

The Last Leg of our European Grande Tour 2015



This is a Pompeiian brothel bed. It's made of stone and industrial strength to take a beating. I use hookers as my hook to grab your attention for this BB which is a consolidation of sites from Italy to the Reich. But we'll come back to the whorehouse, don't worry.



We slept in the camper on the all night ferry from Greece to Italy. I needed the rest to be alert. Dago drivers? Anarchistic. For a people who can't win a war they sure are aggressive, like in this granny knot of cars at an intersection. When in Rome...I closed my eyes, leaned on the horn and stomped on the gas.



It's just a day's drive across Italy from Bari to Pompeii. Another half tank country. We camped across from Pompeii's entrance for three nights. You've seen pictures of the ruins so I'm not going to bore you with many more. This is the forum.



I'm sure you know that the antecedent of our railway track gauge is that of Roman chariots that cut these grooves so I won't bore you with that either.



However, Roman plumbing always blows me away for its sophistication. Pipes were made of lead and fed wealthy homes. The plebs used the many fountains.



Their bakeries also intrigue me. The three stone things are mills. Pour wheat in the top, mules or slaves (40% of Pompeii) turn the grinders, the flour sifts out onto the bottom ledge. The oven could be used today it's in such good condition.



Fast food *thermopoliums* were everywhere. Few homes of ordinary people had room for kitchens. Plebs ate out. They were important social gathering places to shoot the coprolite.



Walls like this make up most of Pompeii.



The stones were either volcanic or limestone often loaded with trace fossils. This volcanic stone was brought up from the shore as it still has 2000-year-old mini barnacles attached.

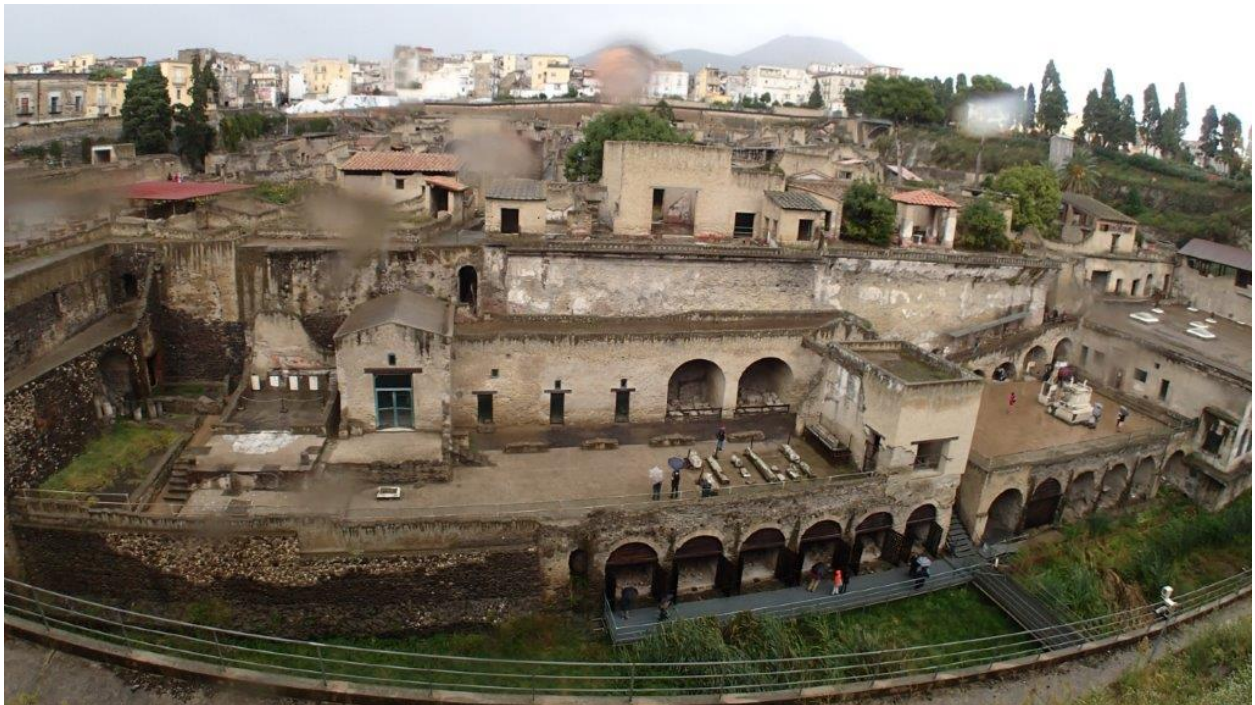


These aquatic trace fossils of burrowing worms were everywhere – including on the huge stone blocks used for public buildings.





