

# LA CONCHA

newsletter of the american pilgrims on the camino

JUNE 2019

## The Simple Beauty of a Clothesline

by Hany Farag  
San Bruno, CA

Artistic expressions are not limited to galleries or created only by design. Magnificent views are found in nature without human intervention. Sometimes it is intriguing to detect artistic expressions in random collaboration of unwitting participants. I never thought a 'laundry line' could offer such an experience!

One hot afternoon on the Camino Francés, I approached my destination for the day. At an intersection, a group of pilgrims were checking directions to the municipal albergue. I paused to examine the town map in my guidebook. In my periphery, I saw a long laundry line on the horizon, which differed from small uniform laundry lines of private homes. I pointed the pilgrims in that direction for the albergue after verifying from my map.

As we approached the albergue, the details of the wash lines started to emerge. A background of blaze green of trees and grass fitted with a harmonious collage of pastel colors. Summer clothing lined in different types, shapes and sizes reacting to the breathing wind. No one intended to create something artistic, yet the random collaboration of elements and nature created a friendly expression. This laundry line would remain for few hours and disappear as night fell. Any item still damp would be hanging on a backpack the following day.

Life at home is comfortable thanks to a long list of modern appliances. The Camino life-style is an alternative based on basic simplicity. Utilizing manual labor along with sunshine complement the experience. In order to discover the next artistic expression, keep walking, and keep washing. ☺



Pilgrim Laundry, Camino Francés, September 2017  
Hany Farag, photographer

## A Message from the Board Chair

Dear Members,

I came across a quote by Sir Richard Branson, who said “Complexity is your enemy. Any fool can make something complicated. It’s hard to keep things simple.” Does that statement ring as true for you as it does for me? It is human nature to add complexity to nearly all aspects of our lives, whether it is through the creation and imposition of bureaucratic rules and processes, the constant addition of activities to our day, or the accumulation of things. At a time when chaos and complexity seem to be the rule, I suppose it’s good to remind ourselves that simplicity requires deliberate effort.

Those of you who have walked the Camino know that simplicity is part of its beauty. And if your experience was anything like mine, you’ll likely agree that simplicity didn’t just happen. It emerged over time, and it took some effort. The lessons of simplicity were revealed in the daily routine that developed as the days passed, in the things you began to notice once you slowed down, and through the gradual recognition of all the things you didn’t really need to carry.

Simplicity is an ongoing challenge for your board of directors, key volunteers, and chapter coordinators, particularly as our organization continues to grow. We currently have 51 chapters with several more in development. The growth is good as more people seek to join the global community of pilgrims.



Maintaining simplicity, though, in the face of our growth will take time and effort. The good news is that we’re all working hard to make this happen. In our new website and member database, we’ve taken on some short-term complexity in an effort to streamline management of the organization...a worthy effort. I appreciate both the hard work of the board members and key volunteers executing the transition and the patience of our members and chapter coordinators as we restore and revitalize our tools and resources.

Going forward, we must all maintain a focus on the threefold mission of our organization, which is to gather pilgrims together, support the infrastructure in of the Camino, and to provide information to current and future pilgrims. We could do a multitude of things to accomplish each of these. But what is truly essential? The urge to add complexity can be irresistible, at times. Our collective challenge is to engage as a community and find ways to keep things simple. It won’t be easy. I think we’re up to the challenge.

Buen Camino,  
Dave Donselar

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*“To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one’s own in the midst of abundance.” -Buddha*

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## Welcome

### The American Pilgrims' Value of Simplicity

Since last September, each issue of “La Concha” has had a focus, one of our organization’s four values. With this issue of “La Concha,” we focus on our value of Simplicity. Your fellow American Pilgrims members write about the simple beauty of pilgrim laundry as it dries on an albergue clothesline; the simplicity of a self-designed “home-to-Santiago” pilgrimage because leaving right now isn’t possible and the call to walk is unrelenting; the joy of letting go of

nearly everything, a nomadic simplicity that isn’t for everyone.

We also describe four of this year’s grants to support the Camino’s infrastructure. Your membership dues and donations make these competitive grants possible. We also offer you an article about Camino technology use, a story about one chapter’s pilgrimage to Chimayo, poetry, photography, a letter to the editors, book reviews and more.

We hope you enjoy the issue. May these articles get you thinking about the value of Simplicity in your own life.

Team “La Concha”

## More Yellow Arrows on the Camino Thanks to You

By Cheryl Grasmoen  
Grants committee member,  
Minneapolis, MN

Walking the Camino is simplicity itself. You just follow the yellow arrows and the conchas. That is, if you can find them. While the American Pilgrims grants program is often associated with improving albergues, much support has been given over the years to improve signage and trails along the various Camino routes. In 2019, American Pilgrims on the Camino made four grants to pilgrim associations to improve signage on the Camino – three of them on the Camino Mozárabe and one on the Via Heraclea.

The Camino Mozárabe was traditionally the route pilgrims would take from the south of Spain to join up with the Via de la Plata at Mérida on the way to Santiago de Compostela. One of the oldest original networks of Camino routes beginning at Almería, Granada, Málaga or Jaén,

the Camino Mozárabe passes exquisite Roman and Moorish structures and winds through olive and orange groves along the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Currently, several thousand pilgrims walk or bike this Camino each year, and the number is increasing. Because the harsh climate causes signs to deteriorate rapidly, American Pilgrims’ grants are funding installation of permanent granite signs on several sections of the routes – the section from Cádiz to Sevilla; the route through the Province of Córdoba; and the section from Granada to Jaén.

