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LA CONCHA

Newsletter of American Pilgrims on the Camino
December 2017

Dawning Awareness

by Robert C. Deming, Fredericksburg TX

I could hear rain through the open window, though it was too dark to make any other kind of appraisal of the weather. I was feeling apprehensive, and I wished again for that pair of rain pants I didn't have. Of course, there was no coffee nor any kind of breakfast to delay my start, so I put on my rain jacket and broad-brimmed hat and stepped out the door onto a dark cobblestone street. I had by this time become accustomed to starting my walk an hour before sunrise, but at times the Camino seemed to be a survival exercise, maybe like one of those TV reality shows I don't watch. My pack had a nice built-in rain cover and my boots had kept my feet dry on previous rainy days, but everyone else seemed to have rain pants or long ponchos, and I just had a pair of wet nylon pants. I walked up the hill, sort of following my

German trail friends Willie and Erwin who walked so much faster than I, worrying about all manner of problems – cold legs from rain-soaked pants, the overall gloominess of the rain in the dark, and my mood becoming blacker with each step.

Quickly the rain slacked off, and just as I was getting warm, I came across Willie and Erwin packing up their jackets and ponchos. I took the cue and stuffed the rain jacket into my pack. It was still dark but not so gloomy without the rain, and my apprehension gradually subsided as the sky lightened. The Germans soon outdistanced me, but there were other pilgrims on the trail, which lightened my spirits further. To improve my mood, I went to an exercise I had begun using in those quiet lonely times; I made myself aware of the world around

In this issue

Chair's Message	2
Book Review <i>Santiago Sketches</i>	6
Chapters	16 - 19
Hospitalero Happenings	23
Lifetime & New Members ..	22 & 25

Member Writings & Photos Throughout!

me in every detail. I paid attention to every sound, every smell, every sight; mindfulness I had read about but had been too busy to practice. As the first rays of the morning sun threw my shadow before me on the ground, the trail turned beside the canal out of Frómista. The trees were still enveloped in mist, there were birds singing, and it was magical. ♦



Canal de Castilla outside Frómista

Message From the Chair

Dear Members,

When I think about the accomplishments of American Pilgrims, I always try to start at our mission statement: *To foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, by gathering pilgrims together, and by providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.* We celebrate every credential mailed, every local chapter event, every hospitalero trained and every grant made.

In addition to these tangible accomplishments this year, we went through a process to identify the values that underlie all our work. Our values are built upon the foundation of our collective experience as pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. In every decision we make and every action we take, American Pilgrims strives to be in accordance with the values of community, service, gratitude, and simplicity.

Community: We welcome all people and strive to create real opportunities for people to connect, grow and share in a meaningful way.

Service: We strive to create opportunities for people to help and support one another before, during and after their Camino experience.

Gratitude: We embrace every opportunity to thank and be thanked for actions big and small.

Simplicity: We always aim to concentrate on what's important in life and to celebrate all we have by appreciating every situation.

I am grateful for all our members and volunteers as none of our work would be possible without you. Many of you have become Lifetime Members, and I send you a special thank you for your belief in American Pilgrims as well as your support, and

your lifetime commitment to the Camino experience.

I am grateful for my fellow board members who roll up their sleeves to see that the work continues and that we are always serving our fellow pilgrims.

This year, we will be saying goodbye to four individuals who live the American Pilgrims mission and values. We will miss Zita Macy, Cheryl Grasmoen, Scott Pate and Jessica Swan. Zita and Cheryl are two of our longest serving members, and we will be acknowledging their special contributions in this issue. Scott and Jessica, too, have made outstanding contributions through their hard work, skills and being good team members. Scott managed tremendous growth in our chapters and Jessica continually pushed us to find ways to engage our members. Both will be missed. This is not an *Adios*, but a *Hasta Luego*.

I'll be writing a bit more about our new crop of board members in the next issue. ♦

Buen Camino!

Jeff Stys
Board Chair



Jeff Stys, photo by Joan DeFeis



Happy Holidays!



A Reading Treat for American Pilgrims

Spain and Portugal have many, many festivals and special days that are unfamiliar to foreigners. It can be one of the joys of the Camino to happen on a festival. American Pilgrims members can login on the [American Pilgrims website](http://www.americanpilgrims.org) and read the "Guide to (Mostly Somewhat Crazy) Festivals in Spain and Portugal." Enjoy! ♦



Thank you Zita Macy & Cheryl Grasmoen!

This month marks the end of Zita Macy's six years on the Board of Directors of American Pilgrims. For many of us, Zita was the first person we met when arriving at a Gathering. Not surprising, as Zita has been the face of American Pilgrims for many years... handling membership questions, producing La Concha, managing hospitalero training and Gathering tasks. Zita has always been the go-to person.

In attendance at the first informal gathering of pilgrims in California in 1999, Zita was a leader in the establishment of American Pilgrims as a non-profit organization in 2003. She has been there for us from the beginning and was one of the first members to receive the American Pilgrims Lifetime Service Award.

Although stepping off the Board, Zita will continue to serve American Pilgrims as a key volunteer in many areas, and no doubt there are more Caminos in her future too.

This month also marks the end of six years of service on the American Pilgrims Board by Cheryl Grasmoen. She has been a compelling force behind our growth and our achievements over the better half of a decade.

She has led by example, working harder than she expected anyone else to and has been a true servant-leader in her own special Minnesotan-nice leadership style. She has given many of us American Pilgrims members the opportunity to make meaningful contributions that helped us work together in community, camaraderie and friendship.

We will miss you Cheryl and are grateful that you will continue your involvement through the hospitalero program and in other ways ♦

Why Membership?

What makes the Camino de Santiago so special? Each one of us has experienced the magic of the Camino. Maybe it was a special connection with a complete stranger, maybe it was an unexpected kindness, or maybe it was a revelation at the end of a particularly difficult day.

As pilgrims, we know that the end of the physical path in Santiago is only the beginning of a more enduring Camino...a Camino that represents a way of life. As such, we look for opportunities to connect and give back. Maintaining membership in American Pilgrims is an active way to continue our Camino.

American Pilgrims launched the Individual Lifetime Membership category (\$500) at the beginning of 2017 and is so grateful for all of you who have made that commitment. The close of 2017 is bringing two new membership levels designed for you to demonstrate your investment in the Camino.

Many pilgrims make additional donations along with the membership dues. In response to this generosity, we wanted to be able to create a way to recognize members' support, so we are now offering new household levels:

- \$75: Friends of the Camino
(Up to 4 Household Members; Renew Annually)
- \$150: Pilgrims on the Way
(Up to 4 Household Members; Renew Annually)
- \$250: St. James Society
(Up to 4 Household Members; Renew Annually)

You now have the option to contribute at a level that is appropriate for your household. The other Annual Memberships have not changed.



