into submission. But as I mull them over

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the following day I realize I have to face them head on. We decide to walk to Rome over the Alps on E5. That was July 14, 2006. We leave on August 3 from Oberstdorf.

These six days' walks, four scattered days of yeses, nos, and maybes and two days snatched from earlier walks, are the hesitant beginning days of our pilgrimage to Rome. So before we get into the pilgrimage proper, the walk starting in Oberstdorf, come with us and look at some of the details of those first six days.¹



¹ See Appendix C (p. 327) for an explanation of how the maps are presented in this book. The appendix also describes the data in the daily headings, notes from Petra, the little pilgrims you see throughout the book, and the pictures and how to get color versions of them.

Tentative first steps

An often-walked path – Wangen

Day 1

10 mi (16 km) – 10 mi (16 km)

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

Home

Highlight: Always a joy.

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



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



Our home close up.

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The Alte Schloss, the Old Castle, stands tall over our home (left).



Hochgrat, our first mountain, is the peak over the roof of this church along one of our daily walking paths near Kisslegg.

Wangen, the town ten miles (16 km) south of home, was the destination of many walks during the time we lived in Kisslegg. I'll write about an anonymous walk as the first step from Kisslegg to Rome—a spring 2006 walk when the fields and trees are covered with flowers.

Leaving our front door, we walk around the castle down past Sonnenstrahl, our hot-springs resort. After a small hill we begin a long walk across flat meadows toward the distant mountains we will cross in July and August.

Walkways are more abundant in Germany than in the U.S. We're setting off on Kisslegg's route W11.

The beginning takes us through a forest and past the site where Graf Zeppelin made an emergency landing with



Tentative first steps

one of his early air ships in a storm in 1906. A stone monument marks the spot a hundred years later.

As we climb a hill, the ridge of mountains we will cross later forms the outline of the distant horizon. I remember driving this road in winter evenings and seeing what appeared to be a tall light pole off in that direction. The first time I saw it was around Christmas time so I thought it must be some German Christmas pole. Well it would have to have been a very tall pole, 2,600 feet (800m), in fact. It was the lights along the cable car going up Hochgrat mountain several miles away. We climb up under that cableway on the fourth day.

The smell of spring flowers fills the air as we dodge another forest and walk over a few hills past flowered fields and blooming trees. Mixed with the flower aroma is the ever-present, heavy Allgäu aroma of freshly spread cow manure always applied in liquid form the day before any rain. The warm spring sun feels so good after a long, cold winter that snowed on us from November till the end of March.



Fields south of Kisslegg.

We continue through fields and forests, under the autobahn, and through a narrow, tree-lined valley. On the edge of the last forest we stop at a bar for a refreshing glass of beer at a table under a tree. Before we know it we're in the Wangen. We return on the train. Our first ten miles to Rome are behind us.

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Spring flowers and tree blossoms along the way.



Some Bronze Wangeners.

Tentative first steps

Moving farther south – Mellatz

Day 2

9 mi (15 km) – 19 mi (31 km)

245 ft (75 m) up – 540 ft (165 m) down

Home

Highlight: Pizzeria in a palace.



The early train takes us from Kisslegg to Wangen. We enter the Ravensburg Gate, walk through Wangen's medieval streets and markets, and exit the Lindau Gate heading south. Before long we pass a large indoor sports stadium and continue out along a shallow stream. It's a cool day though sunny and comfortable for walking.

After a mile or so, we cross a bridge and head up a country path that turns into a minor road. I feel a little like we're on a gentle roller coaster as we sweep down one hill and up the next making our way through the foothills of the Alps. Soon we walk under the railroad and cross one of the highways to Lindau on Lake Constance.

Wangen's Ravensburg Gate.

We walk a small road into a cluster of houses, Schreckelberg. Even walking, we're through the village almost before we know we're there. Back in the treeless green fields we roll over more bright green hills of pastureland and enter Wohmbrechts, another small

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village, but six times the size of Schreckelberg. An Italian pizza restaurant here occupies in a huge palace of a building in the middle of town. I'm impressed. A year later we will sit in its garden and enjoy a pizza.

Our Kompass walking and bicycle map (p. 277) identifies our route as "01." It follows the contour of the hills to the small village of Maria Tann packed in the hills. We want ice cream but its one store is closed.

As we walk, the thoughts of extending this walk 62 more days forward are far from our minds. We have not even begun to plan a walk more than 700 miles south. But today's footsteps are on the path to Rome. There is no reason to repeat them. They help complete the ribbon of land that will become our path to the Eternal City.

When we finish the Rome pilgrimage, we will have another conscious strip of Europe burned into our being. It will join the other strips I have gathered since 2003 in Europe: the Camino de Santiago and the Via de la Plata in Spain and many little trails in Germany. Petra, says she knows almost every hill, valley, and corner of these same paths. And so it is with me. These join the many other paths I have walked in my life. The landscapes we have walked are part of our being.

But back to today, our path now takes us between some farmhouses, across the railroad again, and down a tractor path to a road, which goes under a sweeping railroad trestle to our left. We jog right instead and follow a road somewhat paralleling the railroad. The road takes us back up and south past grassy fields to the next farm where we soon cross the rails for a third time.

As we pass newly cut fields, the smell of the drying grass in the air tickles my nose making me sneeze often. And where they are picking up the grass, my nose suffers even more.

The railroad does a huge sweeping U- and S-turn here as it begins to wind its way up towards Oberstaufen. We walk over a hill, through another field, and then down and across the tracks for the last time. Finally we climb up a field into Mellatz.

The bus comes soon and carries us to the Hergatz railway station where we catch the next train to Kisslegg. Day two of our walk to Rome has ended.

Tentative first steps

Going to the mountains – Oberstaufen

Monday, July 3 – Day 3

17 mi (27 km) – 36 mi (58 km)

1,350 ft (410 m) up – 870 ft (265 m) down

Home

Highlight: A view of Oberstaufen and Hochgrat from on high.

It has been a wet spring so when a dry day in early July comes along we decide to take advantage and walk what, should we continue, will become the next leg of the pilgrimage to Rome. It's time to gear up to the real thing with a full day's walk. We're ready to test our legs to see if we still have it in us to walk a 17-mile (27-km) day.

In the last year we have walked to Lindau on Lake Constance and taken the boat across the lake to Constance. So Petra, who walked the Camino de Santiago from her home in the city of Constance originally, now can say she has walked it also from our front door in Kisslegg. Today we'll connect Kisslegg to the beginning of the Alps.

