

THE ITALIAN BANK JOB



Local gossip



Lamp in Pizzo



Restaurant Trapea

This week has just been brilliant and to honest, we didn't expect it to be this good. The Calabria Tyrrhenian coast (the big toe bit) isn't really mentioned anywhere, so we weren't expecting it to be good. We expected to fly through but reality is we're struggling to leave. It is unspoilt, beautiful and charming. The people are very friendly and you get the feeling you are experiencing a true taste of Italy. We've had a nice mixture of chilling on the beach to hair raising jaunts across terrain not fit for Homer. To top it off I had a banking experience that will leave me scared forever.

As each day comes to a close you take a moment to reflect and ask yourself, why didn't we do this sooner. Then just as you think it can't get any better, the next day brings a new place filled with an unexpected experience. We are truly enjoying every moment.

We are fast approaching our initial goal, Sicily. Once we hit Sicily we have no idea where or what we plan to see, so we just might have to get our thinking caps on and do a little research to make sure we get the most out of the trip.

Thanks to everyone for their kind words about our updates. We're so pleased everyone is enjoying to have a chuckle at my sense of humour although I am still amazed people enjoy them so much.

Wednesday 14th May: Diamante

Well the night night ended about 1:30am when we heard a tap tap on the side of Homer. The occasional soft tap turned in to a constant loud annoying tap, so both of us got up to investigate. Craig stepped out the van all dopey only to be immediately brought to full alert, he'd forgot to turn the alarm off and Homer was screaming his head off. That was it, panic mode, where are the bloody keys. Bog eyed and half naked we flapped around like two fools trying to find the keys only to find them in the place we always keep them. Why didn't we think of that in the 1st place? We stopped Homer screaming and prayed to god that no one heard us. Peanut didn't even flicker an eye lash, which confirms he is now deaf as a post (as well as blind as bat), so the tapping clearly hadn't disturbed his sleep. Craig slowly peered out the door and a gust of wind nearly snatch the door out of his hand. We'd left the horning up and the wind had picked up causing one of the clips to flap. It was such a nice day we didn't expect the weather to turn but no excuse, we should know better than to leave the horning up! Lesson learnt, we packed everything away or should I say threw it in the garage and clambered back in to bed.

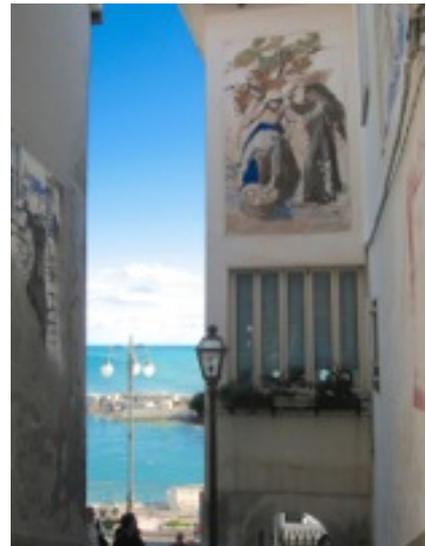
I lay awake for ages thinking about my brother Russell, not sure what time I finally got to sleep but think I cried myself to sleep. Don't care what anyone says, it is a bloody shame to lose someone so beautiful and especially at his age. Very lucky to have him join us on this trip, so we can sprinkle him in all the fantastic places we visit.

The weather had taken a turn for the worst and you could tell the storm would be in for the day. Yesterday, the ocean was like a mill pond but today it was surfers paradise. We did talk about getting our boogie board out but neither of us were brave enough to test the tubes. The waves, a couple of meters high crashed on to the beach with a loud thud, occasionally splashing Homer's nose. It was fascinating to watch them roll all the way down the shore line. The gusty

wind was pretty nasty and poor Homer was getting a right sand blast on his right side. But it wasn't too bad because every so often a palm tree would bend right over and like a feather duster, brush all the sand away. In fact, you could say Homer got an Au Natural car wash. Needless to say we stayed inside for most of the day just chatting about drivel and putting the world to rights.