When I was here last in '73, just as Ms. Saunders and I reached the museum displaying these, we got the call from our bus driver that we had to head back to Naples. I was choked. Finally...I got to see them. Besides vividly sensing their panic, what caught my notice was their size. They were a small, lean people. A little research revealed that the average woman was about 5 feet tall, and the men 5'4".



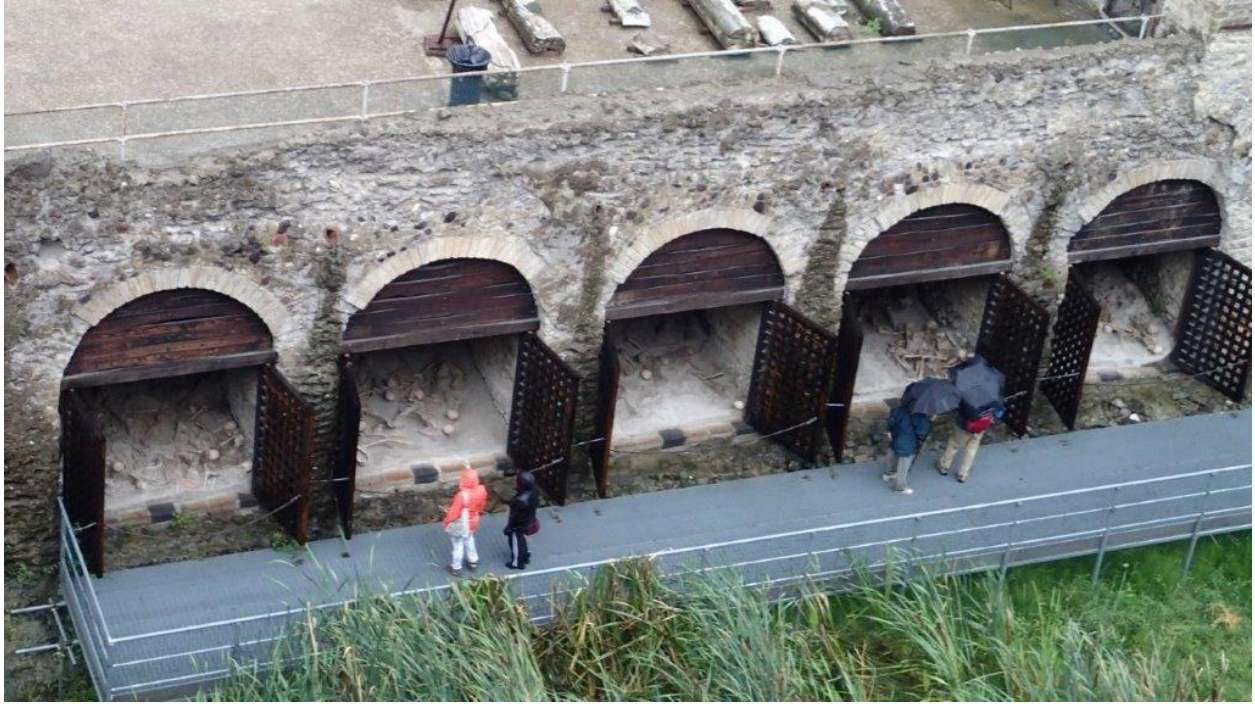
We caught the 15-minute train to Herculaneum, smaller but wealthier. Note those crescent shaped boat shelters in the foreground. We'll come back to them....



Herc is noteworthy partially because of the vivid colors that remain on many outstanding murals.



Also carbon remained. The milling in the boards on the door was just as straight and true as today.



