18TH STAGE - EUROPEAN TRAIL CORRIDOR E/1.

PERTINENCE IRPINIA TREKKING AVELLINO.

Historical/Religious VARIANT of the fifteenth stage.

SANTUARIO MONTEVERGINE ( 1253 mslm ) - TIGLIO SACRO ( 900 mslm ) - MERCOGLIANO ( 550 mslm ) - ABBEY OF LORETO ( 530 mslm )- AVELLINO ( 336 mslm ).

This junction allows you to reach the Borgo di Mercogliano, another historic site of the departure of the Pilgrims' Trail and home of the Abbey of Loreto, now the National Library, where the Benedictine Fathers stayed in winter and where they produced the famous Anthemis liquor. From the Montevergine Sanctuary to the Sacred Lime Tree, the route is identical to that of the fifteenth stage.

From here, however, turning left one continues to Ospedaletto, while going straight ahead, one goes toward Mercogliano. You cross the asphalt road and continue on the Pilgrims' Path, treading a cobblestone interspersed with steps. You meet the road again, and cross it after and before a wide curve to continue downhill and cross it twice more in a subsequent sharp bend.

From here you leave the road and take a traverse that passes under a bridge of the Funicular Railway, designed by Abbot De Cesare to connect Mercogliano to Montevergine to transport the faithful. As early as 1882 it was two-thirds of the way to completion. But due to various inconvebients it was completed in 1926. Station altitude downstream m 528 - upstream m 1262 - difference in altitude m 734 - length of the track mt 1669 - travel time 7 min. - max gradient 64% - carrying capacity 86 pers. still the steepest and fastest funicular in Europe.

From here you continue straight ahead. You pass a narrow curve and arrive in the upper part of Mercogliano, where the Pilgrims' Path traveled since the beginning of the millennium ends or begins.

The origins of the place name Mercogliano are uncertain; it would derive from the Latin Mercurius with the suffix anum, hence Mercurianum. The ancient village was surmounted by a castle from the Norman period, later rebuilt by the Angevins.A very strong fire destroyed it in 1656 and since then it has been permanently abandoned.

Worth visiting are the Old Town of Capocastello, the Church of St. Peter from the 18th century, the 16th-century Church of the Holy Savior, the Porta dei Santi that allowed access to the old town from the lower part, still intact since 1162

From the Town Hall one crosses the entire Borgo and, after the Viale di S. Modestino,with centenary plane trees, one turns right to meet, after a short descent, the Loreto Abbey Palace, rebuilt in its present form after the 1732 earthquake. It has an octagonal structure with a large central courtyard. It was built to a design by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro in 1755. The 'Abbey was used as the Abbot's residence and as a shelter for the monks during the winter period.

It currently has a State Library with about 200,000 volumes, an ancient pharmacy with 13th-century ceramics, an archive of about 7,000 parchments and an award-winning Liquor Factory of the Benedictine Fathers.

Continuing on, immediately after the side entrance to the Palace, at a traffic circle, turn left onto a small asphalt road serving the houses. At the junction with the San Francesco Stream, the road ends and you enter, turning right, a dirt road that runs alongside the stream. You pass under the NA/BA highway overpass and reach Contrada Valle ( AV ).

From here we follow the Urban Trekking route that takes us to the Church of San Ciro on Viale Italia, where the Stage ends.

DIST. km 10 - DUR h 3 without stops - DIFF E - DISL. mt 564 downhill and in the opposite direction mt 564 uphill ( DUR h 3.45 ).

Maximum point mt 1253.

PRESENCE OF WATER ON THE ROUTE : YES.