

LA CONCHA

newsletter of the american pilgrims on the camino

MARCH 2020

Jubilee Walking

By Joyce DeToni-Hill
Lakewood, CO

This year and next, the Camino de Santiago presents an extra spark of joy as we journey into Jubilee Year 2021. Historically and theologically, Jubilee has links to celebration, anniversary, new beginnings and re-centering. It includes releasing things—the physical and non-physical—we have accumulated and no longer need. As you walk this year or prepare for the next, why not use Jubilee to frame your walk?

The Camino offers many ways to incorporate acts of Jubilee.

Years of Jubilee began with a threshold action. Some included a community ram's horn announcement. On Dec. 31, Santiago's Archbishop will strike the slabs covering the Cathedral's Holy Door with a silver hammer, then officially open and bless the door with holy water and olive oil, declaring it open.

In the same way, how will you step over the threshold of your year? Sharing your intent with others and the weeks of active preparation is one way to step over the threshold of declaring yourself a pilgrim. Hearing yourself own those words "I'm walking the Camino" for the first time begins to shift your perspectives. Participate in a group shell ceremony through your local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino if it offers one. You can find pilgrim blessings on your

credential or online at Santiago's Pilgrim's Office website. Ask your faith community to offer you a blessing in worship before you go or host a farewell gathering and share it there.

Take time to name your intentions. What will you release so as to walk lighter? Ego, titles, disappointments, entitlements, fear, masks, makeup, technology? What will you embrace to create new possibilities? Long silences, trust, being, hope, gratitude? Will you leave behind shoulds and oughts and embrace "what is"?

Consider bringing a light item to symbolize your Jubilee walk. Are you remembering or praying for someone? Tie a small charm on your pack or create a paper doll figure to honor their presence. Let them peek out of your pack. Discipline yourself to stop at a small ermita (chapel) each day to pause in silent reflection and leave an offering.

Carry a small rock or symbol from home representing a burden you physically wish to leave at the Cruz de Ferro. Bring along a favorite quote, scripture or theme song to guide your way and keep you focused.

Let Jubilee guide you to new beginnings. ☪

"Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do." – Dr. Benjamin Spock

A Message from the Board Chair



Like many of you, I first became aware of the Camino after seeing the movie “The Way.” I watched it on a long flight home to Guam. At the end of the movie, I turned to my wife and said, “I’m going.” I wasn’t quite sure why at the time. I hadn’t previously heard of the Camino, I’m not Catholic, and I had never really given any serious thought to walking 500 miles anywhere. Whatever drove me to the decision to walk the Camino, my preparations began immediately.

I’m at my happiest when planning my next adventure. I launched into researching the Camino de Santiago through travel guides, personal reflections and maps. That’s where I first encountered the American Pilgrims on the Camino website. I immediately ordered my credential and began reaching out with all of those oh-so-familiar questions: What shoes should I wear? How much stuff should I bring? What size backpack can I reasonably carry for 500 miles? How much money do I need? I started walking more to physically prepare. It was all quite exhilarating.

As I reflect on that time, I realize that the steps we all go through are incredibly important in preparing us mentally, physically and spiritually for our Camino journey. Foremost is making the decision to embark on the journey in the first place. It takes courage to decide to leave your home and walk across another country. Requesting then receiving the credential is a milestone that solidifies your commitment to embark on the journey. Just as important is the process of inquiry, of reaching out to learn from others to prepare for your journey. For experienced pilgrims, it’s worth reflecting on what we went through to prepare for the Camino and remember how we felt. For new pilgrims, know that whether the planning brings you a sense of joy or a sense of anxiety, it’ll work itself out.

These preparatory steps are a vital part of our American Pilgrims’ mission. We provide information and support to pilgrims through our volunteer chapter coordinators, our annual national Gathering of Pilgrims, our Facebook groups, our website and this newsletter. It’s the part of our mission that brings many of us the most joy...the personal outreach and interaction with our fellow pilgrims. The robust engagement of all of us working together keeps American Pilgrims vibrant and our Camino spirit growing.

iBuen Camino!

Dave Donselar, Board Chair

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Welcome

Spring is in the Air!

With this first issue of “La Concha” for 2020, we are pleased to offer you the thoughts of your fellow American Pilgrims members about their spiritual and mental preparation for the Camino. The theme for this March issue struck a chord. We’re grateful for all the submissions we received. Whether you’re contemplating your first Camino or a veteran of many pilgrimages, we hope you’ll find something in these pages to make you think more deeply about your journey.

You’ll also find the latest installment of one lifetime member’s walk to Santiago through the streets and byways of her hometown, Spokane. You’ll learn about our newest chapter in Memphis and read about the activities of several chapters, including the Raleigh chapter’s Camino lending library. And if you’re looking for Camino inspiration, you’ll find several book reviews in this issue.

And there’s more. Much more.

JUNE ISSUE

As we consider the upcoming Holy Year in Santiago de Compostela in 2021, our June newsletter’s theme is your spiritual/mental work during the Camino. The deadline for your submissions is May 21, 2020. Please use our submission form: <https://form.jotformeu.com/americanpilgrims/la-concha-article-submissions>

We’re grateful for the excellent editing help from our team: Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino and Zita Macy. We’d love to have a larger editorial

team, so if you have wordsmithing skills, please volunteer at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

A more critical need is a newsletter designer and layout person. If you use InDesign and can spare 10-15 hours to prepare each quarterly newsletter, we want to hear from you at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

As always, we wish you a ¡Buen Camino! whether you’re on the Camino or not.

Barbara Zang, for team “La Concha”

P.S. A link in the December 2019 newsletter did not work. Annette Argall of Santiago de Compostela wanted fellow American Pilgrims on the Camino members to know that you can sign up for the Anglican Camino Chaplaincy newsletter here: <http://eepurl.com/gJyQQj>

Those who have little interest in spirituality shouldn't think that human inner values don't apply to you. The inner peace of an alert and calm mind are the source of real happiness and good health. – Dalai Lama

Let Us Now Praise our Gathering Volunteers!

By Sara Steig Gradwohl
Board member and Gathering chair

The annual Gathering of Pilgrims is 100 percent volunteer-driven. Because of our robust pilgrim community, the Gathering is a high-quality, inspirational and impressive event. The volunteer Gathering chair coordinates a team that works selflessly, beginning with venue selection, program development, speaker recruitment, graphic design and registration. Volunteers then organize refreshments, welcome attendees at check-in, host receptions and pour wine, introduce speakers and

coordinate our popular raffle and silent auction. Some volunteers are first-timers; many are seasoned. All have enthusiasm for the Gathering and passion for the Camino.

The annual Gathering brings together chapter coordinators and board members; current individual, household, student and lifetime members; and former board members and chapter coordinators. This year we have people registered from 32 states, two Canadian provinces and Australia. Of these, 42 are lifetime members and 24 are shell ceremony participants. About half are first-time Gathering participants, and the other half have attended previous Gatherings.

It's now a tradition that the local chapter or chapters in the vicinity of the Gathering venue host the Thursday evening welcome reception and work closely with the raffle and silent auction coordinator. In 2017 when we added our first chapter coordinator workshop, the Wednesday night coordinator reception became another volunteer opportunity for the local chapters.

We especially thank the Lake Tahoe chapter coordinators, David Jennings and Frank Coughlin, and their top-notch team of 12 volunteers. Although just ratified as a chapter in October 2019, Lake Tahoe has wowed us with their enthusiasm and superb organizational skills. Both Dave and Frank have a long history of walking the Camino and sharing it with their friends and neighbors.

Other invaluable volunteers this year include Cheryl Grasmoen, Jo Halverson, Yosmar Martínez, Jeff Stys and Zita Macy, as well as our speakers and those introducing them. Without such strong volunteer support, hosting the Gathering would be almost impossible.

If you'd like to get involved with the 2020 Gathering, don't be shy about stepping forward and pitching in. We always welcome volunteers and appreciate whatever you can do, even if it's taking out the trash or rearranging the chairs.

I thank with whole-hearted gratitude everyone who has made the 2020 Annual Gathering of American Pilgrims on the Camino such a welcoming event. ☪



View from Zephyr Point, site of the 2020 national Gathering of Pilgrims, March 12-15. Photographer Sara Steig Gradwohl.