But it was here where the story of this port town is most dramatically told. 300 skeletons were discovered in these boat sheds, their last desperate attempt to escape.



Unlike at Pompeii where their bodies were covered with ash, here they were hit with a 500F blast that brought a fast death, and left only bones. There were no cavities to pump plaster into. Talking about cavities, dentists wouldn't have much to do here; teeth were straight and healthy. Sugar wasn't in their diet.



It looks like Madame Su is walking in a moat. No. This was the shore. That 60 meter wall on the right fell from the volcano. The Med is now a couple of clicks away – the volcano having pushed the shoreline back.



Is this the D Train through Brooklyn from Manhattan to Coney Island?



Or Tijuana?



No, it's the half hour train to Naples, still as slummy as when I was here in '73. But the narrow walking streets of the old downtown are rich in character and color and we loved it. (Graffiti is thick all along the Mediterranean, from Spain all the way to Italy and Greece. It's particularly bad here though.)



People eating these cone things caught our attention.



It's such a unique Neapolitan treat it's been elevated to fridge magnet status for tourists.



They're stuffed with seafood and at 5 Euros, a great value. They stuffed both of us. Ain't I a tainty eater? Hey, when you're from a place called Carrot River, whatdya expect? Class?



The Naples National Archaeological Museum is one of the world's great museums that no one has heard of. It houses the stupendous finds from Pompeii and Herculaneum.



These include food – including a round loaf of bread. Furniture also survived but we weren't allowed to shoot pictures of it for some reason. But it was very fashionable.



Have frying pans changed at all?



And this brings us back to Pompeii's brothels, of which there were an astonishing 41 for this town of only 5,000. Everywhere in town were suggestive images – on walls, friezes, lamps, mosaics, wind chimes, carved into stone walls and pavement, pedestals, statues, even garden

ornaments. With visual reminders everywhere, sex was never far from being on everyone's mind all the time. In other words, it was like high school.



These discoveries are stored in the museum's Secret Cabinet, actually a series of rooms. Bourbon King Charles III 200-years-ago ordered them locked away.



They've been relatively recently opened and it reveals a lusty people who enjoyed their jollies and weren't one bit prudish about it. Anything went.



I mean anything. That brothel, steps away from the central forum, had ten cubicles, five on the main, five up, and erotic paintings decorating the walls. It would take an entire BB to do the Secret Cabinet (or Room) justice so instead check out this documentary at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uHuFYyO4go>.



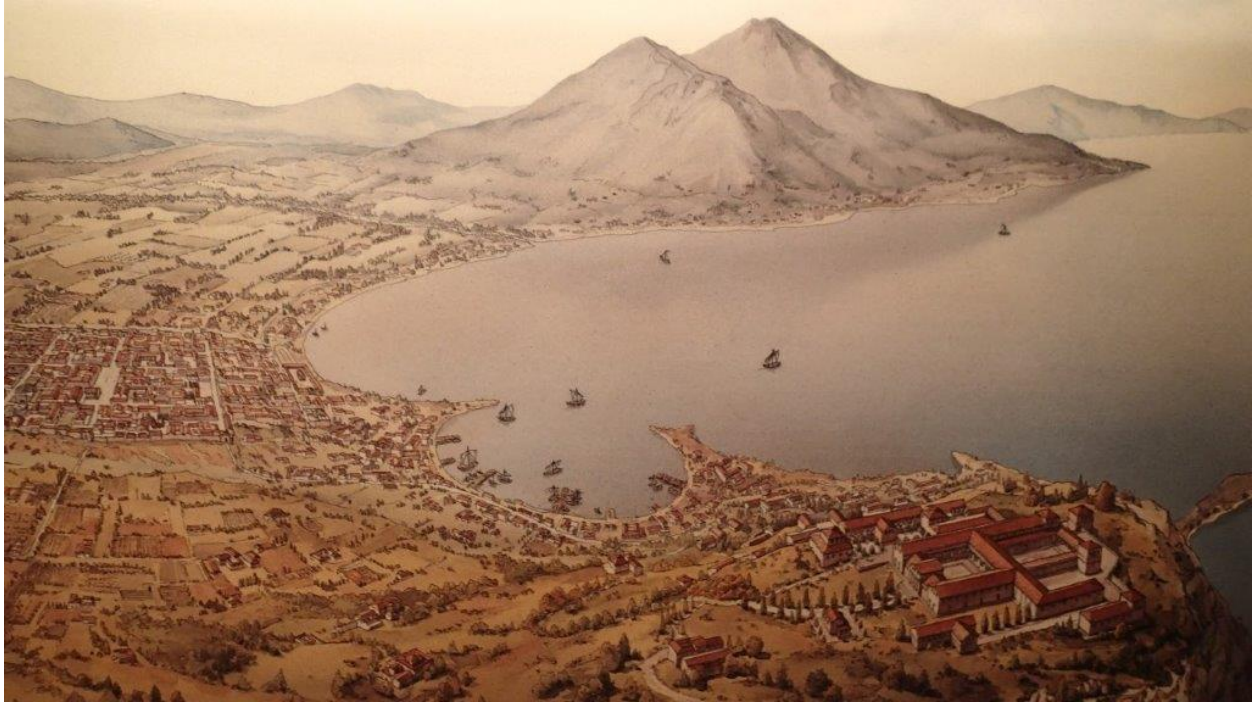
The villain. We drove almost to the top of the green part of Vesuvius, then The Dragon Lady carried me the rest of the way.