We get off the bus in Mellatz in the cool morning sun and stop in a gasthaus for a sandwich and coffee. After eating, we walk out and look up the hill facing us. We have driven up this hill to Lindenberg several times. Now we have to walk it. Somehow it looks much bigger than it does from the driver's seat of a car. But a pilgrimage is step by step. So we take the first step. The next follows naturally. Before I know it, we're standing on top looking down over the valleys below.

After entering a forest along the northern edge of the ridgeline that forms the backside of Lindenberg, we see little of the large town save a few buildings on its outskirts. But the view is long and hazy to the north. Looking back to Wangen and far off to the northeast in the direction of Isny, we wish for more, we wish for clearer air to see just how far the horizon is but it isn't going to happen today.

Our path follows the hill, descends into a valley, and crosses to the next hill.

At one point we walk along a creek for half an hour. The setting is pleasant, the bugs are not. We are treated to an all-out attack on our legs by an army of persistent flies. Back at home that night I hardly sleep from the itch of their bites. We leave their territory quickly.

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The day is warm but not hot. Small clouds cover the sun now and then to give us a bit more shade than the ample trees provide.

As the day goes on we manage to avoid busy roads walking up and down over hills and valleys and through forests until we get to the last large hill between Hopfen and Oberstaufen. The day is dragging on and we have to go up over 3,100 feet (950 meters) and then back down to 2,600 ft (790 m). The view on top in the direction of Oberstaufen and Hochgrat, our next destination, makes the climb worth the effort; it's spectacular.

Tired, we wait in Oberstaufen for the train to take us back to Kisslegg. It has been a good walk and we're reassured that we can do longer walks through deeper valleys and higher hills than we're used to walking. Rome is closer.



Looking back at Oberstaufen.

Tentative first steps

Our first real mountain – Hochgrat

Wednesday, July 12 – Day 4

11 mi (17 km) – 46 mi (75 km)

3,480 ft (1,060 m) up – 720 ft (220 m) down

Staufner Haus

Highlight: Sunset from Hochgrat.

Nine days have passed since we walked to Oberstaufen. It's pretty sure we're going to walk to Rome (90%?). We have only to say the final "Yes" and iron out the details, like, the route and when to walk. E5 is weighing in as the most likely route (See p. 277).

Now it's time to walk a little in "real" mountains to feel them out. Actually I'm the one who has to feel them out. Petra has walked them many times in the past. She's quite at home there. I've never walked in the Alps before. In fact, I've walked precious little in any mountains beyond a mile or so down park trails in the western US. I am more than a little apprehensive about walking in the Alps, let alone over them.

Today we're ready to walk longer, three days. We're headed for Oberstdorf, the entrance to the pass into Austria and points south. We're walking to where we are thinking of beginning the walk that will be many more than three days in a row, a pilgrimage that will ultimately 58 more days.

As we step off the train in Oberstaufen this morning, Hochgrat, our first real mountain looks us in the face. It looks close and a bit above us. A speck of a building we can barely see near the top is our target today.

Getting off the train in Oberstaufen, we walk along the railroad around a mountain to a point where a small road leads down right. After a short distance, we dismiss a small road up to the right as not our path. It seems to be going up too soon. Wrong. We walk far down into a valley and skirt a village before heading back up the hillside to rejoin the initial road just a few hundred feet south of where we walked past it earlier. That mistake costs us 280 feet (85 m) down and back up right in the beginning of the day, 560 vertical feet that we didn't have to walk—not something you like to do in the mountains.

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Hochgrat, on the distant left is our goal for today.

We continue across fields and then steeply down a valley wall to a river and beautiful 100-foot (30-m) waterfall deep in the bowels of the valley. It's eleven and we've been walking better than two hours. We find a place on the stones near the base of the falls and sleep a while. Resting is important on long walks. We try to not only rest but also sleep 15 or so minutes for every two hours of walking, every five miles (8 km). When we do that, we can easily walk long. The place is enchanting. I enjoy the break. I'm ready to sit here a long time; but we get up, climb out of valley, and move on our way.



Mid-afternoon brings another stream, this one remote enough for Petra to swim a while. It's a too cold for me. Summer or not, the water's coming from melting snow not too far away. I rest on the bank.

A cable car takes tourists from the lower flanks of Hochgrat 2,625 feet (800 m) up to the top just below its 6,015-foot (1,834-m) summit. After stopping at its snack bar late in the afternoon, we walk the road that winds up under the cable car. In a few hours we are standing tired in front of Staufner Haus, an Alp-club refuge, a Hütte (I'll translate that to "hut" from here forward). Unlike in the American mountains, walkers have many places to stay in the mountains in Europe. An association of sports clubs known collectively as Alp

Tentative first steps

Vereins, Alp clubs, maintains these huts. Some huts are very remote and supplied only by cable car. All provide basic accommodations, food, and drink. Some have been run by the same family for generations. While most have private rooms, almost all have one or more large rooms, often in the attic, where all sleep next to each other on the floor in their own sleeping bags, laid out like cord wood. You don't have to carry a standard sleeping bag with you. You can get by with a "hostel sleeping bag," a thin sheet-like bag you put between yourself and the supplied covers and base blanket. We take larger sleeping bags because the blankets are often uncomfortably heavy to sleep under. In the end you only have to carry that bag and your fresh clothes and the other things you choose.



The Alp huts aren't luxury accommodations; but at the same time they aren't bare minimum places either. They have good food and good basic sleeping quarters. And when you are a member of the club, the prices are very reasonable. We buy our membership (inexpensive) for the year and settle into a room with two beds and a view toward the top of Hochgrat.

Settled into the room, we go down for a hearty plate of spaghetti. Sitting at a bench outside, we watch the sun set over the mountains and the distant Lake Constance. We can see the sun reflect off its water through the haze. If that haze wasn't so thick, we could see back to Kisslegg where we came from. But we have to settle for the lights of Oberstaufen far below.



Staufner Haus in the morning sun with Seelekopf behind.

When the sun sets, the air cools quickly. We zip our jackets, put a blanket around us, and sit a while longer watching the darkening sky. Germans seem to love sitting out in the cold. They resist for a long time going inside any closed quarters. They were great for opening the windows in the refugios along the Camino de Santiago. The

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French and Spanish came in and closed them and the Germans followed opening them, sometimes several times in one night. Every now and then two opposing strong wills got into an argument that only ended when one gave in, when one or the other found a way to assert his or her case more strongly, or when a third party reminded them both they were on a pilgrimage and should behave and compromise.

After a while watching the sparkling lights of Oberstaufen far below, we retire to our room. The heavy blankets we put over our sleeping bags make up for the lack of heat. Even though it is summer, it gets cold up here on the mountain at night. We are not cold tonight. We sleep well.