*Continue the magic. Embody the Camino.
Join American Pilgrims.*

<http://www.americanpilgrims.org/join-renew>

Student (\$15)

Individual (\$50)

When your current membership expires, please consider joining at one of these levels. If you currently have or have ever had a membership, please write to membership@americanpilgrims.org to change your level. Your membership means that together we can issue over 7,000 credentials each year at no cost to pilgrims, grant thousands of dollars to support the Camino infrastructure, offer hospitalero training (500+ hospitaleros trained to date), support the 45 chapters in their work to gather and support pilgrims, and maintain our website, Facebook group, and *La Concha* newsletter.

Will you renew your membership or join American Pilgrims on the Camino today and continue the Camino that means so much to you? ♦



*Finisterre
photo by Bob Scheckenback
Commack NY*

A Memorable Month on the Via Gebennensis

by J. Peter Monro, Portland ME

If you're looking for a solitary adventure along a Camino route with stunning scenery and a special spiritual history, try the walk from Geneva, Switzerland, to Le Puy-en-Velay in France's Massif Central.

I walked a 350-kilometer variant of that route during October, later than even the few who follow this track usually do. But except for one wind-whipped, rainy, cold day, the sun was out and the temperatures hovered around record-high 70s.

The length of town names was almost proportional to their tiny-ness. Among the smallest were Saint Michael-sur-Savasse and Le-Monastier-sur-Gazeille.

That tiny-ness formed a key to the pilgrimage. Many of the hamlets I passed through are so small they have no commercial lodging of any kind. I was dependent on calling a day ahead to gracious people offering an *accueil jacquaire*, a pilgrim's welcome of supper, shower, bed and breakfast for a donation.

I did that every night for nearly two weeks. Making the phone calls and sharing the meals with the hosts — and any children and other guests they might have — meant that my fluency in French was a required entry card.



The Cathedral of Le-Puy-en-Velay was the author's destination, but it also serves as the start of the Via Podiensis. The monumental statue of Notre-Dame-de-France is lit in the background.

Perhaps that was one reason why I was the first American many of the hosts and locals had ever met! And, for more than two weeks of the hike, I met no one else on the trail.

The route itself was a study in staggering contrasts. I took a cable car up onto La Salève mountain just outside Geneva for panoramic views of the city, its lake, and the Mont Blanc massif beyond. Two days later, I was riding a boat around Lac d'Annecy with banks of fog draped across its ring of mountains.

In the next week, I was repeatedly crossing the Rhône River and climbing the wall of hills west of La Roche-de-Glun. I passed caves dug into the soft sandstone that had sheltered refugees and resistance fighters in World War II.

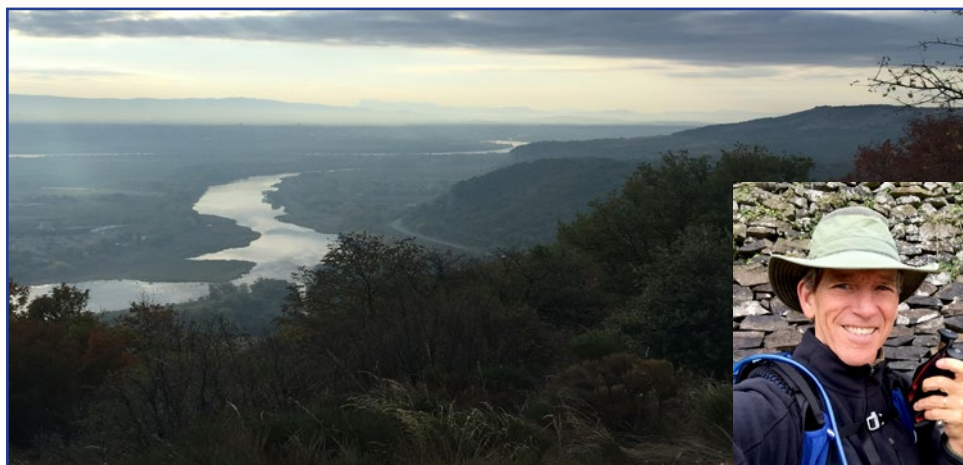
The elderly couple in Saint Antoine l'Abbaye not only welcomed me into their medieval home but also into their spiritual community that now occupies the ancient abbey. Around a ceremonial log fire in the courtyard, they sang one hymn in English especially for me.

The wind-swept fields of the high plateau of the Ardèche I crossed next gave no sign that the staunch Protestants in those isolated farms had hidden and saved roughly 5,000 Jews when the Nazis ruled France.

The steep hills of the Haute-Loire and the

Auvergne led me down into my destination of Le Puy, with its astonishing volcanic pylons each topped with a monumental statue or a chapel. These pylons demanded I climb them.

All in all, my Camino was an unforgettable solitary adventure along the Via Gebennensis and a walk so different from the sociable Camino Francés. ♦



The view of the mighty Rhône River after climbing steep hills just west of La Roche-de-Glun

Two Views of “Santiago Sketches” by David McLoughlin

View 1: A review by Steven G. Rindahl, Cibola TX

As a pilgrim who has walked the Camino, I am writing this review for pilgrims and those who wish to be pilgrims. I start with a short disclaimer: This is a volume of poetry and it is not about the Camino. Rather, it is about Santiago . . . the city and its permanent residents. To a lesser extent, it is about

Santiago Sketches

by *David McLoughlin*

Dufour Editions, Chester Sprints PA 2017 & Salmon Poetry Cliffs of Moher, County Clare Ireland 96 pages

Spain, specifically Galicia. If that warning has not scared you off, you may just be in for a treat.

Santiago Sketches by David McLoughlin is a smallish volume of poems which reflect on life in Santiago. In poems such as “Civil Disagreement,” McLoughlin gently exposes the reader to the tension between those who speak the regional Galego and those who insist on speaking Español. In the short “Praza Do Toural,” McLoughlin writes of early morning in a city where drug addiction is a reality. He reminds those of us with enchanted memories, or expectations, of the wonder which is Santiago de Compostela that it is a city and has city problems.

But the poems are not all of such subjects and McLoughlin does not ignore the pilgrim. There are bright moments woven into the poetry along with the dark. “Portico of Glory” will allow your mind to place your hand on the “Tree of Jesse” in the imprint left by so

many thousands of pilgrims who have gone before.

Is this the right book for you? Are you looking for a book on the Camino? If yes – then no. Are you looking to kindle thoughts of the people of the country which made your Camino possible? Then yes, it likely is. You may just wish to give it a try. ♦



View 2: A review by Sara L. Gradwohl, Mooresville IN

David McLoughlin tells us that he composed these poems between October 1993 and June 1994, when he was a naïve university student in Santiago de Compostela. While not about the Camino, it is a revealing narrative in short sketches of the city and its residents.

The book is divided into nine months or “stages” where the reader can sense his introduction to and immersion into this utterly unfamiliar city. He inhabits the city, coming to know it intimately. We see a transformation, through the reflective eye of youth, as he matures and is ready to depart the city a wiser pilgrim on a new journey.