On the right it's still smoking. It should quit. Not healthy.



Naples today in the bg. With coaching from a passing guide we picked out Pompeii and Herc.



Naples then.



A surprise – while booting at 110kph up the main toll highway running along the wide valley connecting Naples and Rome, we spotted Monte Cassino on its mountain top perch off to the right. Site of a major and bloody WW-II battle. Once we got north of Rome the graffiti and litter disappeared, thank gawd.



I've always wanted to see Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli. The ultimate dream home. He's my favorite emperor. Instead of further conquest, he consolidated the empire's borders and left us the Pantheon. A huge lover of Greek culture, he spread it throughout the empire. And a constant traveler, he left his monuments in the form of the famous wall and triumphant arches everywhere he went. This was a lad who lived large. Very large.



The place looks like a gang of my worst tenants over the years moved in.



His grand bath. The Roman baths are still with us in the form of Turkish baths, or hamams. He had a couple or three others.



Our grand bath. Based on one we had in our hotel in Zanzibar, and a direct descendant of Turkey's, and before that, Rome's. It migrated down Africa's east coast with the large Moslem influence.



The little woman (she hates it when I call her that) fetching up dinner. I made Greek salad every evening and she handled the meat and rice. I drove; she did dishes. We tried the wine believed drunk at Pompeii – the grape is called piedrosso – but it wasn't great. We weren't surprised they watered it down.



Tuscany is soft on the eye, heart and soul and we took a vacation from our vacation here for a week.



When I drove in November 1973 from Florence south I was taken aback by the incredible soft beauty. Everything was golden. Then, Tuscany wasn't Tuscany; the world hadn't discovered it yet and began its love affair. I only discovered it then.





The hilltown of Pienza is the soul of Tuscany. Pope Pius II was born here and when he took power, he returned and made his home town into the epitome of a Renaissance village. We made it our home too. It's a UNESCO site. Hell, all of Tuscany should be on the World Heritage list.



The central square was being made over for a TV series on the Medicis, who bankrolled the Renaissance. Dustin Hoffman is in the cast. The wooden extension was being constructed.



(The extension is on the left.) The square, and Tuscany, weren't always peaceful. In WW-II when the Yanks or Canucks swept through here, this became the OK Corral. The sandstone building facing was heavily peppered with machine gun fire.



The top windows, where the bad guys in the Darth Vader helmets obviously were positioned, were particularly targeted. The shooting was wild. The attacking Allies just filled the air with lead.



The battle must have been fast and furious and wrapped up in minutes with this kind of shooting going on. Each of the many hilltowns would have been garrisoned by the Huns, requiring each to be swept clean. Nasty times. (After the Allies invaded Sicily, Mussolini was overthrown and eventually hung up by his heels, but the Nazi took over. The Wops really never wanted to fight

anyone, least of all the Yanks. Hell, half of Italy was in the American Mafia making a good living.)