Tentative first steps

Panic – Obermaiselstein

Thursday, July 13 – Day 5

10 mi (16 km) – 56 mi (91 km)

2,135 ft (650 m) up – 3,935 ft (1,200 m) down

Highlight: A lot of mountain experience.

We walk only ten miles laterally today but a lot up and down. In fact, the difference between the total up and down is more than a mile at 6,075 feet (1,850 m). Mountain walkers call these up and down distances “high meters.” When one walks in the mountains, “high meters” tell more than the usual lateral distance we are accustomed to measure. A “normal” walker can climb about 300 meters (990 ft) in an hour. It is spoken as: they can “do about 300 high meters up in an hour.” “Normal” walkers can do only a bit more high meters down in an hour. That’s clearly a slow speed compared to lateral movement on flat land, where Petra and I average 4,000 meters an hour (2.5 mph).



Why close to the same speed for up and down when sometimes you see people almost jumping down small stone slides? These jumping slides aside, most downhill walking takes more attention and effort than uphill. It’s easier to miss a step and slip so you have to be more careful. I would much rather climb than walk down in steep terrain.

Getting up early at Staufner Haus, we go down for a warm coffee and breakfast and get out on the path. The sun is bright in our faces as we walk up the ridgeline to the peak of Hochgrat. The Alps stretch out ridge after ridge to our right as far as we can see. Turning back we see Staufner Haus against the background of the sheer wall of Seelekopf, the next peak southwest. The valleys to Lake Constance and northwest to Wangen and beyond lay on our left as we return to our climb. On top I sit on the bench and resist sitting on the edge of the mountain and hanging my legs over the cliff as we drink in the bigness. Even as I write this book a couple years later, I can feel the tightness in my chest as I stood next to that sheer drop.

Several peaks form a southwest-northeast ridge. We walk east along the knife-edge sloping gently southeast and dropping sharply to the northwest. Our wide path winds along close to the top on the sloping side. Where the two-foot (.7-meter) path is steeper, those maintaining it have built log steps to make walking easier. The path is very well kept up as are most of the paths we walk in the Alps. I am surprised that my fear of heights is very comfortable with the paths.

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E4 and E5 lead us northeast along the ridge.



Petra walks in the mountains southeast of Hochgrat.

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This walk is our first encounter with the long-distance walking path E5 (See p. 277). Can I walk it over the Alps? I don't know yet. Here on the Hochgrat we're also being hosted by E4 (See p. 277).

After a half a mile we leave E4 and E5 to the ridge and head down the sloping side south along a path designated OA. We cross gently descending grasslands and a few, small snowfields down some 1,650 ft (500 m) in a couple kilometers.

It's after noon when we arrive at the bottom of the valley at Gasthaus Scheidwangelpe in the middle of nowhere. Well, not really "no-where." There's a big parking lot at the end of the road here. Many walk the path along this valley between Hittisau, Austria, to the west and any of several villages to the east. This gasthaus is another of those mountain places that serve summer walkers and winter cross-country skiers.

We walk in to the smell of aging cheese and damp wood. It's an old place that makes cheese among other things. I order a *Schweitzer Wurstsalad*, a cheese and *wurst* (a cold meat) salad. In the US one would probably call it sliced Bologna and cheese with onions in vinegar and oil dressing. But *wurst* is better than Bologna. I like this salad and eat it often in Germany, especially with a large glass of beer. But since we're about to make a major assault on a mountain [sounds impressive?], we have sparkling apple juice instead of beer. We talk of our plans, if and when to begin the major part of this pilgrimage to Rome and come to no conclusions. After an hour we're walking up the next mountainside.

The path begins steep enough to make me walk slowly to breathe comfortably. I have my coat off within fifteen minutes though there's a chill in the air. We walk far around a high cliff only to come out on top of it a while later. The trail gets narrower and decidedly steeper. I lean forward more to feel secure as I take hefty steps up one after another steep section. The ground is gravelly. I'm not comfortable. Petra is ahead and going forward as if it were the surface she walks on all the time.

The path levels off as we travel along the contour of a steep slope. Then along comes some snow that hasn't entirely melted. I am not a happy camper. The path crosses the snow. I see myself sliding off into the valley far down to my left. I take a deep breath and then breath more rapidly as I walk gingerly step by step. Surprise, my shoes are holding. I'm not slipping. But my heart is near my throat.

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A few more steps and I am back on solid ground. That wasn't so hard.

We walk uneventfully over Girenkopf and then Heidenkopf, two peaks on this three-peak ridge. I continue along the ridge proud that I am quite well at managing my fear of heights so far. But the Universe has a test waiting for me, "So you think things are going well? Try this." Oops, a rock wall has merged into the path. Rather, the path has become a rock wall. I have to cling to it as I move forward using my toes in the cracks of the wall. The world drops off at sixty degrees to the right, not vertical but very menacing. Now my heart *is* in my throat. Petra comes back and shows me how "easy" it is to walk the wall as she demonstrates walking toe over toe the 16 ft (5 m) between her on the continuation of the path and me. I can feel my backpack pulling me off the wall and down the mountainside.

She advises, "Keep three points in contact with the rock at all times. When you have three set, move the fourth. One foot, one hand, one foot, etc, until you get here. Just remember that the other three have to be set before you move the fourth." It sounds simple enough.

I throw her my stick and begin clawing my way across. First all four set; then gingerly a hand moves followed by a foot. But how do I cross one foot over another. She demonstrates and cannot quite grasp my trepidation. I get it after a couple more tries. Foot, hand, hand, foot, foot.... Ah, I get this—maybe. Soon I am on the other side. I let out a deep breath, sit down, and rest.

In ten minutes I am back on my feet.

"Be careful when you get over here."

My heart speeds up several beats. I don't need to hear that. When I see what Petra's talking about, my heart pounds even faster and jumps into my throat. The flat path is two feet (0.7 meter) wide, a suburban sidewalk. *But* it drops off at 80 degrees on both sides down a thousand feet (300 meters). It's 30 feet (9 meters) long. I start to cross it. I freeze. I step back. I do the same a second time.

What now? I can't go back. A wall and a couple almost vertical descents are back there. I fear losing my balance and falling. But oddly, I don't fear dying; we all have to die some day. I fear rather injuring myself enough so someone would have to take care of me. That's one of the last things that a male wants to have happen to him in our society: to be in a position where he has to be taken care of.

Tentative first steps

I can't move. Petra tries to take command of the moment. "Why do you think you are going to fall?"

I can't think coherently, let alone answer. Then she says, "Don't you remember that dream you had of us on our twentieth anniversary standing on a Greek Island with friends in our garden? How are you going to do that if you fall? You have more than 17 years to go yet."