McLoughlin describes many familiar places and scenes, but during grittier times before the Camino de Santiago was inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. We see (and can almost smell) Santiago: the old men and women, the junkies and the punks, and the prostitutes all loitering about its fountains, plazas and cafes. We’re reminded of cafés before anti-smoking laws, and before the influx of tourists and pilgrims who can now overwhelm the city. The reader can know more deeply the city’s soul through his words.

Poetry can sometimes express a thought, feeling, emotion or place better than prose. McLoughlin captures what Virginia Woolf called “Moments of Being” and his writing reminds me of my own existential journal entries when I begin to really see, hear, smell, taste and feel what’s going on around me. Lifelong memories are made and intense memories can come flooding back when triggered by a sensory experience. In the Notes at the end of the book, the author provides definitions of the Galego words he uses to season his poems, providing an unfamiliar reader a more genuine sense of place and moment.

His creative and credible use of language conveys personal sadness, fear, loneliness, isolation and longing. In his poem “Leaving” I was acutely reminded of my own melancholy when departing Santiago in the misty, pre-dawn light. His attitude towards his subject matter becomes a love letter to Santiago, warts and all. Reading poetry can be intimidating and difficult, but I found McLoughlin’s style to be enjoyable and revealing, bringing back memories of my own times in Santiago. Even if you aren’t a regular poetry reader, his sketches might inspire you to add a few days at the end of your next Camino to get to know the city as more than your destination. ♦

Finding Inspiration in Contrasting Combinations

by Larry O'Heron, Rochester NY

This past August I made it to Santiago de Compostela, but I won't say that I completed my Camino. This four-year journey over four trips on the Vía de La Plata, Camino Sanabrés and Camino Francés gave me the opportunity to review many of life's experiences.

I came to the Camino Francés without a stone burden to leave at Cruz de Ferro. Before leaving home, I gave my burden serious thought, considering various past experiences to leave under the cross. Ultimately, I left for Spain without a stone. I can't say why, except that I didn't want to leave a symbolic representation of an issue under the cross... I felt that I had learned to deal with and accept my past. I did not need to let go of something... at least not yet in my life.

That brings me to my backpack. At some point after Cruz de Ferro, maybe by O Cebreiro, I realized why I did not want a pack transport service. My backpack with all my shoes (four pairs because I'm big on shoes), clothes and assorted items was my "stone"... but I wanted it with me as a sign to myself of the strength within me to carry myself and my life forward with humor and good spirit.

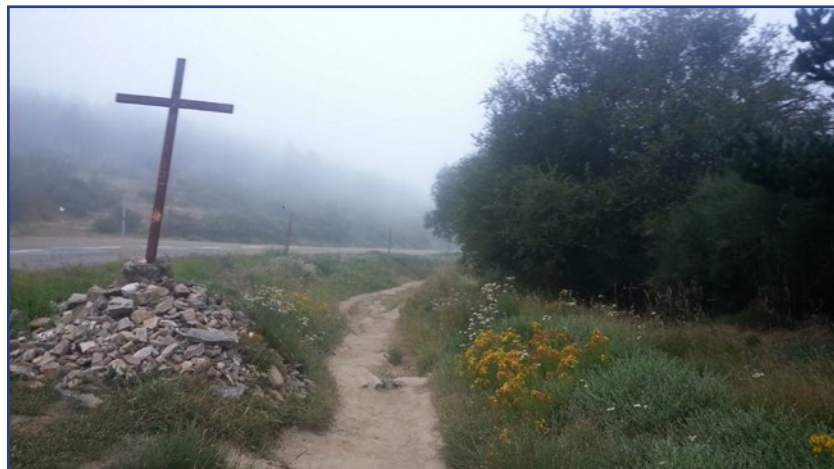
Inwardly, my backpack had become something that I could no more hand off to others than the burden that I would have left at Cruz de Ferro. This realization came to me several hours and some kilometers after Cruz de Ferro through the combination of an unremarkable cross and a memorial to a pilgrim.

The simple iron cross, alone and stark, meant more to me because of its solitude. The memorial to Michael Cura, a Welsh schoolboy who collapsed on a school cycling trip along the Camino, made me face the finality of life while celebrating its living.

Suddenly, the two events opened me to understand the preciousness of life and our experiences, overwhelming me with a combination



The memorial to Michael Cura, Camino Francés



The unremarkable cross after Cruz de Ferro, Camino Francés

of grief and joy. I cannot say that the Cruz de Ferro transformed me, but I can say that it inspired me to look deep inside myself. My life was those things - issues, repentances and sins - that, at one point, were a drag on my life, but they were the very things that had made me strong and independent. The Camino is more than one journey thru life; it's a representation of our entire life. ♦

American Pilgrims as Volunteers

A huge American Pilgrims thank you goes out to the volunteers in our pilot Facebook Volunteer Moderator Program.

Facebook held a Community Summit last summer and American Pilgrims was one of only 100 groups invited to participate. We were thrilled to be recognized as a leader among the social media elite. Board member Yosmar Martinez and Facebook administrator Ann Howley were our representatives. One of the ideas they brought back was to create a Volunteer Moderator program.

Its purpose is:

- To monitor all the posts and steer the conversation in a positive direction when needed.
- To quickly and effectively vet the dozens wanting to join each day and assure they are not robots or companies seeking primarily to market to our almost 17,000 Facebook members
- To improve communication about the goals and guidelines of our group

The responsibilities were significant and the commitment was demanding. We talked to some members who were frequent, positive contributors or who ran pretty amazing Facebook groups for our chapters. They were all glad to be part of the experiment.

The expectations for the pilot program have been surpassed. The volunteers learned the ropes of social media moderation quickly and are incredibly level-headed. Their intuition about posts has invariably been spot on. They created a collegial group rooted in the American Pilgrims values of community, service, gratitude, and simplicity.

American Pilgrims extends a Camino thanks to our moderators: Andy Byers, Geoff Davies, Ann Howley, Jim Martin, Carlos Mentley, Robin Pigott, Virginia Pulver, Rosa Torres-Tumazos and Don Walton.

