

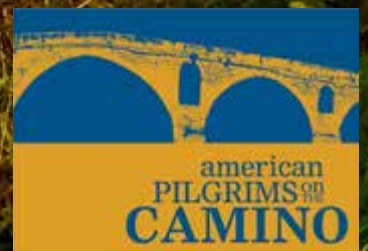
LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

Carry the Spirit

Pilgrims' Post-Camino experience issue

New Board Members
The latest from Spain
Hospitaleros
Grants



SEPTEMBER 2020

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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.

Pilgrim Looking Backward
Photo Credit Cover and Pg. 2: Thom Ryng
Opposite Page:
Orange County chapter participants social distancing in single file, August 1, 2020.
Photo by Teresa Masucci.



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LA CONCHA

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Greetings!

I hope this finds you in good health and good spirits. The summer of 2020 is almost history. And what a summer! Many of us turned our neighborhoods into pilgrimage paths, walking through places new to us, waving to strangers, wondering whether we might get a coffee if we could find a café still open. Many closed, some briefly and some for good. Our landscapes changed, and perhaps we did, too.

In this issue of La Concha, we bring you stories about what your fellow pilgrims learned from their pilgrimages, the words and practices they now live by. You'll read how our chapters—now about 60 across the country—have made the most of this time of social distancing and mask wearing. Several started experimenting with Zoom meetings in April and now supplement those with social distanced hikes and coffees. You'll read about Jacksonville's outdoor shell ceremony and a St. James's Day event in Albuquerque that could be copied almost anywhere anytime. Up in Anchorage, chapter participants got a list of activities to savor a day in Spain without leaving Alaska. We applaud our chapter coordinators for not only their creativity but also their willingness to live our value of community despite the pandemic.

Service is another of our values. You'll read stories about what's happening on the ground in Spain in albergues and at the Pilgrim's Office. We look at hospitaleros—the status of our hospitalero training program, what a hospitalero who served in one village learned from local people, and how one member has become a hospitalera in her own city. Opportunities for service abound. We need only look.

Your membership dues and other contributions have made possible competitive grants to Camino albergues and associations. You're helping to repair a structure's wall, add signage to a route and refurbish albergues on pilgrimage routes that are becoming more popular. Discover the details in our grants story. The recipients are especially grateful for our assistance now.

As you know, gratitude is another of our values. I'm grateful to have served as La Concha's editor for the past several years. I've loved reading your submissions and working with terrific, talented volunteer editors. My board term ends in December. Our new board member, Megan Muthupandiyam, will take over for the December issue. That deadline? November 21, 2020. The theme? Your ways of showing gratitude/giving back to the Camino. It's a fitting focus as we contemplate the coming Holy Year. We'd be grateful if you'd follow the submission guidelines.

Wishing you a ¡buen camino! every day,

Barbara

Barbara Zang, Editor in Chief

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

American Pilgrims on the Camino recently asked you to consider joining the board of directors, and your response was overwhelming. For all who volunteered or expressed interest in other volunteer opportunities with American Pilgrims, please accept my heartfelt thanks. Of the many highly qualified and talented applicants, we selected Jackie Saxon, Allison Venuto and Megan Muthupandiyan for the open positions on the board. Please join me in welcoming them and read more about them elsewhere in this issue. They have talents that will serve American Pilgrims well and guide the organization into the future.

The board conducted its first virtual (and likely not last) quarterly meeting in July due to pandemic travel restrictions. We missed the less formal interactions and after-hours work that come with in-person meetings, but we were able to make progress in developing strategies to support our mission as we weather the pandemic, which has forced us to review what we do and make appropriate adjustments. As a result, I expect you'll see us reaching out in a variety of ways to share the latest information about the Camino, provide opportunities to support the Camino infrastructure and bring people together both virtually and safely in-person.



American Pilgrims chapters, too, are demonstrating great resilience. Whether through walking “virtual Caminos,” sponsoring Camino trivia nights on Zoom, hosting on-line interviews, or organizing socially distanced hikes, our chapters are finding new ways to build and maintain the community of pilgrims across the nation. During our July meeting, the board also met virtually with the team of chapter coaches that emerged from our March workshop in Lake Tahoe. This team of experienced and talented coordinators is building relationships among chapters, mentoring chapter coordinators, and sharing ideas and lessons learned. Additionally, a group of Midwest chapters is making plans for a St. James Day Celebration in July 2021 (conditions permitting, of course). We'll keep you informed as those plans develop.

