

LA CONCHA

newsletter of the american pilgrims on the camino

DECEMBER 2019

Pilgrim's Office Implements New Procedure for Compostelas

By Andy Byers
Sacramento, CA

From April to October, it's common for more than 1,000 or even 2,000 pilgrims to arrive daily in Santiago seeking a Compostela. In the last year alone, 327,378 Compostelas were issued. Early estimates for the 2021 Holy Year are that more than 500,000 pilgrims will flock to Santiago. Previously, pilgrims stood in line awaiting their turn at the counter. This system simply cannot accommodate the expected crowds.

The new procedure requires a visit to the Pilgrim's Office for a ticket with a number with a QR code. Scan the code with a QR reader app on your phone to see in real time (via the Cathedral's server: catedral.df-server.info) which number is being served. You can go enjoy Santiago or wait in a comfortable downstairs lounge until your number is called. When your number is within 50 of the number being served, get to the Pilgrim's Office hallway so you'll be ready to go to the counter. If you are not present when your number is called, you'll need a new ticket. If there are no more tickets, you'll be turned away.

The good news is you no longer need to stand in line. The bad news is the office issues a certain number of tickets each day, which varies based on staffing.

I volunteered in the Pilgrim's Office from October 7 to 21, 2019. The maximum number of tickets given out per day was 1,200. Anyone unable to get a ticket had to come back the next day. Most days all tickets were distributed by 2 p.m. The office opened at 8 a.m. and a line was forming by 7 a.m.

Following these rules will make the process easier:

- Each pilgrim must have a number. If you are a couple or a family, each person must have a separate ticket.
- If you're not there when your number is called, you'll need a new ticket and may need to come back the next day. Do not miss your turn.
- Each pilgrim, no matter the starting location, must get two stamps per day for the last 100 kilometers if walking or 200 kilometers if biking. Each stamp must be dated (either stamped or written).

I suggest you allow a few days in Santiago or plan to arrive early in the morning for a good chance to get a ticket (and your Compostela) that day. ¡Buen Camino! ☚



Each pilgrim must now obtain a ticket with a number and QR code at the Pilgrim's Office.

A Message from the Board Chair



Dear Members,

At this time of year, the holiday season reminds us to give thanks, to be grateful. As I thought about our American Pilgrims value of gratitude, I wondered whether there's a difference between being thankful and being grateful. I came across this quote from author Amy Collette: "Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness. It's the spark that lights a fire of joy in your soul."

From this perspective, gratitude seems more than just being thankful. As Swiss philosopher Henri Frederic Amiel suggested: "Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts."

"Gratitude is shown in acts." This gives me an opportunity to consider what we do and what we might do as an organization to demonstrate the gratitude we have for our members, chapters and volunteers as well as for the pilgrim community as a whole.

American Pilgrims on the Camino is an organization of volunteers whose gratitude for their Camino experience shines through every day. It's evident in the day-to-day work of our more than 100 chapter coordinators who gather pilgrims together. It's evident in the dedication of our team of hospitalero trainers, whose efforts deliver real impact to thousands of pilgrims annually. It's evident in the actions of those who toil behind the scenes maintaining our website and member database, administering our Facebook outreach, publishing our newsletter, developing the program for our National Gathering, and solving the day-to-day issues of this growing organization.

Our challenge going forward is to express not only our thanks but also to act in a way that expresses our gratitude through engagement in, and support of, our growing community of pilgrims. If we get it right, the joy of service will only continue to grow and increase the positive impact we have both here at home as well as globally.

Please join me in expressing both thanks and gratitude to Jeff Stys, who at the end of this year will have completed six years of service to American Pilgrims as a member and past chair of the board of directors. Jeff's leadership has had a positive impact on our pilgrim community that we'll feel for years to come. Although Jeff's board service is ending, we all look forward to his continued engagement in other volunteer opportunities with American Pilgrims.

Gratefully,

Dave Donselar, Board Chair

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome	3
The Gathering	4
Gratitude Essays	7
Chapter News	13

Welcome

Greetings of the season to you, our members!

This issue of “La Concha” focuses on our organization’s value of Gratitude. It’s a great time to remember all those who’ve offered their time and talents to American Pilgrims on the Camino. We’re particularly grateful for our team of editors—Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino, Zita Macy, Catherine Magyera and our proofreader Janie Johns—for their thoughtful, skillful work on behalf of us all.

And we’re certainly grateful for all of you who have contributed stories, photographs and reviews of books during the past year. “La Concha” is our newsletter by members, for members. We look forward to hearing from more of you in 2020.

Looking ahead, Santiago de Compostela will celebrate a Holy Year in 2021 because July 25, the feast day of Saint James the Greater, falls on Sunday that year. To prepare our members who will undertake pilgrimages to Santiago during the Holy Year, we will focus the 2020 newsletters on the spiritual aspects of pilgrimage. As Dave Jennings, a Lake Tahoe chapter coordinator, said, “Spirit is what separates us from the hiking clubs.”

We’re announcing the 2020 themes and deadlines now because the spiritual dimensions of the Camino are many, and we hope to elicit your thoughts and practices on these themes to share with all members.