By early evening the wind and rain had backed off, so we cycled in to town. Not loads to see but it was a nice to get out after being tucked up all day. The majority of Italy is covered in graffiti but here they have done something different. No graffiti but lots of random paintings on street walls. Each one telling a tale and they are pretty good. At the end of the town they have

diamond shaped statute, which is quite apt given the towns name. As we cycled around the



beach front more and more people were starting to head towards the beach. At sunset all the Italians walk up and down the beach or gather in the town square for a good old chin wag. This town was no exception but here the teenagers were dolled up and I mean dolled up. The ladies in short skirts and high heels and the men in suits. Very dapper. Rather bazaar given the weather but nice change to see teenagers make an effort.



Thursday 15th May: Diamante to Cetraro

We set off nice and early, heading South but to no where in particular. The only thing for sure is today is a big day, we are off to a Lidl and Craig is all geared up for a big shop. I have never known anyone love shopping like Craig. The Lidl was quite small but we managed to spend 2 hours looking at all the food products and weighing up how much we could carry. Having a restriction on how much you can stack is a new challenge and one that causes a good debate amongst us. I want fish and he wants meat. I want chocolate and he wants beer. Emotions run high when you're on rations but good job we can laugh at each other once back in Homer. As usual, we unwrapped all the shopping and then put all the rubbish in the bin. Being mobile makes you very conscious of the amount of packaging on food and how much rubbish you make.

Homer's cupboards bursting at the seams we tootled off round the corner to a little beach cove. We had lunch, watched a few fishermen and caught some rays before setting off to find tonight's stopover. We pulled in at Cetraro, which is just a regular small village. We stopped on a small car park over looking the sea. It wasn't anything special but it was quiet. We took a walk around the village in the hope of finding an ice-cream parlour but no luck today (must be the only town in Italy with no ice-cream) only discount shoe shop selling plastic boots. The walk was nice and pleasant, we even listened to a young boy play the cello for his parents. Chilli's drying on the balcony seems to be a favourite in this region. Heading back to Homer we noticed the window frames...remember in the 70's the gold aluminium window frames? Well ever wondered what happened to the stock pile...they ended up here and it looks like they are trending like hot cakes. They were awful in the 70's and trust me they are still just as awful. I took a photo to show you but Craig deleted it thinking it was a mistake, dozy bugger.



Back in Homer we watched the world go by. There was a little discount store to our left and it was a good place to people watch. There was a disabled chap in his 30's who worked there, it looked like he kept the shopping trolley's in order and kept the car park clean. Everyone knew



If I lick quietly
do you think
they'll hear me?

him and he knew
was a happy soul
everyone smile.
woman and child
in a small fiat to
After watching
settled down to



I am in doggy
heaven. I love
this motor
homing life.

everyone, he
and just made
Later on a
picked him up
take him home.
the sunset we
watch another
Second time

Prime Suspect the one about Della Mornay.

around but they are still good to watch. Craig finished his pot of Nutella and Peanut kindly licked the tub clean to save on washing...kept him occupied for a few hours!

Friday 16th May: Cetraro to Manatea

We woke to lots of cars honking. We wondered what was going on but as soon as we pulled down the blinds we could see what all the commotion was about. Everyone was honking "good morning" to the disabled chap, clearly well liked and loved amongst the people of Cetraro.

Yesterday, Peanut ran out of his lams dog biscuits, so we picked up a bag from Lidl. He's had lam's for 14 years, we've tried others but he point blank refuses to eat anything but lam's. Oh dear the owd dawg is going to go hungry and grumpy! We opened the bag and the biscuits were huge, like doggie meat balls. We put some in his bowl, sat back and waited. He went over, gave them a sniff, glanced back, put one in his mouth and spat it out. He looked up as if to say "what the hell is that" The biscuit rolled across the floor, he followed it, nudged it with his nose and then ate it. We didn't move, we were stunned. Cheap dog biscuits the size of rocks and he likes them. Yippee. He cleaned up the lot and licked his lips, so we now have one full and happy pooch.

BTW Peanut has cushioning disease for those who didn't know. He's on tablets to keep it under control and whilst it helps, he still bloats up from time to time and looks like an over fed sausage dog. On bad days he swells up and slowly releases the gas at regular intervals during the day.