Definitely off the beaten track, the Via Heraclea, an important historic road to Santiago, starts at Perpignan, France, at the French and Spanish border. The pilgrim association in Girona, Spain, is eager to improve signage on this route in anticipation of a big increase in pilgrim numbers in the 2021 Holy Year. Our grant will pay for signage on a portion of the route from

Col de Banyuls, right on the Spanish border, to the monastery and albergue at Sant Quirze de Colera, and onward to Zaragoza.

Next time you breathe a sigh of relief when a yellow arrow comes into view, remember that you have played a part in supporting the Camino and the pilgrim experience through your membership dues and donations.

Thank you!



## To the "La Concha" editors:

I loved the March article titled, The Camino: Rite of Retirement Passage. Hats off to authors Lou Flessner and Adam Wells.

I walked the Camino Frances in 2017 while transitioning from 53 years of working, doing everything from scooping ice cream as a 15-year-old to serving as a CEO at 68. I loved my career, my organization and everyone on our team. The decision to retire was difficult, but necessary to realize lifelong dreams. The Camino provided a much-needed pause between the world of work and the world of retirement. The opportunities to reflect and think while putting one foot in front of the other was exactly what I needed at that time in my life.

I was clearly in a state of transition in 2017. I found many peregrinos I walked with were also in various states of transition. College to career. Death of a spouse. Loss of employment. Divorce. The three stages of retirement transition identified by the authors captured this phenomenon in words extremely well. Well done, guys!

Michael Varney  
Tucson (now Maricopa), AZ  
March 23, 2019

## Hospitaleros News

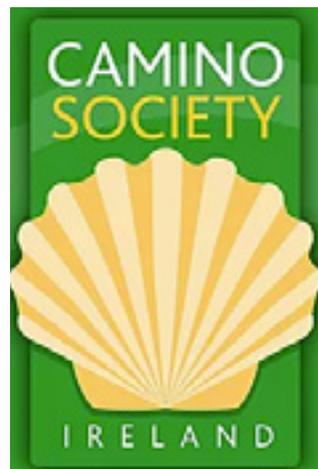
If you're looking for a way to give back to the Camino, consider becoming a hospitalero. American Pilgrims on the Camino offers training several times a year throughout the country.

The June 2019 session in Federal Way, WA, which ran from June 7-9, had a full registration. Here's our newest group of trained hospitaleros. Daniel De Kay, one of our trainers, writes that as of June 10, 2019, we have 45 American Pilgrims-trained hospitaleros who will serve in 17 different places in Spain and Portugal this year. This includes volunteers who are welcoming pilgrims at the lovely Ribadiso albergue.



Cheryl Grasmoen, Minneapolis, MN, photographer.

The next hospitalero training session will be in September 2019 near Colorado Springs, CO. Registration will open in July. For further information see <https://americanpilgrims.org/hospitalero-training/>



Camino Society Ireland just published its summer "Shamrocks & Shells" newsletter. Read it here: <https://shamrocksandshells.wordpress.com/in-this-issue-summer-2019/>

## Gathering 2019

We thank everyone who contributed items for the raffle and auction at the Gathering. We had a record-breaking 300 raffle items and 100 auction treasures donated. We're grateful for the generosity of both donors and those who purchased raffle tickets and bid on auction items.

A special thanks to the kind, hard-working raffle and auction volunteers from the North Carolina chapters, especially Peggy Beaman, Don Walton, Martha Hayes and Grace Bunemann. We were also delighted to have the services of auctioneer Jo Halverson of Tyrone, GA.

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*“Eat, drink and love...  
the rest is not worth a  
nickel.” -Lord Byron*

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Joan DeFeis, Needham, MA, photographer.

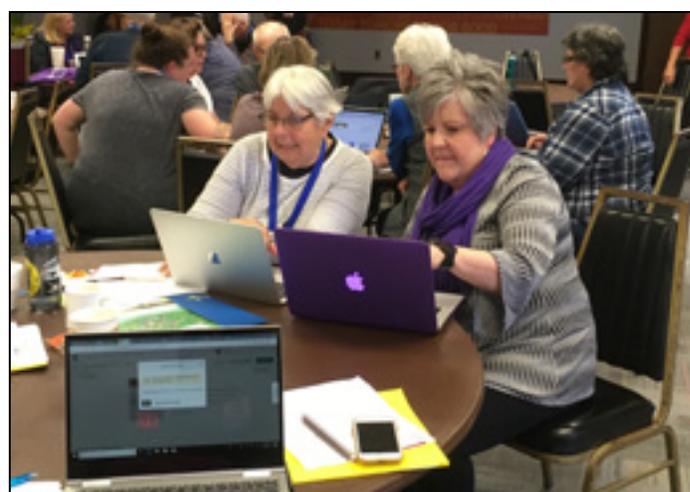
Nearly 300 pilgrims came together in March at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC, for the 22nd Annual Gathering of Pilgrims. We celebrated "Cultivating Camino Connections" with memorable talks, music, a film, a raffle and auction, and a return of the Camino Cabaret. Enjoy this sample of images from this year's Gathering.