MARCH ISSUE

Your spiritual/mental preparation before the Camino (Deadline February 21st)

JUNE ISSUE

Your spiritual/mental work during the Camino (Deadline May 21st)

SEPTEMBER ISSUE

Your post-pilgrimage processing of your Camino (Deadline August 21st)

DECEMBER ISSUE

Your ways of showing gratitude/giving back to the Camino (Deadline November 21st)

You’ll have our gratitude for using our new submission form: <https://form.jotformeu.com/americanpilgrims/la-concha-article-submissions>

PLEASE NOTE We are in sore need of a designer/layout person for “La Concha.” If you have access to InDesign and can volunteer your talents, we want to hear from you at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org. We’d be ecstatically grateful to add you to our team.

In the Spirit of the Camino,
Team “La Concha”

*Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed.
Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute
with love, grace and gratitude.*

– Denis Waitley



2020 Gathering of Pilgrims

Mark Your Calendars! American Pilgrims' 23rd Annual Gathering of Pilgrims is just around the corner. It will be March 12-15, 2020, at Zephyr Point Conference Center in Zephyr Cove (Lake Tahoe), NV.

The Gathering is an excellent opportunity to share experiences, support one another and learn more about the Camino and the pilgrimage experience.

The Gathering will run from late afternoon Thursday through noon Sunday. We're planning many interesting speakers and helpful presentations on different routes, history, pilgrim first aid, an update from your board of directors, a shell ceremony and singing of "Ultreia" for pilgrims walking their first Camino in 2020, a movie

and lots of entertainment. We'll also hold our popular silent auction and raffle.

If you'd like to donate a silent auction or raffle item (such as new gear, a book or Camino-themed memento), please fill out this [online donation form](#) and either ship your item to the address on the form or bring it with you to the Gathering.

Registration will open in early January – watch for details to be emailed to members. We hope to see you at the Gathering! ☺

American Pilgrims Annual Financial Review

By Steve Lytch

Treasurer, American Pilgrims on the Camino

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



2019 Funding Sources

This mission is sustained by three sources of funds totaling \$276,388

Membership Dues

- 41% (\$112,750) of the income to support our mission comes from your membership dues.

Annual Gathering and Hospitalero Training

- 40% (\$111,975) comes from registrations for the Gathering and hospitalero training.

Donations

- 19% (\$52,863) comes from donations, which are the remaining balance of our funding.



2019 Expenditures

When general operating expenses such as insurance and administrative services are allocated to each aspect of our mission, our funds are used as follows:

Annual Gathering

- 41% (\$113,719) of the budget is dedicated to gathering pilgrims at the annual Gathering and in 53 local chapters.

Hospitalero Program and Grants

- 41% (\$113,325) of the budget is allocated to support the Camino through hospitalero training and grants to local federations in Spain, France and Portugal that operate donativo albergues, improve waymarks and keep the Camino safe and accessible.

Pilgrim Support

- 18% (\$49,455) of the budget makes it possible to inform and encourage past and future pilgrims by issuing credentials free of charge, publishing “La Concha,” and monitoring two Facebook groups.

Making a donation to American Pilgrims on the Camino is one way to give back to the Camino. You can also encourage other pilgrims to become members and connect with the global community of pilgrims.

If you would like more information on the finances of American Pilgrims on the Camino, please contact me at treasurer@americanpilgrims.org. ☞



Gratitude for Grants

By Joseph McClain
San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

In winter, hearts turn inward, encountering gratitude as thoughts wander to hardy peregrinos trudging through early snow in Europe.

Gratitude is a constant companion for American Pilgrims members: gratitude for the funds made possible by our membership fees and donations, gratitude for the projects along many Camino routes, using the funds to make important improvements, and gratitude that from far away we can make a difference for peregrinos and for the people who care for them.

Along the often-arid stretches of the Via de la Plata between Galisteo and Aldea Nueva del Camino, an isolated 30-mile stretch with scarce accommodations, American Pilgrims on the Camino is partially

funding an effort by the local association to set up and operate two mobile housing units equipped to sleep eight people each. Picture the palpable gratitude of peregrinos arriving there and discovering a new place to rest!

In the beloved Albergue Santa Maria in Carrión de los Condes, which sheltered nearly 9,000 peregrinos last year, American Pilgrims is helping the nuns provide new mattresses and mattress coverings. Imagine the gratitude of a weary body encountering a good bed after a long Meseta day!

In the popular albergue run by the Asociación del Camino de Santiago in Burgos, where many of us have stayed, American Pilgrims funds are making it possible to rip out old, damaged flooring and replace it with new wood. Envision the gratitude for being able to run around with bare feet and not get splinters!

Along the Camino Mozárabe from Medellín to San Pedro de Merida, American Pilgrims approved a grant to place stepping stones across a river in order to reroute the Camino from a dangerous highway. The association ran into bureaucratic roadblocks and revised the grant to provide signage and new granite markers. Ever missed a yellow arrow painted on a little rock along the Camino? Feel the gratitude for not getting lost and not having to retrace precious steps!

Gratitude is a common theme among those of us who have walked a Camino. Wanting to give something back is something many of us feel. Sometimes it's not so easy to find a way to give back, but these grants provided by each and every one of us are concrete ways we can all offer the Camino experience we know so well.

