

ITALY DIARY

September 13, 1993 through October 5, 1993

Monday, September 13

Our very good friend Jack Lobenberg came by our house a little before 7:00 AM to drive us to the airport. After putting our panniers in his trunk, we put the bike rack on the back of his Taurus and loaded the two bikes..

We got to Sacramento Airport at 7:30, in plenty of time to check in, get bicycle boxes from United Airlines (American in Sacramento did not have boxes last year, either), remove pedals, turn handlebars, tape up boxes, check panniers and bike boxes, and otherwise get ready for our 9:30 departure.

We changed planes in Chicago, and spent the night over the Atlantic.

Tuesday, September 14 Malpensa Airport to Novara

We arrived at Milan's Malpensa Airport at 10:00AM on an nice sunny morning with a bright blue sky. We unboxed the bikes, reattached the pedals, straightened the handlebars, changed into our shorts and jerseys in the airport rest rooms, and rode our bikes out of the airport about 11:00.

The first few miles of our ride to Novara was on a moderately heavy secondary highway, but about half-way we were able to turn off onto narrow local roads (la strade provinciale) with light traffic. At times we rode alongside a big canal full of water.

We rode through Nosate and Galliate in lovely weather, about 20°C. Roadsides were lush with ferns, nettles, trees. The fields were

green. We crossed the Ticino River which was broad, clear, and fast. We were expecting shallow, sluggish, muddy rivers.

During the day's ride we saw several Italian men in jerseys and black shorts on road bikes - perhaps twelve altogether. There were also many older men and women using sturdy one- and three-speed bikes for transportation.

In Novara, we found the Azienda de Promozione Turistica where we were given a map of the hotel locations and were told the Garden Hotel near the RR station was okay. (Apparently the tourist offices are not supposed to recommend a hotel.)

We checked into the Garden Hotel about 4:00 PM. We had the smallest bathroom I've ever seen. A toilet, bidet, basin, and shower were crammed into 4' by 6' of floor space. One straddled the bidet to use the basin.

In the shower there was a cord hanging out of the wall that appeared to be a clothesline. I rinsed out my socks and underwear and then stretched the cord to hang them on. There was an immediate commotion with people beating on the hotel room door and trying to get in with a pass key.

These people were shouting in Italian, and Jane was shouting back at them in English that I was undressed and did not want anybody coming in. It turns out that every Italian hotel bathroom has that cord

hanging in the shower - it is an emergency alarm in case the person showering needs help!

After showering and changing into street clothes, we walked around town. About 5:30 there was thunder and then rain. All the townspeople were promenading in the streets and piazzas, but when the rain started they took shelter in the shopping arcades.

Dinner in the hotel was delicious but a little expensive. We both had gnocchi and mixed salad. I also had a little steak and a 1/4 carafe of red wine, both of which were included in the 25,000 L tourist menu.

Wednesday, September 15 Novara to Pavia

Breakfast at the Garden Hotel consisted of a small cup of cappuccino, toast in plastic packages, biscotti in plastic, jam in plastic.

The day's bike riding was most enjoyable. We were on little farm roads with no traffic for the most part.

Vigevano was delightful with its beautiful piazza crammed with people. They appeared to be a combination of shoppers and school kids and office workers on lunch break. There was a renaissance cathedral, arcade, and clock tower.

We crossed the Ticino again - this time on very busy S-494 - then we turned off on back roads. At Binasco we got on busy P-40 for a mile or two before turning south through Lacchiarella and quiet back

roads, then we saw the towers of the Certosa di Pavia.

The Certosa, founded in 1396, truly was a three star attraction. There was a magnificent view across the inner cloister to the colonnaded terraces and towers. The dazzling facade, created during the period from 1470 to 1560 by the Mantegazza brothers, and by Amadeo, Briosco, and Lombardo, is totally adorned with marble sculptures and reliefs. The Gothic interior is adorned with renaissance frescoes.

Leaving the Certosa, we rode south through a couple of little villages and then we rode on a small road alongside a large canal all the way into Pavia. There were lots of men fishing in the canal. We stopped and watched one man land a pretty good sized fish that looked like it might have been a carp.

Upon arriving in Pavia, we went directly to the Azienda de Promozione Turistica for a list of hotels and a city map. We went to the Hotel Splendid where we got the last room available. The room was actually a garret up under the roof with three sagging single beds, a wash basin, two small, thin towels, a broken down and dirty armoire, and a definite smell. The smell seemed to come mostly from the water that had a rotten-egg smell, but then again the floor seemed to smell. Hotel Splendid, indeed!

After showering and changing, we walked the length of the walking street - the Corso Cavour and the Corsa Mazzini.

We ate in a pizzeria in the Piazza Vittoria which at 7:00 PM was jammed with people. My pizza had seafood on it and very little cheese. It was very good.

The old man working in the hotel seemed to do everything. He was up at 7:30 AM and got us our breakfast. He also smoked one

cigarette after another and coughed continually.

Thursday, September 16 Pavia to Crema

Checking out of the hotel after breakfast we found that the old fellow managing the hotel absolutely refused to accept our credit card. Fortunately we had sufficient lire.

Before leaving Pavia, we went to see the very attractive Ponte Coperto across the Ticino River, an old covered brick bridge bathed in soft morning sunlight. Then we rode to Lodi on fairly busy S-235.

Lodi was a neat little town with a nice piazza. In Lodi I went into a bank to cash a traveler's check. Quite an experience! At an outer door you buzz for admittance that is granted after you are scanned by a video camera. Once inside, you pass into a cylinder with two sliding curved doors. When the first door shuts, then the second door opens. Once in the bank, you show your check and passport to a bank executive who writes out an authorization for a teller to cash your check.

Also in Lodi I went into a "supermarket" for bread and fruit but found that the fruit was all in plastic six-packs. I went out to tell Jane, and we decided we would go ahead and get six apples. I turned to go back in and the store was closed. It was 11:30AM.

But several little shops were still open, so we got pizza bread in one and fruit in another.

The day's ride was fairly monotonous. Flat terrain, gentle tail wind, lots of traffic.

Arrived in Crema about 2:00 PM. We asked a gentleman on a bike for directions to the Palace Hotel which was the cheaper of the two listed in the Red Guide.

The Palace was a very nice four-star hotel. As we were checking in, I noticed a very serious group in the lobby engaged in a seminar on Quality Circles.