Just a few of the items donated to the raffle and auction. Joan DeFeis, Needham, MA, photographer.



American Pilgrims on the Camino welcomed nearly 300 pilgrims to the YMCA Blue Ridge. Assembly in Black Mountain, NC. Joan DeFeis, Needham, MA, photographer.



The all-important collection of nametags at registration. Sara Steig Gradwohl, Mooresville, IN, photographer.

The Atlanta, Raleigh and Western Carolina chapter coordinators helped us put together a pre-Gathering workshop for their fellow chapter coordinators. This was a hands-on experience rather than a series of lectures! Sara Steig Gradwohl, Mooresville, IN, photographer.



## Gathering of Pilgrims 2020

Mark your calendar! Our 23rd Annual Gathering of Pilgrims will be at Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center in Lake Tahoe, NV, March 12-15, 2020. The Gathering is an opportunity to share experiences, support one another and learn more about the Camino and the pilgrim-experience.

The Gathering will run from late afternoon Thursday through noon on Sunday. We're planning many interesting speakers and helpful presentations on different routes, pilgrim first aid, history, a shell ceremony and singing of "Ultreia" for pilgrims walking their first Camino, movies and entertainment, and of course, our popular silent auction and raffle. We'll email all members in early January with registration and further details. We hope to see you there!

Dear Chapters:

We know you're organizing wonderful events and experiences for your members. Please send us your stories and photos. And if you're planning something special to commemorate St. James Day in July, we'd love to hear about it for the September issue. Our address: [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

Gracias!

Team "La Concha"

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*"Simplicity is  
making the journey  
of this life with just  
baggage enough."  
-Charles Warner*

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Camino camaraderie was alive, and heat nor alligators could keep the Jacksonville Chapter members from hiking on the beautiful trails of historic Ft. Clinch in Fernandina Beach, FL, one day this spring.

## Membership Renewal

The theme of this "La Concha" is our value of Simplicity. Your board examined the multiple tiers of membership and decided the structure was anything but simple. We have returned to this dues structure:

Individual Member - \$50/year

Household Member - \$75/year

Student Member - \$15/year

Individual Lifetime Member - \$500

Your membership dues support American Pilgrims' mission in a multitude of ways. We hope you'll consider renewing your membership when it expires. Visit the new [AmericanPilgrims.org](http://AmericanPilgrims.org) website and click on the MEMBER LOGIN to RENEW or JOIN US to become a new member. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Your American Pilgrims membership committee

## Our Chapter's Walk to Chimayo

By Pauline Rindone & Richard Rindone  
Santa Fe, NM

On April 18, 2019,—Holy Thursday—24 members of the Albuquerque Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino made the trek from Sacred Heart Church in Nambé to the Santuario de Chimayo, a distance of 8.5 miles. We followed a paved road through colorful landscapes until we reached the Santuario, where we ate our picnic lunches and visited the chapel with our individual intentions. We returned to Nambé by vehicles we had previously left in Chimayo.

Every year during Holy Week, thousands of people walk to the Santuario de Chimayo, a shrine and National Historic Landmark located about 25 miles north of Santa Fe. The Santuario was first constructed in 1813. There are many legends concerning the origins of the chapel and the “holy dirt” with its reputed healing powers.

As many as 30,000 people pass through the village of 3,000 during Holy Week. It is considered the largest annual pilgrimage in the United States, and is one of the more important traditions of northern New Mexico. As on the Camino de Santiago, some pilgrims walk long distances, and some shorter. Some pilgrims walk for religious reasons, to pray for healing or to fulfill a vow; some come because the route is physically challenging; and some walk to reflect in

solitude. Most pilgrims end their walk on Good Friday.

Northern New Mexican communities come together to support the Holy Week Pilgrimage. People line the roads with free water, oranges, apples and other snacks. On our walk on Holy Thursday, we met an older couple from El Paso, TX, who came for two days to provide support. They do this yearly as a mission of service.



Approaching the entrance of the Santuario de Chimayo.



The Albuquerque Chapter walk to the Santuario de Chimayo in April 2019.

Even the state of New Mexico does its part by placing portable toilets along the route, while the county sheriff's office sets up electronic signs warning drivers to slow down. For many New Mexicans, the pilgrimage to Chimayo is part of their heritage. For members of the Albuquerque Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino, the Holy Thursday walk has become an annual event. It is a good way for

members to experience the spirit of the Camino de Santiago, to try out their equipment and to assess their readiness to walk in Spain.

For more information about the Santuario de Chimayo: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Santuario\\_de\\_Chimayo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Santuario_de_Chimayo)

## A Chapter Connection Paves this Pilgrim's Way

By Merv Cancio  
Twain Harte, CA

I have been an avid backpacker all of my life. I have hiked the John Muir Trail five times and walked hundreds of trail miles in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Hiking in the wilderness is second nature to me. After turning 60 this year, I decided to do something completely different. It's time to try the Camino and see what the fuss is all about. I'm not going to compare which type of walking is better but to be open and accept blessings that the Camino offers.

Even though I am an experienced backpacker, planning and packing for the Camino requires a completely different frame of mind. The gear is different, but carrying as light a pack as possible is equally important for either type of trip.

