

Book Review

Brian Mooney, *A Long Way for a Pizza – on Foot to Rome*, Thorogood Publishing; London, 2012. ISBN 1 854118 790 2

There are, by the very nature of a pilgrimage, as many ways to be a pilgrim as there are pilgrims, which in part explains the pilgrim's all but irresistible desire, upon returning home, to relate his or her experiences to others. Thus the present volume by Brian Mooney, for long an international journalist with Reuters, who walked the 1300 miles from his home in Essex to Rome.

Mooney, who previously walked the Camino to Santiago de Compostela from home, sees such undertakings as a means of escape, as a way of simplifying our lives. Walking great distances imposes a rhythm of its own upon the solitary walker, who becomes a part of the landscape, and thereby obtains a new perspective on the world.

Equipped with a compass, maps, a multi-volume guidebook, the Gospel of St Luke, and a copy of Hilaire Belloc's *The Path to Rome*, the author makes his way alone across France, at times following the traditional route of *the Via Francigena*, at times picking out a route of his own. He spends the night, for the most part, in hotels, and chooses carefully where to take his meals. His budget, he admits somewhat sheepishly, is something in the region of a hundred euros a day, and includes a series of body massages, the first being at the hands of a 'lissom' lady from the Ivory Coast.

The landscape of which the pilgrim becomes a part is in some measure a landscape of his or her own making. The battlefields and the cemeteries, which Mooney visits on his way through France, are peopled with ghosts from his past.

Having reached Switzerland, he finds himself being mistaken for a tramp. Whatever the intentions of the pilgrim, the pilgrimage itself, the long hours of walking, day upon day, will play a part in shaping the pilgrim experience.

Some pilgrims are forthcoming with regard to their reasons for taking to the road, while others, like Mooney, are more cagey. When asked if he is a real pilgrim, he manages not to answer. He is, he claims, the last person to understand what his intentions were.

Mooney, having crossed the Alps and reached Italy, quotes Luke quoting Jesus as saying: 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?' Any pilgrim, on whatever pilgrimage, must learn this, must come to realise that the world, by and large, is to be trusted.

In Rome, Mooney obtains a *Testimonium* to go with his *Compostela*. Seventy-six days after leaving home he is reunited with his wife, whose offhand remark provides him with the title for his book. It has indeed, as she says, been a long way to go for a pizza, but a pilgrimage, as Mooney knows, is as much about the process as it is about the end.

A journey of 1300 miles on foot is not to be taken lightly, and anyone contemplating the walk from Canterbury to Rome might find this book a good place to start. Try it, first, at home.

Robert Mullen