We walked around the town which had two very nice arches and an interesting duomo. A young man with a speech impediment conducted us on a private tour of the duomo. He even took us into the crypts under the transept.

Another man - who at first thought we were German tourists because we were wearing shorts - ran out of the Azienda de Promozione Turistica to give us tourist literature on Crema. The pamphlets described a Basilica of St. Mary of the Cross a couple of kilometers from the town center.

We walked from the west end of town where our hotel was to the east end of town where the road went north to the Basilica. We passed a little carousel where mothers and fathers were watching their tots ride in the little cars and trucks.

We walked about a mile toward the Basilica on a pretty tree-lined boulevard, but decided it was too far and agreed that we would wait until tomorrow morning and see it on our way out of town on our bikes.

The hotel desk clerk recommended a couple of restaurants. We opted for the less expensive of the two, the Ristorante Bosco, which was located about a mile from the hotel down a very dark side road. Jane had risotto with shrimp while I had spaghetti for the prima piatta. Then we had octopus salad and mixed salad.

Friday, September 17 Crema to Cremona

The Palace served a much more complete breakfast than we had seen before. The buffet had bread,

croissants, cereal, orange and *grapefruit* juice, cheese packets, honey, jam, etc. A waiter served the caffè latte.

We left the hotel at 8:30 AM and rode out to the Basilica of St. Mary of the Cross. It was a round church with circular seating. The interior walls and domed ceiling were covered with frescoes. Very nice.

When we came out of the basilica, three carabinieri had set up a road block. Two were stopping cars at random and inspecting the drivers' papers while the third stood back with a machine gun cradled in his arms. We thought they might be looking for someone in particular, but we were to see this same tableau repeated several times on the rest of our trip.

The ride to Soncino was an easy 10 miles in light overcast with temperature about 19°C. At Soncino, a man sitting on a bench in front of the castle agreed to take our picture. Inside the castle was a group of blue-uniformed grade school kids with their teachers.

After an easy ride of twenty flat miles with a good tail wind from Soncino we arrived in Cremona about 2:00 PM. We found the Azienda de Promozione Turistica, but it was closed from 12:00 to 3:00.

We found the Hotel Duomo which looked very good, but it was full. We then went to the Hotel Astoria and got the last room there. Everyone's in town for the music fair.

After changing, we walked around the town center and found the much heralded duomo and baptistery both under repair. We tried to get tickets to climb the tower, but were told we could not, and we did not understand the explanation given in Italian. In the piazza there was a large chrome and plastic pyramid

containing several huge TV screens promoting the music fair.

When we went back to the hotel to put on something a little dressier than walking shorts for dinner, an opera tenor was practicing in the room next door. He had a beautiful voice, and we sat and listened for over an hour.

Dinner at Marechiara was Kraft macaroni and cheese, chicken fried veal steak, salad, wine. The wine and salad were good; the rest was what I would expect at a diner in the US.

We made the mistake of not changing money before the banks closed at 3:00 PM. We cashed a travelers' check at ITALBUS travel agency where they charged a 5% commission.

Tried several times to phone Angelo De Pietri in Carpi, but no one answered

Saturday, September 18 Cremona to Parma

We had our bread, croissant, and caffè latte breakfast in Hotel Astoria then left at 8:45 AM to stop by the Chiesa di San Sigismondo on our way out of town. The church had a very drab exterior, but the interior was covered with exquisite frescoes done by painters of the 16C Cremona school.

Perfect bike riding. Beautiful weather and light traffic. We stopped in the little country village of San Daniele Po where we bought fruit from a peddler to go with bread and cheese from a little store.

The peddler was a real character. He kept trying to sell us items we did not ask for. When we finally did make our purchase, he apparently felt guilty about overcharging us so he gave us three or four other pieces of fruit.

A little later we crossed the Po River for the first time. It was very wide and slow moving. It looked like it could handle navigation although we saw no boats.

We stopped in San Secondo Parmense at noon where we went into a little bike shop and got a bolt for Jane's toe clip. The shopkeeper was very pleased that he understood what we needed and was able to produce exactly the right thing. He refused any money. Then we went in a little bar for drinks.

Near Viarolo we sat on the bank of the Tam River and ate our bread, fruit, and cheese.

We arrived in Parma at 2:00 PM to find the Azienda de Promozione Turistica closed. Found the Hotel Tomb using the Red Guide. The hotel was okay, but our room was very small. You have to walk **side**-ways to get between the foot of the bed and the wall. The bathroom is about 5' by 5' with shower, bidet, toilet, and basin all crammed in. With breakfast, the room is 125,000L.

After changing, we visited the duomo, the baptistery, and the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

The baptistery, built in the late 1100s and early 1200s, was very special. The exterior is Veronese rose-colored marble with carved decoration. The interior of the domed octagonal tower is totally covered with frescoes and sculptures.

St. John the Evangelist's contains frescoes by Corregio. But I was asked to leave before really getting a chance to see the frescoes. My walking shorts were unacceptable whereas women in tiny mini-skirts and fish-net stockings were considered appropriately dressed.

We went to the National Gallery, but learned that it is open from 9:00 to 2:00 only.

About 5:00 we stopped in an outdoor cafe for *coffee*, and suddenly there were people everywhere. The entire center of town was crammed with people elbow to elbow. Young girls in mini, mini-skirts or tight tights, young men in Levis and black leather jackets (despite very warm weather), old ladies, old men, tourists, crowds of kids around their parked scooters, young couples with babies, people of all ages on bicycles.

We ate dinner in the Gab d'Oro. I had spaghetti pomodoro, Jane had pappardelle con funghi. We both had insalata mista, red wine, and coffee. I topped off with zabaglione.

Tried Angelo De Pietri's number several times. Still no answer.

Sunday, September 19, 1993 Parma to Carpi

Breakfast in Hotel Torino was in elegant room with little round tables, green table cloths, fresh flowers.

We left at 8:15 taking S-62 out of town, but the road got busy so we turned off through Paviglio, Santa Vittoria, San Michele Corregio, and into Carpi on a back road.

Today's bike riding was ideal. At 8:15 AM the temperature was 20°C, and it did not get much warmer during the day. The back roads had very little traffic.

We talked to two groups of cyclists, mostly confirming directions at intersections where there were no road signs.

One group was two couples in warm-up suits out for a slow and easy Sunday morning ride. The second group was four men in jerseys and black shorts who were a little more serious. In both cases we

had considerable conversation. My pidgin Italian seems to work okay.

We also saw a pace line of Italian men cyclists wearing helmets today!