By Martha Hayes
Raleigh, NC

One of the expenses in planning a Camino can be selecting your guidebook. That's how it all began. As a librarian in my former life, I naturally wanted to begin a resource library for our Raleigh Chapter when we started in August 2014 to serve pilgrims in our area.

Our chapter wanted to provide a variety of routes and guidebook formats for folks to find the right fit for their planning and hiking styles. Some people look for functional features—a certain size or weight of book, whether it has topo maps, historical information, cultural side notes, or packing tips.

Some don't care as much about the logistics and would rather read about other's experiences—memoirs, spiritual paths, pilgrimage lessons or journey anecdotes. Still others want to read about a similar journey—a Camino with friends or family, after the death of someone you love, new beginnings after a job or relationship transition.

Gradually we have added to our library from donations of books and funds. Our library of more than 70 books is now housed in a suitcase. It's available at all hikes and meetings. Checkout and returns are handled through a clipboard system, and each book is labeled with our return policy and contact information.

A list of resources is available for members to view from a link in our chapter newsletter. The next steps for us might be to include a book review at each meeting or to organize some chats about a common book over coffee.

Learning each other's stories, whether in print or face-to-face, can only add to the Camino experience before and after the journey. ☪



Raleigh chapter's lending library and clipboard check-out system. Photograph by the author.



Memphis Chapter participants walked the St. Jude Memphis Half Marathon on Dec. 5, 2019.
Photograph by the author, far left.

Walking in Memphis

By Elizabeth Crosby
Memphis, TN

The new Memphis Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino is grateful to the board of directors for its support during the formation process. We're excited to join fellow American pilgrims who are also making their Ways. As we grow, we will look to you, the more experienced chapters, for ideas and guidance.

The Memphis Chapter's motto is part of a 1st-century pilgrims' prayer:

We come unready. We come alone. We come together.

Pilgrims in the Memphis chapter have a variety of Camino experiences, including the French, English and Portuguese Ways. The group also includes those who have not yet walked the Camino but are interested in learning more about this pilgrimage.

Since our first meeting in September, the group has met at a bookstore and in two homes for introductory discussions of the Camino de Santiago, including a practical session with tips for those planning a first Camino this summer.

A group from our chapter walked the St. Jude Memphis Half Marathon in December and walked across the Mississippi River and back at the end of February. The Harahan Bridge offers the longest public path across the Mississippi, from downtown Memphis to Arkansas. Pedestrians and bikers enjoy beautiful views of the Memphis skyline, Tennessee and Arkansas shores and the mile-wide Mighty Mississippi.

Buen Camino, y'all! ☺

Portlandia Chapter Celebrates Successful 2019

By Barbara Wood
Portland, OR

The Portlandia Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino held another wildly successful year-end potluck on Saturday, Dec. 7. As has become common here in Portland, we were overwhelmed by the generosity of our chapter participants in our final large community event of the year.

David and Rebecca opened their beautiful home to 105 pilgrims on the eve of their trip to Mexico. We collected donations, shared massive amounts of food, wine, beer and endless smiles and stories about our successful year. The cleanup crew wouldn't take no for an answer to "what else can I do?" and just kept cleaning, working to round up all stray glasses and morsels of food left behind. As you can see from the photo, we collected a lot of wine for next year's events.

Portlandia sent 83 people on pilgrimage this year, and we got most of them back! Nearly 500 people participated in one or more of our 10 monthly walks (held January-October), and we hosted three large community events. We trained our members to use Google Forms to RSVP for our walks and events. That process is going well and makes coordinator life easier. All in all, 2019 was a very successful year.

This year, two members stepped up to help with event planning. Vici Wolff coordinated the year-end potluck, her first time with us, and was a tremendous help to the coordinators. Martha Pelster led planning for the Feast of St. James. Thank you to both and to all volunteers who helped all of our events be fabulous.

We also discussed plans for 2020. We will focus on sustainability and add less to the landfill by having participants bring their own dishes and flatware to events. We commit to support pilgrims on their return from the Camino, and we will identify new coordinators to assume chapter leadership in 2021. If you find yourself in Portland and would like to join us, please contact us at Portlandia@AmericanPilgrims.org. We'd love to meet you. ☺



Wine table at the END of the potluck! Plenty of leftovers for our 2020 events.



Portlandia Chapter Coordinators - left to right: Linda Smith, Barbara Wood (top), Rachel Ganzon. Dec. 7, 2019 at the year-end chapter potluck.

Jacksonville Chapter's First Hike of 2020

The 25,301-acre enchanted Jennings Forest, located in northeastern Florida, welcomed 16 members of the Jacksonville Chapter on their first hike of 2020 on Jan. 26. Led by Dennis Chapman, Friends of the Forest volunteer and trail designer, this hike was a first for the chapter and included visiting a burial site dating to the 1700s. Photographer Dennis Chapman.



Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles, and less than perfect conditions. So what? Get started now. With each step you take, you will grow stronger and stronger, more and more skilled, more and more self-confident, and more and more successful. – Mark Victor Hansen

We Now Have Merch!

Are you a proud member of American Pilgrims on the Camino? Are you looking for ways to let others know about your organization? Are you a chapter coordinator seeking a way to distinguish yourself at chapter events?

You can now wear your heart on your sleeve and our embroidered logo on your chest with a selection of American Pilgrims-branded quality apparel from Lands' End. Currently only polo shirts for women and polo shirts and long-sleeved T-shirts for men are available.

We plan to add more clothing options in the next few months. Know that we collect no money from these sales. The link to order is https://business.landsend.com/store/american_pilgrims/.

We thank you for your membership and American Pilgrims on the Camino pride!



Camino path leaving St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, Oct. 12, 2018. Photograph by the author.

My Spiritual Awakening

By Kathleen Vreeken
Newburyport, MA

After years of longing for “the Camino experience,” I proposed the journey to a friend. He said, “Let me think about it.” I began to deluge him with books, articles and anything I could find about the pilgrim’s road to Santiago. One month of thinking turned into two, then three. Three turned into four, and I became impatient.

“What is there to think about?” I couldn’t fathom why anyone wouldn’t jump at a chance to be on the Camino.

Finally, the answer came.
“I’ll go. It should be fun.”

I was elated. We bought gear, airline tickets and rail passage to St. Jean Pied de Port and arrived to begin what I was sure would be the journey of our lives.

Our first week was magnificent; however, I noticed differences in our reactions. What I found beautiful and spiritually uplifting, my friend found the opposite. While I searched for meaning and purpose, my friend became fixated on coffee, language differences and keeping his electronics charged. While I wanted to experience everything, my friend tried to ignore that we were in a foreign country. He wanted to transport himself back to where he’d come from.

I felt annoyed at his unwillingness to enjoy the experience. I prayed that we would find some common ground. And when I thought that our differences would require a separation of ways, a Camino miracle happened!

It was not the eye-opening event for my friend I thought was warranted. Instead, it was a message to me.

I found I was having a personal experience rather than the shared experience I’d expected. My prayers became less about directing another and more about my own gratefulness to be alive. I started to relax and allow my companion the right to walk his own Camino. As I let go of my expectations, I began to experience a true pilgrimage, a journey into myself.

This journey required that I let my patterns of behavior fall away, to be replaced with a more charitable acceptance of others. I developed a more independent sense of self in the face of opposition and differences of opinion, especially from those who claimed to love me. As it happened, this newly found self would stay with me long after my journey ended. This was my true “spiritual awakening,” opening my heart to the journey of a world as it should be....one of kindness, acceptance and trust. ☺

Counting My Camino Blessings

By Laurie Ferris
Oakland, CA

For first-time pilgrims, it's easy to get consumed with the planning, training, packing, weighing and repacking for the Camino. Newbie pilgrims ask the same burning questions I had just five years ago about backpacks, blisters and starting points. As I became more comfortable with my gear and physical abilities, I became increasingly drawn to more spiritual preparations. Now, I love to integrate blessings before, during and after the Camino.

Our chapter's shell-blessing ceremony usually takes place in early spring. A ritual offering of a Camino shell to the departing pilgrims and the reading of the traditional pilgrim blessing mark a rite of passage in a pilgrim's journey.