As a first timer on the Camino Francés, I have been grateful for the resources that people, websites and YouTube have to offer. I have been preparing since I bought my plane ticket in January. I started by reading from the American Pilgrims on the Camino website. The information on the website was thorough and so accurate that I decided to become a member. As a newbie on the Camino, I thank you for your diligence to keep the website information current and relevant.

I joined the Northern California and Sacramento chapters of the

American Camino. I live far away from these locations, but they are the closest ones in my neck of the woods. Even though I have attended only one event, shell dedication, I look forward to members' daily Facebook posts. Their insights, thoughts and feelings give me a sense of comfort. The Northern California chapter leadership connected me with someone who lives near my town who has done two Caminos. She made the Camino come alive with her experiences and recommendations. Mostly, her gesture of giving me a conch shell as we went our separate ways touched me. If her spirit of sharing is the "Way," then I look forward to begin my walk in June.

## My American Camino

By Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway  
Spokane, WA

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to walk all the way from your home to Santiago de Compostela, as early pilgrims did? Why did they journey so far? Did they want vacation or adventure? Were they seeking God, atoning, grieving, requesting, thanking? In the Middle Ages it was perilous; they might never return home.

The idea of my pilgrimage took root slowly. One evening, my sister chattered to me about a famous 500-mile walk across Spain. I barely paid attention.

Later I saw a movie, "The Way." There was mention at church about Spokane's chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino. That led to a hike.

In 2015, I recall thinking after my uncle's funeral, "Giant trees are falling in the forest." That same day, a mighty wind felled the giant spruce next to my home as I sat listening in the shaking darkness. Subsequently, three more family members died. And now, divorce threatens my 28-year marriage. What response can I make to those giant trees, fallen?

The Camino Francés beckons, but legal matters anchor me. While I still look to eventually walk a Camino in Spain to mark a personal milestone, for now a lengthier American Camino version has emerged as my goal. As the crow flies, St. Jean Pied de Port is 5,055 miles from Spokane, and I have committed to



The author on her American Camino in April, 2019, Spokane, WA.

walk these miles here, where I am. I need to average 4.5 miles daily for three years. Possible? Perhaps the Camino starts when the idea is conceived. Perhaps, as some say, it really only just begins when you finish. Either way,

I am on my Camino Americano to the Camino Francés!

Following Mass on April 1, 2019, I received an official Camino blessing from Fr. Kevin Codd at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Spokane. With my credential – stamped by my local American Pilgrims chapter – in my daypack, I set out on my local journey. A phone app logs my miles, and like a child, I marvel at its ability to track me in real time everywhere I go. As of May 28, I had logged 250 miles.

What is it like to be a pilgrim in my hometown? Walk regardless of weather – in sunshine, rain or snow. Visit with strangers, wave at the homeless. Notice so many details I was previously in too big of a hurry to see in the three decades I've lived here off and on. Explore, not just transit – sometimes heading in the direction I need to be later, other times taking a hilly route, sometimes taking a route I find aesthetically pleasing, other times going where the spirit leads me. Daily Mass is good. Be not afraid, but be street smart. Pray blisters and sore parts improve. Take a little ibuprofen. Be grateful for all of it and the beauty that is everywhere. This is my Camino for now, and God willing, I will arrive in Santiago to celebrate my 70th birthday in 2022. Buen Camino! ☪

## Simplicity: Unmasking the complexity

By Joseph Girone  
Richland, NJ

To write about simplicity seems almost contradictory. After all, doesn't adding more verbiage to this virtue go against the very nature of its meaning of inherent clarity and lack of complexity?

However, we humans live lives of contradictions. For example, amidst desiring love, we act in ways that sabotage what we desire. Life then becomes the search for a personal reconciliation through which we hope to experience a deeper wholeness and coherence in our being. From these contradictions, lessons are learned, experiences are shaped, and simplicity has a chance to emerge from the fog clouding life's essence.

When I walked my first Camino in 2001, my motivation was in challenging myself to see if I could actually walk all those kilometers. To get the edge on the challenge, I read any and all information possible from routes to boots, *etapas* (stages) to *tapas*.

As other pilgrims discover, preparation becomes a burden. That which was meant to help us reach our goal becomes an obstacle. That which was meant to enable us becomes just stuff adding to our load. This contradiction reveals itself through the body's pain reacting to an overloaded backpack and the mind's worry on doing the Camino right, and the burden of my worry only increased with each "¡Buen Camino!"

Slowly, I had the revelation that I was not doing the Camino, the Camino was doing me. Unless I unburdened myself from both a physical weight and the weight of my own expectations, I was not going to meet my challenge – in more ways than one. The simple truth was that I would only meet my challenge by placing one foot in front of the other: step by step, for that second, for that minute, for that hour and for that day.

In a time when minimalism, decluttering, and the quest for a simpler life are in vogue, these sage words from Matthew 6:35 disarm us: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" ☪

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*"To be richer, happier,  
and freer, all you need  
to do is want less."*

*-Francine Jay*

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## How I Radically Simplified My Life, Gave up 'Home,' and Learned to Trust

By Esther Jantzen  
Hawthorne, CA

Yes, the Camino de Santiago changed my life. Big time.

On my 2008 pilgrimage, it was the ease of moving through the world with just a backpack and a debit card that won me over. And it was on my 2011 Camino that I realized, yes, I could live my most outrageous dreams if I radically simplified my lifestyle.

