

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE TEMPLAR TRAIL



What is the Templar Trail?

As described in *Along the Templar Trail* by Brandon Wilson (2008), it is the approximate route followed during the First Crusades in 1096 by Godfrey de Bouillon and his 40,000 troops from France to liberate the city of Jerusalem. It stretches across eleven countries and two continents.

How do the Knights Templar fit into the story?

It took Lord Bouillon and his troops four years to reach the Holy City. Out of those soldiers, nine were selected to become the first Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of

Solomon—or the first Knights Templar. These warrior monks were charged with protecting Jerusalem, future pilgrims, and the Temple of Solomon. Legend has it that they also protected the Ark of the Covenant and Holy Grail.

Where does the trail begin? Where does it lead?

Beginning in April 2006, the two men, an American and 68-year-old Frenchman, hiked canal paths beginning in Dijon, France thru Switzerland to Donaueschingen in southern Germany, the source of the Danube River. There they connected with the *Donau radweg*, or bicycle path, that led them through Bavaria into Austria, then Bratislava, Slovakia and into Hungary. From Budapest, they headed south still following the Danube Valley on smaller bicycle paths and roads to Belgrade, Serbia where they connected with the ancient Roman *Via Militaris* to Istanbul. From there, their destiny eventually led to Jerusalem—although not on the route originally envisioned.

So this path was originally used for war?

Yes, that's what makes this story more than a little ironic (and symbolic), since it involves the transformation of this road of war into a path of peace.

Was it a peaceful journey for the two modern pilgrims?

No, not exactly. Besides the conflicts that arise in any intense travel situation, by the time they reached Belgrade, the Middle East erupted in war. Israel and Hezbollah traded missiles, Haifa was attacked, Beirut Airport was bombed, and southern Lebanon was evacuated. The world press speculated that this might become the start of World War III. Soon after, there was an attempted attack on the US Embassy in Damascus, tourists were gunned down in Amman, Jordan, and an Ebola-like virus erupted in eastern Turkey. It was far from your typical trip.

How did this turmoil affect their journey?

The men decided to continue walking to Istanbul where they would weigh their options and decide if, how and where to continue. Without giving away too much of the story, let's just say that disaster is the mother of improvisation.

Let's discuss smaller details for a minute. How far did the men walk each day?

Depending on the availability of lodgings, they averaged 31 kilometers a day.

Did they carry a tent?

No. In order to travel simply and reduce the weight of their packs, they counted on staying in monasteries, pensions, or bed and breakfasts along the way. In fact, Wilson, an ultra-light trekker, carried only a fifteen-pound pack.

Were they always able to find a place to sleep?

Yes. On a few nights it was touch-and-go, but then locals came to their rescue.

How long did it take to reach Jerusalem?

160 days total; 137 of those were walking days. The trail they blazed was 2620 miles (4223 km.).

What was the reason for walking this trail?

In his book, Wilson lists three reasons for walking this trail. First, it was to make a personal pilgrimage as he had done on other treks, including the legendary Camino Santiago across Spain, the St. Olav's Way across Norway, and the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome. Next, he was determined to make this a walk for peace, to remind people of the necessity to choose non-violent means to settle our differences, especially today. Finally, he wanted to create a peaceful path for future pilgrims to follow to Jerusalem, a city holy to three major religions. He has seen how these paths can be transformative where an inner peace is attained. Pilgrims return home with increased tolerance and understanding. That peace is then shared with their families, colleagues at work, and communities. To that end, his new book contains stages, distances, rough maps, photos, and a packing list for pilgrims who follow in their footsteps.

Was he successful in spreading his message of peace?

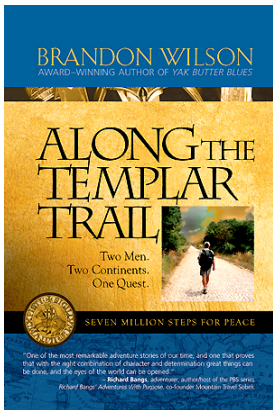
As word of their mission spread, major media, including national television networks and major newspapers in cities such as Belgrade, Sofia, Plovdiv, and others interviewed them, spreading their message to millions.

How much did their walk for peace cost?

True to the concept of making this simple trail available to everyone, they budgeted about \$30US per day/per person. It was entirely self-supported except for some gear: Montrail (Columbia) supplied Wilson's shoes, LEKI USA his Nordic walking sticks, and GoLite provided his pack.

What lessons might readers take away from *Along the Templar Trail*?

Each of us can make a difference in the world. After a thousand years of conflict and destruction, the world is ready for peace—and peace begins within. As Wilson says, "We are all pilgrims, each on their own path, each with their own story to tell. Walking is only a first step, but one we each can take to discover the peace within. In that way, eventually, war will become unconscionable. Darkness will be dispelled with light—one person, one step at a time."



Is this Wilson's first book about travel and peace?

This is Wilson's third book, yet his most impassioned. His first, *Yak Butter Blues: A Tibetan Trek of Faith* (2004), told of an incredible 1,000 km. trek he and his wife made on a rugged pilgrimage route across Tibet. Staying with Tibetan families, they survived blizzards, Chinese bullets and slow-starvation. It's a riveting tale of human endurance and intimate look at a Tibetan culture teetering on the edge of extinction. His next, *Dead Men Don't Leave Tips: Adventures X Africa* (2005), took readers onto the crazed roads of African adventure, while adding a face to the world's most misunderstood continent.

Where is the author walking next?

Only his walking stick knows, but it's already calling from the corner.

Wilson's books are available worldwide, or at www.pilgrimstales.com.

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For more information: pilgrimstales@hawaii.rr.com