

# Via Claudia Augusta – by WITOOR 2014

## DAY 1

**Donauwörth, Germany - Augsburg, Germany - 54 km**

The beautiful Donauwörth, as the name suggests, is situated on the banks of the Danube river, at the point where it flows into the river Wörnitz. Long time ago a small fishing community settled on an island of this river and based its life on trade routes between Rome and northern Europe using the navigable stretch of the Danube. The Via Claudia Augusta starts here. It's completely flat. We are heading south. We met in front of the sign that marks the beginning of the path. We're all here : Bettina, Elena, Eugen, Ludwika, Marcello and Simone. Picture ready and off we go! We like it from the very beginning, the green embraces us from everywhere. It is also well signposted and we rarely look at our GPS. We pass small villages that sometimes seem almost deserted. On the road, the sound of a few cars gives way to sounds of nature. We are overwhelmed by sounds nearly forgotten: birds singing, dog barking... And that touch of the wind on our faces! The thing that we notice straight ahead is the amount of care that people here give to their land. Each little garden is preciously taken care of, the bus stops and supermarket car parks are almost sparkling clean. Then, little towns with little churches, that many times remember times of Claudio Augusto. Many times there is also a water fountain, that unfortunately very often says "Nicht Trinkwasser". So: no drinking! Under Meitingen, the cycle path slips in the shade of a forest and begin to follow the Lech River, a tributary of the Danube. Water has a beautiful colour that often contrasts with yellow sand of river beaches. In fact, we happen to see someone standing under a parasol or someone else who is about to swim. We decide to sign the place on our map for all cyclists who want to take a refreshing bath or just put their feet in the water.

The river takes us until Augsburg. The entrance to the city is worth to see by every cyclist. The last few kilometers are situated in a huge park dedicated to sports. We find ourselves in the crowds of people busy with different activities. We receive different signs of greeting and admiration and after having done the first climb on the way, we can finally relax.

## DAY 2

**Augsburg, Germany – Landsberg Am Lech, Germany - 48 km**

Augsburg was founded during the reign of Roman Emperor Augustus in 15 BC and after Trier is the oldest city in Germany. It was a Free Imperial City for over 500 years.

After a quick trip around the centre with a camera, we walk down to the River Lech to resume our journey to the south. We cross the river immediately at the closed Hochablass and enter an endless park in which the path runs for kilometers. We begin to meet several cyclists on our path, partly Germans engaged in a trip out of town and partly tourists from distant areas.

These meetings are great for our filming. Someone gets curious and stops to ask why we are recording. Chatting makes the time fly, so we quickly pass parks, ponds and picnic areas to reach the first milestone of the day. These are real stones that were placed along the Roman roads to count the miles. On all of them we find modern Latin inscriptions indicating that this is the place where we meet the history.

We decide to modify our today's route in order to reach charming Landsberg Am Lech. The city is built on the River Lech and we can ensure that it's worth to pedal those 5 km away from the path to see that city. Landsberg is a mix of old and new. The old town with its treasures and historical buildings preserved with great care in perfect condition, contrast beautifully with the interesting modern buildings, giving the city a very particular taste.

But there is still something more about Landsberg. According to a survey by the magazine Stern, Landsberg is one of the two cities, in two regions of Germany, the one offering the best quality of life. It goes without saying that a city in which you live so well is definitely suitable to accommodate cyclists of the Via Claudia Augusta.

This evening we decide to have a typical Bavarian dinner in one of the best restaurants in town. The food and beer is served by a waiter dressed in Bavarian costumes and all this together delivers magical moments.

## DAY 3

**Landsberg Am Lech, Germany – Füssen, Germany**

**80 km**

Our weather fortune seem to be leaving us today. Even though warm, but not sunny day is good enough to cycle, it's not really perfect for filming and pictures taking. Watching heavy clouds approaching us quickly we try to speed up with pedaling. Unfortunately with no luck, as we learn later on, Fussen welcomes us with pouring rain. Supporting van on days like this is a treasure. Despite of some hills ahead of us, the route to Fussen is almost idealistic though, with many artifacts of Via Claudia Augusta along the way. We come across Roman milestones again, Roman-like villages with churches and a part of real stony Roman road – a real treasure!

Fussen and its surroundings is definitely a must-see. No wonder it's called a romantic soul of Bavaria. In addition, with its 65 perfectly signposted routes it can be easily called a paradise for cyclists. And then the town's charming location on the edge of the Alps. Framed in by imposing high mountain peaks and an idyllic lake district, at an altitude of 800 -1200 meters above sea level (the highest Bavarian elevation) is the ideal starting point for visiting the royal castles of Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau. If not the rain, it could have been truly romantic.

## DAY 4

**Füssen, Germany - Ehrwald, Austria**

**36 km**

45 km of a very pleasurable cycle path, chilly, but not raining.