We watched the morning runners. The women look OK but the men need help, serious help. For some strange reason all the men in Italy seem to think it is cool to jog in shell suits. The louder the colour the better...candy floss pink and baby blue seem to be this seasons hot favourite. I will try to get a photo one day. Having said the women are OK, Craig's not convinced as they all have jet black dyed hair with tight perm. Its true, so 80's, I remember the trend very well!

As we set off we started to seek out the cheapest diesel price. In Italy, it surprising how different the prices are from station to station and it really pays to shop around. You can have two fuel stations next to each other one at €1.60 and another at €1.92. You also pay one price for service and one price for self serve. In the north of Italy everything is virtually self serve but in the south, self serve seems to be a new concept. The people want to pay the cheaper price but have no

idea how to operate the machine, so they sit in the car, wave their hands at the attendant who eventually backs down and does it for them at the cheaper price. We found a fuel station @ €1.60 litre and filled up Homer. He was very thirsty today and it cost €80 but understandable climbing all those steep hills.



As we headed further south we passed more and more unpainted, concrete apartment blocks. Lots of areas look so poor and run down especially compared to the North. We passed a breakers yard full of panda's and small cars, slightly different to the one in Rome, which was full of top end sports cars.

We stopped at the little town of Manatea. The town itself was quiet but lots of hidden ruins and caves. Unfortunately the main castle and church overlooking the town was blocked off- if you look closely you can see the orange tape in the hillside.

Back in Homer and Peanut didn't look too happy. I picked him up and noticed two

lumps at the side of his chops. I shouted Craig over "Peanut has mumps" We both prodded our poorly little pooch only to conclude 10 minutes later that he had two big lumps just under his ears. He looked like a little hamster. What do we do in the middle of nowhere? I looked at Peanut, he looked at me then we both looked at Craig. I rubbed one of his big mumps to sooth the pain. Peanut started to chocked and after a couple of minutes a perfectly intact meat ball rolled across the floor. Then with another big cough a second meat ball. Them bloody dog biscuits. Poor little sod must have suffered all day with the biscuits lodged behind his back teeth.

Tonights stopover...at the end of the coastal road overlooking the deserted bay. Nice and quiet.



Saturday 17th May: Manatea to Pizzo

Big treat for breakfast, fresh croissants and variety of danishes. They tasted so good and perfect food choice for today's adventure. As we set off Craig did a quick stat update and so far we've travelled a grand total of 3492km and still averaging around €25 per day for everything.



As we made our way to Pizzo we noticed dozens of wind turbines on the distant hill tops. Guess the landscape and the wind here is a perfect place but then again, solar must surely take some beating. As we climbed over the hilltop we could see Pizzo, perched right on the next headland. The town is built on the side of the hill overlooking the ocean. The castle here is in good nick and its where they imprisoned and then later shot, Napoleon's brother in law.

We managed to park right at the top of Pizzo outside the school - great place at the weekends! Craig turned off the engine and as he turned round he swore "bloody hell Peanut, you've pickled everywhere" Peanut got up from his perch and looked at Craig. Craig rapped him on the nose and told him to get under. Peanut looked confused but realised some deep shit was going on and so crawled back under. He'd wee'd right at the top and through travelling it had gone all over the vinyl floor. It was everywhere. We mopped it up but it didn't smell like normal. It smelt like...lemonade? We lifted chair seat and sure enough one of the lemonade bottles had fallen over and sprayed open. Half a bottle of liquid and that's why there was so much. It was everywhere...shoes, dog food etc. We spent ages cleaning up the sticky lemonade whilst apologising to Peanut. Once he realised he was out the dog house he even offered his licking services.



We decided to walk (rather than cycle) in to town given the steep roads and paths. We wound down through loads of little alley ways and streets. The place had a lovely rustic charm about it and every where you looked you could see beautiful flower pots and baskets. Not only a pretty town but people who care for their town, which makes it even more beautiful. As we leisurely walked the locals greeted us with friendly smiles and the odd nod. The square was one of the best so far with lots of chairs and cafes to chill and watch the world go by. As we approached the other end of square we saw another bride and groom. She looked beautiful, her dress quite plain but elegant. The couple wandered around the square with the





photographer taking snaps for their album.



We stumbled across a little house aptly named Bello Vista and it is quite easy to see why the man who lived here was so happy with his garden view.