The piazza in Carpi was deserted except for pigeons when we rode in about noontime on Sunday.

An older man on a bicycle appeared. He came right over to us and started a conversation. While we were telling him where we were from and where we were going and listening to him tell of relatives in Stati Uniti, a younger man (perhaps 45 years old) came jogging through the empty piazza and joined us.

The new arrival spoke perfect English. He told us where the Hotel Duomo was located. (We had booked the Duomo ahead from Parma). Interestingly, to get to the hotel, we were to go through a very narrow alley alongside the duomo and then turn left in another alleyway and continue on for 100 meters and the hotel would be on the right.

We changed and went to the castello which contained a very nice Museo. We went to the little 12C church. Then we went to the theater which had been perfectly restored with levels of boxes all around and huge, ornate crystal chandeliers. The guides were college girls. Ours was very solicitous, wanting to practice her English.

We went back to the hotel and asked where we could get something to eat since the ristorante were not serving on Sunday evening. The desk clerk recommended a pizzeria, advising us to get there before 7:00 to beat the crowd.

Sure enough, when we went back outside, the piazza and all the streets were mobbed with the traditional evening promenade. Fifteen minutes after we took our outside

table in front of the pizzeria, there was a line waiting for tables.

The pizzeria was very good and not too expensive for a change.

Monday, September 20 Carpi to Bologna

The young man managing the Hotel Duomo said he would give us a special breakfast at a special price since we would be working so hard riding our bicycles. He fresh squeezed some ruby red grapefruit and gave us a second pot of caffè latte with our bread, croissants, and toast.

We rode from Carpi to Bomporto with lots of traffic, but I did want to see Bomporto where my grandmother was from.

Once we had seen Bomporto, which was an unimpressive little town on a busy highway, we were able to turn off the planned route. Just before Ravorino, we turned south on a farm road then took the first farm road running easterly. It was delightful. Tractors plowing in fields. Hunters shooting rabbits. And no traffic! We stopped and asked an elderly woman cutting weeds in a ditch if we were on a through road, and she very good-naturedly assured us we could get through on the road.

We went through San Agata Bolognese, San Giovanni, Brudie, Anzola d'Emmanuel and into Bologna on S-9. The very busy, four-lane S-9 was a mistake. I had intended to take S-568, but went through Brudie woolgathering and missed the turn.

Bologna struck us as a large, busy, ugly city. When we found the city center, I took a picture of Jane in front of the Neptune fountain, but two spaced out hippies fishing for coins in the fountain made any picture taking difficult for me and the rest of the tourists.

The Azienda de Promozione Turistica sent us to the Hotel Centrale which turned out to be on the third floor of an office building - they had no place for the bikes. We went back and the girl in the Azienda phoned four or five other hotels and found us a room at Hotel Touring that had a garage for bikes.

The Hotel Touring turned out to be two or three doors up a little alley, but it was nice. Its brochure claimed "all the modern in-room conveniences for commercial travelers and conventions," but it won the prize for the smallest bathroom. The bathroom H& the shower stall. The shower head was right over the toilet, basin and bidet. Everything got wet when you took a shower. But we already knew to put the toilet paper outside the bathroom before showering.

Between 5:00 and 7:00 people materialized in all the streets and squares until there was no elbow room.

The Green Guide gives the city center three stars and says that the adjoining squares, the Piazza Maggiore, the Piazza del Nettuno, and the Piazza di Porta Ravegnana form "an ensemble of rare beauty." Well.... Somehow we must have missed the good parts.

The large Neptune Fountain is attractive, but the duomo exterior looks unfinished, and the two leaning brick towers just look like faulty engineering. The shopping arcades around the Piazza di Porta Ravegnana were all black from air pollution. Traffic was impossible.

We went to the Trattoria della Santa upon advice from the hotel. It was excellent and inexpensive. Through dinner, with Jane translating for me, we talked with a young French woman medical student and her visiting mother seated at the table next to us. They were charming. We talked mostly about the good

French food, especially the bread and wine.

Tuesday, September 21 Bologna to Ferrara

The Hotel Touring served a nice breakfast which included orange juice.

We lucked out and found the route out of town directly. Marsh had circled Via Corticella on the map in the Red Guide, and that street worked out perfectly.

At San Giorgio di Piano we turned onto a farm road that we took through Rubizzano. At Poggio Renatico we stopped in a grocery and got bread, fruit, cheese and wine for our lunch. Two ladies shopping in the store said we spoke good Italian!

We arrived in Ferrara at 2:00 PM. We went to a cafe and waited until 1:30 for the Azienda de Promozione Turistica to open. The man there was not much help, but he did give us a town map and a list of hotels. We went first to the Nazionale which was full. Then we went to the Stefano which turned out to be a lump. Finally, the third hotel we went to, the Albergo San Paolo, was okay.

The hotel room, quite large compared to others we had been in, was not fancy but was okay. We had a lot of noise during the night; apparently the building across the street from our window was being leaned during the night by people who talked very loudly all night long. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

After changing, we took a quick walk around town and came back to the hotel. Just as we were entering the hotel we encountered another couple who were cycling. They were Bill and Marilyn Lee from Vancouver. Later we had a beer with them in a sidewalk cafe and

they told us that they also were booked at the Aldo Moro in Montagnana for the next night. They also said they had been to the Palazzo Schifanoia that had interesting frescoes of the months, so Jane and I went there and were not disappointed.

When we came back from the Palazzo we joined the Lees for dinner at the Ticevuta Fiscale Ristorante.

The duomo in Ferrara had a beautiful Romanesque-Gothic Lombard style triple facade, but it was being cleaned and one third of it was still covered with scaffolding.

Wednesday, September 22 Ferrara to Montagnana

I said that our room was noisy during the night. Early in the morning, 5:00 AM or so, it sounded like brick layers were shoveling mortar from the cobblestones. Then garbage trucks and street sweepers made an incredible racket. Then it sounded like a bunch of gorillas banging garbage cans full of rocks. (The Canadian couple said they used earplugs at night in the Italian hotels.)

When we got up, we went to a cafe right next door to the hotel and got a croissant and a caffè latte - really not enough fuel to start cycling on.

The morning started out cool and foggy. I could not find the back road through Occhiobello and Stienta. We rode on S-482 which was not bad, and after Stienta there was only light traffic.

We bought bread, cheese, and fruit in Badia Polésine where there was a large market in the piazza with all the stalls selling clothes and shoes.