As we thought about how to best sustain the mission of American Pilgrims in these complex and uncertain times, one of our members pointed out something that made me smile. She said that the Camino was a “wonderful distraction” from the chaos and uncertainty that we often find ourselves in today. I think she is spot-on. In the midst of everything going on, it's good to step back once in a while and focus on what's good in the world around us. Neighbors helping neighbors, essential workers diligently serving the community, people finding new ways to stay connected...recognizing the value of community. In that spirit, thanks to all of you in our pilgrim community for your continued support. Hang in there and stay safe!

iBuen Camino!

Dave

David Donselar

MEMBERSHIP

Membership Call to Action

*By Tom Labuziowski
South Bend, IN
For the membership team*

Fellow members of American Pilgrims on the Camino, your membership earns you special status, including direct email delivery and immediate online access to La Concha, including the issue you are currently reading and enjoying. Your membership has enabled American Pilgrims to award over \$55,000 in grants in 2020 to the most deserving non-profit facilities and projects along our favorite Camino routes.

We admire and appreciate your continued membership during these challenging days. You should know your generosity helps compensate for the significant decline in credential requests and associated donations as the Camino infrastructure and pilgrim needs continue to evolve due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

How else can you help? Will you please ask just one fellow pilgrim friend who may not be a current member to consider joining American Pilgrims to help carry our mission forward? You might also consider upgrading your membership to the next level. Every little bit helps. If you have questions, email membership@americanpilgrims.org. Thank you. ☺

THERE ARE
2 ways of spreading
LIGHT
be the candle or
THE MIRROR
that reflects it

The Difference You Make: Our Grants Fix Wall, Add Signage, Remodel Albergues

By Joseph McClain
San Miguel De Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico
For the grants team

The Camino continues! Many of us feared for the future of albergues along the many paths to Santiago when COVID-19 hit the world. We polled organizations that had already applied for funding through our American Pilgrims Grant Program to find out whether they would be able to continue their plans given the pandemic crisis. Overwhelmingly, their answer was a resounding, “Yes!”

The American Pilgrims Grants Program funds projects not only on the well-known Camino routes but also on other lesser known ways to Santiago: the Camino Levante, the Camino Mozárabe, the Vía de Plata, the Camino de la Lana and the Camino Sureste, just to mention a few. These Caminos are becoming increasingly important as pilgrim numbers increase on the Francés.

This year the Asociación de Amigos de los Caminos de Santiago del Sureste from the town of Caudete received funds to repair a large façade wall of the albergue. The wall was cracked. Water was beginning to seep into the nineteenth century structure, threatening to undermine the integrity of the entire building. Caudete is located at a strategic crossroad of the Camino de la Lana and the Camino Sureste and receives increasing pilgrim numbers each year.

Valderrey, León, is on the Vía de la Plata just before the intersection with the Francés around Astorga. The municipality has made a former train station available as an albergue. The Asociación Amigos Leopoldo Panero will receive funds from American Pilgrims to help furnish the building. The former train station is the only albergue between La Bañeza and Astorga.

New signage made possible by a grant from American Pilgrims will greet peregrinos along the Camino Levante-Sur. The signage will begin at the Cathedral Plaza of Almería with a large marquee, continuing eastward to Cabo de Gata with ceramic placards for buildings, signs from lamp posts and yellow arrows on wooden stanchions. This is a project initiated by the Asociación de Amigos del Camino en Almería.

In the small town of Sollano on the Camino de Valencia, the Asociación Amigos Camino Santiago Comunitat Valenciana with a grant from American Pilgrims will be able to remodel and furnish a new albergue.

Despite the fact that most of us cannot be on the Camino this year, it is truly good to know that with our membership fees and donations we continue making a difference through significant grants awarded by American Pilgrims. We thank you for your support and good will as we continue to help improve the infrastructure of the Camino. ☪



Façade of albergue of Asociación de Amigos de los Caminos de Santiago del Sureste from the town of Caudete. Spring 2020.
Photo credit: Joaquin Requena Requena

MEET THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

We elected Allison, Jackie and Megan to the board in July 2020, and they have begun their three-year terms. We are grateful for their willingness to share their talents to serve fellow pilgrims. Here's your brief introduction:

I dreamed of walking the Camino for many years after learning about it while reading a travel memoir. As an educator, I spent many breaks travelling and dreaming of travelling. Finally, my husband, John, and I started dreaming of the Camino. We walked the Camino del Norte and Primitivo for six weeks in 2018. The Camino provided renewal, freedom, and friendship. Upon returning home, we got more involved with the Dallas-Fort Worth Chapter of American Pilgrims and continue to grow our love of Spanish culture.