They embody the spirit of our volunteer-driven, membership organization. We could use a few additional moderators in the group. If you are interested, email Facebook@Americanpilgrims.org for more information. ♦



American Pilgrims in International Social Media

In October, American Pilgrims Board member Yosmar Martinez and long-time American Pilgrims member George Greenia participated in the 6th International Congress of Jacobean Associations. While they were there, they were interviewed for

the popular blog published by Correos, the Spanish postal service. The interviewers didn't get all the details exactly right, but overall the post tells the story of American Pilgrims quite nicely. You can read it in Spanish or in English. Thanks Correos! ♦

English link - <http://www.elcaminoconcorreos.com/en/articulo.php?i=American-Pilgrims>

Spanish link - <http://www.elcaminoconcorreos.com/es/articulo.php?i=american-pilgrims-la-mano-amiga-del-camino-de-santiago-en-eeuu>

Sacred Rite of the Camino Welcome-Home Event

by Laurie Ferris, Oakland CA - Coordinator Northern California Chapter

The Northern California Chapter held its annual Welcome-Home Celebration and Potluck event on November 11th in Oakland. This year's presentations included Camino routes beyond the Francés. First-time pilgrims and Camino veterans alike were given the opportunity to share highlights at the gathering of nearly eighty pilgrims. It was a fun way to learn



Potluck lunch - Spanish specialties
photo by Merula Furtado.

www.americanpilgrims.org/northern-california-chapter

After the presentations, the potluck lunch opened, and we were all ready to feast! Bay Area pilgrims put on quite a spread, and some of the entrées were inspired by the Camino. I was happy to see favorites, such as Manchego cheese, Jamón Ibérico, and Tarta de Santiago. And of course, it wouldn't be a pilgrim gathering without plenty of vino! Spanish Albariño and Tempranillo and Portuguese Vinho Verde were in the mix with some local California varietals.

After lunch, we gathered for "Class of" photos, a tradition our

chapter started last year. We even had a few pilgrims who walked the Camino in the 1990s, before it was cool!

Then, the sacred rite of sharing Camino experiences began. Table by table, pilgrims were invited to share a story, a favorite memory, a lesson learned. This is, perhaps, the most important ritual pilgrims can attend, whether they choose to speak or to simply listen and reflect on their own Caminos.

It wasn't about backpacks and blisters. People spoke of friendship, serendipitous meetings, funny situations, and transformation the Camino provided. Camaraderie flowed, and new bonds were made. The event concluded with Emilio Escudero reading Antonio Machado's poem "Caminante No Hay Camino" in Spanish, followed by Susan Alcorn reading it in English. A perfect way to end the day!

I am forever grateful to be part of this tribe of pilgrims and to have the opportunity to walk the Camino. ♦



Brooke Taylor holds a message for Rennie Archibald, the founding member of the Northern California chapter, who retired to Spain earlier this year.
photo by Merula Furtado.



Class of 2017 Pilgrims
photo by Merula Furtado

Carrying My Sister With Me

by Nancy Lake, Fairfax VA

"Most of my best memories come from some old dirt road." These are the words I repeat every time I'm rewarded with a dirt road instead of a paved one while walking the Camino. They come from a picture in my sister Trishie's bedroom that I discovered while she was dying. It wasn't a pretty photo or even in a nice frame; just a picture she printed from the Internet with a simple black border. We had grown up, played, visited relatives, and shared memories on old dirt roads. The phrase obviously touched something in her and it touched something in me, too.

I'm a hiker. It's my first love and a source of inner strength. In 1995, I hiked the entire length of the Appalachian Trail and it defined me forever. When I heard about the Camino, I immediately put it on my list and completed my first walk in 2009.

My family never understood hiking, but the movie "The Way" was a turning point. I dragged every family member and friend I could wrangle to watch the movie so they would gain an inkling of why I hike. I wanted them to understand the freedom of being outdoors, the friendships forged, the feeling of accomplishment, and more. My sister became a believer, bought the movie, and watched it numerous times with her grandchildren. After suffering

her third encounter with breast cancer and weighing less than 100 pounds, she told me it was her dream to walk the Camino. My heart sank. I could not imagine her being able to walk all day, or half a day, or even an hour. I didn't know what to say. Less than six months later, I watched over her as she left this world. I knew I had to walk for her.

This past year, I walked the Caminos Primitivo and Inglés carrying her ashes with me. I had intended to leave her ashes on Camino markers. Instead, I preferred to keep her with me. Every time I stepped onto a dirt road, I repeated her mantra and told her we were walking together. At Muxia, we sat together on the rocks by the ocean she loved. I completed the Camino Inglés on her birthday. While attending a group session with Camino Companions, I learned her name could be added to my compostela, "Vicarie Pro" meaning "in memory of." Once again, Trishie and I had celebrated more memories together along dirt roads. ♦



Nancy and sister Trishie, photo by Pat Lake

Editors Note: Camino Companions is an opportunity for reflection, sharing and quiet space in Santiago de Compostela for those who have walked the Camino. For more information, see their Facebook page.



Dirt Roads – May 2017 Camino Primitivo

American Pilgrims Helping Camino Infrastructure

The American Pilgrims grants program is one of the ways that our members express gratitude for the many gifts of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Our 2018 grant cycle began this month with our annual Call for Proposals, issued on December 1. Grants of up to

\$6,000 are available to non-private albergues and charitable organizations in Spain, Portugal, and France to develop and improve Camino infrastructure. If you are interested in helping review grant applications, please email grants@americanpilgrims.org. ♦



A route marker on the Mozárabe Route

Encountering Monsieur L'Arbre du Pèlerin

by Johnna Studebaker, Santa Fe NM

It was a chance encounter we won't soon forget, my twin sister and I, as we walked the Camino on the Le Puy Route in southwestern France.



Bright and early this morning, we walk through the village of Arzacq-Arraziguet along a narrow street, the Chemin de Saint-Jacques. Moving along onto a dirt trail through dense woods, we have the good fortune to meet

one Monsieur L'Arbre du Pèlerin – a huge old tree who is as wide as he is tall. He looks like he has been standing around motionless eating pains au chocolat nonstop for, at least, the last thirty years...his girth is so wide. His grand knotty crevices are filled with candles, scallop shells, prayer notes and even a little statue of Mary. Oh, and, of course, hot pink plastic flowers are tucked under one of his many leafy arms. Pilgrims have lovingly loaded him up. As if this were not enough, a line of shells runs up one side of his ancient trunk. A sign posted on him reads arbre du pèlerin. I wonder if he is a cousin of Treebeard from the land of the Hobbits, what the elves call an “ent.” If trees could smile, this stately old gentleman surely must be smiling right about now. His grin stretches all across his gnarly old face. And, I think I notice a slight wink as we pass him by. Enchantée, Monsieur L'Arbre. Enchantée! (Delighted to meet you!) We are grinning too now, ear-to-ear, as we stumble on down the Camino, hardly able to contain ourselves. ♦

Monsieur L'Arbre du Pèlerin, Le Puy Route

Hospitalero Observations

by David Cook, Indianapolis IN - Coordinator Hoosier Chapter

As I prepared to depart for the Iberian Peninsula, I wondered why I was giving up my daily routine to help run a hostel along the Camino. I love my routine which involves simply waking up in a comfortable bed and turning on the coffee pot to brew while taking my daily shower, (without pushing the control button every 10 seconds). Then, I am accustomed to dressing and walking to the end of my driveway to pick up the newspaper (hopefully not in a puddle). Finally reading the newspaper and enjoying my cup of coffee is a good way to start the day. Why would I want to give this up the first 15 days of September?