We ate lunch in a pear orchard north of Castelbaldo and then continued on an unpaved road for 2 or 3 km.

We stopped and talked to some rabbit hunters.

We entered the fortified gate through the ramparts of Montagnana about 2:00 PM. The town was stunning. Not only were all the crenallated walls and towers in tact, but the piazza and surrounding arcades were perfect.

Bill and Marilyn Lee were sitting at a table in the piazza, and they asked us to come back and join them after we checked in to the hotel and had changed.

We sat with them for about an hour, then Jane and I walked around town. We decided this was definitely the highpoint of the trip so far. The ramparts, towers, and gates completely surround the town. The arches and ceilings of the arcades are painted in intricate designs.

The Albergo-Ristorante Aldo Moro is wonderful. It has marble floors, marble stairs, marble door-casings, period furniture, and oil paintings in all the public areas. Our room had an inlaid hardwood floor and marble topped bedside tables and a marble topped dresser. The armoire, unlike those in the other hotels, was a very elegant piece of furniture.

But typical of all Italian hotels, the lighting at night was very frugal. Timed lights in hallways and stairways. Little lamps with 25 watt bulbs in room. My solar powered calculator would never work in the hotel rooms at night.

Dinner in the elegant dining room was delicious. Jane had spaghetti with gamberoni. I had carepalla (flat noodles with truffles) and lamb chops. Also insalata mista and a half bottle of house wine. At dinner the Lees were quite dressed up - he had a necktie, she wore a dinner dress. We took each others pictures.

Thursday, September 23, 1993 residential cul-de-sac between A.

Montagnana to Padova

Breakfast at Aldo Moro was just as elegant as dinner. We had blood red orange juice, fresh croissants, raisin bread, rolls, lots of cafe latte.

When we got our bikes and went out onto the street, we found that the entire town had turned into a market. Stalls everywhere, and we had not heard a sound during the early morning when they were setting up. We looked around market, took some pictures, then headed out of town gates at 9:30 AM.

We headed north into a pretty good headwind. Vo was a pretty town that was also having market day.

Leaving Vo the road started right up on the two-mile uphill to Teolo. There was a gale force wind blowing, and trees were bending and swaying. As we climbed, the views from the switchbacks were outstanding. This, after all, was the first elevation we had achieved in our entire trip except for going up over levies and bridges and for going over freeway overcrossings. There were farm houses, vineyards, forests, and several huge rock outcroppings to be seen.

We met or were passed by quite a few men in shorts and jerseys riding racing bikes. Apparently the Colli Eugenei give the only hill climbing workout in this part of Italy.

We rode through the resort town of Teolo perched on top of the mountain pass, and then we enjoyed a two-mile down hill into Abano Terme. Here the wind, curiously, was almost non-existent. We stopped at a large monastery on the way into Abano Terme, but it was closed until 2:00, so we continued on.

In Abano Terme we could not find a town center, nor could we find a grocery store. We got some fruit in a fruit stand and ate in a graveled

Terme and Padova.

When we rode into Padova, we saw towers and domes which we thought belonged to the duomo. We headed for them to find that they belonged to the Basilica de Santa, not the duomo.

When we finally did locate the duomo, it turned out to be a big ugly monstrosity. We walked all around it thinking some aspect might be picturesque, but not so.

After some searching and asking, we found the Hotel Verde where Bill and Marilyn Lee had reservations, but the lady in charge adamantly refused to take the bikes in saying she had no space for them. She recommended the Hotel Pace and the Hotel Pavia and drew a map showing how to get to them. After searching the area for an hour, we gave up trying to find either hotel.

In the modern quarter of the town we spotted a large, modern, three-star Hotel Europa. Since it was close to the train station and to the museum we wanted to visit we decided to stay there. It was okay, but by American standards it was a laugh. The room had two single beds, a small desk which doubled as the TV stand, two black plastic chairs, and a daybed with a stained backrest.

After changing, we went to the Museo Eremitani. It turned out to be a complex of museums which included the Scrovegni Chapel with excellent frescoes by Giotto (1305-1310), an archeological museum, a gallery of 15C-18C Venetian and Flemish paintings, a coin museum, and more that we didn't see. The gallery contained many masterpieces, but what we both remember most is a crucifix done by Giotto.

After the Eremitani, we went to a cafe for snacks then walked around the old quarter. We returned to the

hotel for dinner which was very good but not inexpensive. The house wine was outstanding.

After dinner we walked back to the old quarter. We wound around among the maze of narrow streets, alleyways, and arcades until we were thoroughly lost. Finally we recognized the little cafe where we had earlier had snacks and found our way back.

Friday, September 24 Padova to Venice to Padova

Breakfast in Europa was more complete than other hotels, but total frustration for anyone in a hurry. At first there was no milk, nor were there bowls for the cereal. The juice carafes were empty. There were no napkins. But eventually they got it all together. They even brought us second pitchers of coffee and steamed milk for our caffè latte, a real treat.

We went to the train station and bought tickets for a train to Venice that was leaving in 15 minutes. We were sent to Track 2, but when we got there we noticed the sign light up on Track 1 saying "Venetia - 9:17." We and a hundred other people dashed down the stairs and crossed under to Track 1. When we got to Track 1, a train pulled in on Track 2, and all the signs changed. Now "Venetia - 9:17" appeared on the signs over on Track 2. So we and the hundred other people now ran back downstairs and crossed back to Track 2. We and the hundred others just made it.

During the train ride to Venice, we visited with a Danish couple.

The weather was becoming increasingly overcast, and before we got to Venice it started to sprinkle. When we got to Venice there was no rain. But the dark gray sky was not too good for photographs.

We bought an all-day ticket on the water bus and then went to St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace. Both were definitely worth the three stars awarded them by the Green Guide. The interior of St. Mark's with its Byzantine mosaics, arches, and domed ceilings is breathtaking.

We walked up and down lots of narrow little streets, crossed lots of little canals on arched bridges with boats and gondolas passing under. At almost every bridge there was a gondolier trying to tempt folks to take a gondola ride.

While we were walking around, I tried to get the trite travel poster shot of an arched bridge across a narrow canal with reflections and a possible gondola, but without much luck. The combination of poor light, a dull water surface, and too many people made it tough.

Lunch was a club sandwich in front of a little pizzeria that served pizza only at night. It was not great, it was expensive, and the waiter was an arrogant jerk who never brought us our bill. When I went inside to inquire about our bill, "Ti Conto," he appeared from God knows where and said I was to ask him and only him for the bill.