That speech actually helps. I turn on my yogic concentration and stare at the path in front of me. I think of being in that garden 17 years from now. I put one foot in forward. I take a next step. Then I take another. I keep staring at the path and concentrating on the picture of me in that white-walled garden over a deep blue sea next to Petra, both of us a bit older. It's working. I am in the middle. Another step. Concentrate. More steps. I make it and collapse to rest.

When I regain strength in my legs, we walk the 200 feet (50 meters) up the steep path to the tabletop of Siplingerkopf at 5,752 feet (1,745 meters).

I let out that primal scream. Petra chides me saying that someone might think I am falling off the mountain and need help. I don't care. I need to let off tension. I feel enormous relief standing on the top having made it to this point. I lie down and sleep fifteen minutes.

As I get up I say, "If this is what it's like to walk over the Alps on E5, I don't want to have anything to do with it."

I'm not faring well with my introduction to mountain walking. These few yards have scared me a lot. Earlier episodes made me nervous but this one puts fear into my heart.

Now I realize that I am on top. *I have to go down.* "No mountain is done until you are down." I cannot conceive of walking back the way we came, so I must go forward to whatever is in front of us. I am apprehensive. I know what it was like coming up. *Think positive. Maybe it's better going down. My "tentative first steps" into mountain walking don't have to be quite so vivid.*

Petra volunteers, "We can always call a helicopter to come and get you."

"Fat chance."

Petra's statement isn't a joke. In the mountains when you get stuck for any reason and cannot get down on your own, someone can call a

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helicopter to get you down. You can call one if you feel you will injure yourself getting off the mountain. Of course, you have to pay for it. The system is well established and maintained for the protection benefit of all walkers. I don't think I'll call them today.

We begin walking down. It starts out easy, first wide then along a narrow path on the edge, nothing like the way up. But as the path begins to roll over the edge it gets steeper and steeper down a gully between two ridges. Soon we're on a ledge climbing over a little melt water. It's very steep and tight.

Petra says, "Sit down and slide on your *popo*," ("*popo*" is German for "buttocks").

"I don't want to get dirty in the mud."

"Ha! That's a laugh. You're saying *that* when you always say a little spot here and there don't mean anything."

"But this will be a big spot."

"You have two choices. Get dirty or fall."

I sit and slide down to where I can stand again. And, yes, I get dirty.

Petra: I feel fear for Mike on the way up the mountain. How can we get down into the valley safely? I remember situations where I was in fear myself in the mountains and my former partner helped me to get down. Now I am in his shoes. What can I do? I have no fear to fall myself. I feel confident. I am afraid to lose Mike. I can be here and advise him how to get down. I tell him to sit on his popo and slide down a bit, when it is necessary. This situation helps me to realize that I can be there and support Mike but in the end I have to trust in life and believe that we will get down safely. He has to walk his walk.

The path continues out a point of land. I cannot figure out where we'll go next. Some place we have to go down more steeply than we are going now. A noisy family is coming up behind us. We stop in the shade of a bush to rest and let them pass.

Each member of the family in turn pauses a bit at the top of the ridge just beyond where we stopped. When Petra gets up and also stops there and sighs, my heart starts moving back towards my throat. *What's there?*

I get up and edge my way to the place that has made each in turn stop. Ya! I see it. The path goes down at 60 degrees. But someone

Tentative first steps

has cut rudimentary steep steps that go down two feet for each foot forward. Petra says something to reassure me. But by now I am getting used to this mountainside thing. I easily step down step after long step. Then we turn into another steep descent through a gully. I do that with little effort also. Finally, we're back down in the grassland following cow paths.

It's decision time. We have booked a room at a place over the next ridge. I have had more than enough steep ascents and descents for one day. Do we stick to the path and climb over the next two peaks both over 5,000 feet (1,600 m) or do we walk down to a nearby town and make our way along the road to our stopping place? It's getting later in the afternoon. We walk the road.

But this road is no walk in the park. We walk down 1,650 ft (500 m) to the town, Balderschwang. There are several hotels. But we decide to go to the one we booked up the road. Everyone passes when we try to hitchhike. So we go across the street to a hotel and ask whether anyone is headed in our direction. A woman from the hotel volunteers to take us. We accept as we realize that this hotel itself is an acceptable place to stay. But we have booked the other place.

As we leave town with the woman we pass other acceptable hotels. When we arrive at our place, it's a ski lodge sitting alone in a mountain valley. Only a couple patrons and the house crew are there. The manager says curtly, "I thought you were not coming." It's already seven. He shows us an over-priced room. It's unacceptable. Although it's already seven and we're dead tired, we leave trusting we will find something better when we move forward.

We talk as we begin hitchhiking again. It's a German thing to honor your booking word no matter what. We had booked this place so we couldn't stay in Balderschwang, even though we rejected this place in the end. Or did we reject each other? The manager wasn't at all receptive of us and he seemed happy when we left.

Petra said, "Again, I didn't go with my feeling. Why can't I go with my feeling when it tells me something? Those were good hotels back in Balderschwang. I thought two or three would have been agreeable places to stay. But I had to do what I was *supposed to do*, what I said I was going to do. Why couldn't I change my mind and follow my intuition?"



"We *could* have but we didn't."

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“We have to learn to listen to our intuition better.”

“And to act on it. ... We have to act on it too. You’re usually good at doing that. What happened here?”

“Because you usually have to pay when you book a room and don’t take it; you have to pay anyway.”

We drop the subject and continue to hold our thumbs out for each passing car. No one stops. It’s getting darker. We decide to walk as we stick our out thumbs. At least we’ll get somewhere down the line sometime tonight instead of standing on this remote hillside stop.

After a couple miles and many cars, a station wagon stops. The smell of alcohol hits us as the passenger opens the door. We get in anyway. The driver and his two companions pontificate on several subjects. They’re from Obermaiselstein. We don’t know where to go. We just want a place to sleep for the night. We pass up one rural hotel because it looks overly busy. In the end he drops us in Obermaiselstein.

Walking up a street, we look for food and a gasthaus and find neither. Both of us are tired and a bit short with each other. Petra is ready to take a train back to Kisslegg, where there’s a comfortable bed waiting. As we start to walk toward where a train might be, we notice the sign of a guesthouse. Dropping the train idea for now, we ring the bell. When the woman answers we ask if she has a room. With a very startled look she says, “Yes.” It’s already 8:30 pm.

“How much is it?” I can’t remember what she answers but we’re startled at how reasonable it is and ask to look at it. “We’ll take it.”