Stone cross at Finisterre. Photograph by the author.

Memorable Churches & Masses



- ▶ **Iglesia de la Virgen Peregrina in Pontevedra**
Shell-shaped and Camino-themed
- ▶ **Iglesia San Francisco in Ferrol**
Mass honoring the Virgin Mary as "the Queen of May"
- ▶ **Pilgrim Mass in Grandas de Salime** – Kissing relics!
- ▶ **Cathedral in Lugo** – Perpetual Adoration of Eucharist
- ▶ **Parroquial Albergue Ponferrada** – Lord's Prayer in every language + meditation / reflection
- ▶ **Santa Eulalia de Arca O Pedrouza** – Shell altar
- ▶ **Santiago Cathedral** service in English daily
- ▶ **Pilgrim's Office Chapel** – Daily Camino reflections

Some of the author's favorite churches along different Camino routes.

At a regular Mass, I'm not shy about asking for a Camino blessing, as priests are usually happy to oblige. Before I started my second Camino, I was at a regular Mass at Iglesia San Francisco in Ferrol. I asked for a blessing and was invited to stay for a beautiful vespers service honoring the Virgin Mary as "the Queen of May." I attended a pilgrim Mass almost every night during my third Camino as I was with a group of Catholics from Malta who had planned for this. It was fun to see a different Camino family forming at these Masses, some of whom I never saw on the path.

Cruceiros, the stone crosses of Galicia, and stone waymarks can be prompts for us to pause for a moment of reflection. I stopped at many along my Caminos to take breaks, give thanks, pray or perhaps read a prayer card left by someone who walked before me.

After each Camino, I love to attend a Mass in English at the Cathedral. There have been priests from Ireland, Venezuela and the Philippines. Each service took place at smaller chapels within the Cathedral. After my fourth Camino, the Cathedral was closed, so I attended service at the chapel in the Pilgrim's Office. I stayed for the daily pilgrim reflection. We each had a chance to share our story—some were emotional (bring Kleenex!), and some were funny.

I respect that there are pilgrims at various points on the spirituality spectrum, from secular to devout. But all pilgrims, regardless of religious background, are welcome in the churches. From large gatherings with kindred spirits, to quiet moments to pray in solitude—don't miss the many wonderful opportunities for Camino blessings. ☪

My Damascus Moment

By Elaine Hopkins
London, UK

Saul had his spiritual insight on the road to Damascus. I have mine on the Bridge of Rabies in Zubiri. It somehow seems appropriate that I should injure myself in a place noted for its curative properties, and after two days of walking the Camino Francés without either incident or accident. My life has, after all, been full of both. But this time, as I return to the vertical and glance down at my bloodied knees, I know it's different.

My fall takes place in silence. I have, over the years, schooled myself not to cry out in pain. I have no wish to draw attention to my tenuous grasp of gravity. On this occasion, though, I have no means of hiding my injuries. I'm wearing shorts and do not even have a Kleenex to mop up the blood.

Adam, my Camino mentor, is ahead of me. When he turns and catches sight of my knees, he is both confused and appalled.

"Elaine, what happened?"

"I fell over."

"Why didn't you call out?"

"I don't know."

But I do know. I've realized, for the first time in my life, that I'm ashamed of the neurological condition, dyspraxia, that affects my balance, coordination, memory and speech and has blighted my life.

My reaction makes no sense. My condition is part of my genetic inheritance. But I cannot deny the feeling. Shame is very visceral, very distinctive, very heavy. I feel it but cannot speak of it, not even to Adam, this man who has taught me everything I need to know about the Camino.

Like Saul, I too have a life-changing moment. Mine does not lead to three days of blindness and fasting, as Saul's did. But soon after my return home from my week on the Camino with Adam, it does lead me to do something I hadn't intended. As I'm

completing a freelance copywriting job, my intuition guides my fingers to make the necessary arrangements for continuing my Camino.

I accept my intuition's guidance with good grace, knowing that I am returning to make peace with my dyspraxia. I resume in Logroño, my previous finishing point, and meet an American pilgrim who also has dyspraxia. We walk together for 20 days. So begins my journey into self-acceptance. Spiritual preparation comes in unexpected guises; mine certainly did. ☺

The Caminio in Brazil?

Lifetime member Sara Gradwohl discovered a Camino mojón (distance marker) at Ipanema Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Jan.16, 2020. Only 8,013 KM to Santiago. Bom caminho! Photo by Dan Gradwohl.





The author at the Ibaneta Pass, Pyrenees, on March 29, 2018. Photo by the author.

Seven Principles— A Spiritual Framework for My Camino

By Russ Eanes
Harrisonburg, VA

From the first I heard about walking the Camino Francés, I understood it to be a unique spiritual experience, one I would ultimately dream of for 20 years. And so, my inner preparation began, two decades before that cool, wet March morning in 2018 when I departed St. Jean Pied de Port bound for Santiago de Compostela, 500 miles and 35 days away.

I left my job in early 2018, set my date of departure, and focused on both my physical and inner preparation. My reading, prayer and meditation crystalized into a list of seven simple principles I intended to follow as I walked:

1. I will try to go about 25 kilometers per day.
2. I will make no reservations for lodging, accepting whatever is available when I reach a destination.
3. I will not be in a hurry.
4. I will carry my pack the whole way, forcing me to keep the contents light.
5. I will walk the entire way—no taxis or buses.
6. I will make it a priority to slow down and listen for the voice of God speaking around me or through those I meet.
7. I will accept, within reason, whatever is offered me, as a gift from God.

These guiding principles weren't just restrictive rules: They provided a spiritual framework by which to experience my Camino:

- The 25-kilometers-per-day pace became an inner discipline of perseverance—I would have to keep moving, avoiding the temptation to quit, or to take a bus or taxi even in cold or snowy weather.
- Not making reservations was a spiritual discipline of abandonment—I would have to accept whatever lodging option came my way, which meant I stayed in some rustic places.
- Not being in a hurry required a practice of presence to observe my surroundings and listen deeply to those I encountered.
- Not planning meant being open to give—maybe to help someone with a physical need, or perhaps fill someone else's need for companionship.
- Keeping my pack light meant a spiritual discipline of simplicity—learning to live with a lot less.
- Accepting whatever I was given was a discipline of humility—I would have to admit my own need, whether physical or a result of my own poor choices or planning.

I am grateful for this inner preparation, which yielded a rich experience that remains one of the most significant of my life. ☪

Setting Your Camino Intention

By Steve Lytch
Lancaster, PA

Just as you prepare your body for the challenges it will encounter on the Camino, you can prepare your spirit for what the Camino will offer. An important part of spiritual preparation is identifying your Camino intention.

A Camino intention is something you hope to resolve or accomplish along the Way. For some, that intention is obvious. It's what compels them to take the journey. Some pilgrims walk the Camino as a way to deal with grief. Some walk because they are at a crossroads, hoping to discern what direction life will take as they finish school, ponder a change of vocation or approach retirement. Some do the Camino as an affirmation of life and an act of thanksgiving after they've recovered from a life-threatening illness.

For others, though, their intention is not so obvious. They feel an irresistible but mysterious pull to the Way of St. James.

Spending time reflecting on your Camino intention before you begin can help focus your pilgrimage. It's easy to be overwhelmed by all the new experiences you have along the Camino, the stories you hear and the insights you have. Your intention can help you make sense out of all those things. It can give you a filter through which to receive and interpret what you encounter.

It is important, however, to hold your intention loosely, and that could be what takes the most spiritual preparation. The Camino is a liminal place both physically and spiritually, a time out of your ordinary time. While on the Camino, you are neither here nor there, neither in the place you

came from nor at the place you are going. That is what makes a pilgrimage different from a trip to Santiago. If your goal is to visit the tomb of St. James, you can do that easily and efficiently by train, plane or automobile. You take a pilgrimage because you want to extend the journey, and because you expect something to happen along the Way.

You can cultivate openness by engaging in prayer or meditation that involves emptying yourself of all distractions and practicing awareness of what is around you. A loosely held intention isn't a long-range plan for life, a formula for dealing with grief or a technique for self-discovery. It's a focused readiness to receive whatever the Camino provides without knowing what that will be. ☪

Along the Camino Inglés

Tower of Hercules, an ancient Roman lighthouse, A Coruña, Galicia.
Photographer Sara Steig Gradwohl.



