



The Appian Way: Ghost Road, Queen of Roads

(Culture Trails: Adventures in Travel)

Robert A. Kaster

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The Roman poet Statius called the via Appia “the Queen of Roads,” and for nearly a thousand years that description held true, as countless travelers trod its path from the center of Rome to the heel of Italy. Today, the road is all but gone, destroyed by time, neglect, and the incursions of modernity; to travel the Appian Way today is to be a seeker, and to walk in the footsteps of ghosts.

Our guide to those ghosts—and the layers of history they represent—is Robert A. Kaster. In *The Appian Way*, he brings a lifetime of studying Roman literature and history to his adventures along the ancient highway. A footsore Roman soldier pushing the imperial power south; craftsmen and farmers bringing their goods to the towns that lined the road; pious pilgrims headed to Jerusalem, using stage-by-stage directions we can still follow—all come to life once more as Kaster walks (and drives—and suffers car trouble) on what’s left of the Appian Way. Other voices help him tell the story: Cicero, Goethe, Hawthorne, Dickens, James, and even Monty Python offer commentary, insight, and curmudgeonly grumbles, their voices blending like the ages of the road to create a telescopic, perhaps kaleidoscopic, view of present and past.

To stand on the remnants of the Via Appia today is to stand in the pathway of history. With *The Appian Way*, Kaster invites us to close our eyes and walk with him back in time, to the campaigns of Garibaldi, the revolt of Spartacus, and the glory days of Imperial Rome. No traveler will want to miss this fascinating journey.



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