It's something to be really grateful for. ☞

Our Hospitalero Training Program is 15 Years Old

By Cheryl Grasmoen
Minneapolis, MN

Returning pilgrims frequently seek ways to give back to the Camino in gratitude for their profound, life-changing experience. Joseph Campbell, author of “The Hero’s Journey,” would not be surprised at this common pilgrim sentiment. He wrote, “The ultimate aim of the quest, if one is to return, must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others.”

This desire to serve others brings many American Pilgrims members to the hospitalero training sessions we offer four times each year. Since 2004, the American Pilgrims program has

trained more than 650 members, and more than half have served as hospitaleros. In 2019 alone, more than 50 served in Spain. In addition to the United States trainings, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Australia and South Africa also conduct hospitalero training.

Successful completion of a training session entitles the volunteer to be placed as an hospitalero in one of the 17 albergues on various Camino routes under the umbrella of the Spanish Federation. In 2018, the Federation placed more than 600 volunteers from 23 countries. At least half as many served in other albergues on the Camino.

What does this expression of gratitude mean for the Camino? The generous donation of time and personal expense on the part of so many allows many albergues to operate on a “donativo” basis or at a very nominal expense to pilgrims. And, most important, it preserves and maintains the tradition of hospitality on the Camino – creating a warm welcome and safe space for pilgrims on their journey.

Learn more about the American Pilgrims hospitalero training program: americanpilgrims.org/hospitalero-training/ 📄



November 2019 hospitalero training group, Sebastopol, CA.
Jeanette Chacon, Santa Barbara, CA, photographer.



September 2019 hospitalero training group, Colorado Springs, CO.
Cheryl Grasmoen, Minneapolis, MN, photographer.

Donativo Albergues: Experiencing Gratitude through the Centuries-old Traditions of Pilgrim Hospitality

By Rosa Torres-Tumazos
Delray Beach, FL

Thanksgiving is the perfect season to remind me of my Camino pilgrimage. It was on the Camino I first came to know true gratitude, as I experienced it unlike ever before.

I became keenly thankful to all those I encountered on my Camino: fellow pilgrims and hospitaleros who helped me, taught me, served me. I felt so vulnerable and needy walking alone across Spain and appreciated the kind and supportive interactions I had with others. Once I returned home, I wanted to share the kindness I received on the Camino. That's when I learned I could continue that Camino spirit of sharing as a volunteer hospitalera.

Gratitude is the perfect word to describe the feeling of appreciation for both receiving and giving back on the Camino.

I have volunteered as an hospitalera numerous times in many albergues. All have been sponsored by parochial organizations and operate as "donativo," accommodations accepting a free-will donation from each pilgrim seeking refuge. Donativo albergues offer traditional hospitality to pilgrims and are staffed by volunteers like me, pilgrims looking to give back to the pilgrim community. We attempt to provide hospitality with the same centuries-old traditions for which the Camino is known.

Donativos are not free accommodations. Pilgrim donations help cover the costs of maintaining the facilities, such as electricity, hot water, cooking gas, cleaning supplies, insurance and at times even WiFi. When dinner and breakfast are provided, donativos rely on donations to cover the cost of the meal. Often where I served as hospitalera, we would thank the previous day's pilgrims for donating generously for today's meal, and likewise express gratitude towards today's pilgrims for helping us welcome and provide for tomorrow's pilgrims.

*Gratitude makes sense of our past,
brings peace for today, and
creates a vision for tomorrow.*

— Melody Beattie



Donativo box at Albergue Bercianos del Real Camino.
Rosa Torres-Tumazos, photographer.



Hospitalera Rosa Torres-Tumazos serving evening soup at the donativo Albergue Bercianos del Real Camino.

Volunteers who staff donativos are trained and there to serve you and make your Camino special. Hospitaleros perform some or all duties that help make the albergue welcoming and comfortable. We do all the housekeeping and often cook communal meals for our pilgrim guests. Equally important, we are available to help pilgrims plan and process their Caminos in real time. We share laughs and tears, encouragement, a listening ear or a hug when that is what's needed.

I encourage you to stay in a donativo albergue to experience this traditional hospitality. If you do stay at a donativo albergue, please be as generous as you can so that this tradition may continue. And, if you feel the urge to express your gratitude for what the Camino has already given to you, volunteering in one of the donativo albergues might be for you. ☺

Lifetime Members

We welcome our members who joined American Pilgrims at the lifetime level from March to November 2019. We're grateful for their support!

- Thomas Coleman, New Hampshire
- Rebecca Jackson, Texas
- Katy Davis, California
- Todd Rydstrom, California
- Mike Dickman, California
- Allison Venuto, Texas

*What separates
privilege from
entitlement is gratitude.*

- Brene Brown

Anglican Camino Chaplaincy Serves Pilgrims in Santiago

By Annette Argall
Santiago de Compostela, Spain

A relative newcomer to the organizations that serve pilgrims in Santiago, the Anglican Camino Chaplaincy has just completed its second year of operation. Under the auspices of the Diocese in Europe (Church of England), the Anglican Chaplaincy offers pastoral care and practical help for pilgrims in Santiago.

In 2019, chaplains celebrated Eucharist on Sundays and Wednesdays, and together with lay volunteers, offered fellowship and hospitality on weekday afternoons, including a shared meal after Wednesday Eucharist.