Walk in Love

By Roy Howard
North Potomac, MD

*The best possible
preparation of success
is empower yourself with
trust in self capabilities.*

– Anil Sinha

“Be imitators of God, as beloved children,” Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:1-2). “Walk in love as Christ walked in love.” The Greek word for walk is peripateo. It means to walk comprehensively; to walk around. All we do is contained in this delightful word peripateo. It’s a way of life. Some argue that what Paul is describing doesn’t exist, that this love is impossible in our world. Perhaps those doubters are right; but if they are, then what about friendship, community, marriage or family; yours and mine? If love is impossible then none can exist. But what if it’s true that our capacity to love grows as we walk with one another, bearing one another, speaking truthfully to one another, and opening ourselves to the Spirit who forms a people to love? Isn’t this the more excellent way?

I wear a Fitbit that tracks my daily steps. I rely on it far too much, yet it does tell me how I’m doing with the goals I’ve set. I wish I had an activity-tracking band that could measure my steps walking in love. I would call it a peripateo band!

Peripateo is close to the word peregrino, another word for those walking the Camino de Santiago. During my days as a pastor walking the Camino Francés (2015) and Camino Primitivo (2017), I encountered many peregrinos and peregrinas who wanted no part of so-called institutional religion. They were self-described “nones,” though many had been nominally affiliated. “Nones” are often criticized for being non-committal and self-indulgent, claiming to be spiritual but not religious, refusing communal obligations. I didn’t find that to be true. The “nones” who are my dear Camino friends desire a community of the kind Saint Paul describes.

Walking with them, I experienced care and compassion for one another, a community created by a common purpose. It was not perfect, by any means, but truthfully my life is significantly altered by the experience. I am now retired from the pastorate and engaged in leadership coaching. I will be returning to Spain in May 2020 to walk the Camino del Norte.

I believe we are all beloved children of God, each of us walking a path through this life, desiring a community where love is the central practice. It’s not perfection we seek, nor superficial religion. What we seek is a community that widens our capacity to love God and love one another.

This is to walk in love. ¡Ultreia! ☚

Believing in Myself

By Natasha Ravnik
Oakland, CA

My mental and spiritual preparation for the Camino began the day that I committed to walking it. That was May 31, 2017. I remember it vividly because once I made that decision, I felt more at peace in my soul. Everything started to change.

One cannot underestimate the importance of proper preparation. The Camino “works” you—pushing the limits physically, mentally and spiritually.

Weekly Camino training walks got me prepared physically. I became much stronger and able to walk longer distances without strain. I invited friends and family to join me. Each walk we set an intention. Topics included grace, gratitude,



Natasha Ravnik on a Camino training hike in July 2017 on Mt. Tamalpais, Marin County, CA. Photographer Marie Gunter.



The author's Every Mind Matters offering at Cruz de Ferro, Camino Francés, Oct. 27, 2018. Photograph by the author.

healing and bigger causes like “caring for the environment” and “talking about racism.” The walks instilled a sense of purpose, connection to my fellow pilgrims, personal courage and faith.

My mission for walking the Camino de Santiago was to raise awareness about mental health. I have suffered from anxiety and depression for many years, so I walked for my healing.

My greatest battles were internal. I had to face my own frailties, deal with setbacks and overcome physical and mental challenges. I had to believe in myself.

Daily prayer and meditation prepared me spiritually. I am a Catholic/Buddhist. To spiritually prepare for my walk, I started a daily regime of mindfulness meditation every morning, followed by practicing lovingkindness to myself and

others every day. I walked to my church each Sunday, praying the rosary. It was hard at first to be in church in hiking clothes when everyone else was in their Sunday best, but fellow parishioners soon became used to me like this and encouraged my pilgrimage.

I walked 303 miles from Burgos to Santiago from October to November 2018. I practiced mindfulness and lovingkindness for my body—especially my feet! I prayed for many people, especially those who had contributed to help me do this journey. They had faith in me when my own faltered.

Although I walked much of the Camino solo, I was not alone in my soul. I felt connected to a Divine source, to my fellow pilgrims and to nature.

I was a pilgrim. That was my job: walking—open mind, open heart and courageous soul. ☸

The Miracle that Didn't Happen

By Hany Farag
San Bruno, CA

When I was a kid, my mother would tell my brothers and me the story of the miracle in Fátima, Portugal. Mary, mother of Jesus, appeared to three shepherd children, and later to a crowd in what is called the Miracle of the Sun. My mother implied this miracle of light rewarded the children for their good behavior. I tried my best behavior for days yet nothing happened, so I reverted to my usual self.

Traveling from Lisbon to Porto to start my Camino Portugués, I planned to visit many sites in-between. After a short stop in Santarem, I took the train to Fátima. The small train station, 30 kilometers outside the city, was empty. I checked into a small hotel, dropped my backpack on the bed and hurried to see the Fátima shrine, an image imprinted on my childhood memory.

The Sanctuary of Fátima includes various buildings, shrines and monuments. In the basilica, I joined a Latin Mass in progress. Crowds were arriving and departing in buses. By nightfall, I walked back to my hotel, treasuring the spirit of this visit.

I flashed my cardkey to enter my room. Before I had a chance to turn the light on, the room was already softly illuminated. I closed the door and saw a distinctive circle of light reflected on the ceiling. I couldn't trace the light to any lamp in the room. What should I make of this?



The Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary at the Sanctuary of Fátima in Portugal, September 2016. Photograph by the author.

I'm usually skeptical when I hear about such things. Now this unnatural event is in my hotel room, and I'm the sole witness. Is it a message to me? Should I share it with others? Where to start and with whom? What if the situation got out of hand? Could I still travel to Porto and walk the Camino? These thoughts were stressful, so I pushed aside my backpack to sit on the bed. The circle of light shifted from the ceiling to the wall!

I don't remember how long it took me to figure out the reality of this event: the headlight I kept in the belt pocket of my backpack was inadvertently pushed on. It needed a dark room in Fátima for the light to shine.

This miracle that didn't happen was a real refresher: faith isn't material, and spiritual growth is a personal experience. And I would need to buy fresh headlamp batteries. ☞

The First Peregrino

By Jerald Stroebele
Anchorage, AK

While walking the Camino del Norte late last October from Santa Marina, my day's goal was Luarca, 25 kilometers away. But, the way required a lot of up and down rain-slick ravines. I soaked my boots crossing a swollen stream and had only gone 18 kilometers. At 4 p.m. I stood under darkening skies at the top of another plunge down a muddy ravine and thought about retreating to the N-634 and following the pavement. In my best bad Spanish, I asked a man playing ball with his dog if there was a bridge over the stream at the bottom. He answered in perfect English. Only then I noticed the sign on his fence: "Castellito Ricardo." An albergue!

Richard Milner is a U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran with service-connected PTSD. In 2017 he was drawn to the Camino and soon walked four Caminos. In 2018 he moved to Spain and searched for property for an albergue where he could reach out to and help other veterans heal. It took a year to find his Castellito Ricardo, astride the Camino del Norte. It came with Chano, the balloon chasing dog.

A week earlier Richard had launched his albergue by inviting several Spanish Camino friends to drive over and share a meal and the night. He invited me to be his first "walk up" peregrino. The dinner he fixed was superb. The conversation even better. I am a Vietnam vet. We bonded.

Castellito Ricardo is 220 kilometers from Santiago, at 43.54413/-6.453647. The albergue is not a donativo. Richard merely seeks support, partners, sponsors, vets and others who can be influencers in attracting veterans to participate in a special healing journey by spending three days preparing for the Camino. Further, he hopes to help prepare young people to begin a Camino as their rite of passage.

Richard says, "The purpose of ...Castellito Ricardo is to bring together the Camino de Santiago with the Camino de la Vida (to join the physical Camino to our life's journey). This is a refuge for some, where recovery and healing can take place. For others, it is a place to spend the night, enjoy a meal and good company, to soak their feet with a healing touch, and perhaps to play with my dog, Chano." My feet were already soaked. I did all the rest. ☺



Albergue Castellito Ricardo, Canero, Asturias, Spain, Oct. 24, 2019.
Photograph by the author.