What were my outrageous dreams? To spend my later years free of the financial strain of home ownership or rent. To write, explore, learn and pursue my interests unfettered. To travel where I felt called. To be of service to my family, friends and spiritual community. To own only the necessary or the deeply satisfying.

Gradually, I gave up the idea of needing a home. But I didn't risk it until I'd gotten things lined up—I retired, closed my small business, took my pension, and became reconciled to being solo in the world. Then slowly, I gave away furniture, books, clothes, kitchen stuff. In 2012 I sold my double-wide in California.

But of course, I need a roof and a bed, so I've become a nomad who house sits in places that interest me. My Prius holds my needed belongings, and my daughter's

garage has my files, art and heirlooms. So far, all is very well.

I know this lifestyle would appeal to very few. But with global changes, massive migrations, political and economic surprises, I'm drawn to living lightly. I feel compelled toward freedom and simplicity.

The downside of being deliberately homeless? I look fear in the eye often and try to smile. I surrender a lot—my rigidity and assumptions, my need for control. Sometimes I must endlessly accommodate the preferences of others. Sometimes I'm physically and emotionally stressed.

The benefits of this simplicity? I've learned to trust more. I'm certain I'm a beloved child of the Universe. I find that reinventing myself is an adventure. My heart soars when I hit the open road. I cherish and expand my network of friends. I can write and be creative anywhere. And I love being unconstrained by stuff.

How long will this lifestyle work for me? I don't know. But... isn't "not-knowing" a big part of the fun of it? Like on the Camino? ☘

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*“How many things are there which I do not want.” -Socrates*

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## Letting Go

By Kate Fisher  
Saluda, NC

When the plane set down in Madrid, I had one thing on my mind: getting on the train to Ávila as quickly as possible. This was the first stop on my pilgrimage, which would later connect Tui to Santiago along the Camino Portugués.

Fortunately, I had my ticket. Unfortunately, I missed the train. Okay, let go. I prayed that I would get to Ávila before the Museum of St. Teresa closed.

When I arrived in Avila, I hailed a taxi and arrived in time. Gracias a Dios. May I find my way to my pension...later.

I spent the day tracing St. Teresa's footsteps. She had captured my heart with her writing:

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you...God alone

fills all our needs.

I visited each spot on the map and even walked out beyond the walled city for a spectacular view.

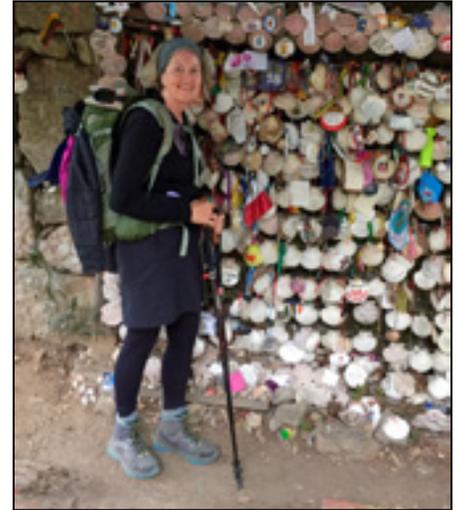
After dark, I found my room and laid out the few items in my backpack. Something was missing. All of my liquids, including a special oil blend from my daughter had been left at airport security. I let go with a wish that a nice woman who worked at the airport would enjoy them.

A few days later, on my walk along the Camino Portugués, I would lose an earring that had been with me for over 40 years. Let it go. After day three, I decided to simplify and send my backpack ahead to travel more lightly. Let it go. After six days, my Camino was complete, and

the only problem was two dark toenails. I let them go, too.

My final pilgrim test of letting go into simplicity was when I flew from Santiago to Madrid and then on to Warsaw. I didn't realize that I had to pick up my backpack in Madrid. It wasn't checked through, and I didn't have time to wait for it in Warsaw. I boarded a bus for a week of teaching English with only the clothes on my back and what was in my shopping bag. Fortunately, one of those items was my laundry kit. I let go and had a great week.

Upon my return, my backpack appeared and so did a new way of handling life. Letting go. Since then, I've let go of more things and in so doing moved closer to simplicity. ☪



The author on Day 3 on the Camino Portugués.



Camino Portugués, coastal route, Sept. 12, 2018. Cathy Hollister, photographer

## Too Tired

By Cathy Hollister  
Hermitage, TN

Too tired to complain  
Too tired to feel angry, resentful or judgmental.  
A pilgrim's lot is to walk for miles in the heat  
And allow exhaustion to purge all negativity  
A pilgrim's job is to see beauty and hope.  
Watch the waves pound the rocks,  
Feel the ocean breeze.  
And know that inner peace is possible.

## Our Complicated Relationship with Technology in the Sacred Space of Pilgrimage

By Roni Jackson-Kerr  
Tulsa, OK

I study culture, communication and technology, and in 2015, I found myself on the Camino attempting to examine the effects of technology on the ancient practice of pilgrimage. During that research and beyond, I have scoured online pilgrim forums, conducted interviews and had hundreds of conversations with pilgrims on the subject.