The Chaplaincy is staffed entirely by volunteers, both lay and clergy – all veteran pilgrims themselves – from countries throughout the English-speaking world. This year's volunteer priests came from England, Northern Ireland and the United States and were joined by other volunteers from Australia and the U.S.

The Chaplaincy has developed a strong ecumenical relationship with the Archdiocese of Santiago, which provided Sunday worship space at the Church of Santa Susana and a place for weekday fellowship at the Ecumenical Center near the Cathedral.

Several American Pilgrims members took part in Anglican Chaplaincy activities this year, and all are welcome. To learn about what is in store for the Chaplaincy for the coming year, you can subscribe to the Chaplaincy newsletter at [Anglican Camino Chaplaincy Sign Up Page](#). ☞



*Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today,
at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick,
and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful.*

- Buddha

Autumn Pilgrim

By Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway
Spokane, WA

November 25, 2019: Greetings from the street, Peregrinos! After 239 days and 1,225 miles, I have 4,330 miles to go, step by step. There are a few challenges this fall.



Like Spain this year, winter came early to Spokane, WA. Our first snow fell September 28. The following week, a stunning 5-inch snowfall brought down many tree limbs and interrupted power across the city for a day. After the massive cleanup, the autumn leaves fell too.

Cold has set in. On downtown streets, many homeless people sleep under train trestles and in doorways. Greeting these folks day after day increases my prayer for them. Spokane does not have enough shelter space. Last week I visited four shelters with a group, trying to witness the challenges of providing basics needs. It calls me to action.

Our days are markedly shorter. Sunrise after 7 a.m. and sunset near 4 p.m. today, our daylight will shrink to only 8 hours by year-end. Darkness is unavoidable, as are uneven sidewalks. On dark streets, I wear a headlamp, a bright orange pack, and a reflector belt. While many pilgrims use headlamps early to reach an albergue by midday, this pilgrim often walks after sunset in a thick coat, a headlamp and mountain runners.

Pilgrim feet are a big deal! Early on, I had a few blisters that resolved with careful nail-trimming and Smart Wool socks. Then, a perfect storm of shoe selection, increasing mileage, running and jumping resulted in a bigger problem: left heel pain. Then I finally admitted the pain was not improving with prayer and ibuprofen alone. Calcaneal bursitis is humbling. I got new shoes, had to slow down, rest, seek advice, accept help and ask for prayer. I still need prayer.

This fall, I began a 9-month retreat, the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life – a series of prayers, meditations and reflections compiled by St. Ignatius of Loyola. *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Renaissance Classics, 2012) tells how he resolved to journey from Spain to Jerusalem and later founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuit Order). Learning to pray Ignatius' iconic prayer, the Examen, we ask God, "Show me Your Way." Perhaps, it is not really my Camino after all; someone greater is in charge. Still finding joy, I keep walking, seeking The Way and praying to reach Santiago. Perhaps we'll meet. ¡Buen Camino! ☞

Editor's note: This is the third reflection from Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway about being a pilgrim in her own town as she walks daily to travel the collective distance, as the crow flies, from her home in Spokane, WA, to St. Jean Pied de Port (approximately 5,055 miles). This is her Camino for now.

Ultimately, her goal is to walk the Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port, arriving in Santiago to celebrate her 70th birthday in 2022. You will find Leah's previous reflections in the June 2019 and September 2019 issues of "La Concha."

Gratitude on the Cammino di Francesco

By Ann Loar Brooks
Lewes, DE



The author at Eremo della Casella near Caprese Michelangelo, Italy. Steven Brooks, Lewes, DE, photographer.

My husband, Steven, and I were a little more than a third of the way through our pilgrimage from Florence to Assisi. We had spent the previous day exploring St. Francis's beloved Santuario della Verna. The awe and wonder we experienced at that holy basilica still filled us and lightened our steps despite dark skies and the threat of thunderstorms.

Over the previous five to six days, we'd passed camo-clad hunters stalking *cinghiale*, wild boar. In addition, we had read that wolves were returning to Italy's Apennine Mountains, the peaks we were traversing. We'd been warned not to aggravate either the hunters or the animals.

Within an hour of our departing Chiusi della Verna, the skies darkened from mouse to steel gray. The path ascended steeply. We hastened our steps, sidestepping occasional path-wide muddy puddles. Wolf prints and scat appeared in the middle of the muddy path. We walked even faster. Twice, as we hurried along, Steven's foot slipped at the edge of puddles – once soaking a boot and once resulting in a fall so hard one of his carbon fiber poles broke. Not long after, he found a solid stick and claimed it as a replacement pole.

As mist turned to rain, we were stunned when a deep guttural Jurassic-Park-like growl rolled down toward us from a dark ridge above. The indistinct forms of three or four *cinghiale* about 25 or 30 meters ahead loomed through the trees. In a flash, five or six more of these large animals sprang across the path to join their pack. We didn't move for a minute. Suddenly, three boar babies bound across the path to join their family. Had we not waited, we could have come between the two parties of boar – a terrifying thought.

An hour before we reached Caprese Michelangelo, our destination for that evening, the heavens opened and proved to us that even the best rain gear can be ineffective. Lightning struck so close my hiking poles shook and the hair on my arms rose, and our footwear was no match for the torrents of water that turned paths into waterfalls. Despite arriving bedraggled and drenched, we were warmly welcomed by our pensione's owner who served us celebratory beverages, which we downed with deep thanks for our safe arrival.