With the room taken care of, we head out to find something to eat. We’re hungry. Music leads us to a restaurant next to a park. At an outside table, we order a beer and read the menu. The air is cool yet comfortable. A band plays in the park. It’s like the Wednesday night band in the square at home when I was a kid. I was close to tears at times. We enjoy supper and the music, all unplanned in a small town in southern Germany. Then we return to sleep serenaded by the bells of the nearby cows. The food, the music, and now the cowbells, what a wonderful end to a challenging day.

Tentative first steps

The decision: Walk over the Alps – Oberstdorf

Friday, July 14 – Day 6

11 mi (17 km) – 67 mi (108 km)

1,800 ft (550 m) up – 1,475 ft (450 m) down

Home

Highlight: Basking in the sun next to a cold lake.

We talk long about walking and pilgrimage with another couple in the breakfast room. Afterwards we leave and follow the bicycle path south of town. It's a pleasant, warm day, a good day for walking. We walk across fields, through a park, and along a road up over a heavily forested pass.

As we walk, we talk about my experience on the mountain yesterday. "That map we're using is deceptive. It says the path is easy, requiring no climbing experience. If that's easy, I don't want to see hard. If E5 is like that, I don't want to walk it."

Petra answers, "I don't know it. I have never walked all of E5."

"But I remember the map showing some difficult areas and others requiring climbing experience. Does that mean there might be even worse? I don't want to walk in places like that saddle yesterday again."

"Does that mean you don't want to walk over the Alps then?"

I answer, "I don't know."

We stop talking about it to enjoy the walk we're on. But it remains near the surface of my thoughts for the rest of the day.

Walking in and out of a couple small villages, we stop in the second for a coffee and a sandwich. Then we find a tree to rest under, lay out our ground mats on the grass, and sleep half an hour.

When we get up the path leads us over a hill to a fine view of the Oberstdorf valley to the east. It's clear and the mountains beyond stand proud against the blue sky blotched with fluffy white clouds.

Fear of heights resurfaces. "You know those mountains are really a *border* challenging me. Maybe it's time for *me* to *challenge* my fear of heights. All my life my heart has been in my throat whenever I have stood on a high place. I think it's about time to face it and see what it is."

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“So does that mean you’re ready to walk over the Alps? On E5?”

“Ya. It’s time. I need to do it. That can be my goal for the first half of this pilgrimage to Rome—face this fear and learn from it. It’s a border I have to challenge.”

“So we go now?”

“Ya. We go! Yes!”

I feel good. We feel good. The air is crisper. The sun warmer. The breeze more refreshing. We’re walking to Rome for sure now.

That’s how we decided to walk to Rome over the Alps. It was July 14, 2006. We’ll leave on August 3 from Oberstdorf.

A few days later I discover that the Kompass walking map (p. 277), the one we use for crossing the Alps, marks yesterday’s Siplingerkopf path as not only difficult but one requiring climbing experience. So that lets off some more pressure. I do not have to fear some of the yet unseen steps so much.



Petra as we walk to Oberstdorf.

With renewed lightness we walk on through the woods to an overlook above Freibergsee, a beautiful lake with a storybook background of trees and snowy mountains. At a resort we pay a few euros to lounge in their chairs and swim a bit. After all, this walk is for resting and relaxing a bit as well as feeling out mountain walking. The Freibergsee was one of our goals so our swimsuits are in our backpacks. But in the end the water is a bit too cold for me. Petra

Tentative first steps

swims out and around and around. I get a little wet a couple times and quickly get out. Cold water and I don't mix well.

Petra: I love this lake. It's clear, blue, cold, and surrounded with mountains. I have been here before. To swim in a lake like this is a gift for my vital energy. I breathe deeply and my whole body tingles. On summer evenings after a long day, bathing is special. The skin is sensitive and sun warms you up. It is a joy.

Across the lake a modern ski jump thrusts up against the mountain backdrop. It looks so out of place, so odd against the green of the trees and distant mountains, even a little obscene. When I get home I remove it from my picture. That's the joy of modern digital photography—when you don't like something in a picture you can change it with a little effort. So now I have a beautiful mountain view *without* a ski jump.



A beautiful mountain view without a ski jump.

After resting a few hours and eating dinner, we change back into walking clothes and head over the hills down into Oberstdorf, the last town in Germany in this corner of Bavaria hard on the Austrian border. This quaint little town seems to exist only for tourists.

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We catch pieces of the World Cup in packed bars while we wait for our train home. In a couple hours and two train changes we're back in Kisslegg knowing for sure now that we will walk to Rome.



Looking toward Austria south of Oberstdorf in the late afternoon.

A rainy beginning

A rainy beginning

This summer started wet and turned dry in July. The sun shone brightly all month. We expect a lot of sun for walking over the Alps in August. But the weather gods have different plans. It rains on eleven of our first sixteen days. After a while it becomes routine. But we would have enjoyed a bit more sun.

That rain makes it more difficult for me to face my fear of height. And when it turns to snow it carries a lot of apprehension with it. My goal in walking over the Alps is to look my fear of heights in the face and learn from it. All my life I have feared walking or standing on the edge of high places. I can be inside any structure (even flying a plane upside down near the ground!) and have no fear. But let me stand with nothing between me and the ground but air and some distance and I lock up.

I'm ready to live beyond this fear of heights. It is time to separate unwarranted fear from genuine respect for the real dangers in the mountains—and wherever else similar fears restrain me.

Beyond facing fear we have one other clearly stated goal, to decide what to do when we leave Kisslegg, where to go and what work to do. And Petra is looking forward to just enjoying the walk over the Alps, something she has wanted to do for twenty years.

With that in mind, what are our plans as we begin? Now in August we'll walk to Verona, and maybe Fidenza. We have time open until 10 September when we have to be back to conduct a seminar. Our plan then is to return to Italy in October to complete the final 24 or so days to Rome.

That said, this pilgrimage might not happen this way at all. We have other things in the fire that could change everything, things that could take us to California.

Petra: I applied for a job in California. If I get an invitation for an interview, we'll interrupt the pilgrimage. I feel good with the job application. And going to California is one of my dreams. A jump from Germany to California with the security of a job would be very good, a dream of any immigrant. So I hope I get this job.

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If we get an email inviting us to California, Rome could be side-tracked indefinitely. Life is that way sometimes. We walk the pilgrimages of our lives with open minds. Sometimes our lives play out exactly as we plan for them; other times not. Sometimes we plan two or more things at once letting them develop side by side. We watch then to see which bears fruit for us.



So is it *A Roma!* or *To California?* I shall assume it is *A Rome!* Until that email comes announcing *To California!*

For now, this first leg takes us over the high Alps on E5 (See Appendix A, p. 277). It's time to walk up and down and across huge mountains and take on nature at its raw edges. I'm ready. We're ready.