The “donativo” Municipal Albergue is in Nájera, a city with a population of 8,000. The pronunciation of Nájera has the accent on the first syllable, giving it a distinctive Middle Eastern sound. The name is from the Muslim word meaning the land between the river and the mountain — and that is exactly where this historic city lies — between red cliffs and the Nájera River.

Our daily routine was the same for the 15 days we were engaged in service to the peregrinos. By “we,” I mean the four of us being Michela from Italy, Anne Marie from France, Elisa from Spain (1st week) and Pedro from Spain (2nd week) and me. We felt we had most of the language skills needed as all were fluent in multiple languages with one great exception, “moi.” Now for the daily routine.

6:00 AM: Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” or Rossini’s “William Tell Overture Finale” was played as the lights were turned on in our 45-bunk bed dormitory.

Until 8:00 AM: Someone stayed at the reception area to answer questions and get the peregrinos pumped up with Willie Nelson’s “On the Road Again.” It was perfect music to get the morning started right, and they seemed to enjoy it. Most

peregrinos were gone by 7:30 AM.

Then, Michela and Anne Marie would take turns fixing breakfast. There were usually fried eggs/jamon/queso for me. There was always plenty of bread and jam and café con leche for everyone else plus any leftovers from the refrigerator that needed to be eaten. (Over the two weeks I gained 5 lbs.)

9:00 to 11:00 AM: This was the time to prepare the hostel for the next wave of peregrinos. All areas were cleaned top to bottom daily on a rotating basis.

#1 Dormitory was swept and mopped and all bed-covers were stripped and laundered over the 15 days.

#2 Toilets and showers washed down and disinfected.

#3 Kitchen/salon/laundry room swept, mopped and cleared. The peregrinos did a fairly good job of cleaning and putting away their kitchen things.

11:00 AM to 1:30 PM: This was our very limited free time during the 15 days. The hospitaleras would shop for our food or supplies for the hostel. Again, Michela and Ann Marie would fix lunch to make sure I was eating enough.

1:30 PM: For the hospitaleros, this point is when the day really starts, and it usually starts off with a bang even though we have been up for 8 1/2 hours!

We greet the peregrinos with cold lemon water and fruit, verify their credential and assign beds. Many peregrinos will have walked the 30K from Logroño, and all desired a lower bunk. The older

peregrinos were the ones awarded lower bunks. Assigning beds required a great deal of attention because, unlike the airlines, we make every effort not to overbook and are careful to determine which beds remain available for the late-comers — who would be in serious need of a bed.

Continued next page..



David Cook with co-hospitaleros Anne Marie Seynaeve from France and Michela Accorinti from Italy

Hospitalero Observations continued

We would hang around answering questions and generally being available to chat until around 7:00 PM when we would go to a local restaurant for dinner.

Until 10:00 PM: One or two of us would staff the registration area and field the occasional question about shipping a mochila, where to attend Mass or get medical attention.

Finally, at 10:00 PM closing time arrived. Most of the peregrinos would already be in bed but some would be out having a final smoke of the day. We

would cue up Pavarotti's "Nessun Dorma" while ushering the stragglers into the dormitory.

Tomorrow always brought a new wave of nearly 90 peregrinos washing over us as we found ourselves once again marooned in this ever-flowing stream of Camino de Santiago, until our term of providing hospitality came to an end. It was a true honor and privilege to be able to provide hospitality to our international peregrinos, and I highly recommend taking on this service to the peregrinos of the Camino de Santiago. ♦

Solitude on the Winter Way in Mid-October

by Chris Slater, Asheville NC

A short distance from the albergue in Ponferrada there's a prominent signpost – right for the Camino Francés, left for the Camino de Invierno. The latter was traditionally a route for pilgrims when the heights of O Cebreiro were impassable due to snow. The seething masses went right; I went left and was the only pilgrim for nine days before the route joined the Vía de la Plata outside Lalín, two days from Santiago. My reward was a delightfully diverse camino, from the remains of Roman gold mines at Las Médulas, along the Sil valley with a different view at every turn, steeply down and then up to cross the Miño at Belesar, then over the highlands of Alto de Faro. A different Galicia, lots of grape vines on terraced hillsides, even olives, but the same timeless hamlets and tiny churches. Curious local folks. Few farm animals, so the pilgrim is spared both the pungent pong of drying dung and the need to watch his step. I enjoyed the dedicated hospitality of Asún in A Rúa, who has converted two rooms in her house for pilgrims, and of Manolo at Bar Mar in Sobradelo. As the only pilgrim I felt very special,

very privileged. I felt special in a different way at the vast albergue in Quiroga where I became an Object of Curiosity to a large tour group, so that I felt like a zoo animal. Unfortunately, I wasn't petted.

This is a camino of outstanding charm and historical and religious interest (e.g. the churches at Montefurado and Diomendi), abundantly waymarked with a variety of signs thanks to the

local associations and the recent efforts of the Xunta. Its authenticity was a matter of dispute, but since it was certified in 2016 it can be expected to grow in popularity. It needs more albergues, but plans are afoot in several places. Meanwhile, inexpensive accommodations are readily available in pensiones, casa rurales and bars. I never paid more than €20 for a bed thanks to special pilgrim rates and being out-of-season. It's not an easy option, physically, but has plenty of corredoiras and farm tracks and relatively little asphalt, none of it with much traffic. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Rebekah Scott, Laurie Reynolds and other contributors for the inspiring guide, available at <https://www.csj.org.uk/planning-your-pilgrimage/routes-to-santiago/routes-in-spain/camino-de-invierno/> ♦



Signs along A Rúa de Valdeorras, Camino de Invierno

Cruz de Ferro: Healing and Hope

by Irene Lipshin, Placerville CA



Irene placing a stone at Cruz de Ferro

I decided to walk some of the highlights I missed last year and Cruz de Ferro was number one on my list.

Today, I climbed the highest mountain on the Camino Francés, 1504 meters (4,934 ft.) above sea level, a steady hike to Cruz de Ferro, the replica iron

cross that sits on a five meter (16.4 feet) high wooden pole. It's surrounded by a pile of stones and rocks that pilgrims leave for different reasons. According to legend, it was once part of a pagan ritual that predates Christianity.

As I walked the trail to the cross, with three small crystal rocks in my pocket, I felt an emotional change, more serious, almost fragile and I began to cry. I felt a spiritual presence beyond one religion. The sky darkened, a breeze blew softly and the air was quiet. Clouds moved and created shadows in the path. As the ground leveled out, the cross seemed to appear in front of me, like a vision on the Way. I was surprised at its simplicity.