A few days later in Sansepolcro, Steven purchased a replacement pole. Before he discarded his trusty stick, he thanked it for its service and left it in gratitude on one of Sansepolcro's cobblestone streets. 🍷



The Camino: A Pilgrim Hiking Club?

By Dave Jennings
Kings Beach, CA

I have recently met several people who have expressed interest in the Camino. Wonderful! They typically have many questions. You walked 500 miles? How far did you walk a day? What did you eat? Where did you sleep? When they ask if I had walked the Appalachian or Pacific Coast trails, I realize that they are thinking of the Camino as a thru hike, a long walk in the woods.

Yes, we hike, but walking is just the mode of transportation for experiencing the Camino. The Camino is so much more than the hiking. Walking with a backpack exemplifies one of the Camino lessons – simplicity. Walking provides entry into the kaleidoscope of community, equality, silence, introspection, universality, respect, history, nature and more that all contribute to the spirit of the Camino.

The pilgrims of old did not walk to Santiago de Compostela to lose weight, quit smoking or find a mate. The Camino, with its routes all over Europe, was a collection of pilgrim paths leading to the tomb believed to be of the Apostle St. James the Greater. These pilgrims were often seeking answers to questions related to their personal life's journey.

Arriving at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, nobody asked those early pilgrims if they walked for religious/spiritual reasons. There was no other reason. Today's pilgrims have many different reasons for walking the Camino. However, regardless of their initial reason, many find that the Camino leads them to the same questions and discoveries as the earlier pilgrims. Despite the times and advanced technology, the questions of life still demand answers. What today's pilgrims discover, often in hindsight, is that rather than being struck by a bolt of understanding upon arrival in Santiago de Compostela, they find the answers they are seeking in their day to day encounters along the Way.

So, we hike, backpack, walk the various Camino routes not just for the exercise but to experience the path to discovery. May that we live all the days of our life's journey in the spirit of the Camino. ☸

Joy is the simplest form of gratitude. – Karl Barth



Participants at the Boise chapter's inaugural meeting in October 2019. Becky Bunderson, photographer.

*You cannot do
a kindness too soon
because you
never know how soon
it will be too late.*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introducing New Chapter: Boise, Idaho

By Phil Woodford
Boise, ID

The Boise Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino celebrated its inaugural meeting with a presentation about the Camino Portuguese on Oct. 30, 2019. The chapter had two exploratory meetings prior to the inaugural meeting in June and September with strong attendance. We're excited to plan programs at least quarterly in the future.

Organizers for the new chapter are Becky Bunderson and Phil Woodford. Pilgrims, future pilgrims and others interested in joining this new group in the Boise area are encouraged to contact us at Boise@AmericanPilgrims.org. ☞

The Colorado Front Range Chapter in the Colorado Mountains

By Gene McCullough
Denver, CO

For some years the Colorado Front Range Chapter has been considering an overnight trip, jealously reading the announcements of overnights by other chapters. This year we acted!

Colorado is blessed with a collection of backcountry huts administered by the 10th Mountain Division Hut Association, mostly situated at elevations between 10,000 and 11,500 feet in our beautiful Rocky Mountains. These huts are well outfitted for backcountry stays, with wood-burning stoves and ovens, sleeping space for 16, propane cooking burners, cut firewood outside, and photovoltaic lighting. And elegant outhouses!

We originally had 14 people signed up for this trip but due to an assortment of conflicts that came up, there were only four who made the trip—Cathie, Sue, Jennifer and Gene.

We chose Uncle Bud's Hut, just over four miles northwest of Leadville (at 10,150 feet, the highest incorporated town in the U.S.). It was an unrelenting uphill hike of 1,400 feet in the first two miles. With further ups and downs, it was close to 2,000 vertical feet altogether. But what a stunning day it was! Colorado's fall is colored with aspen trees,

and they were about a week from peak color. The entire weekend was gorgeous—mostly clear and sunny with highs in the fifties and lows just above freezing.

Saturday was the day for a hike and, after a *very* leisurely rising and pancakes cooked by Jennifer, we did the two miles to St. Kevin Lake, a high mountain lake situated in a cirque at 11,800 feet. En route, we topped out at 11,920, we think an altitude record for all of the chapters. This has to be one of the most beautiful lakes in Colorado! (We've searched for a St. James or Santiago anything in Colorado and have come up with a blank.)