It's so calm and peaceful it's hard to imagine those hard times and hard men.

JJ



Because of our Kraut plates over the 2.5 months we frequently had Jerry's goosestepping up to our van, *actunging* with arm raised in Nazi salutes. Madame Su insists they were just waving in a friendly manner, but what does she know?



Siena. The heart of Tuscany and a living Renaissance museum.



People laid around on the round square lazing in the sun.



One was this Siena female plumber on her day off.



The Dragon Lady doing her morning stretching exercises.



I shouldn't make fun of her. For one thing she doesn't even weigh 100 pounds. In Siena she bought me these incredibly comfortable handmade Italian Mafia hitman dress shoes to go with my tuxedo. I'm much too discreet to say how many dollars they cost but I'm worth every bit of the 177.5 Euros she paid.



You mean he actually wears something other than khaki! Well, sort of. I have a few dozen Hawaiian shirts I wear when home, but on the road and expedition khaki – with breast pockets I can secure – are best.



In return, I bought her a gelato. Hey, don't scoff. A cone cost 8 bloody Euros. That's \$11Canadian. For a cone. At that price I deserved to eat half of it, and I did.



When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie.... Forty years ago pizza was a joke of a thin, hard crust with a veneer of tomato sauce and cheese. The Yank greaseballs really invented the pizza, then brought it back to Italy, where it caught on.



Then we boomed north through the Dolomites and Brenner Pass. I think that's where the Brenner Party were snowed in in the 1800s and ended up eating each other.



The hills are alive with the sound of muzak. We blitzkrieg through Austria, not even a quarter tank country.



Back to the Fatherland. I always thought “pissoir” was a humorous take off. I was wrong. This was at a rest stop on the autobahn where the speed limit is 130kph but some go a helluva lot faster – and everyone drives like they were invading France.



And back to Munich, having put on 10,882 kilometers. We took our van back a week early and put up at the 1890 Eden Wolfe Hotel so we could explore Munich more. Interesting town, especially if you like beer and are fascinated in things Nazi.



First stop was a visit to Adolf's place from 1920-29. He rented a tiny, cold room here, now used for storage because of it.

as



Schellingstrasse is the hip street, and was fashionable then. L-R: brown building was Heinrich Hoffman's studio, Adolf's official photographer, and where he met happy airhead and assistant Frau Eva Braun. Next was Nazi HQ. And with the turret, his former favorite lunch spot until the owner supposedly cut off his tab. There's no information if he survived the war....



Above Hoffman's door is one of the few vestiges of the Nazi era: a stone eagle, though beheaded. Munich had more trouble coming to grips with its evil past than the rest of Germany but it's done it with maturity and courage. A new Nazi documentation center opened this May on

the site of the Brown House (another HQ) on Konigplatz, site of Nazi rallies and the infamous book burning. If only the Japanese could come to terms with their evil past in like manner....



For lunch, Adolf moved down a block to the Osteria Bavaria, but also known then as the Osteria Italiana.



It's recognized as his favorite Munich restaurant and is still a top restaurant,



It's little changed. Continuing our interest of checking out favored eateries of mass murderers, we lunched here too. See the Buenos Aires Blah Blah for the ABC Café where we lunched on excellent, if heavy, Hun food where Eichmann and Mengele met. This is the left wing as you walk through the door.



But Hitler and henchmen liked the right wing, of course, and his favorite table in the roomette at the end. That's the table over Frau Su's right shoulder.



The roomette, like the restaurant, is rich in character, with huge century plus old paintings on the walls themselves. Great atmosphere. It's such a civilized place to take a break from barbarically planning invasions and the wholesale slaughter of millions.



His favorite dish, being a vega, was vegetarian ravioli. Although I don't normally like the stuff, I ordered the spinach rav. It was brilliant! Delicious! The Frau ordered spaghetti with truffle. Yes, we'd go back.



