

## The Italian Job - text & photos from Paul Harding's facebook blog:

May 24<sup>th</sup>;

Only a few more days before I set off on The Italian Job... a 6 day, 560 mile bike ride from Catania, Sicily to Rome, commemorating The Italian Campaign. I'm taking our Branch Standard in my bike box on the 'plane, and 8 wreaths, for laying at Catania, Salerno, Cassino, Minturno, Anzio, Anzio Beach Head & Rome CWG Cemeteries - and then finally, a last one at The Tomb of The Unknown Soldier in Rome.

Anyone shy of pledging £1 for me? All sponsorship is for The Poppy Appeal, so all you need is a link!

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser->

[web/donate/makeDonationForFundraiserDisplay.action?fundraiserActivityId=389412](https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser-)

May 30<sup>th</sup>;

Day 1 starts and my luggage - though thankfully not my bike - is still in London. Ah well, at least the weather looks good! Laid our wreath at Catania CWG with our standard bear improperly dresses as his beret, gauntlets and sling were still in London.

Wreath laid at Catania CWGC (Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery)



May 31<sup>st</sup>;

Day 2 and now with my bag, we're on board the short ferry trip to the Italian mainland on time and in good spirits. Our first climb is today, 5.3 miles at 4.99%. Yesterday's sunny skies made a fantastic day's riding very enjoyable. Took loads of photo's but need wifi to load them. Maybe in tonight's post..

And to continue the saga... Messina to a little past Lamezia, mainland Italy. Maybe 96 miles. Well. Let me tell you, that monster of a climb turned out all right. Not so much pussy cat, more a sleeping tiger, because if you lost your concentration for a moment, things turned for the worse very quickly. Riding at 6 to 7 miles an hour is a superb platform for taking pictures, to take a look at the ones attached today. The second and third stages were also good in their way; my Garmin proved reliably trustworthy to lead us off the beaten track and up a mountain, but we have grown used to her (it could never be a 'him') wily ways and took a sanity check; discussed things like grown adults and returned the half mile to the main road. Our hotel tonight, Hotel Ristorante La Lampara, needs only pointing you to its trip adviser page (I'm not superhuman, and know if you're reading this you can do the rest, so no hyperlink, folks. Sorry).

1<sup>st</sup> June;

Day 3 was a blast, folks! But before I go on, let me apologise for the failure of mine to show you the real Italian scenery in my last post (no pun intended) by not having any pictures attached. Can't understand it; will try again. Anyway. Today began at Hotel Ristorante La Lampara with a heavy downpour that luckily decided to head off somewhere we weren't going just as before we set off; so we all packed our wet weather gear somewhere handy, just in case. The first stage, to Torremezza, had us catching a local Italian cyclist who gave us a good tip and guided us round a rather nasty hill. He set a cracking pace though, and some of our riders were not able to keep up. The next stage was a little more steady, and we mostly kept together. The 3rd stage, from Sparvesille to 'The White Horse' (a road side restaurant between Marina and Maretea) was

again rather steady and, if we didn't keep together the whole way was because some of us decided to stop and take some scenic pictures (I'm expecting great things from our professional photographer after this ride!). The last 14 miles to Sapri was amazing. I don't think I have ever climbed a hill, rounded a corner and saw, off in the distance, the road that we must take climbing still further ahead of us. But so it was, on this stretch - with the steepest part just before the summit; then downhill all the way to the hotel. I'll let you know about Sapri tomorrow - there's a band playing outside our hotel and it's time to party.



View of Sapri from it's southern approach road

2<sup>nd</sup> June;

Day 4 was a disaster! On our way to Serre, the road had been washed away, leaving us no choice but to make a 12 - 15 mile detour, with 2 or even more 15% climbs. So we decided to take our evening meal at Salerno and ferry everyone to the hotel 30 miles away. Because I returned to collect the remaining 7 bikes and 2 minders, bedtime for me (and them) was 2.30am. Even so, some of the best cycling I have done.

3<sup>rd</sup> June;

Forgot to mention that, at our wreath laying ceremony in Salerno CWG (wreath laid by [Paul Robinson](#)), our standard bearer was put on a charge for being improperly dressed - berret, gauntlets and sling all good, but no suit, white shirt or Legion motif tie. His lamentable excuse was, he was knackered.

Day 5 was an absolute blast. A little behind time arriving at Cassino and 2 of our number step up to the plate - Roger and I. We do it and return in 61 minutes, which includes 3-4 minutes taking photographs at the top! But we're so far behind time at Minturno, 3 of our Cyclists opt for the ferry to the very nice hotel; the remaining 3 (Peter, Paul and I) set off tanking it down the coast road the 23 miles to Terracina: fortunately, a car returned after unloading and picked us up with 14 km to go - which included an immense tunnel. Time pressure tomorrow though.



Monte Cassino, seen from the Cassino CWGC

June 4<sup>th</sup>;

Day 6 and the last day is over. We did it! Not all plain sailing by any means, but with an early start and a bit of help from our contacts at NCI Chiesola & CWGC, we made it! More tomorrow when I wake up.

Just had lunch in the square facing the Pantheon, sharing a pizza with a few friends and reflecting on the last few days. Over 560 miles in 6 days; coping when the road was washed away, causing a 12 mile (and 3 serious climbs) on our longest day's ride; getting to bed at 2.30 am - after driving from Salerno to Nola, returning to Salerno to collect bikes and driving back to Nola; getting up the next morning at 5:30 to get the show on the road - the same day I cycled up Monte Cassino; carried our Branch Standard at the wreath laying ceremonies, the information plaque unveiling and at The Altar of The Fatherland. Now wondering what one has to do to raise sponsorship for The Poppy Appeal if that lot doesn't make folks sit up and pledge their cash. Maybe some pictures will help - here's me at the top of Monte Cassino.



The rest I will put on you tube and give you a link. Meanwhile, why not take a trip down to pledge control? <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/.../makeDonationForFundr...> And that you tube link? It's [here](#).