Chano, the balloon chasing dog, with Richard Milner in Canero, Asturias, Spain, Oct. 24, 2019.
Photograph by the author.

My Spiritual Preparation

By Joseph Curro
Arlington, MA

To be spiritually ready for the Camino, one must practice discernment and be open to signs that are found along one's way.

When I was first considering a pilgrimage, I faced the task of convincing my wife to consent to me and our 18-year-old daughter going away into the unknown for almost six weeks. She was skeptical until we pulled into the driveway of our suburban Boston home one day. I opened the driver-side door of my SUV and found a scallop shell at my feet. I was totally freaked out, but when I showed it to my wife she

said, "Well, you have to go now." (I later learned that my younger daughter had been cleaning out the car after a beach trip and had flung the shell into the yard, but that did nothing to diminish the power of the sign for me.)

Shortly after finding my shell, I attended the monthly Contemplative Eucharist service in the chapel of our local Episcopal convent. One of the organizers, Julia, opened the service with the words of St. Augustine, "Solvitur ambulando." It is solved by walking. Another sign!

At this point, I threw myself into mental, spiritual and physical preparation for the Camino. At times, they became one and the same.

Instead of driving to work, I began walking 2.6 miles each way to a shuttle bus, spending the time "binge-listening" to Camino podcasts and audiobooks. Some days, I walked all the way home from work (almost 9 miles!) to extend my listening time and to build up my endurance.

My long walks sometimes took the form of mini-pilgrimages. My daughter and I strapped on our new backpacks and walked 2.5 hours to have them blessed during the Boston chapter of American Pilgrims' potluck dinner in downtown Boston. On Good Friday, it was a 3-hour walk to a monastery in Harvard Square.

I devoured books, films and videos about the Camino. I signed up for spiritual direction, where our conversation was dominated by my upcoming pilgrimage, and I sought out any former pilgrims I could find. I started to practice centering prayer, and I read or listened to the Daily Office. During a guest sermon at my church, I spoke publicly of my pilgrim intentions.

Finally, bolstered by a blessing from my rector and a carefully chosen stone for Cruz de Ferro, I took my first steps as a pilgrim feeling spiritually prepared. ☚



Joseph Curro and his daughter Savannah at the end of their pilgrimage at Virxe da Barca sanctuary in Muxia, July 10, 2019. Photograph by the author.

A Prayerful Preparation

By Bette Vidrine
Lafayette, LA

*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

For the Compostellan Holy Year of 2010, the Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela Julián Barrio Barrio wrote, “Pilgrims of Faith and Witnesses to the Risen Christ,” a pastoral letter to pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. He encouraged pilgrims to prepare physically, mentally and spiritually. I had been physically and mentally training but until I read this book, I had not considered training spiritually.

I started praying on my walks. I prayed the chaplet of St. Dymphna, patron saint of those with mental or emotional afflictions. This small string of beads—and the prayers these beads mark—accompanied me on all my training walks and continued with me all the way to Santiago.

I prayed for the people who lived in the houses I passed along my walks. I prayed for the people who had statues of saints in their yards, for people who had crosses on their houses, for anyone whose home I passed by. One day I stopped in front of a house to pray. The man who lived there came out and asked what I was doing. I told him I was praying for him and his family. He asked where I lived, and when I told him it was just few blocks away, he said okay, and went back in the house. Almost immediately he returned and asked if I knew he had two angels living there. I said no. He then explained he has two mentally challenged sons. He said they had never sinned, so he called them his angels. He told me their names and asked me to keep praying for them. And I have.

My grandson suggested I should start walking to Mass, just as I would on the Camino. Along the way, I would stop and have coffee or visit with friends who lived on my path. After Mass, I would follow the same path back home, or sometimes extend my day’s walk another five miles and have coffee or lunch at a grocery store.

A few weeks before my Camino, I asked my priest to give me a blessing for my journey, as the Archbishop had suggested in his pastoral letter. It was a beautiful blessing.

Before my Camino, I thought God would teach me more about myself. Instead, He taught me more about Himself. He was with me every step, during all the foot pain and exhaustion, all the beauty and awe, meeting me through the Holy Spirit in very special ways. ☪

Editor’s Note: Find “Pilgrims of Faith and Witnesses to the Risen Christ,” the pastoral letter of Msgr. Julian Barrio Barrio at https://www.oficinadelperegrino.com/wp-content/uploads/pastoral_english.pdf

Preparing for the Camino: Strengthening my Body, Emptying my Head

By Dianne Homan
Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada

I put weight in my backpack and reduce weight in my brain. It's a little over a month before my next Camino, and I'm preparing. Now that I'm a senior, getting in shape takes longer than it did when I was younger.

I wrap some big coffee table books in a wool blanket for padding, stuff the unwieldy shape in my pack, call the dogs, and head out for a morning walk—at least an hour long and including some hills. With the added pounds on my back, I find I pay more attention to how I transfer weight through my feet, how I let my knees rebound, how I keep my ears over my shoulders rather than jutting my chin forward to counterbalance the load. I am present in my body.

I'm breathing harder than usual with the extra exertion. I watch the in and out of it. I imagine the atoms I exhale mingling with the atoms of the natural world around me. That opens my senses to the wonderfulness of the mountains and the trees and squirrels and birds, even though I've seen it all thousands of times before. I am present in my surroundings.

Not even halfway through the walk, I realize how good I feel. My jaw isn't tense and my hands are relaxed. Those are places I tend to hold onto worries or frustrations or wishes for something other than what is. I can fool myself into believing I'm being productive when my thoughts are spinning. But I know the best answers always come from a quiet brain and a body that's rhythmically making its way through a landscape.

I get to my turn-around place for this day's walk, and maybe I take a moment to rotate on the spot to appreciate everything. Maybe I close my eyes and feel the sun and breeze on my skin. Maybe I sing a song.

I head home. The stronger my body is and the emptier my brain can be of day-to-day stuff, the more ready I feel to do a pilgrimage. I travel to France or Spain or Portugal prepared for new insights, to be inspired and to open my heart to people and experiences. I am present on the Camino. ☞

Along the Camino Francés

Bridge in Molinaseca over the
Rio Meruelo, Nov. 4, 2018.
Photographer Kathleen Vreeken,
Newburyport, MA.



Preparing Your Heart to be Open and Expectant

By Ron Ottenad
Long Beach, CA

*Spiritual growth
is not like fast food.
It takes time for its
roots to grow, and
that requires us to be
receptive and patient.*

– Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Much thought and energy are given to planning for the Camino and choosing what to take. Additional energy is spent training the body for the demands of long days of walking. These are necessary to prepare for the journey and help build anticipation.

It is equally important to be attentive to the heart, cultivating the capacity to be open and expectant. To do this, I focus on three areas to help posture my soul.

First, I prayerfully explore the expectations I am bringing with me. Though I may not always recognize them, I have expectations about how things will be and what I will experience. These can lead to disappointment when the expectations are not met. By giving space for these to surface and be recognized, I gain the ability to make decisions about what I will do with them. I can choose to hold onto them, hold them loosely or let them go. These choices help prepare my heart to embrace the serendipity of the Camino and the gift of being invited into what I did not anticipate.

Second, in prayer, I explore any fears I might have. As I am packing, I ask *what am I carrying because of fear, rather than need?* This helps me open to any anxieties I might have regarding the journey. Being honest in prayer about these, exploring what gives birth to them and asking for what I need to lay them down takes away their power. This frees my posture to be one of love and openness, rather than fear and guardedness.

Third, I explore my intentions. I prayerfully ask questions about the desires I have for this journey. Identifying these informs the choices I make as I walk. If there is a question I want to prayerfully explore, I will create more space to walk alone. If I desire for my Camino to be an expression of community, I will find ways to connect with others. If I simply want to be open, I take a responsive posture. Noticing my desires empowers me to be more intentional about my heart's posture.