Much of the existing research on the topic comes from one perspective: that technology has a negative effect on the pilgrim experience. The reasons are sound: modern technologies are a distraction that stand as a barrier to deep spiritual experiences; the “hero’s journey” is unattainable if the connection to home isn’t broken; and our communication devices create walls between pilgrims –rather than communing with one another and relying on one another for comfort and companionship, pilgrims simply seek out the solace of friends and family back home. All these implications may be true; however, they don’t show the whole picture.

Many pilgrims with whom I spoke indicated their communication technologies served to deepen their pilgrim experience, and for many, allowed them to take the journey at all. Many pilgrims also expressed they could not have

been away from home for six to seven weeks if they couldn’t have stayed connected –ailing parents, children and various responsibilities simply wouldn’t



Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO, photographer

allow for a disconnected journey. For many, this was a regrettable but necessary interference. Others reported that being able to share the journey with loved ones actually enhanced it.

Our relationship with technology is complicated because our devices are equally useful and detestable. They open a world of connectivity, while disconnecting us from those around us. If we are to be good stewards of The Way, we must ensure that if we remain connected, we do so in a way that minimizes the encroachment of technology into the sacred space of pilgrimage. Perhaps this means leaving our devices on “airplane mode” or setting restrictions on how and when we will use them. Perhaps this means having a “digital detox,” as scholar Cal Newport

suggests, to break technological addictions once and for all. Or perhaps this means communing with our fellow pilgrims rather than being “alone together,” a phrase Sherry Turkle has coined to describe the social disconnect caused by our devices.

The theme of this “La Concha” issue is “Simplicity.” In many ways, technology has de-simplified the experience of being a pilgrim. It’s up to us remember how to live simply on the Camino. ☪

## The Beauty of Simplicity

By Karin Kiser  
San Diego, CA

Remember living for weeks on the Camino with everything you needed on your back? Now look around you. Imagine carrying everything you own on your back right now, including your house, car and all of your possessions. Imagine wearing all of your clothes at once. You wouldn’t get very far.

The Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule, states that we regularly use about 20% of what we have. The rest of it, the 80%, sits there collecting dust. Your stuff can weigh you down both physically and mentally.

Increase your sense of freedom and possibility by letting some

of that stuff go. Create space in your life by releasing things that no longer serve you. Lighten your load!

Start with physical objects. What are you holding onto that doesn't positively contribute to your life? When you look at your possessions with your Camino eyes, which items seem excessive or wasteful? Perhaps you have clothing you haven't worn in a year or unnecessary items in your car. Walk around your home and take inventory. What could be released to create more space? Consider everything in your kitchen and closets. Have you used that tea set you received as a gift years ago? What about all those electronic gadgets?

Life is meant to be lived, not consumed. Simplifying your stuff is a fast-track way to live more fully. It is also essential for living the pilgrim way, as it offers space for new ways of thinking and feeling and makes room for the unexpected to come in. Allow more spaciousness in your home and in your mind for new beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and ways of being.

Simplifying doesn't just free up space in your home. It reduces your stress level as well. The more stuff you have, the more mental energy is required to manage it all, not to mention the physical effort to clean, dust and repair it.

Consuming less isn't about deprivation or sacrifice. It's about freedom: freedom to be, do and

have what really matters to you. Challenge yourself to simplify your physical environment. Donate or recycle those items that are no longer in alignment with how you want to live now. ☞

*Adapted from "After the Camino: Your Pocket Guide to Integrating the Camino de Santiago into Your Daily Life." Part of the book's proceeds goes toward Camino maintenance efforts. (Eds. Note: See a review of the book elsewhere in this issue of "La Concha.")*



A vineyard on the Camino Sanabres, Laurie Ferris, photographer

## Finding Simplicity on the Camino de Invierno

By Laurie Ferris  
Oakland, CA

Lately for me, simplicity has been easier said than done. To-do lists, family, work, deadlines and hobbies seem to have me scattered in different directions. My daily yoga practice and occasional forays into meditation help, yet I feel like my life becomes more complex the older I get.

One of the aspects of my job in communications at a university is that I am on social media a lot. I feel like I am tethered to my phone, so I crave being in nature all day and completely

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*"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." - Lao Tzu*

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unplugging. This is one of the reasons I look forward to walking a Camino every year.

As I write this, I just returned from my fourth Camino. I chose the less-trodden Camino de Invierno (Winter Way) in part because I didn't want to be around a lot of crowds. This Camino provided me the solitude I needed, especially in the first six days where I only saw a few pilgrims. When I finally caught up with a pilgrim on Day 3, I was excited to meet Umberto from Italy, a colorful character who has walked 58 Caminos!

In the last few days, I met more pilgrims as the Invierno merged with the Camino Sanabrés. But most of the time, I walked alone and enjoyed nature, animals and beautiful landscapes. This also gave me the opportunity to meet local people, many of whom were happy to talk to me and appreciated that I made an attempt to speak Spanish with them. As a woman walking this challenging route alone, I was a curiosity. A few laughed that I was una poca loca, but muy valiente (a little crazy, but very brave).

Pilgrimage forces us to pack lighter, detach from our routines and allow things to unfold. Ultimately, it boils down to simplicity of survival: walking, finding food, securing shelter and, of course, communicating. I admit that I couldn't completely unplug, for when I settled into an albergue with fast WiFi, I binged on social media for hours. My "Good WiFi Friday" was a way of catching up on journaling and getting my fix of updates from family and friends. I will never forget the kindness of the people I met, the peace and quiet, and the relative simplicity I found on this year's Camino. Now if only I can keep this simplicity throughout the year! ☺



Umberto, a pilgrim from Pistola, Italy.