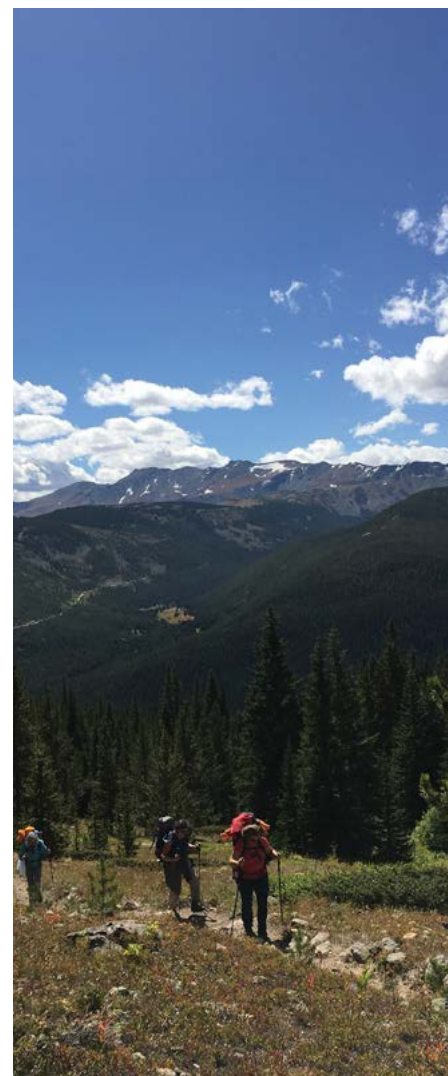
Saturday after sunset, Jennifer did a star watch event out on the front porch. Most of us don't see the Milky Way very often these days but there it was. So bright it looked like a cloud band!

Sunday's return to civilization was equally beautiful and a heck of a lot easier than the way in! In addition to being seriously downhill, the packs were a lot lighter.

We created a [photo journal on Google Drive](#). (Click the link to view online.)

This event was a winner in every way, and we'll be repeating some version of it in 2020. 🍷

At 11,000 feet on the way in on the Colorado Trail northwest of Leadville, CO. Gene McCullough, photographer.



At the trailhead, left to right: Gene McCullough, Jennifer Moss-Logan, Cathie Desjardins and Sue Wills.

Introducing the New Finger Lakes Chapter

By Nancy Holzner
Ithaca, NY

This fall, a new chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino was established in the Finger Lakes region of New York state. Based in Ithaca, the chapter serves central New York and the Southern Tier, as well as northern Pennsylvania.

Chapter coordinators Nancy Holzner and Jana Hexter met in a local hiking group, becoming friends as they shared their Camino experiences. Nancy walked the Camino Francés in 2014 in memory of her husband, Steve, who died in 2013. Jana has walked two Caminos with her daughter: the Camino Francés in 2017 and the Portugués in 2018.

Soon they encountered a group of local Camino pilgrims who'd been meeting informally for some time. The group decided to start a recognized chapter to help connect with other pilgrims and maintain the spirit of the Camino in our daily lives. Exploratory meetings over the summer revealed significant interest among experienced and new pilgrims alike.



Chapter participants enjoyed a hike in Tremans State Park, October 2019

The Finger Lakes chapter has so far taken advantage of the Ithaca area's trails and gorges for group walks and hikes, followed by opportunities to socialize. In November we gathered for a potluck dinner and a discussion of Camino Magic. Upcoming events include a screening and discussion of the 2018 documentary "The Camino Voyage" about a group of Irish pilgrims who embarked on their pilgrimage in a hand-crafted, traditional boat.

We are planning presentations by pilgrims who have walked different Caminos, more hikes throughout the Finger Lakes region, a shell ceremony in the spring for departing pilgrims and a discussion on how to keep the spirit of the Camino alive after returning home.

Nancy and Jana welcome all pilgrims in the Finger Lakes region to join us for hiking, fun and community. ☺

*Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness.
It's the spark that lights a fire of joy in your soul.*