Some pilgrims carry a stone that represents sorrow, burdens, guilt, gratitude, hope, requests for health or healing. And more, of course, as it's an individual gesture. I placed two

stones for friends whose loved ones had passed away recently. Knowing I was already blessed, with 71 trips around the sun and being here on the Camino, I set my small crystal with the others as a prayer for healing the world. In the Jewish religion there is a practice of kindness and helping others, "Tikkun Olam" (Repair of the World). I wanted to reach beyond my own sorrows, hopes and dreams to a place that creates love and hope for humanity, for our planet.

I handed my phone to another pilgrim and asked him to take a photo. There were several people placing stones, but rather than waiting for the mound to clear, I felt a comfort in being in this spiritual and ancient place of healing with others.

Leaving my stones, I whispered one more prayer, then walked down the rocky, steep mountain to El Acebo to find a bed for the night. I felt lighter and at peace within myself, hopeful for our world: beyond borders on the Camino. ♦



Irene climbing down to El Acebo



Irene climbing up to Cruz de Ferro

Meeting "The Madame"

by David Jennings, Kings Beach CA

At 5 a.m. it was dark and foggy, with a chilling wind as my wife, Monica, and I joined four other sleepy-eyed pilgrims at the convent/albergue in Vézelay, France. Then joined by six of the nuns, we made our way to the cathedral. Entering the church was challenging as the interior of the massive stone structure was lit by a single candle burning on the altar. By *braille* we found our way to a pew, while the nuns went up near the altar where they knelt down on the hard, uneven stone floor. All remained unchanged in the silent darkness for about 30 minutes, at which time a few more candles were lit, and six priests entered and knelt across from the nuns. I said a prayer for the nuns still kneeling on the cold stone floor. More time passed in silence before the Mass began, followed by a pilgrim blessing. That was our start of the Via Lemovicensis (the Vézelay Route).

We had arrived in Vézelay by bus the day before. The small hill town is a starting point to Santiago; we were directed to the convent to sign in for the Vézelay Camino. The woman in charge (everyone knew her as "the Madame") registered us, and as there are two routes from Vézelay by way of Bourges or Nevers, she asked which route we intended to take. I said we intended to go to Bourges, as we had the guide books and information for that route. She replied that the way to Nevers was much better, that the Bourges route offered only a big church, but was otherwise boring farm country. Assuming she should know, we changed route plans and donated our guide books to the convent. In return Madame gave us some mimeographed sheets of information on the towns and accommodation on the Nevers route. She offered to make



Statue of St. Bernadette, at the Convent of St. Bernadette, Nevers, France (St. Bernadette came from Lourdes to Nevers, and lies in rest at the Convent)

reservations for our night stays for the whole way, but we preferred she only make reservations for a couple of nights, and we would take care of ourselves after that. The Madame gave us strict orders to attend the pilgrims' Mass the next morning.

We saw no other pilgrims leaving Vézelay by our route, and I recall passing through a lot of farm land on the way. Hmmmm?

However, from war-torn past to today's City of Nevers, it is worth the walk. Madame was right. ♦



The Cathedral at Vézelay, France

Chapter Snapshot

We now have 45 chapters engaged in the work of gathering pilgrims together. Among the newer chapters, Southern Wisconsin has planned a movie viewing and Tarta de Santiago bakeoff to warm up the “brisk” December months. Meanwhile, the Okies on the Camino watched a French documentary about the Camino from the 90s and have an urban hike with a presentation about the Camino Portugués scheduled later in the year. The Inland Northwest Chapter (eastern Washington, eastern Oregon and northern Idaho) celebrated the Camino and pilgrims with a Catholic Mass, shell ceremony, and pilgrim meal for over 100. Finally, activity is bustling on the east coast with Charlotte hosting Thursday tertulia drop-ins.

Here is a snapshot of the wide-ranging activities during the fourth quarter of 2017 from a sampling of 23 of our chapters who engaged in an astounding 130 activities:

Hikes: 65

Speaker Events: 14

Camino Coffees: 10

Movie Screenings: 6

Tarta de Santiago Bakeoff: 1

Tertulias: 9

Meals/Potlucks: 10

Happy Hours/Tapas: 8

Meetings/Gatherings: 6

Shell Ceremonies: 4

Our chapters are working to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by gathering pilgrims, providing information, and supporting the Camino. If you are interested in getting involved or forming your own chapter, visit <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/local-chapters>. ♦



Anchorage



Asheville & Raleigh



Atlanta



Austin



Charlotte



Chicago



Chico



Colorado Front Range



Inland Northwest



Kansas City MO



Northeast Oklahoma



Northern California



Old Pueblo



Orlando



Puget Sound



Sacramento



Santa Barbara



Silicon Valley



Southern California



South Wisconsin



Texas Gulf Coast

Finisterre - Galicia Spain

by Carol Delaney, Providence RI (with her brother John Delaney)

The dream brings you to the end of the world.
What more could you have wanted than this bar,
serving vino tinto and raciones,
while throngs of people share a photo op?

Had you thought that everything would stop
when the path ended? Many hearts leapt off
the edge watching the sun set, dissolving
upon the dark water, splaying out

its colors in broad bands. That is when doubt
must have crept into the consciousness
of those seeking to worship its radiance,
to where it was rising in splendor again.

Every age is an ignorant one. Such men
sail like Columbus from Gomera,
venture forth like Magellan from Seville
not knowing what everyone one day will.

But still... when we walked down the hill
back to Fisterra, in the gradual dark,

a full moon began its rise across the bay,
offering a coincident change of light

that turned everything into black or white.
Content with what we know, most of us
will stay at home, leave adventuring
to the reckless, rich, and irredeemers,

and live our lives out simply as dreamers.
We'll spare ourselves the disappointments
and the injuries, all that prep time,
and fulfill our fantasies with headlines.

Yet men want to follow where the sun shines.
Myriads over millenia
have sat on those rocks where we had been,
mesmerized by the meaning of that view—

perhaps with a drink of wine, as we did too—
but deprived of the common knowledge
that takes so much for granted now, and
makes a wondrous sunset feel like déjà-vu. ♦



Finisterre photo by Larry O'Heron, Rochester NY

Savoring the Very Last Steps of the Camino

by Linda Thornton, Austin TX - Austin Chapter Coordinator

Since arriving in Santiago, I have not slept well. All the sights and sounds of the last 35 days are swirling around in my head, and I am trying to sort them out. We are all aware of the much discussed three aspects of the Camino. While the physical and mental parts seemed easier to identify, the spiritual portion requires much more soul searching. I wait for an epiphany as I try to analyze each day, but nothing comes to mind.

I open our Camino book and start to flip through it, not sure why. We have owned *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago* by John Brierley for over a

year and have referred to it many times throughout each day of our journey, yet for some reason, I have never turned to the last page until now. The words of Marianne Williamson's "Deepest Fear" poem (from her book entitled *A Return to Love*) make the hair on my arms stand on end and bring tears to my eyes. Once again, the Camino provides, presenting me with this spiritual gift that was not to be unwrapped until just the right time. ♦

Editor's Note: Linda uses the poem with the permission and blessings of its author.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our Light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking.
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our light shine,
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Tunnel into plaza in Santiago photo by Robert Scheckenback, Commack NY

Lifetime Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following lifetime members to American Pilgrims on the Camino.

- | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| ◆ Dana Baggett | ◆ Gwojen Fung | ◆ Christopher Kelle | ◆ Jacqueline Saxon |
| ◆ Abigail Bornstein | ◆ Lin Galea | ◆ Sandy Lenthall | ◆ Julie Scott |
| ◆ K Andrew Byers | ◆ James Geier | ◆ John Long | ◆ Daniel Stalling |
| ◆ Kaye R Callaway | ◆ Cheryl Grasmoe | ◆ Paul Louie | ◆ Jeff Stys |
| ◆ Elaine Chapin | ◆ George Greenia | ◆ Zita Macy | ◆ Lynn Talbot |
| ◆ Denise Davis | ◆ Bruce Guthrie | ◆ James Martin | ◆ John Homer Theroux |
| ◆ Daniel De Kay | ◆ Peg Hall | ◆ Yosmar Martinez | ◆ Rosa Torres-Tumazos |
| ◆ Cathy Diaz | ◆ Sheridan Christian | ◆ Rosann McCullough | ◆ Sarah Tucker |
| ◆ Maryjane Dunn | ◆ Tully Sun Hedley | ◆ Gene McCullough | ◆ Anne Uglum |
| ◆ Hany Farag | ◆ Karen Hegyi | ◆ Kirk Pappas | ◆ Karen Wark |
| ◆ Ben Fisher | ◆ Elaine Hopkins | ◆ Victor Prince | ◆ Debbie Wernet |
| ◆ Linda Fitts | ◆ Diana Huntress | ◆ Bruce Robbins | ◆ Bryan Winter |
| ◆ Victoria Fry-Ruiz | ◆ Roni Jackson-Kerr | ◆ Cristino Rodriguez | |
| ◆ Michelle Fuller | ◆ Guy Joaquin | ◆ Michael Romo | |

A Membership Milestone

American Pilgrims on the Camino just celebrated a milestone – 50 lifetime memberships. A lifetime membership is the ultimate expression of gratitude and commitment to the mission of the organization. Our lifetime members ensure that we can continue to support the Camino infrastructure, gather pilgrims together, and provide information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.

Roni Jackson-Kerr, Co-Coordinator and founder of the Okies on the Camino Chapter, expresses the importance of her lifetime membership: “As a pilgrim and a graduate student studying the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrimage has become an integral part of my life. I appreciate all that American Pilgrims on the Camino does to support pilgrims and the Camino itself, and I wanted to show my support for the organization and do what I could to ensure their work can continue.”

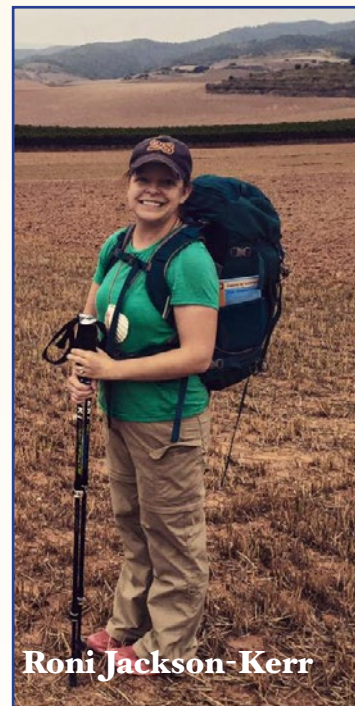


Chris Kelle

Similarly, Chris Kelle of the Chicago Chapter reflects: “For me, walking the Camino was not just something to tick off a bucket list. It was a point of great significance in my life. American Pilgrims on

the Camino is one of the reasons I decided to walk the Camino by offering resources through my local chapter to hear advice and stories from others who had done the pilgrimage before me. My personal Camino experience ended up being not only a significant point in my life but a defining factor of who I am. For that, I am grateful for what American Pilgrims on the Camino has done and continues to do for me and for everyone as an organization. I decided to support American Pilgrims on the Camino as a life member in hope that through their mission they can inspire others like me to take that first step as I had.”

Join Roni and Chris in taking the next step. Please consider becoming a lifetime member. Current members should contact membership@americanpilgrims.org to change to the lifetime membership category. ◆



Roni Jackson-Kerr

Hospitalero Happenings

American Pilgrims continues to be a strong volunteer presence along the Camino. We work closely with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino to provide hospitaleros in the eighteen donativo albergues the Federation assists. Many of our hospitalero volunteers have also served in private, municipal, and parochial albergues that are not connected with the Federation. Hospitalero opportunities exist in France, Portugal, and Italy as well. ♦

Eighteen new hospitaleros were trained in Colorado Springs CO in October 2017. Congratulations to our newest hospitalero graduates. We look forward to hearing about your hospitalero experiences on the Camino!

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| • Camille Brito | • Paymun (PJ) Jahangiri | • Chuck Shinn |
| • Ben Cole | • Michelle Lesley | • Karen Shirley |
| • Jane Hamilton-Florea | • Dorothy Norbie | • Cynthia Sibley |
| • Tina Harris | • Judith (Jude) Parker | • Katherine Stearns |
| • Chris Howard | • Alma Rodriguez | • Loren Thomas |
| • Neda Jahangiri | • Clara Serrano | • Gayle Thomas |



Upcoming Hospitalero Training

Feb 9-11, 2018 in Sausalito, CA

(Registration is open now)

April 10-12, 2018 in Los Alto, CA

August/Sept 2018 - in planning stage

Nov 9-11, 2018 - Winter Park, FL

Coming Soon – Registration for Gathering 2018 Making Meaning from Memories

What does a Camino experience mean for your life?

What do you do with your Camino memories?

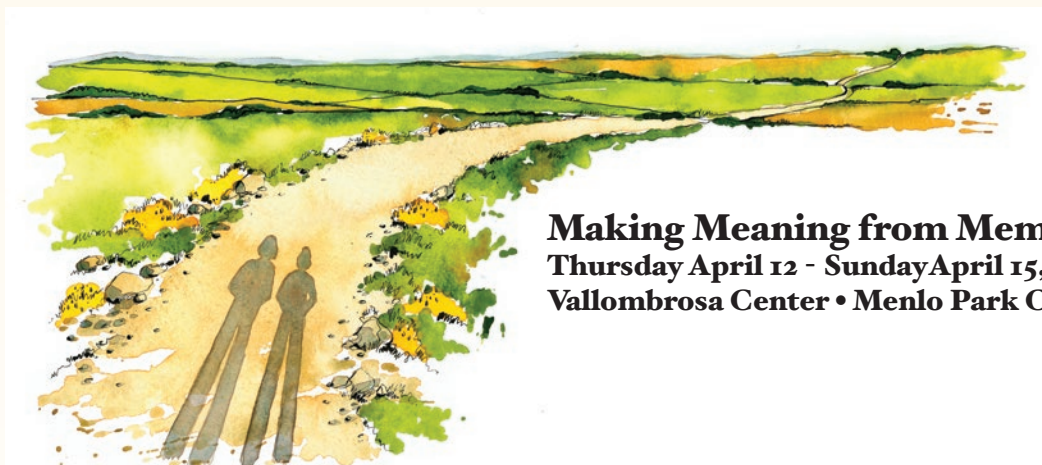
These are some of the questions we will play with at the American Pilgrims 2018 Gathering, Thursday April 12 to Sunday April 15, 2018 at the Vallombrosa Center in Menlo Park, CA.