Passing by Ehrenberg Castle Ruins to finally enter on beautiful path in the forest. We pass by the hermitage on Katzenberg which was sort of gate from the Middle Ages. Today's complex of the hermitage also includes an old roadside inn, a chapel and barracks.

This is how we arrive in Tyrol. The next town, Ehrwald is a typical mountain holiday destination and it has a lot to offer. Family hiking trails along lush mountain meadows, steep rock faces for extreme climbers, trails for mountain bikers and rafting tours turn every meter of altitude into an experience. But that's not all. Fancy to see the view from the top of the Zugspitze? With three cable cars running to the top, it's not a problem. But leisure activities is not all what Ehrwald's got to offer. It has still retained a wealth of traditions: if you want to experience old customs such as the Sonnwend-Feuer (the solstice fire) – Ehrwald is a perfect place.

For us Ehrwald is particular for yet another reason. We find a bike treasure there – a place created especially for cyclists. Wonderful.

## DAY 5

**Ehrwald, Austria – Landeck, Austria**

**55 km**

A day in Austria. No rain, but no sun either. We're worried for pictures and video recording. Sun spells would make it much more inviting. It's also chilly, but this only motivates to pedal quicker. Avoiding rain clouds is our main task for today. We don't want to repeat Fussen experience. Also because there is Fernpass ahead of us – a beautiful passage along two lakes, it would be a pity to use a car.

Road quickly starts to climb and we climb as well. But it's all worth it as the downhill is even more picturesque – the route seems to be almost attached to mountain. We pass Fernpass castle, Brauerei Schloss Neu-Starkenbergr built in fourteenth century to protect the original Via Claudia Augusta and Kronburg Castle built for the same purposes. Then we quickly find ourselves in the valley where cycling route joins the walking path of Via Claudia Augusta.

We arrive to Landeck quite early. The famous Landeck Castle towers can be seen from quite far away. It used to be the court of the Counts of Tyrol. Today, however, it is one of the most important cultural meeting places with many concerts and exhibitions on.

In Zams, close to Landeck there is also Tyrol's mystical gorge (Zammer Lochtputz) – all aspects of water enriched by multi-media shows. The legend says that those who dare to enter the Zammerloch, are sure to come across mysterious sights. So be aware!

## DAY 6

**Landeck, Austria – Resia, Italy**

**65 km**

Our first part of Via Claudia Augusta route tracking finishes in Resia today. Before we leave Austria though we have some bike climbing to do. It is tough and breathtaking, but not only because of altitude, but even more because of landscapes. Passo Resia was one of the most historically important Alpine passes from the Middle Ages until the Early

Modern Age. Even though, Passo Resia is possible to reach also for those with little ones or those a bit less trained cyclists. Quite a few cycle shuttles help cyclists and their bikes to get passes and this makes Via Claudia Augusta the easiest alpine crossing for cyclists.

It is beautiful indeed and there is even much more to see afterwards. For those really big fans of Via Claudia Augusta there is a Via Claudia Augusta archaeological museum in Fliess – located a little unfortunate for cyclist (2km up the hill) but still worth to see. Also Ried Blick auf Schloss Siegmundsfried is a place to see and for those of you who decide to stick to bike all the way long, there is a quick trip to Switzerland available (border in Bauensemble Altfinstermunz) as this is how the route goes.

One of those specialities waiting for tourists on the other side of Passo Resia is the sad story of the tower in the lake. It's definitely a must see! We find Resia the perfect place to end the phase one of our route planning. Motionless lake, mountains and tranquility would be the best description of today's stop.

## DAY 7

**Resia, Italy – Lagundo, Italy**

**80 km**

Today's stage is one of the most beautiful and relaxing on the way. First of all, it's way down where the sweet ride is the boundary to the natural beauty and history of these places. In fact, along the way we find so many cyclists. Probably thanks to nice weather, but not only. This path is made accessible to all thanks to the many bus services with bike transport that give the option of trespass steep parts quickly and with no muscular effort.

We start early. After a few hundred meters we come across one of the most spectacular things of this trip: the bell tower of Old Graun in the lake. In 1950, the village of Graun and part of Resia had to give way to the construction of the reservoir. The tower sticking out from lake is left as a reminder of the town. It is possible to stay here longer and have a walk around lake or practice different sports such as kite surfing. Unfortunately we do not have much time and we have to start to cycle again.

Our downhill part starts in perfect condition and completely surrounded by nature. At Burgeis there is a castle right next to the path and a little higher up the Benedictine Abbey of Marienberg, located at 1340 m above sea level which makes it the highest Benedictine abbey in Europe.

Then Glorenza - one of the most beautiful villages in Italy with its walls in perfect condition. We do not want to write much because we want to leave the surprise for you. Let's just say one should stop there at least for an ice cream. The path runs along the Adige River. We pass Castelfoglio with its castle nearby.

