

# EQUESTRIAN PILGRIM ALONG THE FRANCIGENA WAY. PLANNING, SURVEYING AND TESTING FRANCIGENA AS AN EQUESTRIAN PATH IN TUSCANY

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## Summary

Currently, the ministerial Francigena Way has no equestrian variants and staging points for horses, for both the overnight that for the temporary stop; many sections of the path are lacking of water supply, very important for horses. In addition, many of the current draft ministerial routes pass along highly trafficked roads, dangerous for the riders but also for hikers and bikers. The purpose of the study is to make the Francigena Way in Tuscany usable by horseback, ensuring quality standards to European levels of facilities and infrastructure for the horses. In this perspective, the equestrian tourism becomes an integral and driving force for the economy of rural areas, through the enhancement of local specialties and across all activities related to the horse. The horse can become true protagonist of the territory's rural life, eco-friendly means of transport, discovery tool for rural areas and main subject of the agricultural multifunctionality concept. Equestrian tourism is a hiking experience which favors a slow travel, more and more widespread, and that allows for an intimate and natural vision of the territory and a greater knowledge of the rural environment. To make Francigena usable by horseback also provides greater possibilities of use, expanding the target of tourist (by foot, by bicycle, by horseback) and stimulating public and private incentives to various possibilities offered by breeding and keeping the horse in the perspective of multifunctionality agricultural holdings.

Keywords: Francigena Way, equestrian tourism, horse paths, horse building

## Introduction

Today, many people walk through the paths of pilgrimage, as evidenced data on the way to Compostela, and many of those want to have an experience together with his horse and an equal are those who would like to do but do not have the opportunity, especially because often there are not buildings and paths specially created. The "equitourism" is one of the best hiking way that best allows a more intimate and natural landscape, to arousing emotions in the rider that only the horse can transmit.

Tuscany is a region that definitely offers an exceptional opportunity for the development of equestrian tourism thanks to the wealth of its natural and environmental heritage and to the craft traditions, history and culture of its inhabitants. In fact today the equestrian tourism is not

any more a small market, but has become a true form to spending time to discover the landscape.

In Europe there are already two important cases of successful integrated offering of equestrian tourism. The first system is represented by Ireland (already fully operational), the second is located in Italy and is represented by the Abruzzo region. In particular, this project looks at the model of Ireland, which has been able to relate public and private initiatives by creating a tourism product that has turned the horse culture of the territory in a special tourist offer “all season” and to generate local economic value. A rational and modern network of riding trails involves the building of specific structures for the horses according to the new needs of equestrian tourists.

Today the Francigena in Tuscany and in the rest of the Italian stretch is not suitable for horse tourists, there's no reference points to stop with the horse and equestrian variants that necessarily must be identified to guarantee the safety of horses and riders. Many paths of the Ministerial Francigena project pass along highly trafficked roads, dangerous for the riders but also for walking and biking hikers. Along the Way there are not specific building for horses both for overnight and for the temporary stop, which would allow visits to villages and places of religious interest. In many sections of the route there are not even of water supply, very important for horses, especially in the summer when they sweat a lot.

The Department of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Systems (GE-SAAF), in collaboration with The Department of Tourism of Tuscany Region, completed by next year the realization of the equestrian path along the Via Francigena in Tuscany, guaranteeing European quality standards of the structures and infrastructures for the horses (Fig. 1).

The objectives we wanted to reach with this research are:

- create an equestrian path of the Via Francigena in Tuscany;
- total GPS survey of the Via Francigenain Tuscany on horseback, of the different variants, of the equestrian rest areas and first total test directly by horse;
- planing of new buildings solutions horse shelters to connect to the equestrian paths
- promotion of equestrian tourism as a slow and silent traveling, and as life healthy habit;
- spread of a modern and different way of thinking about the horse, not as a means of transport but travel companion
- promotion of the horse as an instrument of spreading of agriculture multifunctionality (hippotherapy, pet-terapy, educational farms, hiking equestrian tourism and sports, development opportunities for farriers, saddlers and local veterinarians, etc.).



Fig. 1. The Horse Francigena Way

## Materials and methods

The field surveys were carried out by a new design methodology of paths based on new types of paper ballots and using GPS specially thought out for the acquisition of data in rural and mountain areas.