I became a lifetime member of American Pilgrims on the Camino and board member because I believe in supporting the Spirit of the Camino. Working with pilgrims and helping them learn more about the Camino keeps the Camino alive in my daily life. Thankful for the lessons learned and friendships made through the Camino, I look forward to continuing to serve other pilgrims. My husband and I plan to walk the Camino Inglés and Japan's Kumano Kodo next year. The dreaming continues! ☪



ALLISON VENUTO
Dallas, TX



JACKIE SAXON
Urbandale, IA

I was introduced to the Camino in June 2013 when I accompanied a group of seminary students and their professor to France to walk two weeks of the Le Puy route. When I returned home, I nicknamed the experience as my “Necessary Mistake.” It was a lot harder than I had anticipated which is why I thought it might have been a mistake, but it was also necessary because the Camino has a way of “working your nerves” when you least expect it. Before I knew it, I was on the internet in search of more information about the Camino and the concept of pilgrimage – which brought me to the American Pilgrims on the Camino website. Once I started looking around and gathering more information I was hooked.

Since 2013, I have walked a two-week section of the Camino del Norte in the Fall of 2015, and then I decided to go “all in” and walked the Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago in the Spring of 2017. I had such a profound and transformative experience that in the Spring of 2018, I walked the Camino Francés again, and this time I went all the way to Muxia and Finisterre. In the summer of 2019, I walked a portion of the Coastal Route of the Camino Portugués from Baiona to Santiago and God willing, I will walk the Camino Inglés sometime in 2022.

Somewhere along the way, I became a lifetime member of American Pilgrims and have continued to enjoy learning more about the organization and ways to give back and support pilgrims. You are my “peeps” and I believe in the Spirit of the Camino and the organization’s mission and vision. ☪

Having crossed the threshold of Santiago’s Cathedral three times as a pilgrim, over the past decade I have devoted much of my intellectual life as a poet, researcher, and digital storyteller to exploring the lessons the Way has taught me . . . and continues to teach me.

When American Pilgrims on the Camino put out a call for members to consider joining the board earlier this year, I heeded the call. I felt that my skills as a story weaver and communications specialist would well serve pilgrims who have known the deep call of the Way, or are in some way, seeking it. Thrilled to serve for the next three years, I very much look forward to the opportunities board leadership will afford me to craft conversation, contemplation, and otherwise help fellow pilgrims prepare for, endure, and process their own journeys along the Way. ☪



MEGAN MUTHUPANDIYAN
Elm Grove, WI

What to Know as the Camino Reopens

By Carmen Marriott
Tucson, AZ
for the external relations team



No more communal meals or use of kitchens.

We are fortunate to belong to the global pilgrim family with relationships with Spanish entities including the International Fraternity of the Camino de Santiago (FICS) and the Association of Municipalities of the

Way (AMCS). These organizations are committed to ensuring the traditions of the Camino endure while prioritizing the safety of pilgrims and providers during the pandemic. The good news is there have been no reports of COVID-19-related problems at albergues on the Camino.

Of course, there is a new “normal” on the Camino. With the reopening of the Camino on July 1, 2020, we’ve received first hand news from Juan Carlos Pérez Cabezas, president of FICS, who shared the following:

- Pilgrim traffic is approximately 25% of what would be expected in a normal year on the Camino Francés.
- Most pilgrims are Italian, French and Spanish.
- Lodging is available along the entire Camino Francés.
- Albergues are limited to overnight lodging only; communal dinners and group activities are no longer allowed.

The “Safe Shelters” program, launched with the collaboration of organizations such as AMCS and FICS, has developed tools to assist albergues and pilgrims with the following:

- A [Contingency Plan and Action Protocol](#) for albergues is available in Spanish, English and French. It has been downloaded more than 10,000 times to date.