Play, we will. This year, a Camino Café will be open where we can chat, work a puzzle... play! The line-up of presenters and panelists includes a variety of scholars, storytellers, writers and artists bringing different perspectives on how to make meaning from

our memories of the Camino experience. It includes some of you who volunteered in response to our call in the September La Concha.

We will interact with researchers making meaning of our collective memories and learning how parents and their children make meaning of their shared memories. There will be artists who make meaning with words, pen, ink, and watercolor and who will help us do the same.

The preliminary program and registration will be available online in January. Mark your calendars for a fresh, fun and meaningful experience. ♦



artwork by Jennifer Lawson, South Portland ME

Making Meaning from Memories
Thursday April 12 - Sunday April 15, 2018
Vallombrosa Center • Menlo Park CA

Contributors

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ♦ David Cook | ♦ Nancy Lake |
| ♦ Carol Delaney | ♦ Jennifer Lawson |
| ♦ Robert Deming | ♦ Irene Lipshin |
| ♦ Laurie Ferris | ♦ Peter Monro |
| ♦ Merula Furtado | ♦ Larry O'Heron |
| ♦ Sara Gradwohl | ♦ Steve Rindahl |
| ♦ Roy Howard | ♦ Chris Slater |
| ♦ Roni Jackson-Kerr | ♦ Johnna Studebaker |
| ♦ David Jennings | ♦ Linda Thorton |
| ♦ Chris Kelle | ♦ Robert Scheckenback |

Welcome, New Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who joined American Pilgrims on the Camino from September 2017 through November 15, 2017. We look forward to meeting all of you at future Gatherings and events.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| ◆ Nicole Aniceto | ◆ Paymun Jahangiri | ◆ Christopher Olaes |
| ◆ Frank Arriola Jr | ◆ Sonny Jepson | ◆ Kirk Pappas |
| ◆ Robert Bain | ◆ Paul Kane | ◆ Sage Parker |
| ◆ Silvia Barragan | ◆ Kara Keating | ◆ Scott Peters |
| ◆ Steven Baumann | ◆ Julie Lambert | ◆ Maria Petito |
| ◆ Gerard Berroya | ◆ Kayla & Jim Lehmann | ◆ Jennifer Piche |
| ◆ Bill Bianco | ◆ Gloria Leon | ◆ Rita Price |
| ◆ Jeanette Blaine | ◆ Marta Lorenzo | ◆ Tessa Quinones (Boudreaux) |
| ◆ Jean Bormes | ◆ Edward Lybrook | ◆ Lloyd Rath |
| ◆ Yolanda & Ancil Borromeo | ◆ Fran Lyles | ◆ Franny Rennie |
| ◆ Bernard Bossart | ◆ Owen Madden | ◆ Ann Reyes |
| ◆ Marie France Brush | ◆ Patricia Mathews | ◆ Richard Rindone |
| ◆ Peter Casas | ◆ Jeri and Steve May | ◆ Anthony Russini |
| ◆ James Cashion | ◆ Joseph McClain | ◆ Ronald Santapaola |
| ◆ Noel Castillo | ◆ Gregory McClure | ◆ Lester and Maria Schaffer |
| ◆ David Cavazos | ◆ John McGinnis | ◆ Michele Schofield |
| ◆ Christine Chudd | ◆ Heidi McGough | ◆ Joel & Andrea Semanko |
| ◆ Gary Clark | ◆ Stephanie McNally | ◆ Clara Serrano |
| ◆ Kevin Codd | ◆ Margarete Mehrabian | ◆ Margot Shrift |
| ◆ Kay Connolly | ◆ Judith Mendoza-Aransay | ◆ Larry Skelton |
| ◆ Dale Duncan | ◆ Jerry Mock | ◆ Bernard Soja |
| ◆ Laurie Dunne | ◆ Erin Moore | ◆ Carol & Keldon Sorvig |
| ◆ Ana & Aitana Elorriaga | ◆ Ann Ni | ◆ Kari & Kyle Sorvig |
| ◆ Mikel & Arana Elorriaga | ◆ Megan Nichols | ◆ Sandra Stapleton |
| ◆ Patty Fink | ◆ Scott Nolte | ◆ Kathleen Stoll |
| ◆ Jenny Flores | ◆ Dorothy Norbie | ◆ Patricia Terrell |
| ◆ Anna Futrell | ◆ Meg O'Neill | ◆ Marcella Theeman |
| ◆ Theresa Gilliland | | ◆ Lorenzo Thomas |
| ◆ Raymond Glienna | | ◆ Bethany Tirrell |
| ◆ Francisco Gonzalez | | ◆ Michelle Tubilla |
| ◆ Tatjana Good | | ◆ Rick and Alice Wagner |
| ◆ Jim Gudaitis | | ◆ Rita Weissman |
| ◆ Janet Hanpeter | | ◆ France White |
| ◆ Jeanette & Michael Harris | | ◆ Debbie & Jim Wooster |
| ◆ Linda Harvey | | ◆ Georgette Young |
| ◆ Cathy Hoyle | | |



photo by Roy Howard, North Potomac MD



The mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino is to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, by gathering pilgrims together, and by providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.

Do You Have Camino Impressions to Share?

With every issue we are delighted anew by the quality, variety, and abundance of submissions – and especially by the fact that so many are from first-time contributors. Your enthusiasm for the Camino and for *La Concha* as a medium for sharing that enthusiasm keeps us going!

So, please keep telling us, in 400 words or fewer, about your Camino. Consider a photo, a poem, or a new found understanding of an idea – a pilgrim's perspective. Please visit Newsletter on our website

for suggestions and guidelines.

The submission deadline for the next issue is February 16, 2018. We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

iBuen Camino!

*Peg Hall, Elaine Hopkins, Steve Lytch, Zita Macy
Mona Spargo & Jessica Swan*

December 2017 Team La Concha

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Peg Hall – Secretary
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Peg, Jessica & Zita
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Zita
Peg, Cindy, & Jessica

Key Volunteer – Webmaster

Gene McCullough

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