A shepherdess on the Camino de Invierno. Photography by Laurie Ferris

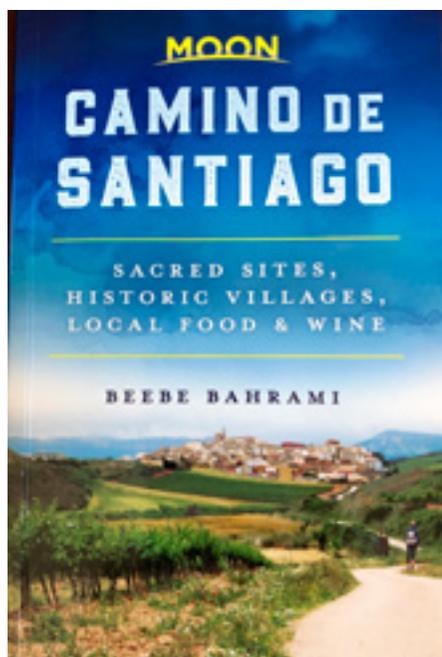
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*"Getting rid of everything that doesn't matter allows you to remember who you are. Simplicity doesn't change who you are, it brings you back to who you are." -Courtney Carver*

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The Mesata. Gene McCullough, Denver, CO, photographer.



## A Camino Francés Guidebook that Reads like a Novel

"Camino de Santiago: Sacred Sites, Historic Villages, Local Food & Wine"

By Beebe Bahrami

MOON TRAVEL, 2019. 400 PAGES

Reviewed by Ann Loar Brooks  
Lewes, DE

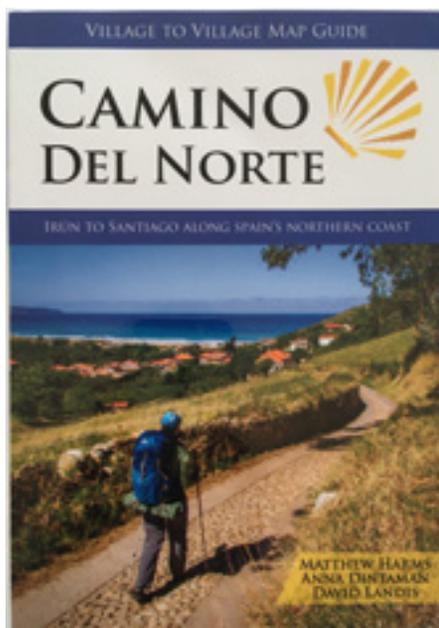
Open to any page of Beebe Bahrami's new guidebook and the stunning photos will stir in you a yearning to set out immediately for the Camino Francés. In addition, you will be swallowed up by prose that flows like a good novel.

This experienced pilgrim (Bahrami has walked the Camino nearly every year since 1995) serves up a travel guide for the Camino Francés unlike any before published. She offers rich historical and folklore details, highlights not-to-miss places, and shares information on regional traditions and foods, nightlife and wine tasting suggestions, options for solitude or camaraderie, where to find the best views, the meaning of Camino symbols, architecture facts, side excursion recommendations, and dates of festivals and celebrations throughout the year.

Because Bahrami does not assume every pilgrim starts in St. Jean Pied-de-Port, she provides easy-to-follow directions to many towns and cities along The Way and suggests flexible stages. Other practical details include a fold-out elevation/topological map; conversion tables; advice for when to reserve lodging (if doing so); geographical and weather data; route options; tips on gear and potential problems; volunteer opportunities; advice for seniors, solo, and LGBTQ travelers; and how to rent a bike for the relatively flat Meseta.

As do many other popular guidebooks, Bahrami's book provides accommodation listings for villages, towns and cities along the Camino, including more in the upper price range than the average guidebook. However, albergues and casas rurales do not receive quite the same coverage as they do in John Brierley or Anna Dintaman's guides. For that reason, I recommend consulting additional sources when planning lodging. In addition, trail details—precise turning points, dirt track versus pavement data, elevation changes, and where to find waymarkers—are less thorough in this guidebook than you will find in the others. And because the paperback version of Bahrami's book weighs in at just over one pound, as lovely as it is, the Kindle format would be most practical for the average pilgrim.

Despite these (minor) drawbacks, given the unique information that Bahrami includes in this splendid guidebook, I highly recommend *Camino de Santiago: Sacred Sites, Historic Villages, Local Food & Wine* for all pilgrims who wish to maximize their experience along The Way.