Boat traffic in Venice is very heavy. The Grand Canal is all choppy water due to the wakes of constantly passing large boats, and the little canals have regular boat traffic jams in them.

We saw a UPS boat!

People everywhere. The water buses are all full. On one waterbus we ran into another couple staying at the Europa Hotel in Padova. The narrow little streets are so congested, it takes forever to get from one place to another.

At one point we watched a glassblower create a little vase. We went into the attached shop and looked around. There was one

small piece we liked, but it was 100,000 L, and the shopkeeper said he would not ship such a small order.

We went back to the train station at about 5:30. On the train we sat and talked with an Austrian couple and their poodle (the poodle didn't actually talk) who said there was a bike route from Germany through Austria into Hungary along the Danube. Something we will look into for a future trip. Across the aisle there was a machinery salesman from India.

We got back to the hotel, showered, read for a while, then went down to dinner. During dinner the sky opened up and rain came pouring down. The downpour continued almost all night, but in the morning some blue sky was starting to peek through.

Saturday, September 25 Padova to Casteifranco

We decided not to do another day in Venice. It's beautiful. But it's too crowded and too expensive.

We looked at the map and the Green Guide and decided to ride to Casteifranco. By taking a circuitous route, we could make about a thirty-mile ride of it.

The morning started out very cool, but by the time we turned off S-307 at Vigodarzere to ride on little farm roads, we were ready to peel off our outerwear. We rode through the tiny villages of Reschigliano, Borgoricco, Massanzago, Rustega, Piombino Dese, Castelfranco, S. Marco, and Salvatona.

Several times we encountered wet pavement and big puddles indicating that a heavy shower had just passed through, but we had only a few scattered drops of rain on us.

Near Borgoricco a motorist honked, went ahead and pulled off the road,

and flagged us down. He wanted to know where we were from. He gave us his business card and wanted us to write him when we got home.

In Piombino Dese we stopped in a cafe for *caffè Americano*. The cafe was immaculate. It had beautiful wood paneling and freshly painted white plaster interior walls. Bathroom was spotless and ultra modern. Automatic lights. Automatic faucet. And automatic soap dispenser. A young couple were operating the cafe. The woman was a sweetheart.

A man in the cafe asked us all about our traveling by bicycle. Apparently he had once done a bike tour.

We got to Castelfranco at 1:30 and went to the Hotel Roma which we had booked ahead from Padua. Although the hotel was outside the city ramparts, it was still very conveniently located. (Castelfranco is only about 500 meters across.) The hotel was modern and nice.

We walked around the town, took a few photos, saw Giorgione's masterpiece - Madonna with Christ Child - saw a wedding in the Duomo.

It started to rain, so we went back to our hotel about 5:00. Rain came down in torrents for two hours. Then at 7:00 it quit, and we went back out.

The castle and some other buildings were lighted.

Cars were everywhere. The whole village was just one big traffic jam with everyone looking for parking places. In Italy it does not take long to learn that you do not get between an Italian driver and a parking space.

It sprinkled a little, so we sat under an arcade and had coffee, but if the sprinkles dampened the promenade

a little bit, it sure wasn't apparent. People were elbow to elbow.

We had pizza, salad, and beer at a pizzeria next to the clock tower at the main gate in the ramparts appropriately named the *Alle Torre*. Service was excellent. Food was very good. Prices were reasonable. Italy is consistently inconsistent!

Sunday, September 26 Castelfranco to Vicenza

The Hotel Roma served a very nice *prima colazione*.

The morning was cool and overcast. We went through the walled town and took a couple of photos then rode north to Costello di Godego, then east through Belvedere. We crossed the Fiume Brenta at Friola then went south to Pozzoleone, Bressanone, and Bolzano. Then it started to rain.

We went directly to S-53 and to Vicenza as directly as possible. No more dinking around on back roads in this rain.

Before we encountered the rain, we had repeatedly seen groups of club cyclists out enjoying a Sunday ride on the back roads. But they disappeared when the rain started.

When we got to the Piazza Signori in Vicenza, the rain had let up to a light drizzle. In the Piazza there was a hot air balloon and crowds of people. But five minutes after we arrived, heavy rain resumed.

We asked two men taking shelter in a doorway where there was a good hotel. One said, "Qui, qui!" and pointed. We looked around the corner of a little alleyway, and there about 50 steps away was the Hotel Vicenza.

Jane went in, saw that it was okay, learned that we could put our bikes in an unused entryway, and signed us up for a room.

We went up to the room, opened the window, and watched the downpour. Water was sluicing down roof valleys and into gutters. There was lots of very loud thunder.

We stayed in our room until 6:00 when the rain let up. We went out and walked around the town. Vicenza is a very attractive town with lots of stylized architecture. The building facades, the arcades, the piazzas are adorned with reliefs, statues, columns, etc. The architecture is by Palladio or his followers.

We went to the Olympic Theater, but it was not only closed, the grounds were also closed.

A little circus set up in Piazza Signori, and a crowd of about 100 people with umbrellas gathered to watch. Kids, apparently local, from about 4 to 16 performed. A girl walked a tight wire. A dozen kids of all ages rode unicycles of all sizes. Some young men juggled. Others did fire-eating and *fire-breathing* tricks. There were performances on stilts. Not professional, but fun.

We had dinner in a great little pizzeria in a side street. There were tourists from everywhere eating there; lots of different languages being spoken.

We went back to the hotel at 9:00 and there was still light rain coming down.

The Italians set their clocks back an hour today. That means I will have even less evening light for photography for the remainder of the trip.

Monday, September 27 Vicenza to Verona

We woke to patches of blue sky among scattered clouds!

The hotel did not serve breakfast, so we went out at 7:30 (nothing opens before that) for coffee and rolls. We checked out at 8:00 and decided against the planned route through hills south of Vicenza. They looked difficult and time consuming, and the weather has not been cooperative.

We went through Altavilla, Lonigo, San Benifacio, Belfiore, San

FA Martino B. A., and into Verona. It was still 41 miles without going south into the hills.

There were views of distant snow-capped Dolomites, churches and castles perched on hills and ridges. Big white clouds obscured any views of the snow-capped peaks after about 10:00. Lots of vineyards and orchards.

(Over the whole trip, we had started in rice and corn fields, then hay and row crops like sugar beets, then vineyards and apple and pear orchards.)