– Amy Collette

Pilgrims Meet at the Grand Canyon of the East

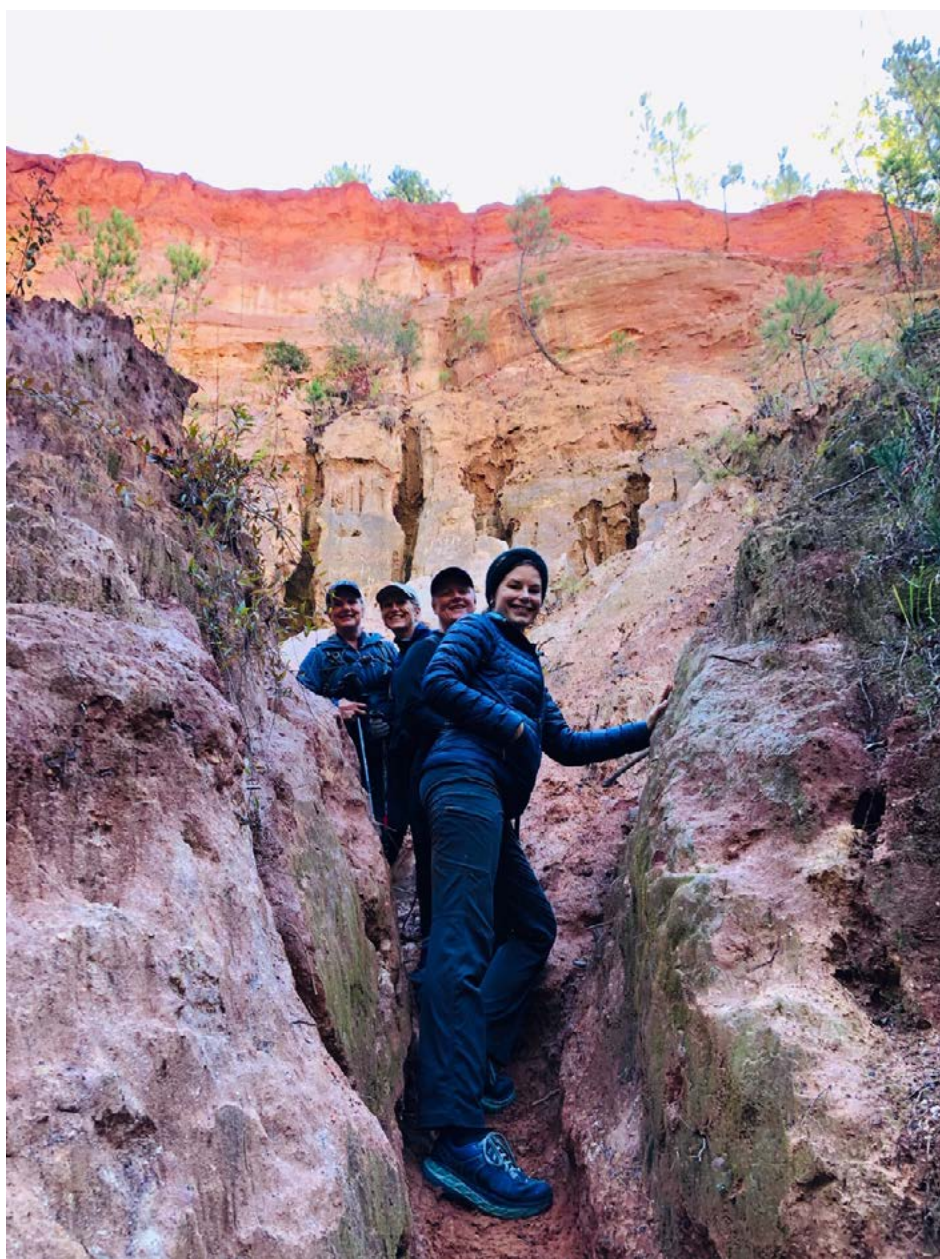
By Pierce Kelley Miriam Gallet
Jacksonville, FL Fleming Island, FL

On the first weekend of November, 41 pilgrims from Atlanta, GA, and Jacksonville, FL, gathered in the “Grand Canyon of the East,” where nine canyons of red, white, purple, pink and orange sandstone reach hundreds of feet above gullies carved by erosion and poor farming practices hundreds of years ago. Temperatures dipping into the low 40s at night couldn’t dampen the enthusiasm of all who attended. Two nights of dining on paella, pork, pasta, pies and many bottles of wine,

coupled with music, dancing and standing around a campfire created an atmosphere of friendship, fellowship and fun.

Providence Canyon State Park, located about a 150 miles southwest of Atlanta, and a bit farther from Jacksonville, consists of over 1,000 acres and 10 miles of hiking trails, which ranged from easy to moderate. They were no challenge for the veterans of the Camino de Santiago, but no one could dispute that the views were glorious.

The purpose of the gathering was social. Miriam Gallet and Susan Peacock—the co-coordinators of the Jacksonville Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino—and Atlanta co-coordinators Jim Martin and Susan Corwin simply wanted the two chapters to meet each other. Both chapters are active at the local level and meet most months for some social event or hike or to conduct business. In August, the Jacksonville Chapter presented scallop shells and certificates to those who were about to embark on their journeys or to reward those who had completed theirs. This event was the first time these two chapters, from different states, had ever come together. As K.C. Caklebaugh said, “When you meet a fellow pilgrim for the first time, there’s an immediate bond due to the shared experience.” There were no strangers there... just friends we hadn’t met yet.



Pilgrims from the Atlanta and Jacksonville chapters explore the canyons during a joint hike Nov. 2, 2019. Front to rear, Dianne Smith, Nancy Ike, Lisa Victory and Susan Peacock. Miriam Gallet, photographer.

Jim Martin and his wife, Jodi, prepared Paella Valenciana on Friday night, which was spectacular, and the fare for Saturday night was a smorgasbord of delights, as everyone brought some delicacies to be shared by all. In between, on Saturday the group hiked the canyons, admired the majestic pinnacles and chasms for several hours, before convening at the Omaha Brewing Company in nearby Lumpkin, Georgia, for liquid refreshments and libations. No one went home hungry or thirsty.

On Sunday, Jim arranged a tour of the White Oak Pastures farm, which prides itself as being one of the few places in the country to raise Iberian hogs. Jim, a culinary expert whose family comes from Spain, has a keen interest in the quality of the pork used in his paella dishes.

Georgia is well-known for having some of the best state parks in the country. Most attendees camped at Florence Marina State Park, which offered cabins, sites for RVers and a campground with a store, boat ramp and other facilities. Others chose to sleep in tents in Providence Canyon Park, which provided only primitive sites with no amenities. Unfortunately, there were no



After a seven-mile hike in Providence Canyon State Park, members of the Atlanta and Jacksonville chapters pose for a group photo. Miriam Gallet, photographer.

albergues in the area, but the two campgrounds, along with the picnic area with a covered pavilion, provided more than adequately for what was needed.

Joann Mason, a three-time Camino adventurer, summed up the weekend by calling it a “truly remarkable event that entwined nature and the Camino spirit for all to enjoy.” K.C. added, “Where else can you have nearly 50 people from different walks of life connect immediately and have a weekend of joyous camaraderie?” Plans are underway for future get-togethers.