A rainy beginning

A comfortable start – Spielmannsau

Thursday, August 3 – Day 7

4 mi (7 km) – 71 mi (115 km)

640 ft (195 m) up – 33 ft (10 m) down

Spielmannsau

Highlight: We're walking.



Heavy rain is falling in Kisslegg as we catch the 11:19 train to Oberstdorf. We're walking a short distance today so we're starting later. It would please us if the rain would let up.

It's a stumbling start. Petra's old umbrella isn't keeping her very dry any more. I leave my walking stick at the Hergatz train station. I'd like to say I left it as I rushed to catch the connecting train. But that's not so. We have to wait there a while for the connection and I just leave it. That's the third or fourth walking stick I've left somewhere during transportation changes in the past few years. I'll find one along the way. I need a Roman version anyway. In fact, I'll find one, lose it, and find another a couple times before we get to Rome.

Our friend Monika meets us in Hergatz. She came up from Constance and is walking with us the first few days. We are three.

In Oberstdorf we stop for coffee and cake. Petra goes out to look for an umbrella. Monika and I wait in the restaurant. Petra and I prefer walking with an umbrella in the rain much more than with a poncho and "rain gear." For us "rain gear" usually soaks us from the inside out. If it is raining so hard that a big umbrella can't keep most of me dry (a little water on my lower legs and shoes is nothing) then it's raining hard enough to stay inside anyway.



Petra: Yes, now is the time to buy a new umbrella. The clerk shows me several and there it is. This one is mine. It has a name: "You'll Never Walk Alone." These words bring me back to my first pilgrimage from Germany to Santiago de Compostela on the Camino de Santiago. I'm back in Estella, in Spain in front of a refugio sitting on a wall with a fellow pilgrim from Denmark. We're listening to this world-renown song. It's the first time I have ever heard "You'll never walk alone." My fellow pilgrim has it on her I pod. We listen to it again and again with shared earphones, our heads stuck close together. We have never seen each other or met before. We are sharing our life stories and crying together. We both have lost a loved one, she and I my father her brother. This song helps us to cry and let the

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sadness go. It transforms us on this pilgrimage to Santiago. I'm still touched by this happening three years ago. Now at the beginning of our pilgrimage to Rome this song with this deep experience flows into my heart. I know I'm connected to the force of life, the Universe. We will walk through storms and hopefully we will never lose our dreams and hopes and we'll hold our heads up high. I have to repeat the words here.

Petra returns with her new umbrella, *You'll never walk alone*. She sings praises of its lightweight and ergonomic handle. She'll carry it long and use it well.

You'll Never Walk Alone

When you walk through a storm
hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark.
At the end of a storm is a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark.
Walk on through the wind,
Walk on through the rain,
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown.
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone,
You'll never, ever walk alone.
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone,
You'll never, ever walk alone.

Written by Rogers and Hammerstein for
the 1945 Broadway musical 'Carousel'



A church on the edge of Oberstdorf.

A rainy beginning

Finally, around two thirty we walk across a wide, flat field and begin the gentle climb out of Oberstdorf. Clouds are low and before long it starts drizzling—nothing major, just enough to make us open our umbrellas. Petra is proud to use hers so soon. We stop under a tree and Monika takes our picture under Petra's new umbrella.

As you look at the picture below notice the street clothes. We wear nothing special. Petra has shoes with a little higher back but mine are just low back walking shoes. In a couple days I'll get some high backs but as soon as I get out of the mountains, I'll be back to the normal walking shoes. This is how we walk.



Petra and I under You'll never walk alone as we begin our walk.

The walk is slow, uneventful, and enjoyable. It is a comfortable start, a good, short distance for the first day. The mountains climb higher and higher at our sides. We're walking a narrow road. Several others share the road with us. They're walkers, not pilgrims. They're out for a walk for the day or the next few days. We're out to walk many days and a long distance. They find it a bit amazing and amusing that we're planning to walk so far. But they always wish us luck and many ask us to say a prayer for them when we arrive at St. Peters.

My notes from today tell me that I feel that in time we'll be going very remote where there are very few people. In fact it never hap-

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pens. People are often around us even on the most remote paths we take through these mountains.

We arrive still fresh and relaxed at Spielmannsau (Sportsman's field) before six. It is a big place with many guest rooms. Petra and I are assigned a couple bunk beds in a room for six. No one else joins us. Monika has a similar room down the hall that also proves to be a private room. There are not many here tonight.

As we sit in the restaurant eating and drinking later, a huge picture window looks out up a valley behind Monika across the table from Petra and me. Clouds play in the valley and on the mountain peaks. Every few minutes a different view erupts, a different feel pours over the trees and ridges and into the window. By the time we leave and stand on the porch, the clouds have congealed and the air below is starkly sharp. Deep green trees stand against the brown and gray valley walls and the gray sky. All is absolute. I fear even trying to photograph it. I cannot begin to capture its essence.

We walk a half a mile (1 km) up and back down the grassy fields of the valley. Our journey to Rome has begun now. In 60 or so days we'll be in Rome ... unless other things intervene. But even then it will be around 60 walking days because we'll surely return to finish the pilgrimage no matter what time stands between this beginning and the end.

A rainy beginning

A wet, tough climb – Kemptner Hut

Friday, August 4 – Day 8

4 mi (6 km) – 75 mi (121 km)

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

Kemptner Hut

Highlight: Walking through a waterfall.



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



We walk up this valley and turn left at the clouds this morning.

The three of us begin the morning walking together. But it soon becomes apparent that we're walking at three very different paces. We talk about it and agree to walk each at his/her own pace. That isn't the safest way but we inexperienced (Monika and I) want to do it that way. Petra is experienced and feels responsible for us. I'm a relative new comer to this mountain thing though I've walked in hilly terrain with a pack before. But Monika is very new to both mountain walking and carrying a pack, let alone both at the same time. But it's important to her to find her own pace to learn by herself instead of be-

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ing told step-by-step by Petra. The same is true for me. We'll meet later when we're at or near the top.

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

Oh, yes, the drizzle hasn't let up from last night. It continues all day today. It is never heavy, but it is always there. Its momentary stops are just long enough for me to close my umbrella only to have to open it again in a few minutes. We stay quite dry with the umbrellas.

In a couple kilometers the path turns left up a valley and gets narrower and steeper. At one point it's little more than a foot wide with the mountain dropping steeply into the trees on my left. I am surprised that I have no real fear. I just concentrate and continue walking. That wouldn't have happened a few weeks earlier. Maybe it's the trees below offering to catch me if I fall.

At one point we meet walkers coming down. They're wearing full rain gear: yellow rain coats and rain pants. They look hot and wet. They tell us we have to walk through a waterfall up the path. I take the information but try not to comprehend just what that means. I'll face it when we get there.