We saw a few hunters and fishermen today. Especially in San

I Mb where we stopped at a commercial fishing pond and where two Italian men bought us beer and talked to us for an hour. They absolutely would not let us reciprocate.

We stayed and ate our bread and cheese there while we drank the second beer the men insisted on paying for.

We arrived in Verona about 2:00 PM. We searched for the Azienda de Promozione Turistica in the neighborhood where the Red Guide indicated it to be. Finally we asked directions, and it turned out to be on the other side of the Roman Arena from where we were looking.

The man in the Azienda gave us a list of hotels and a map. But by now I was getting wise. We picked a hotel, the Aurora, and I went back in and asked him to phone the

Aurora, ask if they had a double room, and ask if they had a place for two bikes. He did, and they did.

The lobby was on the second floor. But we were able to ride around to the back of the hotel where the streets were one floor higher and bring our bikes directly in.

We got the last double room. It had twin beds. The "matrimoniale" were all taken. Only a two star hotel, but very nice. We had a small room up under the eaves - the windows were down at ankle level. The bathroom was nice. The hotel was right on the Piazza Erbe, - the center of action in Verona - and it had a terrace looking down on the Piazza.

We changed and went walking. Verona is beautiful! No doubt the most aesthetic and harmonious collection of piazzas, palazzas, and torazzos of the trip. Verona e una Città bellissima!

We saw the Piazza Erbe, the Piazza dei Signori, the Ponte Pietra (from Roman times), the Ponte Scaligero, the Castelvecchio, the Roman Theatre. We were so busy walking around to see these things, that we forgot to go inside the Roman Arena which we had seen when we were looking for the Azienda de Promozione Turistica.

At 7:00 we went to a little ristorante with tables under a canopy in an alley. Jane had spaghetti with frutti di mare. I had penne with crab (granchio) sauce, vino rosso de casa, and tiramisù. It was good, but Jane always thinks they take too long to serve you and then get the bill to you. We got the bill at 8:00, then we walked along the shopping streets. When we got back to hotel there was thunder, lightning, and heavy rain.

Tuesday, September 28 Verona to Saló

I rained all night, but morning was just overcast.

Breakfast at Aurora was best yet. It was a full buffet with yogurt, cereal, prosciutto, salami, gorgonzola, little cheeses with mint leaf and tomato on top, pastries, rolls, assorted fruit, fruit juice, and all the caffè latte your heart desired.

We left at 8:30 going out of town on Corso Milano which was not easy to find. The town is not in a grid pattern due to the Fiume Adige snaking through the town. We followed our planned route exactly through Bessolango, Lazise, Torde Benaco, Ferry across Lake Garth to Toscalano-Maderno and on to Saló.

Lunch was in a little nondescript pizzeria-ristorante in an alley in Toscalano-Maderno. There were no other customers. When we went in, rain started pouring down, so we decided to stay and see what we'd get.

The woman cook, waitress, proprietress brought us a menu, and we selected Risotto a Pescare. It was fabulous! Mussels, clams, calamari in rice with tomato sauce. My favorite meal of the whole trip. Although it was marred by thunder and lightning and pouring rain and the prospects of going out to our bikes to complete our days itinerary in pouring rain.

But we are so lucky! We delayed over coffee and stayed in the ristorante for an hour and a half, and the rain stopped, and the sun came out!

We got on our bikes and made a dash for Saló. We rode into town, saw a sign pointing down to the waterfront that said Hotel Vigna - where Marsh and Irene had stayed - and we went directly to the hotel. We were given a lakefront room

with a terrace and a view of the lake.

After changing, we walked around under heavy gray skies. Thunder was rumbling in all directions. We met an English couple sitting on a lakefront bench huddled in their coats who said they had booked a tour to Said, and they had been freezing here for three days.

At 4:30 it started raining again. But the bicycle goddess was smiling down on us today. It only rained when we were not on our bikes. May we be so lucky the rest of the trip.

Said is a picturesque little town. The interior of the duomo is exquisite.

We stopped in a little shop where I bought a long-sleeved T-shirt to wear under both my polo shirt and my windbreaker. I had not brought any cold weather clothes.

Dinner in Hotel Vigna - salad, pasta, red wine - was nice. Our table overlooked the lake.

Wednesday, September 29 SaIó to Brescia

We woke to very cool weather. There were dark clouds in the north and blue sky to the south. Since it did not seem to be threatening rain, we rode through countryside towns of Muscoline and Cappetzone on way to Brescia.

We got into Brescia about 12:30. We stopped at a tiny park on a back street to eat our bread, cheese, and fruit lunch. There was a lady in the park with a stall offering socks and stockings for sale.

We went to the Azienda de Promozione Turistica, but it was closed.

So we went to the Roman ruins and they were closed, but a man said he

would open at 2:30. We waited. And it was worth it. This wonderful little museum had Etruscan, Greek, and Roman artifacts all very well displayed. There was a perfect bronze winged-victory cast by some Roman artist in the 2C A.D.

We went back to the Azienda where a girl gave us a city map showing hotel locations. She phoned Hotel Italia for us. They had a room, and they had a place for bikes. When we got there, Jane took and immediate dislike to the desk manager who was officious and unfriendly.

After changing, we walked through the Piazza Vittoria where a Swiss festival consisted of beer, sausage, yodeling, mountain climbing, and wood sculpturing booths. And mobs of people having a good time.

We went on to the castle on the heights above the town. It was a beautiful setting with gardens, views down upon the city, turrets, drawbridges, and golden evening sunlight.

On the way back through the piazza I got a sausage in a bun. Delicious! Also, the Swiss sculpture had turned his log into what was beginning to look very much like the Madonna and Child.

No rain!

We went to the Trattoria della Corso on the recommendation of the hotel desk manager, but the maitre de or whatever you call him in a fancy Italian restaurant said they were totally booked for the evening. The place looked elegant.

We then went to a little pizzeria-ristorante which turned out to be great. Jane's spaghetti with frutti di mare and my ravioli were both delicious.

We went back to the Swiss festival after dinner, but it was getting very cold. At 9:00 we went back to our hotel.

Thursday, September 30 Brescia to Bergamo

We woke to light streaming through the little lattices in our shutter. I tried to open the shutter, but it was so old it was inoperative. In fact, the whole room is old. There's no bulb in the fixture over the basin. The room is lighted by one little indirect fluorescent light in the picture molding. My solar powered calculator would not work at all. The armoire is old and broken down.