After lunch we decided to head back in to the town but this time we decided to cycle. I clearly have lost my marbles, why the hell would I agree to cycle round a town perched on a cliff face. Going down was fun but coming back up, well to say I was red faced is an under statement. I had hot sweats just looking up never mind pushing a damn bike. We passed these little taxi's and if I am honest, I would have quite happily paid for the ride home but for Craig being such a tight bugger.

Anyway, on the way down we noticed a young chap carrying a trumpet then we spotted an older guy carrying a trumpet. We discretely followed them and sure enough they lead us to the church. We didn't know but today's is the festival of Saint Francis the local village saint. By 4pm the church was packed and everyone dressed for the occasion. Once the service was over the church bells rang in celebration and the people of Pizzo proudly paraded through the streets carrying a statue of Saint Francis. The street decorations were fab, look closely and see if you can see what they are made of (one for Freya & Ruby).



The day reminded me very much of my childhood and the annual May walking day were everyone dressed up and families came together. Good old fashioned walking days, you can't beat them.





Sunday 18th May: Pizzo to Trapea

7am and we drove Homer down through Pizzo and plopped him right at the bottom of the town on the sandy beach. We watched the local fishermen bring in the catch of the day and decided here would be a good spot to stay over. One local chap explained that today they were setting up stales here to continue with Saint Francis celebrations. Ummm maybe not a good place to park up and probably a good idea to get out now before the street become too crowded. We tried to find Homer a place in Pizzo but it was no good, too many people coming to celebrate, so no choose but to move on to Tropea.



We pulled in on a tiny cove just before you reach Trapea (picture below, cove in distance on the right). It has the most beautiful white sand and I am guessing tone of the finest beaches in Italy. We could see a couple of people but that was it, so we decided to set up our stall for day. I did something that I haven't done in ages. Sat on the beach and listened to music all day. It was heaven. Craig went beach combing for a few hours and then when he returned, I did gave him a nice manicure and pedicure. I put some clear nail varnish on him or at least I thought it was clear. It was only when he screamed at me, I realised it clear until it gets a few UVA light and then it goes a lovely girly violet. With a lazy day on the beach, not much to report today.



As we sat having our evening meal, Craig noticed a guy looking like Richard Branson pull up in his car. He got out with two plastic bags and slowly started to fill the plastic bags with sand. Clearly not Richard! It took him ages to fill and no idea what he wanted the sand for. Another guy did the same thing a little later on? Can anyone solve the mystery?

Once again, we watched a beautiful sunset whilst we sipped our elderflower water. I don't think we'll ever get bored of watching the sunset. It really does make a beautiful end to the day.



Monday 19th May: Trapea to Scillia

Eor Eor Eor. What you doing, Joanne? Eh, what do you mean what am I doing? I was asleep until you woke me up, you idiot. Well what's that noise? We stuck our heads out the window and sure enough a donkey was sniffing out Homer's bum. It did a few laps round Homer in the hope of a carrot or two but not today little donkey. No vegetables, I lost the war in Lidl, so we only have frozen meat. He Eor'd good bye and strolled down the beach.

This spot is one of the best yet. Beautiful white sand, turquoise waters and all tucked in to an little cove. When you look behind you get a wonderful view of Tropea, which is only a short bike ride. The beaches in Tropea are beautiful and probably the nicest beach we've seen so far but arriving on a weekend means they can get a little crowded, so we decided to stay just outside and what a brilliant spot we found. The town itself is built right on the edge of a steep cliff, towering right over the beaches below.

We started up Homer and headed towards one of the main beaches in Tropea. We carried the bikes up the steep steps, which were built in to the rock face and popped out in the middle of the square. What a superb view - we could see the church of Santa Maria Dell'Isola



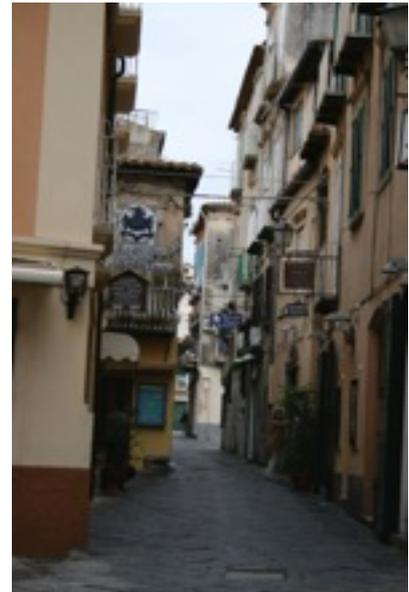
perched on a rock to our right and in the distance Stromboli.