## Two New Mini But Mighty Guidebooks in the Village to Village Series

"Camino del Norte: Irun to Santiago Along Spain's Northern Coast"

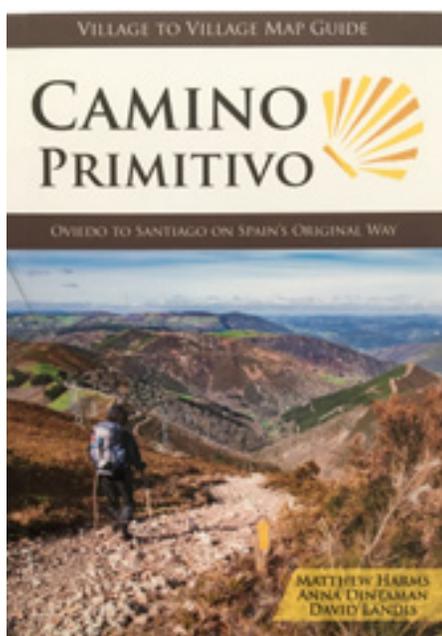
"Camino Primitivo: Oviedo to Santiago on Spain's Original Way"

Both by Matthew Harms, Anna Dintaman and David Landis

VILLAGE TO VILLAGE PRESS 2018-2019

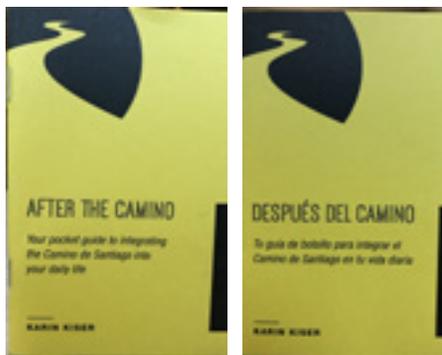
96 PAGES (SECOND EDITION) AND 64 PAGES (FIRST EDITION)

Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele  
Anchorage, AK



After walking the "punishing Primitivo" this past fall, I had just about decided to go entirely paperless on my next camino, only carrying apps on my smartphone. But I love tactile paper, confident it can't be accidentally deleted or lost through a misplaced phone. Along comes the latest additions to the Village to Village Map Guide series, one for the Camino del Norte and another for the Camino Primitivo. I ordered both new books and when the package came I thought "This is too light, and too bad they are wasting postage sending one at a time." Wrong, both were enclosed. This del Norte guide weighs 3.4 ounces (96 grams), This Primitivo guide weighs 2.5 ounces (70 grams). By comparison, other guides I have used on these routes have weighed anywhere from 8.8 ounces (249 grams) to 12 ounces (295 grams) for del Norte and 4 ounces (113 grams) to 4.8 ounces (136 grams) for the Primitivo. But it is not just the light weight that is the beauty of these minimalist guide books. They are complete guides to these routes, with stage maps, town maps, climb and descent charts, albergue addresses and phone numbers, symbols showing town and albergue facilities, and even the kilometers and percentage of each stage that is paved and unpaved. Although other guides generally comment on road vs. trail walking and show variants that may favor one or the other, I have not seen actual kilometer and percentages before. Both books have 12 pages of general information on the camino including history, travel, eating, phones, medical care, packing lists and more. This provides a good introductory briefing on the essentials. You may wish to read these pages before walking, then remove with a sharp knife to make these lightweight

guides even lighter. A Kindle edition is available for the del Norte and one is in works for the Primitivo. The Village to Village series also offers guides for the Caminos Francés, Finisterre, Portugués and Inglés. In my view, these guides are the most highly recommended.



## Tiny Books, Big Ideas

“After the Camino and Después del Camino”

By Karin Kiser

CAMINO CHRONICLES PRESS, 2019. 64 PAGES

Reviewed by Anita Welch  
Muncie, IN

“After the Camino” (English version) and “Después del Camino” (Spanish version) are pocket-sized books with exercises and contemplations to help guide pilgrims returning from their Caminos.

The tiny books, measuring only 3.5 x 5.5 inches, are divided into three sections. The first part includes things to do immediately upon the pilgrim’s return to continue the momentum, such as jotting down memories and sorting through photos. Drawing on the Pareto Principle, Kiser also suggests that returning pilgrims simplify their physical possessions by donating and recycling items that are taking up unwanted space in their daily lives.

Part Two offers practices to incorporate over time, including reaching out to others through participation in local pilgrim associations or simply being more aware of others around them. Part Three explores the future and how to integrate the Camino experience into a pilgrim’s daily life.

Unlike guidebooks that are only used before and during the journey, these books are designed to be reread whenever the post-Camino blues begin to appear. Whether you read in English or Spanish, this is a perfect companion to remind you of your Camino experience.

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*“Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.” -Ernst F. Schumacher*

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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.

With every issue of “La Concha,” we are delighted anew by the quality, variety and abundance of submissions. Your enthusiasm for the Camino and for “La Concha” as a medium for sharing that enthusiasm keeps us going. The September 2019 issue will once again focus on our value of Community. What part does this value of community play in your life now? Are you creating a “Camino family” where you live? Do you find community in your local American Pilgrims chapter? What does it take to create and maintain community? Send your essays, photographs, poems and more to us by Aug. 21, 2019, at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

We ask that you follow these simple submission guidelines:

- Be an American Pilgrims on the Camino member.
- Include your name, city and state of residence.
- Keep to the 400-word limit and submit to [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org) as a Word document. (We will review a longer, tightly written submission of no more than 800 words.) \*Include photographs or illustrations as jpegs. Send them separately not embedded in the Word document. And send no more than three photographs with your Word document.
- Include a caption with each photograph.

For more detailed guidelines, please visit Newsletter on the American Pilgrims website.

We’d love your help. If you have editing, photography or design skills you’d like to contribute to your organization, please let us hear from you at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

¡Buen Camino!

June Team “La Concha”

Suzanne Gainer, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino,  
 Zita Macy, Catherine Magyera and Barbara Zang

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