Our route out of town was pretty much as planned. We rode through Coccaglio and Palazzolo. We took a side trip on a little back road that had nice views of monasteries, farms and little castles perched on hills. We stopped and talked to two men on bicycles on the road into the little village of Cologno.

Palazzolo was a lovely town. It had winding and twisting streets that went up and down hills on either side of the Fiume Oglio. There were towers and scenic bridges.

On the way into Bergamo, we crossed the Fiume Serio which was at a high flow rate reflecting heavy rains in the mountains above us.

In Bergamo we went directly through the lower town and up steep, narrow cobblestone streets to the medieval and renaissance Città Alta. We found the Albergo Agnello d'Oro after asking a couple of people in the little streets.

We were lucky. The little Agnello d'Oro, the only hotel in Città Alta, had a room and they had a storage room where we could put the bikes.

We were also lucky with the weather during today's bike riding: clear and cool with no rain.

We changed and went to the Piazza del Duomo, a very attractive square

surrounded by fine buildings. In one corner there was a tower and a covered staircase.

Next to the duomo is a little chapel, Capella Colleoni, that was designed by the architect Amadeo. It has an ornate facade of precious, multicolored marble with wreathed and fluted columns, vases, pilasters, medallions, and reliefs. The interior is decorated with reliefs and frescoes by Tiepolo.

We were fortunate to join a guided group in the duomo who were being shown the altar panels. Ordinarily these beautiful wood inlays are covered with locked panels. But the guide removed the covers and shown a light on the inlays as he described them. As he moved the light over the inlays, the figures, trees, and buildings in the scenes took on different appearances - interesting.

The rest of the duomo was really too ornate with its stucco reliefs, statues, tapestries, frescoes, wood carvings. It was a hodgepodge of several centuries of artistic styles.

We looked around the piazza for awhile, but we got so cold we returned to the hotel for more clothes. When we came out again, it was raining. But we still walked around the town.

We had dinner in the hotel. The dining room was very ritzy and very pricey. During dinner we chatted with a Canadian couple at the next table. He was an OB-GYN from Montreal. Their first language was French.

The hotel lobby and dining room had pictures, dishes, pots, pans, trophies and such over every inch of the walls and ceilings.

Friday, October 1 Bergamo to Como

We woke to a cool, dark day. I went out before breakfast to see if I could photograph the piazza without any delivery vans or contractors equipment parked in it.

So what do I find? A big white tank truck and two workers hosing down the square. When they had worked their way to one end. I tried a couple of shots, but the light required very slow shutter speeds and very large f stops - not a good combination.

Went back to hotel where we had breakfast and then checked out. Breakfast was okay, not great. We had a roll and a croissant each, canned orange juice, and only one cup of caffè latte each.

When we paid the bill, we learned how outrageous the cost of our dinner was. Jane had eaten a small bowl of ravioli and I had a small dish of risotto, a glass of wine, and tiramisù. We both had coffee. Dinner cost 72,000 L - about \$48.00!

The hotel was quaint, but not great. The room was smelly (it seems everybody in Italy smokes), and it had very small twin beds.

When we went out it was raining, so we wore our rain gear. And we needed the rain gear until about noon when we stopped at a little roadside cafe for hot prosciutto and formaggio panini (sandwiches).

The food hit the spot since we had so little to eat for dinner or breakfast at Agnello d'Oro, but the little restaurant was really kind of dumpy. The lady who made our sandwiches was busy half the time taking care of her cute, plump baby and a little dog begged from us while we were eating.

After lunch it quit raining, but it remained very cool. A sign along

the way said 13° at 1:45. That's only 55°F. A gray, dark day.

We got into Como at 2:30 after riding through some very hilly terrain. But Jane climbed the hills surprisingly well for all the concern she expresses about the possibility of any hills on the itinerary.

In Como, we went to the Tre Re Hotel which looked great on the outside. It was on a little court and the lobby and staircase were impressive. There was a garage in which we put the bikes.

The room was a little larger than most, but otherwise pretty much the

We changed and went walking. Inquired about the boat to Bellagio. Lake Como was rising and overtopping the quay. Duckboards are required to get to the boat landing.

We went to a coffee shop and sat and watched the rain come down. We returned to the hotel by dashing from arcade to arcade. Just as we got back, the sky opened up and the rains were torrential. We were so cold in our room that we put on all our clothes. The manager said it was against the law to turn on the heat this early in the year.

As soon as the hotel dining room opened at 7:00 we were there for dinner. Dinner was super and the prices were moderate. Best food so far. At 8:30 when we went back upstairs, we asked for extra blankets.

Saturday, October 2 Como to Bellagio to Como

It rained all night; very heavy at times. Our windows rattled with wind-driven rain.

At 7:30 workmen renovating the back of the hotel right outside our

window started work. First they backed a truck into a little patio; this required much shouting of directions. Then they started shoveling gravel into a concrete mixer.

We went down to breakfast, and then went out and shopped for an umbrella.

We took a fairly large boat named Fra Portochristo to Bellagio. A large French tour group was on the boat, and although they were disappointed with the weather, they seemed to be having a pretty good time.

An English couple sat upstairs in the open air deck. (Even though the upper deck had a cover over it, the rain blew in from every angle.) They said they had their "longbobs, wellies, and oilskins," and felt totally prepared for the weather. Not like the English couple in SalO who were so dismayed with the weather. They stayed out there for the whole one-and-one-half hour trip.

In Bellagio we ate lunch across the street from the boat landing and watched the rain pour down. Our waiter was from Boston.

After lunch we went to the dog show - supposedly the biggest dog show in Europe - but the weather was really spoiling the whole affair. There were very few tents, and they were inadequate. Dogs were soaking wet and shivering.

So much for beautiful Bellagio. I took a picture of an alleyway and a picture of the lake with its whitecaps.

Oh, the world water ski championships were being held in spite of the six-foot waves. We saw one skier, dressed in an orange wet suit and being towed by a white boat, successfully surmounting the waves. The others fell down every 100 meters. All but two gave up.

We took the 3:20 boat back to Como. We were the only passengers although the boat made about a dozen scheduled stops at different ports on the way back to Como. Each docking was an experience with the wind and rough water. Rain poured down all the way back.

Returning to Como, we found the water had risen far beyond the quay to about half way up the lakeside piazza. Stores were being evacuated. Workmen were extending the duckboards to the next block up from the lakefront.