A pilgrim packs his backpack in a large plastic bag following the safety protocols. All Photos on this page by Juan Carlos Pérez.

- A poster with simple safety tips for the Camino, featuring internationally understood symbols and drawings.
- Videos (go to [youtube.com/watch?v=AonDq9D4Qg0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AonDq9D4Qg0&feature=youtu.be) to watch it) with recommendations for pilgrims and hospitaleros, disseminated through social networks and shown on the information monitors in St. Jean Pied de Port.
- An interactive map for the Camino Francés updates the available and open shelters every two weeks (go to amcsantiago.com/map to see it).

The reopening of the Camino’s infrastructure requires balancing the needs of private businesses, the traditional “donativo” albergues and municipal hostels. Several donativo

albergues have closed due to either a lack of pilgrims or the cost of maintaining a safe environment. While there are concerns about an increased accommodation cost of 20-40%, there

is limited data available. It is worrisome for future pilgrims facing their own financial challenges. Our friends in Spain continue to promote and protect the tradition of the “donativo albergue” and Camino hospitality, meaning anyone, regardless of their financial situation, should be able to walk the Camino de Santiago.



Social distancing in the dormitory.

In the next phase, the AMCS has launched the “Breathe Deep” (Respira Hondo) campaign to promote the Camino as a “healing” space - a safe and restorative experience following months of shelter in place. 🇪🇸

Santiago Update: As Seen on Rua Carretas

By Annette Argall
Santiago de Compostela

Pilgrims are arriving daily in Santiago by the hundreds, rather than the usual thousands, at this time of year, but regardless of numbers, most head straight to the Pilgrim’s Office on Rua Carretas to obtain their Compostelas. As with so many changes brought about by COVID-19, the Pilgrim’s Office has made some adjustments to accommodate them.

Pilgrims awaiting their Compostelas now wait in line outside on Rua Carretas instead of inside or near the courtyard. Being outside is safer in the time of COVID-19, and there is more opportunity for social distancing. Almost all pilgrims wear masks in public places to comply with the Spanish requirement.

The guard on duty at the front door assigns each pilgrim a number. Pilgrims waiting to be called have the opportunity to speed up the process if they have a QR code reader on their phones. They can input data that is usually captured in person at the counter, such as nationality, starting point, profession and reason for doing the Camino. If they don’t have a QR reader, they need to provide the information at the counter as always.

Editor’s note: According to the August 26, 2020, edition of el Correo Gallego, the Pilgrim’s Office issued almost 11,000 Compostelas in the first 15 days of August. In July, fewer than 10,000 pilgrims received Compostelas. 🇪🇸

A guard hands out numbers and explains the Pilgrim’s Office system to arriving pilgrims. August 2020. Photo Credit for all images on this page: Annette Argall.



They’re back! Pilgrims queue outside the Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago to await their Compostelas.



Using a QR code for a faster Compostela. Santiago de Compostela, in front of the Pilgrim’s Office, August 2020.

Summer 2020: the Camino in the Time of COVID-19

By Cheryl Grasmoen
Minneapolis, MN

In any other year, many of us would have just returned from the Camino or be making our final preparations to go. COVID-19 derailed those plans. Nevertheless, our thoughts remain on the Camino. Some of our good friends have checked in with us and share these stories.

Peaceable Kingdom in Moratinos has many fewer pilgrims this year. Rebekah Scott reports keen competition for those few who spend the night in town—an average of five to 10 pilgrims each night. They tend to be Spanish, Italian, French and German as we would expect. An American student or ex-pat legally residing in Spain occasionally passes through.

Peaceable Kingdom seems to be welcoming mostly young pilgrims without means. Often sleeping outdoors and eating sparingly, Jean from France ironically is finding the Camino to be too noisy. Lee from Belgium stays where she can help. Parisian Jeronimo works for food and a bed along the Way and contributed his tech skills to Peaceable Kingdom. All three pilgrims have found the current Camino to be shockingly expensive.

At a recent meeting of the *Fraternidad Internacional del Camino de Santiago* that Rebekah attended, the discussion focused on the impact on pilgrim finances due to closure of most municipal and parochial albergues for 2020. The result has been some disappointing price gouging, especially in “bottleneck” places where only one or two albergues are open at the end of a long etapa. A bed that went in March for €5 or 6 now costs €12 to 20. Not only is this happening on the Camino Francés, but prices are particularly high on the Camino Primitivo.