You can't go to Munich without checking out the Hofbrauhaus where she, as usual, got so slobbering drunk she couldn't carry me home. This was taken Sunday 3:00pm and the place was packed. Oktoberfest ended Oct 4 incidentally. These Boche love their beer. An oomph band in Bavarian shorts was playing.



As usual, she also dragged me through sex shops. They go for the Vegas look.



She didn't find anything of interest, but I spotted this New Zealand sex toy. I considered buying it for Kiwi friend and movie guy Kevin Chisnall in Bangkok but decided it wouldn't fit in the overhead storage in the plane. Sorry Kev.



While on the subject, this statue downtown reminded me of a joke Chicken Legs invented three months ago that I'm still laughing about. "Know why men don't have breasts? We'd never get anything done." Garth Ramsay, as he's occasionally known, generously volunteered to revamp

Blah Blah and post all 60 plus entries so they'll be accessible. He's a computer geek and a bloody genius at it. And this wraps our August 17-Oct 31 invasion of Europe.



Biggest surprise? Les Frogs. They were the nicest, happiest, most polite and helpful of everyone, even apologizing for their poor English! I had to check the map to make sure I was indeed in France. France was also the cleanest, wealthiest (along with the Reich), most beautiful and hospitable to campervans. We could park anywhere, unlike Italy and Croatia where paid campsites were required (though in Italy you could park free at highway truck stops which have restaurants, wifi, hot showers, and dumping and watering up stations, all free. France and Germany have these great toll highway stops too). And the food, of course, was great. We lived on wine and foie gras. The Frogs were so great I finally accepted that I have some Frog ancestry way back, something I lived in denial about.



Biggest epiphany? That Spain, France, Italy and the Balkans sit on an enormous slab of limestone. Thus the Greco-Roman marble columns and statues, marble basically being limestone with an attitude. Limestone, or calcium carbonate, is an accumulation of dead aquatic animals with shells or skeletons built up in seas over hundreds of millions of years, then thrust up by tectonic forces.



Tips? Campervanning is the best way to tour Europe. We had an incredibly enriching experience - but there's a downside. Driving. Driving in Europe in '73 wasn't a big problem, and we had to use road maps. But today traffic is so bad – and the roads often so narrow and winding – that driving is challenging. You absolutely need a GPS, available at general stores in Europe for \$150CAN. Even with one, it's not always easy. The Dragon Lady was in charge of navigation – I concentrated on keeping us alive – and sometimes I joked that it was a good thing she wasn't a navigator in a WW-II bomber or her Lancaster would have bombed London.



We called ours Madame Q, though she sometimes became Miss Q; they're not always accurate and twice ours led us into impossible situations, requiring us to back up and turn around in near impossible conditions. On one we dinged the back left, got scratches on the right and the front lower plastic fenders; buy a lower deductible on the insurance packages they offer than the standard 1200EURO one we went with, especially if you're going out for a long time like us.



Europeans are used to these conditions and drive like speed demons. The Frogs and Krauts were the best, the Frogs also most courteous; the Albanians, Greeks and Wops the worst. Each

country has its individual driving culture. Stops signs mean nothing to the later three. There's still several Euro highway signs I have no idea in hell what they mean.



Other tips? When wild camping, we'd use McDonalds who have free wifi and plugins so we could charge our devices, do email, and load up on Ted Talks. (You need a European plug adapter.) Paid campsites, when we had to use them, invariably had all the needs: wifi, potable water and dumping stations for gray water and the bog. Most of the time we camped by clear, beautiful streams and had our morning baths in them, wonderful. Camper rentals are significantly cheapest in Germany and we paid \$96CAN daily for ours. We booked through Motorhome Republic at sales@motorhomerepublic.com. The depot is at McRent's enormous sales area at Sulzemoos, northwest of Munich near Dachau and its infamous concentration camp. A taxi costs about 60 Euros. McRent were very professional to deal with; motorhomerepublic were less so. Their staff needs some training, but I still recommend them because they had the best price for the very same product.



So that brings us to the end of this grand adventure and series. Adolf. Adolf! Over here to your left. Be a pal and wave goodbye to my friends. Good, thank you.



Until the next adventure somewhere in the world – or it well may be my book launch - ciao!