Soon I come on an opening and have to walk down fifty feet (15 m) of steep mud. Petra is standing at the bottom to see how I fare. I walk gingerly fearing the worst. I could slide down this mud bank to get safely down. I don't want to. I'm surprised. My shoes stick to the mud. I can hold my balance and my feet to the embankment and walk with relative ease. I get to the bottom without incident. I'm 63 and learning new things about my feet to say nothing about walking in such a mountain environment with backpack.

Petra moves forward. I plod along carefully picking my steps on what has become a series of ups and downs on a narrow path along the valley wall. Monica is behind me. Soon I'm walking along a narrow path 50 feet above a stream down to my right. I wind in and out and back in until I turn a corner and there is Petra setting under a rock overhang out of the rain. I join her and we eat the sandwiches we made this morning. After eating we lie back and sleep 15

A rainy beginning

minutes. That's long enough though. We get cold and have to move. This little overhang was a welcome shelter. It's actually rather amazing where you can make your temporary home if you keep are attentive.

We haven't heard from Monika. She dropped behind an hour or so ago. A group of walkers pass and we ask if they've seen her. One tells us he saw her and she was turning around to go back down. It was too heavy for her. She wanted to learn to feel comfortable walking so she can do some other long-distance walks, maybe even the Camino de Santiago some day. So she thought hitching a spot with us for a few days as we started our walk to Rome would be a good way to get some experience while walking with others. Petra told her it might be a strenuous but she wanted to come anyway. It didn't work for her this time.

When we hear from her later, she reports that this was a good lesson for her. She has always been an overachiever, many times taking on bigger tasks and responsibilities than she could achieve without excess stress. After reflecting on this morning with us, she realized she was doing just that with us, taking on something too big for her at the time. She took that lesson back to her daily life. There she declined to take on a project she knew was larger than she wanted to handle. She was happy for the lesson she learned on a muddy German mountainside today. This is one of the things these pilgrimage walks are all about for us: learning things you can apply to life.



Before I leave Monika, I have to say that, as I write this, she is walking the Camino de Santiago somewhere between Geneva, Switzerland and Le Puy, France. She started some time ago at her home in Constance and is walking a week or two at a time. She has also slowly come to grips with her fear of walking alone.

But we're still on this mountainside. We get out from under our protecting boulder and continue up the path. Around almost the next corner we encounter the waterfalls, not just one but three. They are cascading down a rock wall to our left, over the path, and down under a pile of snow in that creek now a hundred feet (30 m) below. They aren't a huge flow of water, but enough to soak us and even wash us off the path if we're not careful. Our path is a rounded ledge in the middle of the rock wall. A cable is pinned to the rock to hold on to. I pause for a breath or three.

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Petra goes first and makes it easily. I follow with no little trepidation. I test the wet rock. It isn't so slippery. I use my umbrella to keep the waterfall water off my clothes. With my left hand I hold the cable. I inch forward. Not so bad. In my boldness I walk quickly and easily through the first two falls. The third is bigger. In the middle I step in a hole and at the same time feel a huge surge of water on the umbrella—it's doing its job. I maintain my balance and walk out of the ordeal with only a wet left leg. That wasn't so bad.

The path becomes a bit flatter. Soon we can see Kemptner Hut a couple hundred feet above and to our right. We continue far more forward before turning back to avoid a deep ravine between the hut and us.

Kemptner Hut is a huge place in the middle of nowhere. It has no phones of its own and our cell phone doesn't work either. Its electricity is from generators. All supplies arrive by cable car. Like Staufner Haus on Hochgrat, it exists solely for mountain walkers.

We remove our muddy shoes and put them in the drying room, a room in the basement with heater and clotheslines, a standard accessory in these alp huts. Then we warm up with a huge pot of tea. Petra is excited to have a cheese dumpling for supper. I try one. I'll pass the next time. We sleep in a huge lager, a room full of mattresses. It's like having a huge double bed. But we don't need quite that much width. We have only one 55-inch-wide (140 cm) sack sheet. It is quite enough in the end. Climbing into it, we cover up with our sleeping bags or the blankets of the hut.

As I write this, this climb to Kemptner Hut seems worse thinking about it than it was that day walking it. Then I was in the Now, choosing each step carefully and thinking of nothing else. Nonetheless looking at it from the vantage point of having finished the entire walk to Rome, I realize that this walk up to Kemptner Hut today is the second most demanding walk of the entire pilgrimage.

A rainy beginning

New shoes – Madau, Austria

Saturday, August 5 – Day 9

11 mi (18 km) – 86 mi (139 km)

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

Gasthof Hermine

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



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

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

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

Germany to Rome in 64 days



Our first view into Austria.

We walk down three thousand feet (920 m) by the time we get to Holzgau later in the morning. About a third of the way down I slip on a rock and fall on my backpack. My arms and legs flail in the air. Petra has a long hearty laugh. I join her. For days she reminds me how I looked like a huge bug laying there upside down on that rock. It was an easy fall. The backpack is a fine cushion to land on.

A creek flows to our left. It cascades over pile after pile of rocks in ever-larger waterfalls. Its sound is always with us.

My back is tired. My legs sore. Climbing yesterday was fine but descending this 2,000 feet (615 m) so far this morning is taking a toll.

Around ten thirty we pass through a forest into an opening with a restaurant, a welcome rest. We enter, have a drink, eat a soup, and rest. It feels good to sit and warm ourselves.

Coming out to a steady drizzle, we walk on a road. The footpath is gone. The road is so steep that its concrete surface is ridged for cars can get traction. The creek is now a large waterfall that cascades in three large drops down the valley. Several people are around looking at it. But it seems they aren't walkers like us. They have driven up from Holzgau, parked just below, and walked up to enjoy the falls.

A rainy beginning

In time we get to Holzgau, at the bottom of the valley. It's on the edge of a wide, flat, east-west valley. Finding a restaurant where we can sit outside, we rest with a beer, and share a wurst salad. We often share our meals when we aren't ready to eat full portions.

My shoes have been the subject of much discussion today. I walked the Camino de Santiago and the Via de la Plata in Spain in low-back walking shoes. I'm walking in a similar pair today. They seem to be gripping ok but Petra thinks mountain boots would grip better. She is convinced that my shoes are insufficient for mountain walking with its ups, downs, mud, and stones. She insists I need the ankle support and better gripping. As the day progresses, the terrain is telling me the same. My ankles hurt. I have slipped in a few places I would rather not have. I'm ready to try a pair of high-backs. We stop at a sporting goods shop and buy a pair. Now I have a new problem. I have new shoes that aren't worn in.