The prayerful exploration of these areas tills the soil of the heart, preparing it to be expectant and open to what may be planted, germinated and grown as one walks the Camino. ☪

Approach Your Pilgrimage with a Beginner's Mind

By Karin Kiser
San Diego, CA

We live in the age of information overload. With a few clicks of a button you can find thousands of articles, websites, forums and blogs on just about any topic on Earth, including the Camino. The number of guidebooks, memoirs, documentaries and websites about the Camino can be downright overwhelming. My advice? Don't look at any of it before you go. That's right. Resist the urge to fill your mind with other people's experiences.

Don't get me wrong. I like a good Camino book as much as the next pilgrim. But the more Camino information you absorb before you go, the more mental filters you'll have between you and your experience.

For illustration, imagine you watch the latest Hollywood movie. You enjoy the movie so much you decide to buy the book from which it was adapted. Whether you realize it or not, because you saw the film first, you will read the book through the filter of the movie, and it will be impossible for you to imagine the characters any way other than how they are portrayed in the film. All of those Camino memoirs and blogs stand to have the same effect on your Camino, for however insightful or informative they may seem, the reality is each represents a single person's perspective. There's no need to take the lens of another person with you on the trail.

Whether you're preparing to walk your first Camino or your fifth, consider approaching your pilgrimage with a beginner's mind, without fixed expectations, free from the filters of others, open to the new, the unexpected, the unplanned.

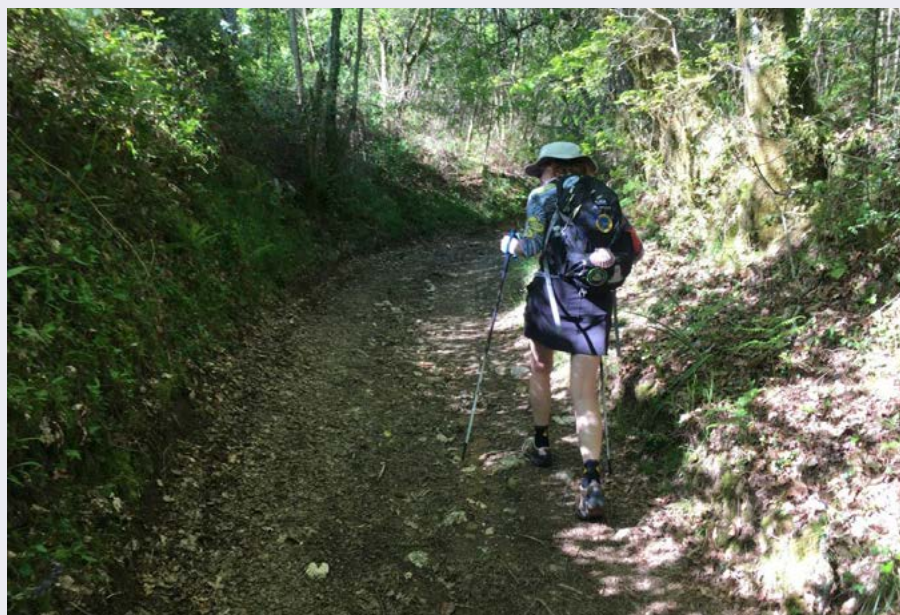
After your Camino, knock yourself out. Enjoy reading various memoirs and blogs. See the documentaries. Engage in online or social media forums. Swap stories with other pilgrims. And, savor the memories from your own, unique pilgrimage.

¡Buen camino! 🍷

Editor's note: Karin Kiser is author of "Your Inner Camino" and "After the Camino," neither of which she says is meant to be read before your Camino.

On the Way to Santiago

Along the Camino Inglés.
Photographer Sara Steig Gradwhol.



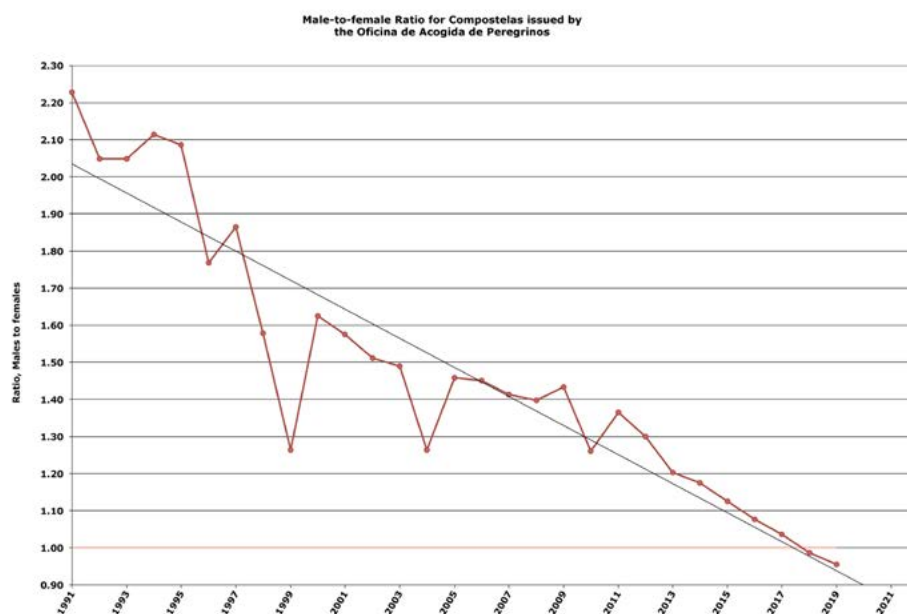
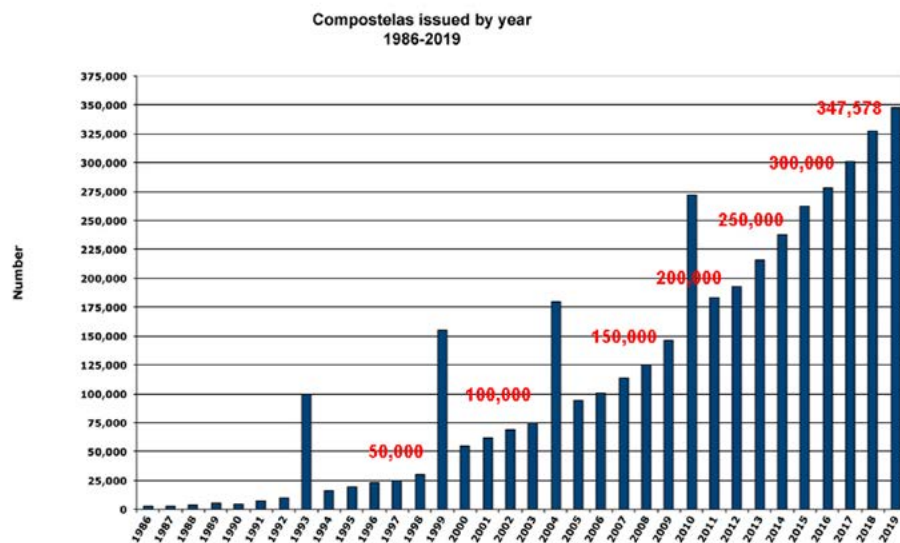
Camino 2019 by the Numbers

By Gene McCullough
Webmaster, American Pilgrims
Chief Number Manipulator

The Camino year 2019 is now history, so let's take a look at the numbers for the year. For the most part, trends of the last few years continued. The big number is 347,578, the number of Compostelas awarded by the Oficina de Acogida de Peregrinos in Santiago, up 6.2% from 2018. The number of Compostelas awarded to U.S. passport holders was 20,652 or 5.9% of the total. This percentage has remained stable since 2016.

Naturally more Compostelas were awarded to Spaniards than to citizens of any other country, followed by Italy, Germany and the United States. This order has been constant since 2015. Starts on the Camino Francés crept down to 55% of arrivals. The Portugués continued as the primary route taking up the slack, accounting for 27% in 2019.

If you've been reluctant to walk the Francés due to continually increasing traffic on that route, here's another take: If you remove those on the Francés who started in Sarria, you're left with those starting everywhere before Sarria. And those numbers have been very steady dating back almost a decade. Interestingly, 2015 to 2016, 2016 to 2017, 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to 2019 all showed year-to-year decreases. Of course, the numbers increase dramatically in Sarria. You could bypass the Sarria crowds by splitting off from the Camino



Francés in Ponferrada, a few days before Sarria, and following the Camino Invierno to Santiago. The male/female ratio has been on a consistent linear decline since at least 1991 when there were more than two men for every woman on the Camino. Parity was reached in 2018 with a ratio of 0.99, and the number dropped even further in 2019 to 0.95.