We went back to Hotel Tre Re at 5:15 and rain was roaring down outside. If it keeps up, Como will be flooded. We asked a shopkeeper if this was normal, and he said, "No, this is a disaster!"

We showered and crawled under the comforter that the desk had sent up to our room. We read, watched TV, and dozed, then went down to dinner. The tourist menu was penne con pomodoro e pesto and medallion of Tacchino (Turkey Scaloppini) con funghi, ice cream with Grand Marnier, and cappuccino. Very, very good!

While we were eating there was thunder, lightning, and cascading rain.

The hotel and its dining room could not be better. The service is quick and courteous. There is a man about forty who wears a tie and dress shirt that seems to be everywhere. He has interpreted all the menus for us. He has directed our waiters on how to serve us. He helps at the desk. And he seems to be on the job 24 hours a day.

When we went up to the room, the radiators were beginning to put out a little heat. I heaped some wet clothes over the radiator in the hope they might dry finally.

We went to sleep to the sound of pouring rain.

Sunday, October 3 Como to Lugano to Como

Woke up to sunshine!

We had breakfast and walked to the train station on as pretty and bright a morning as you'd ever want. Two senior citizen bicyclists were taking each others pictures in front of the flooded piazza.

We took the 10:04 to Lugano and we got there at 10:50. It was a beautiful day, beautiful town, and a beautiful lake.

There was a grape harvest festival in full swing with bands playing, booths dispensing wine, beer, and sausages and people everywhere.

We walked down through the town from the train station to the lakefront where we went on a 1-1/2 hour boat tour of Lake Lugano. We had views up fjords toward snow capped peaks in the Alps under a bright blue sky. Visibility was forever.

The boat put in at one little lakefront village after another where restaurants were crammed with celebrants waving and singing. The passengers on our boat were singing Italian songs led by an Italian lady.

There were people of all nationalities getting on and off the boat.

After our boat ride, we went to the town center and walked around through the festival activities. We ate in a pizzeria where two small pizzas and a bottle of wine cost 48,000 L (\$32.00). I think this included an exchange rate from lire to Swiss francs, because we had no francs.

We took the 15:06 train back to Como. We found Como bustling

with activity in beautiful, bright sunshine.

Jane was not feeling too good, so she went to the hotel and took a nap. But she quickly recovered and we went out for a walk. At 8:00 we had dinner in our hotel again. Still excellent. The tourist menu included lasagna tonight.

After dinner it was too cold out to go walking.

Monday, October 4 Como to Somma Lombardo

We woke to another glorious, sunny day with a clear blue sky. We checked out of our hotel and left Como a little after 8:00. The lake had risen even further during the night.

When we got near Olgiate, we could see the Alps! Visibility is the best we've had on the trip. The air is sparkling clean.

The air is cold, but it is comfortable riding in the sunshine in shorts and a jersey.

We stopped in the village of Tradate for bread, cheese, fruit, and wine. People in the store wanted to know all about our trip. One lady kept saying "complemente, complemente!" on our traveling through Italy by bicycle.

In Albizzate there was an incredible view of the snow-covered Swiss Alps. Apparently a lot of fresh snow fell in the mountains when it was raining so hard in Como. I climbed on a wall and took a couple of pictures of the distant mountains.

We got to Hotel Tre Leone in Somma Lombardo at 2:30. It proved to be another typical Italian 3-star hotel. Queen size bed. Tiny bathroom. Dim lighting.

When we came downstairs, the girl at the desk said that her mother's

maiden name was the same as our surname. We asked if her mother's family were from Modena, and she thought so. Anyway, she said she had called her mother and her mother was going to come to the hotel at 6:00.

We went out and explored, but found little to see in Somma Lombardo. There was a castle, but it was not open to the public. We had coffee in a little bar where we asked the proprietor where the piazza centrale was. He said Somma did not have one.

This is our first Italian town without the 10:00, 12:00, and 5:00 promenades.

At 6:00 we returned to the hotel. Our desk clerk, Sabrina Granata, and her mother, Tamara Granata, were there. Tamara spoke no English, so we had to converse through Sabrina. Tamara's father was William Pivetti and his father was Ferdinando Pivetti who was married to Maria Zanasi. William had a sister Lilia and a brother Gustavo.

Tamara believed that Ferdinando had a brother Augusto and sisters Stella, Zaira, and Anna. She said she would check with her own mother on ancestors and relatives in the Modena area and write to us.

Her mailing address is:

Fam. Granata Pier Renato
Via Medaglie d'Oro
21019 Somma Lombardo
(VA) Italy

Fax 0331
251914

After our visit with mother and daughter, we walked through the old quarter, went to a music store where Jane bought a tape that contained some of the songs the people were singing on the boat on Lake Lugano, and then went to the only pizzeria we could find open.

The pizzeria was very rundown and nondescript on the outside, but people were going in. Inside we found the place quite busy. I ordered spaghetti with frutti di mare and Jane ordered spaghetti with "cappers" and olives. Both were delicious. Mine was very generous with langostines, prawns, shrimp, mussels, clams, and lots of spaghetti. For the first time in Italy I could not finish all the food I had been served. We also had mixed salad with lots of juicy, ripe tomatoes. We topped it all off with cappuccino.

Tuesday, October 5 Somma Lombardo to Malpensa Airport to Sacramento

We ate breakfast and checked out of hotel at 8:15. The ride to the airport was only 4.5 miles. We were there before 9:00. By the time we found the American Airlines office upstairs, got boxes and tape, boxed the bikes, had everything X-rayed, went through our security interview, and checked our luggage, we had only an hour to shop in the duty-free shop.

The Italian employees of American Airlines were very nice to us. They made a special effort to get us the boxes and the tape and to help us get through X-rays and interviews because they were expecting a bus from Milan and thought we'd like to be done before the crowd arrived.

Also, while we were boxing the bikes, two other couples were boxing water ski equipment, so we asked them if they had participated in the championships at Bellagio. They had. And one of the women had come in first. She said she was in an orange wet suit behind a white boat.

Return flight went right on schedule. The food and wine on the

first overseas leg was great. We watched the movie and dozed.

Going through customs in Chicago was a hassle as usual with the bike boxes. Since we had to move the bikes a considerable distance from carousel to customs to baggage check-in, I put them on a luggage cart. The cart's wheels did not caster, so the bikes went sideways and would not fit through the doors and gateways. But we managed it.

Got to Sacramento right on schedule, and Jack was waiting for us with his car right outside the baggage claim area. He had us home by 10:00.