Miriam, who celebrated a birthday on Friday night, was surprised with a birthday cake with a Camino design on it. She and Jim concluded the weekend’s festivities with the familiar refrain: “Buen Camino, fellow pilgrims! Until we meet again, fare thee well,” and a prayer for the continued health and well-being of all who have traveled on the Way of St. James. It is, without a doubt, a society of kindred spirits. ☪

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

– William Arthur Ward

Pilgrims' Thanksgiving

By Laurie Ferris
Oakland, CA

Every fall, our NorCal chapter hosts a gathering of pilgrims as a “welcome home” celebration, complete with a potluck, special presentation and pilgrim story hour. It’s a nice way for pilgrims to mingle and share stories among those who can relate. Let’s face it, some of our friends and family won’t ever understand the appeal of the Camino. That’s okay, because we have our own special Pilgrims’ Thanksgiving, minus the turkey and the drama!

Feedback from our previous surveys showed that story sharing was the favorite aspect of this event. This year, we scheduled the activity before lunch so that people could introduce themselves. Instead of coaxing the stories out table-by-table, pilgrims lined up for their three-minute chance to speak at the microphone, and we ran overtime. Even the shyest pilgrims participated! We enjoyed listening to each pilgrim’s heartfelt, personal and, at times, hilarious story. It is clear that people are grateful for this Camino thing.

More friendships were sparked in the potluck line and during lunch, as well as in the group photos and hospitalero presentation that followed. I believe this story-sharing tradition is as essential a ritual as the shell blessing for departing pilgrims that our chapter hosts each spring.



Natasha Ravnik and Marie Gunter proudly holding their credential and Compostela. Merula Furtado, photographer.



Bryan Winter brought us right back to Spain with this jamón serrano, sliced to perfection! Merula Furtado, photographer.



During recess, pilgrims gather in the school yard for the “Camino Class of 2019” group photo. Congratulations! Merula Furtado, photographer.

Don’t let your Caminos pass by without honoring and celebrating them with your fellow pilgrims. If your local Camino community doesn’t already have a welcome home event, start small at a café or someone’s home. Perhaps next year you can find a larger venue such as a park, church, library, community center or restaurant. To see more photos and a video of this event, visit thecaminoprovides.com. 🍷

I was so busy behind the scenes that I didn’t have a chance to share my story, so here goes: In May 2019, I walked the Camino de Invierno from Ponferrada, a less-trodden alternative to the Camino Francés. Some stages are very long and lack traditional pilgrim services, and I was a curiosity as a woman walking alone—I didn’t see another pilgrim until the third day! I met more locals, spoke more Spanish and had more time to work things out in my mind. It tested my fortitude in many ways, but was exactly what I needed. The kindness of strangers is what I remember most from this Camino—strangers who became my Camino Family. I am thankful for each step along the Winter Way.

St. Louis Chapter News

By Amy Horton
Warrenton, MO

On Sept. 15, the St. Louis chapter held a review of fall pilgrimages in Missouri. Catherine Dantin shared her experiences walking the Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne pilgrimage, which begins in Kansas each October and crosses Missouri, concluding in St. Charles on Nov. 18, the Feast Day of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne. Donna Kallal shared information about the annual October pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Starkenburg, with a group coordinated by the Society of Saint Pius X. Finally, Carla Unnerstall discussed the Katy Trail pilgrimage that traverses 45 miles along the Katy Trail from Augusta to New Haven, with stops at six Catholic churches along the way.

On Oct. 20, our chapter experienced excellent autumn weather for our six-mile round trip group hike on the Al Foster Memorial Trail near Wildwood.

On Nov. 16, we met for a group hike with those walking the Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne Pilgrimage, including Catherine Dantin and Ann Sieben, founder of this pilgrimage honoring an American saint. After following in the footsteps of where she served her mission, we gathered at Kate's Coffee in Augusta to hear stories from the pilgrims who started 23 days earlier. We walked together to the Katy Trail State Park trailhead in Augusta, then accompanied them on their pilgrimage to their next stop in Defiance. Their pilgrimage would conclude two days later at the Shrine of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne in Saint Charles. ☚



Review of Missouri's fall pilgrimages at Middendorf-Kredell Library, O'Fallon, MO. Amy Horton, photographer.



Katy Trail State Park trailhead. Augusta, MO. Joette Reidy, photographer.



Sherman Beach – Al Foster Memorial Trail, Wildwood, MO. Benjamin Voss, photographer.

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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, gathering pilgrims together and 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. To prepare members for the upcoming 2021 Holy Year, the **MARCH 2020 ISSUE** will focus on **Your spiritual/mental preparation before the Camino**. (*Deadline for submissions is February 21.*)

Please use our new submission form <https://form.jotformeu.com/americanpilgrims/la-concha-article-submissions>. Also, please make sure that your photographs are between 500 KB and 2 MB, not embedded in text and have captions that identify the photographer, place and date of the photograph.

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

We welcome your questions and comments at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org. We also welcome your willingness to volunteer your talents as an editor, photographer or designer!

iBuen Camino!

December Team “La Concha”

Trina Christensen, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Janie Johns, Beth Jusino, Zita Macy, Catherine Magyera and Barbara Zang

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