If this has piqued your interest about what other fascinating data we might have collected, check out the Statistics page on our website: <http://americanpilgrims.org/statistics> 📊

Editor's note:

This material was assembled from the Statistics page on the Oficina website: <http://oficinadelperegrino.com>.

Six Days on the Camino Mozárabe

By Annette Argall
Santiago, Spain



Cheryl Grasmoe walking toward a sea of olive trees on the Camino Mozárabe between Baena and Castro del Río, Nov. 3, 2019. Photograph by the author.

If you are considering a winter Camino but walking the entire Camino Mozárabe seems too daunting, walk only as many stages as match your time, fitness and wallet. Last November, Cheryl Grasmoe and I did just that and walked six stages of the Mozárabe between Jaén and Córdoba. We found that the food was unique, the scenery extraordinary and the people welcoming.

At 1,400 kilometers, the Mozárabe is Spain's longest Camino if you walk it end to end from the Cathedral of Almería all the way to the Cathedral in Santiago. Starting points vary, but most pilgrims start in Almería, Granada or Málaga.

We started in Jaén, Spain's olive oil capital. American Pilgrims has awarded grants to the Jaén Camino Association for way-marking and albergue refurbishment. Over the

years, we had met the group's leadership; now it was time to get acquainted with the city and the route that begins there.

We made our way to the Cathedral to collect our first stamp, then on to the nearby tourist office for our second. The woman there did several practice stamps on scratch paper to be sure we would get a good image of the city's well-preserved Arab baths. She was then extraordinarily careful to get it straight on our credentials. When was the last time anyone was that careful when they stamped your credential? We knew this was going to be a special Camino.

The Camino between Jaén and Córdoba is well marked (the results of the American Pilgrims grants are apparent in Jaén province). Stages average between 20-25 kilometers and rarely include towns between



An American Pilgrims-funded granite marker keeps us on the right path between Martos and Alcaudete on the Camino Mozárabe, Nov. 1, 2019. Photograph by the author.

each day's start and finish. The terrain is rolling and doable for a moderately fit pilgrim. There are few albergues on this stretch, but every town has economical hotels. Backpack transport is nonexistent except for taxis. The landscape has sweeping vistas with olive trees as far as the eye can see—there are more olive trees in the province of Jaén than in all of Italy!

In six days, we met only one other pilgrim on the path, but several former pilgrims approached us in towns. In a short time and lots of empty space, we met our share of characters, kind souls and an unforgettable angel of the Camino named Paco. We also saw a Visigothic burial site, the olive oil museum at Baena and Córdoba's magnificent Mosque-Cathedral.

Will we walk more of the Mozárabe? Absolutely, whenever time permits. ☺

Letter from the Winter Way

By Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway
Spokane, WA

Greetings from milepost 1,497, over a quarter of the way from Spokane to Santiago de Compostela. Somewhat limping along in snowy Spokane at this point, I continue to have bursitis of the left heel. I read somewhere that Camino-walking changes your feet forever. I keep walking.



Self-portrait of the author bundled up for a winter day's walk.



A view of Mount Spokane from Cliff Park overlooking the city of Spokane. Photograph by the author.

Pain visits me daily. It is a challenge and a cross. I found encouragement on the American Pilgrims Facebook group. Joseph Carabillo wrote, “Never quit. Go slow. Go slower. Never quit.” So that’s my plan. All summer, I stored miles for winter, in case of sickness, ice or severe wind-chill. On track for a 2022 arrival in Santiago, my daily average is 4.7 miles. Was I too zealous? Pain is your body communicating with you. Listen. The lesson is that a snowstorm is equally beautiful whether walking with flakes caressing your eyelashes or watching while resting on a warm, comfortable sofa. Rest is important.

My Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life (SEEL) Retreat continues—a series of prayers, meditations and reflections compiled by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Officially in the “Second Week: Accompanying Jesus Christ on Mission,” it is week 22 of our prayer. The days in Spokane grow longer. Our divorce mediation is over; the decree pending, after 29 years. My Little Kitty recently died after a long illness. Nearly 17, she brought me so much joy to her life’s end. My other creatures are quick to console me. Winter always seems to take its toll.

My orange knapsack is getting noticeably dirty. My friends tease me about its ubiquitous presence. Did I mention my washing machine broke?! I am blessed with a backlog of home projects but improving my language skills is more interesting. Voilá, I have Camino angels already! There is Patty who loves to teach Spanish and walk. She gave me a recipe for Tortilla Española, the traditional Spanish omelet made of egg and potato, and it was delicious. Divine Providence arranged for a French tutor, Evelyne. My German friend Regina has me Babbel-ing German. Europe is getting even closer. Today, I was invited to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes, France, this spring.

Are 5,055 miles really possible? I remind myself God is in charge. There’s a whisper, “Do not worry... Be not afraid... Never give up. Never quit. Go slow. Go slower... Take heart!” Maybe we’ll meet out there. Saint James, pray for us. Lots of love from the Way, Weg, Chemin, Camino... Leah ☪

Editor’s note: This is the fourth 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 500 miles of 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, September 2019 and December 2019 issues of “La Concha.”

Daily Life on the Meseta

"A Furnace Full of God"

By Rebekah Scott
Peaceable Publishing
2019
245 pages

Reviewed by Virginia J. Pulver
Greenwood, SC



What pilgrim walking the Camino hasn't nurtured a little fantasy about returning to Spain to open an albergue? Rebekah Scott and her spouse, Patrick, did just that! In 2006. The two intrepid ex-journalists bravely stepped out, leaving life in the USA behind and began to carve out a life in a tiny village along the metaphorical yellow-brick road that is the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela.

During those early years in their little house on the prairie, Scott shared her daily experiences and unexpected challenges in a consistently engaging blog. Over the years she continued to artfully detail the nuances of expatriate life in rural Spain. Life unfurled in the Meseta winds, pilgrims arrived, years passed, and then, at last, came the book!

Scott's book is a series of gentle vignettes about the happenings in this unlikely place. Each chapter moves the reader through the months of the Holy Year of 2010. The book does not disappoint. The prose unfolds beautifully, painting a memorable picture of life in this rustic, isolated home on a less-travelled road along the Camino.

Scott is a storyteller. Her characters and creatures come to life on the printed page. She skillfully describes the tenacity it takes to stay in one place, to carve out a home where terrain, language and culture conspire to make life especially challenging. Scott shows readers that small-town locals are not particularly inclined to include outsiders in their inner circle (at least not at first). She captures the feel of the loneliness of the windswept Meseta, but she also captures the gentle joys and the peace of this quiet place and this special community.

I read Scott's delightful book in the dark of night on Epiphany (Jan. 6, 2020), a night about following a star, a dream and a journey into a new way of living. I finished reading the book at dawn and fell asleep, dreaming of the Camino and the people that populate Scott's excellent memoir. She is a gifted writer. I wept, I laughed, I cheered.

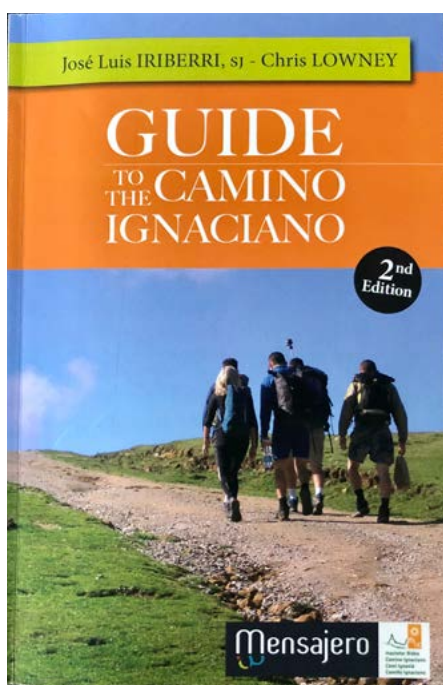
I encourage those who have pilgrim-dreams and Camino-fantasies or who toy with leaving the USA behind to try out expat life to find a copy of this gem and settle in for a wonderful heartfelt experience. ☺

Follow the Way of St. Ignatius

"Guide to the Camino Ignaciano," 2nd Edition

By José Luis Iriberry, SJ and Chris Lowney
Cluny Media
August 2018
220 pages

Reviewed by Ann Loar Brooks
Lewes, DE



Just minutes after Chris Lowney spoke about the Camino Ignaciano at the 2019 American Pilgrims on the Camino Annual Gathering in Asheville, NC, this book, "Guide to the Camino Ignaciano," 2nd Edition, sold out—and with good reason. This pilgrimage offers the wonder and spiritual solitude that is not always available on other Camino routes. Lowney and his co-author, José Luis Iriberry, SJ, have captured the romance and mystery of this pilgrimage in their guidebook.