Finally we enter the area of apples and someone has thought well to open a small kiosk to offer (out of charge!) a glass of apple juice. Delicious!

Before arriving in Merano the path gives us one last great emotion: the panoramic view from two giant chairs. Soon we enter Merano Forest, famous for hosting the factory of beer. We recommend a visit to the production of beer. Later on you can have a pint in the very atmospheric bar nearby.

## DAY 8

**Lagundo, Italy – Bolzano, Italy**

**40 km**

Lagundo is situated only 25 km from Bolzano, so it's a day of slow riding for us. It also slowly announces things we will see along the way: the emblem of a barrel of wine, overhanged by a vine-shoot of black grapes, symbolizes the viticulture practiced in the area.

This part has also a slightly different experience to offer. Let me reveal some secrets: dark wood, big windows, clear lines, minimalist furnishings, the use of high-grade natural materials and the exclusive feel-good products made from pure natural produce from South Tyrol that are used there. These are Thermals Baths of Merano. Highly recommended!

But Merano is not only for spa lovers. It is located within a basin, surrounded by mountains standing up to 3335 metres above sea level, at the entrance to the Passeier Valley and the Vinschgau. In the past the town has been a popular place of residence for several scientists, literary people, and artists (no wonder!) including Franz Kafka, Ezra Pound and Paul Lazarsfeld, who appreciated its mild climate.

It's also close enough to wonderful city of Bolzen, so we are able to get there on the same day. To many of us it is a perfect location for many reasons: it has vineyards, mountains, good weather and lakes. It's also very bicycle orientated.

## DAY 9

**Bolzano, Italy – Trento, Italy**

**57 km**

The bicycle orientation of Bolzen shows from the very first contact with the city where you can immediately notice how public institutions are involved in this movement, and what's more important, how absolutely growing it is. Bolzen is crossed by a dense network of bike paths, and the cyclists are channeled on these tracks and can easily reach all areas of the city.

For us, leaving this morning, it is nice to be able to experience this special time of the day. We obediently get in the queue, or rather, we form the line, and still being careful at intersections, we gradually abandon the center and head south towards Trento. Leaving the city we come

across one more particular thing: a series of dining areas for cyclists, the famous Bike Grills. Furthermore, there is still a kiosk that apart from fruit sells also fruit juices and energy drinks for cyclists.

The path of the Adige Valley is one of the most beautiful in Italy. Completely flat, surrounded by the Alps Retiche to the west and the Dolomites to the east. The route touches here the buttocks villages that have shaped the history of the valley. The small town of Neumarkt is a typical medieval market town. The towers of the castle on the hill above the center of the city of Mezzolombardo, probably built in the 13th century, served as a guard at the main road. Archaeological findings indicate that there was a Roman fort also nearby.

Socially open Trento welcomes us on a late afternoon. In the Province of Trento we meet again the posters dedicated to the Via Claudia Augusta.

#### **DAY 10**

##### **Trento, Italy – Avio, Italy**

51 km

First of all, Trento follows Bolzen in ranks for quality of life, standard of living, and business and job opportunities, (coming 1st, 6th and 2nd in Italy respectively) The city preserves also its Austro-Hungarian architectural heritage and is the only city in the Alpine area that shows its former glory of the Renaissance. Also here, we find the famous (and the first) Nomi Bike Grill.

The area is famous for its apples but also grapes. We appreciate the kindness of the local farmers who on more than one occasion offer us grapes straight from the bush. Never had better!

The path continues to follow the Adige River and nearly to Rovereto. In Rovereto we find Museum of Contemporary Art.

And in Sabbionara Avio we luckily arrive for the Grape Festival where we have the opportunity to visit the various courts and courtyards of the houses at the foot of the Sabbionara Castle of Avio.

#### **DAY 13**

##### **Erbè, Italy – Ostiglia, Italy**

And our last part of the Via Claudia Augusta route, full of historical treasures. Devil's Villa or Villa Bra are only couple of them.

Palude del Busatello is another treasure, this time natural. It's an oasis where nature can be accompanied by activities like birdwatching, observation of plant species and also the visit of monuments and other natural attractions found along. The only thing from our cyclist's perspective was lack of effort put into this area. With the grass sometimes waste-high it was almost impossible to pass or even to enter by bicycle. Cycle routes displayed on boards seem inviting, but probably because no one used them in a while, they became overgrown.

Finally we arrive on the bank of the River Po, and after a few kilometers we can clearly see the ancient Roman port. It is a sunny Sunday afternoon when we arrive in Ostiglia. Maybe that's why it looks so deserted. It seems like the town is just for us and that we are the only attraction scheduled for residents this afternoon. We try to go to the Po River Museum, but we find doors closed due to damage caused by earthquake in 2012.