For the creation of the paths we have been used GIS software Arcview 3.3 and ArcGis9, basic cartography dell'IGMI scale 1: 25,000, cartography 1: 10,000 and 1: 2,000 of the Tuscany Region and other regions, raster and digital, and aerial photos of the different areas. The cartographic survey has resulted in a first step to a careful evaluation of historical sources and references. This examination allows the identification of a primary track and the verification of paths already delineated and existing in order to illustrate possible improvements and to indicate possible variants of the main path.

After preliminary research, we move to the second stage operational field: tracking of the entire path directly in the field; relief and verifica-

tion of the path identified on paper. Then were detected the criticalities, such as river crossings, road crossings, landslides, crossing private property; rest facilities and / or hospitality, places of natural, historical and artistic interest.

The instrumentation and software used for the survey in the field were: GPS Magellan Explorist 610, handheld Pocket Pc Hp Ipaq hx2750 128 mb with ArcPad software, Creative digital audio recorder, digital camera Nikon ColdPix. The survey was executed using the GPS in kinematic mode with reference to the following specifications: maximum acceptable error planimetric = 5 m; Significant frequency = 1 s; maximum PDOP admitted during the survey = 6; minimum number of satellites received in the course of the relief = 5.

The processing of data collected consisting of: control GPS tracks recorded on the cartography and overlapping of the acquired data; creating Excel tables with data; chart creation of the altimetry; creating tables distances / trip times. The data were entered into the GIS shapefile as creating a series of digital thematic maps.

#### *Survey and test-collaudo by horse*

After the discovery phase of the equestrian variants followed in cartographic laboratory of the Department were made some visits to the most problematic sections to verify the accessibility of the routes identified in the laboratory.

In June of 2011, it was made a test-collaudo of the equestrian variants identified directly by horse. The trip lasted 17 days for a total of 435 km (in total 620 km including the reconnaissances). The trip was set up and directly conducted by Dr. Gianluca Bambi, expert in equestrian and rural tourism (Fig. 2). To encourage and promote one Italian equine race was chosen a Haflinger horse that is perfect for traveling along the Francigena, especially in the Apennine section.

## **Results**

#### *Horse shelter along Via Frangigena*

A rational and modern network of riding trails involves the building of specific structures for the horses according to the new needs of equestrian tourists. These shelters require appropriate technical models that today cannot be found easily in the Italian or foreign literature. Over the years this gap has led to the development of the practice “do it yourself” and following old techniques of construction, not able to meet the new demands of the market of horse tourism.



Fig. 2. The Dr. Gianluca Bambi and his horse along the Via Francigena

This research has highlighted two different models, with solutions that can meet the needs of equestrian tourists and have correspondence with the laws about the construction and the health part.

These structures, preferably made with traditional materials and according to correct criteria of insertion into the landscape and reducing environmental impact, are:

- 1) Temporary stay horse-shelter: buildings to put in resting places of interest along the path (historic villages, monasteries, etc.), where it's possible to arrange the horses for a few hours and allow to the riders to make a careful visiting of places of interest;
- 2) Overnight stay horse shelter: structures to put in particular points where it is possible to spend the night for horses and riders. This research has pioneered a new type of horse barn with attached storage feed and saddle-room. These structures are very dynamic, due to the possibility to change quickly the position of the horses (max 8 places).

This research also aims to create a sort of guideline for the construction of models to be put inside the municipal law. The structures were designed following the general principles of the Code for the Protection and Management of Horses prepared by the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies. The code provides the essential criteria for the proper management of horses, in accordance with good practice and ethical behaviour to protect the health and the welfare of the horses.



For the design were observed the following principles: low impact, low cost, easy installation, complete reuse.

The research has identified two different proposals of horse shelter, with solutions that can satisfy the needs of modern tourists riding and have correspondence with the legislation about constructive sanitation. These buildings, preferably made with materials and according to traditional types must follow the criteria of correct insertion into the landscape and reducing environmental impact, and are:

1. Overnight stay horse shelter
2. Temporary stay horse-shelter

#### *Overnight stay horse shelter*

This type of horse shelter must be connected to one official accommodation for the riders (according to the regional law LR 42/2000). It is an innovative type of horse shelter (Fig. 7), designed to meet the different needs. In fact, the structure is able to use like a box (horse stall) or single placed horse (like the old horse post station), with easy operations that require few minutes.