The book is divided into three parts plus a glossary:

Part 1 is a concise yet thorough explanation of pilgrimage in general and a description of the Way of St. Ignatius in particular, including a history of the great saint.

Part 2 contains practical planning for any pilgrimage; a daily guide for each of the recommended 27 stages of the Ignatian Way with directions, lodging, maps, elevation, taxis/transportation, beautiful color photographs and notable sites and facts; and an Ignatian tip relevant to each stage.

Part 3 offers a daily "guide to the interior way" with meditations, scriptural references and prayers created for each stage.

The glossary is a short list of Spanish architectural and geographical terms.

Because Lowney is a student of medieval history and both authors are Jesuits, the book has a wealth of information about St. Ignatius and the history of the towns along the way. In addition, their experience as pilgrims on this route and the Camino de Santiago informed their stage creation. Stages increase in length and difficulty over time so that pilgrims may build their endurance along the route.

The book, at just under one pound, weighs more than the average pilgrim might wish to carry. I hope that the authors consider offering this guidebook in an ebook format that can be accessed via a smartphone to alleviate the weight issue. That format could also improve the readability of the elevation charts. In this print version, those charts are small and hard to read. In an ebook, they could be zoomed to a larger size and become more legible.

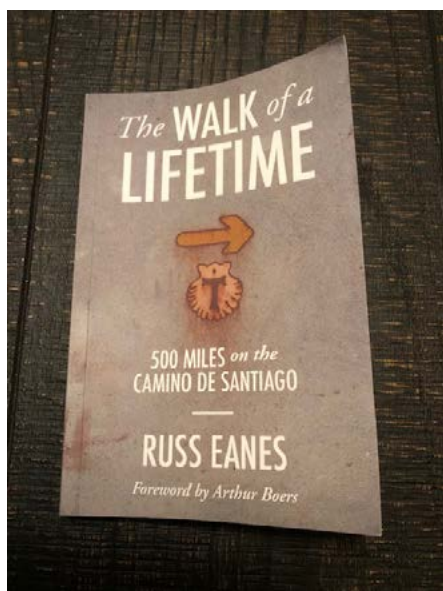
The year 2022 will be the 500th anniversary of St. Ignatius' conversion. Using this comprehensive guidebook, you couldn't go wrong if you plan on celebrating that momentous occasion on the Camino Ignaciano. 🙏

Cultivating Slowness on the Camino

"The Walk of a Lifetime: 500 Miles on the Camino de Santiago"

By Russ Eanes
The Walker Press
2019
209 pages

Reviewed by Roni Jackson-Kerr
Tulsa, OK



There is no shortage these days of Camino memoirs. So many pilgrims seeking to translate their Camino journeys to the page might inspire the cynic in us to wonder whether the market is simply too flooded with such accounts to fully appreciate them any longer.

Russ Eanes has lovingly quieted that cynical voice.

Reading his book was like getting to walk the Camino all over again. As I plan my own return to the Camino this year, reading Eanes' account of the villages and their lessons gave me butterflies as I begin to anticipate my own journey.

His frequent mantra "I am not in a hurry" is such a valuable piece of advice for aspiring pilgrims as well as those of us not on the trail, a welcome reminder for all of us to slow down. His concept of "cultivating slowness" is most valuable, as he reminds us that slowing down is something we have to consciously work at in a society that insists on hurrying us along.

The book offers a great mix of both practical advice and philosophical examination of the pilgrimage. I found in Eanes not just a fellow pilgrim but a kindred spirit, one whose reflection on and sometimes critical examination of the broad range of cultural and historical elements of the Camino de Santiago were most relatable and insightful.

And while I'm not sure he can justifiably credit himself with coining the phrase "Camino Magic," as it long predates this book and his Camino, he does such a lovely job of showing that magic to us. It's the kindness of others, the simple gestures, that certain something that makes the Camino a truly magical experience.

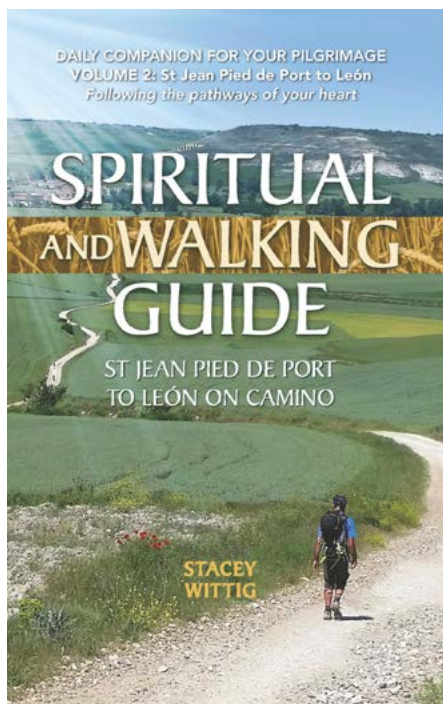
Some Camino memoirs make you wish that you had had the opportunity to walk alongside the author. Eanes' is one of those. And yet he does invite us to walk alongside him on his journey, sharing with us the scenery as well as his innermost thoughts and struggles. Walking with him was an absolute delight.

I found myself echoing his words as I closed the book, "It's a great day to be alive." ☘

Devotional for Spiritual Preparation

By Stacey Wittig
Flagstaff, AZ

Editor's note: This is an excerpt from her upcoming book, "Spiritual and Walking Guide: St Jean to León."



Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Psalm 119: 105 (KJV)

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. Psalm 16: 11 (NIV)

At this point, you may be thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" Perhaps your heart pounded with joyful anticipation as you purchased your airline tickets a while back. However, now, with only days left before you board that plane, you may be worried about the unknown. Did I pack the right gear? Will I be able to physically complete the journey that stretches before me? How will I find my way from the airport to [fill in the blank]?

Sometimes the first, small, humble step is the most difficult, whether the footstep propels us into an actual physical journey or the next phase in the cycle of life. That could be why we can relate to the Chinese proverb, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." By concentrating on the first modest step, we can let go of fears of the great unknown.

Likewise, in the first scripture above, God lights a small lamp that casts just enough glow to illuminate only the few next steps. By reading his word, we hold the lantern in our hands and can follow the path that he unfolds for us.

What is more, God doesn't leave us after we take that first step onto the illuminated stepping stone. The second scripture promises that, indeed, God will reveal the path of life. When we trust and keep to God's route step by step, we'll experience his presence, filled with a holy joy even during difficulties. Yet, it's often difficult for us self-reliant citizens of the modern world to trust in his guidance. Because the whole journey from start to finish is not visible, it's only by faith that we can let go of control and take the next step.

For Reflection:

- Consider how you've been self-critical as you anticipate your upcoming journey.
- Up to now, what small steps have you already taken to launch this spiritual adventure?
- List three things about which you would like to have more clarity once your pilgrimage is complete. ☞

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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 with your fellow members inspire us.

To prepare members for the upcoming 2021 Holy Year, the **JUNE 2020 ISSUE** will focus on **Your spiritual/mental work during the Camino**. (*Deadline for submissions is May 21, 2020.*)

Please use our new submission form <https://form.jotformeu.com/americanpilgrims/la-concha-article-submissions> and 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: americanpilgrims.org.

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!

Gratefully,

March 2020 Team “La Concha”

Trina Christensen, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino,
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