The island looked like a big cone but with a

chunk missing out the middle. Evening trips to the island are quite popular as often you can see the lava flow from the active volcano. We continued to cycle up and down the little cobbled streets. What a charming place and full of character. Both Tropea and Pizzo are definite places on the hit list. There are a few quaint B&B's around, which attract the German tourists and I can understand why. The town is big enough to spend your nights strolling along looking in tiny shops after a nice Italian meal. During the day you can soak up the rays on one of the many coves and cool off in the calm turquoise water. With the Pizzo just down the road this would certainly be a holiday hotspot for us.



We went to the hole in the wall to draw some cash. My card was having a bad day and wouldn't play ball, so I had to take a visit in to the bank. What an experience! Firstly, I had to press a button to open the door. The door opened and I then had to step inside. The door closed to reveal what I can only describe as a glass time capsule. I expected the door at the other side to open but no it didn't. An automated recording calmly said a few Italian words and beamed a light on my head. Is this meant to happen or do they think I am going to rob the joint? I looked up and it kindly repeated the words. Oh OK it wants me to do something. I looked forward and again, the automated voice repeated its little speech. I looked behind and sure enough I had an Italian audience looking at me. They were waving their hands and giving me clues but I couldn't hear them. This time capsule was sound proof. Not that it would make any difference if I could hear them. I felt like a complete plonker. Stuck in a glass time machine with a spot light on my head. I frantically looked around for clues and there to my left was a finger print reader. I placed my finger on the scanner and the automated voice said a few stern words. I had another go and still no joy. The Italians were all gawking at my finger, I really was tempted to just turn around and give it to them but by this time the audience had grown to include all the nearby shop keepers. After several swipes the door opened but not the door I wanted, the time capsule had rejected me. Damn. A dozen Italians started to give me instructions by which time I had lost the will to live. By god I only wanted a bit of cash. I stepped back in to the capsule and once the spot light came on, it dawned on me. I needed to boogie on down. The bee gees tune popped in my head and as soon as I heard "staying alive", my body went in to rhythm and the timing was perfect. Arm up, finger out, shuffle la bootie, swipe the scanner and bingo, we're in. Once inside, now what....I cued for 2 hours to be guided to another cash machine. Good job we've started a change tub!



After the bank ordeal I needed a drink, so we chilled in a local cafe with an Italiano espresso but taking to the road again and heading south. I'd like to stay a few days here but the weather isn't great, which means a good time for travelling. Marg the GPS seemed a little unsure on her directions and despite her hesitation we trusted her judgement and followed her unusual route. After about half an hour I discovered the purpose of arm rests, to hold on for dear life. Homer was vertical and clinging on to the road with all his tread. In front I could just see blue and at one point I didn't know if it was the bloody sky or the sea. Marg sensed a road block and guided over an unused road. I was just about the fling her through the window when a Phil Collins track made me crack up...'holding on'. Not sure if that's the title but you know which one I mean, the one in the Cadbury's advert where the Gorilla goes bonkers on the drums. Once back in a horizontal position my stomach didn't quite feel right. We pulled over on a cliff face for some fresh air.

Back to normal, I have to say the views were stunning. The road along the coast line are fantastic and you have to hand it to the Italians, it takes some guts to build these roads. We passed through dozens of tunnels and travelled over stomach churning suspension bridges (look

in the distance on the photo below) but nothing could top the panoramic views from up here. And



the prize at the end, Scillia. A lovely little village with crystal clear waters and not a tourist in sight. We parked up right at the far end on a little ledge and what a lovely view to end the day. After an exotic tea of thick country veg soup, we chinned a few glasses of red wine and laughter at today's events. Topped off nicely with a few fireworks from one of the beach restaurants.

What's that noise? I don't know Craig and I don't care but for sure it ain't no donkey. It was a damn stray cat with half a dozen kittens trying to snuggle in Homer's engine bay. Peanut, your turn to do your duties.