We walk a few kilometers across the flat valley floor along paths through green fields and small villages. It's a pleasure not to be struggling up and down a mountainside. The people who walk in the mountains, the E5 hikers, walk for sport. They usually take a taxi or bus across valleys like this. But I find the valleys are an opportunity to regenerate myself after strenuous walking up and down over the previous ridge. We don't cover as many ridges in a day or week as the taxiing walkers cover, but we do enjoy the full feel of the valley and the natural setting of the people in addition to the mountain goats' ridges. And we experience the entire flow of the walk over a series of mountains.

In a few miles we enter a valley heading south up into the next mountains. We walk along a road up Madautal (Madau Valley) along a river with the long name Alperschonbach, Pretty Alp Creek.

At one point we have the option of taking a path along the hillside instead of the road. We take the road today. We're still adjusting to mountain walking. We'll take the easier way for now.

Gasthof Hermine, a pleasant place along a riverside, is our stop for tonight. The rain hits hard almost as we walk in the door. We get a pleasant room, settle in, hang our wet clothes, take a shower, have dinner, and enjoy the evening as the rain continues to pour.

We've already crossed our first ridge and valley of the Alps and are on our way up the second ridge. We have begun.

Germany to Rome in 64 days

A bus ride already – Zams

Sunday, August 6 – Day 10

11 mi (17 km) – 97 mi (156 km)

245 ft (75 m) up – 1,870 ft (570 m) down

Annemarie Gabl's house

Highlight: Decision not to walk over the next mountain.

Annemarie Gabl
Bachgasse 14
A-6511 Zams
Telefon 054 42 / 52 575
6.8.06

It's still raining. We talked a lot about the weather and the rain last night and this morning. Should we continue over this next mountain? Should we go back? What should we do? What do we want to do? Then this morning we start for Memminger Hut, the next hut up E5. We walk down across a hill to the road but don't get far.

We talk about where we're going. On the other side beyond Memminger Hut we have to walk down 5,900 feet (1,800 meters) without significant places to rest in the middle. We can't rest with the rain. We can't lie on our mats in the wet. The rain is supposed to continue tomorrow. Petra has walked this way before and knows there's no sheltered resting place on the way down. We're just beginning what will be a long walk, around a month on the road. We walked only 3,000 feet (920 m) down yesterday, with a very needed rest midway. A 5,900 feet descent under these circumstances so soon into the walk is asking for immediate muscle and knee pain. We'd have to sit three or four days recovering if we could continue at all.

Some people from the south come down the road we're thinking of walking up. They tell us the path they have just come down is muddy and slippery. The other side has to be pretty much the same.

We need no more convincing. We know we could do this walk. But why should we? We don't have to prove anything to ourselves or to anyone else. We can dishonor ourselves by subjecting ourselves to unnecessary pain, ruining our chances of continuing almost before we get started. We will not do it. We turn around and head back down the valley. Every pilgrim has to walk his or her own path. And that path develops as he or she walks. So it is with us this morning.



On the way back to Bach in the valley, my new boots rub my feet. I'm getting a blister already. I never got a blister on any Camino walk and now I'm getting one the day after I bought new boots. I'll have to put a band-aid on tomorrow. I'll survive on the bus today.

A rainy beginning

We take a 59-mile (95-km) bus ride forward to Zams on the other side of the mountain we're avoiding. It's only 11 miles (18 km) walking. But there are almost 6,000 feet (1,800 m) down too.



Petra rests protected from the drizzle.

At our first bus stop an ice cream shop across the street summons us. At the next stop we wait an hour in a bar spending 3€ (\$3.75) for each ten-ounce (.3 liter) beer. Not your best buy.

The bus driver from St. Anton to Zams loves his job. He tells us about everything along his route, especially about last year's flood. He describes almost every house along the route, every embankment, and every bottle of beer that was lost—the flood washed away two breweries. He is an Austrian who loves Italy and everything about it. He is excited that we were walking there. He takes us beyond his last stop to show us a place to eat and several places to stay. Thanks Mr. Driver—may we love our jobs so much as you do yours.

We take a room at Annemarie Gabl's house, one of the bus driver's suggestions. A leg of the Jakobsweg (the German name of the Camino de Santiago) goes through Zams on its way from eastern Austria to join the route that goes from Constance to Geneva. The Jakobsweg goes right past Annemarie's house. The shell on her door invites pilgrims in for the night. We pilgrims just happen to be walking a different route. It's the Santiago shell on her house that attracts us more than the bus driver's recommendation.

Germany to Rome in 64 days

An eagle's nest on a rest day

We had a comfortable sleep last night and a big breakfast this morning. And, yes, I know we're only four days out of Oberstdorf. Nonetheless we decide to take a day off. We'll take our time and adjust to our new environment. All this walking up and down is new, demanding, and strenuous, especially with so much rain.

In an Internet café we check to see if the world has something to tell us. It doesn't. Next we look for a store with inserts for my new shoes. I like the shoes' lateral support but they need better inserts. I don't need that new small blister to get any larger.

It's a day off from our walking so we walk. We stop at the town hospital where Petra spent 12 days in 1997 after breaking her leg on a nearby mountain. The town sits in a broad valley with high mountains on either side. Once she could get out of traction she went up, sat on the roof, and enjoyed some mighty beautiful scenery.

Finding the Jakobsweg in the hills, we walk it a bit. It connects us to Santiago and to the fact that we met along the Camino. Then we walk a big circle around the town first on the south mountainside and then across town and along a very full-of-water river.

As we walk the river we pass a guy looking through a telescope resting on the top of his car. Petra asks, "What are you looking at?"

"A golden eagle pair up there on the mountain." As I peek through the telescope, I see two eaglets in a nest on a cliff below the path we would have taken had we walked to Zams yesterday. With genuine joy, the guy tells us how long the eagles have been there and how he has seen the two little eaglets only a couple times.

We eat pizza and Greek salad for supper. As we eat, a couple dozen walkers come in for dinner. They have just come down from Memminger hut. They're on a one-week outing. Starting in Oberstdorf, they're headed to Bolzano in Italy. They take busses across the valleys. But this 5,900 feet descent took its toll. A couple will be going home tomorrow instead of continuing. The descent was too strenuous too soon. I feel sorry for them. But at the same time they confirm our reasons for skipping that same pathway and taking the bus.

We finish off the evening sitting in a park in front of a church watching the people and cars of Zams go by. It has been a restful rest day. Now we can get back into walking tomorrow.

Walking over Austria's Alps

Walking over Austria's Alps

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

We are deep in the Austrian Alps. The steep-sided mountains are high, the valleys deep. When we are high and can see far, I feel like we are on the set of "*The Sound of Music*," which was filmed a little east of here.

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