In this way we can offer two possibility of hospitalization, because some horses don't tolerate conditional admission in single placed (Fig. 3). The building permits to accommodate up to 8 in single placed or 4 horses in the box or in other mixed solutions (4+2, 6+1, 2+3).

Pertaining to the area for horse shelter there's a room used to store feed and saddles and also emergency shelter for riders. The module is dimensioned so that the horses are placed head-to-head and have a width at minimum of 147 cm and a length of 307 cm. The building must be equipped with artificial lighting fixed or mobile in order to ensure the inspection operations during the night. Inside every single placed there are one drinking trough and one manger placed in the corners opposite the opening. The water supply must be potable. The door to the storage room must be provided with a padlock.

#### *Temporary stay horse-shelter*

This type of shelter is based on the concept of old horse post station, to put in resting places of interest along the path (historic villages, monasteries, etc.), where it's possible to arrange the horses for a few hours and allow to the riders to make a careful visiting of places of interest. The building is modular and does not have the storage compartment saddles and feed (advisable nevertheless provide a fence to support the saddles and housing). Must be guaranteed one external drinking trough (Fig. 4).

In both structures must be present:

- iron ring to tie in correct way the horses, preferably with a rope fit-



Fig. 3. The overnight stay horse shelter model



Fig. 4. The Temporary stay horse-shelter model

- ted with a counterweight to avoid accidents;
- sink to wash the horse tack and a rubber tube (at minimum 4 m) to clean the horses;
- chain needed in the bottom of the single horse placed (behind the horse), designed to contain and give security to fearful or nervous horses.

Thanks to a collaboration between the Tuscany Region, the Province of Florence and the Wood Design company, one of the Department horse



Fig. 6. Structure completed and inaugurated in June 2014

shelter model was created in June 2014 in the Municipality of Gambassi Terme (Fi). This is the first overnight stay horse shelter along the Via Francigena Tuscany (Fig. 5,6,7,8).

## Conclusions

Make available the Francigena for those who go on horseback, it means expanding the possibilities for use of the Way, targeting a increasing population that practice equestrian tourism. In Italy about 45000-50000 people practice equestrian tourism (according to data of the National Federation Equestrian Tourism - Fitetrec) and there are more than 7 thousand kilometers of horse trails and 120 thousand fans who practice equitourism. In economic terms, the phenomenon of equestrian tourism moves in Italy a turnover of over 9 million euros every year and involves 4,500 agriturismo and other accommodations.

The horse hiker is a traveler / tourist / pilgrim that requires a number of support services both for himself and for the horse, so preferring accommodation to be able to give assistance also for the horse. The price has a range from a minimum of € 100 to a maximum of 350 € per night (including horse service).

The Department (Gesaaaf) in agreement with the Tuscany Region, will complete within the next year the implementation of the equestrian





Fig. 7. Particular of innovative type of horse shelter



Fig. 8. Horse inside the overnight stayhorse shelter

path of the Via Francigena in Tuscany, guaranteeing European quality standards of structures and infrastructures for the horses. The GPS survey, variants equestrian and Points of Interest dedicated to equestrian tourism, will ensure the implementation of an innovative network of equestrian routes.

The final numeric data will be available in different formats, so as to facilitate the final user, which through its GPS, georeferenced images, maps and 3D projections, will have the opportunity to be planned and follow the Francigena in total safety. The Via Francigena will become a great “Ippovia”(Horse Path, the biggest in Italy) which will increase the Equestrian and pilgrimage tourism along the Francigena Way.

This research has allowed to make two different solutions for horse shelters, preferably made with materials and according to traditional types must follow the criteria of correct insertion into the landscape and reducing environmental impact, and are:

1. Overnight stay horse shelter
2. Temporary stay horse-shelter

These horse shelters represent the construction standards along the Via Francigena in Tuscany and we hope, in the next few years, will become the construction model along all the Via Francigena and in other pilgrimage routes.

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