Further down the trail is Villares de Órbigo. No sooner had Lee Tolman opened her new albergue than Spain shut down. Though her albergue is now open, Lee reports that it’s extremely quiet, possibly because cases are rising, and countries are imposing

a 14-day quarantine for those returning from Spain. As expected, her pilgrims are mostly Europeans, with French and Italians topping the list. Masks are required, packs are sprayed, shoes are left outside and sanitizer is provided. Communal meals with distancing are an option. Pilgrims have confirmed the sharp rise in the cost of lodging. They’ve also reported that health safety precautions vary widely. Some albergues are not following distancing guidelines. Some albergues use both top and bottom bunks. Others are very cautious. Lee shares the village wisdom that the Camino will revive “poco a poco.”

Kathy Kennerly, who resides in Ponferrada and volunteers at the Albergue de Peregrinos San Nicolás de Flüe, reports that the Albergue’s daily maximum is 50% occupancy – 75 beds. On the day of re-opening on July 1, only four pilgrims arrived. Now in August, more than 40 stay in the albergue each night. For the safety of the pilgrims, tape is placed to mark distancing, and the kitchen is closed. Kathy says, “I see very few pilgrims in town. Not in the grocery stores, pharmacies or sidewalk cafés. I sure miss our pilgrims!”

While we wish we could be on the Camino, we have the comfort of knowing that it is in good hands, thanks to the dedication of these women and many more like them. ☪



Hot Meals and Coffee to Go: On Becoming a Hospitalera in My Own Backyard

By Beth Jusino
Seattle, WA

It took less than a month of COVID-19 lockdown before the walls of my small (and feeling smaller) apartment started closing in. Daily walks helped, but I felt unmoored and helpless in the face of so much need. Then, in April, I heard my neighborhood Hot Meals program needed volunteers.

According to their website, Hot Meals “nourishes our community with free hot meals in a welcoming setting.” Seattle, with a growing population experiencing homelessness or living right on the edge of it, has a lot of people who rely on programs like this. And even in a pandemic, they need to eat.

So now every Monday I don a mask and gloves, stand behind a table, and welcome my neighbors. I offer home cooked meals, snacks, fruits and vegetables... and conversation. As I pour coffee, I’ve started to ask guests about their days, and I hear stories I’ll never forget. There’s nothing like listening to someone’s real problems to put my own restlessness into perspective.

As the pandemic restrictions lifted a little in Washington, our team of volunteers set up picnic tables outside so that guests could relax and enjoy their meal in relative comfort. And that’s when I noticed something: people don’t just eat and run. They linger.



An albergue in disguise? The senior center where people come for coffee and food, share stories and build community. Photo by the author.

They listen. The regulars know and support each other in this space where they are welcomed, knowing no one will be hurried along or overlooked.

So why am I telling you this in a magazine dedicated to the Camino de Santiago? Because it’s the Camino that taught me how important a relaxed, shared meal can be.

Ask any pilgrim about the Way, and we’ll eventually tell you about the communal dinner tables where tired, dusty travelers gather to share bread and stories. Or the plastic patio tables where we drop our loads mid-day and share a few minutes of peace and cafés con leche. Meeting new friends,

tracking our “Camino families,” and sometimes just offering a shared “wow, this is hard” look... those are the things that keep us going on the days when it all seems to be falling apart.

Now here I am, far from the Camino and grieving the loss of a long walking trip, only to discover, belatedly, that I’m actually serving as a hospitalera in my own backyard. These pilgrims’ journeys are harder, in so many ways, and the coffee isn’t nearly as good. But the purpose of our weekly communal meal is the same—a little bit of peace, sustenance, and encouragement for the road ahead. ☪

Traditional Farming Tools on the Camino

By Terry Williams
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

While serving as hospitaleros at Albergue Fuenterroble de Salvatierra for two weeks in August 2016, my wife, Carol, and I had the opportunity to make friends with many of the villagers there. One, Doña Teresa, whom we frequently encountered at morning Mass, was sitting in the courtyard of her home one day as we were on our way to make food purchases. We admired a beautiful collection of traditional Spanish farming implements that she and her husband had used over the years and later restored for display in their entryway, and she invited us in.

Her husband, who had been napping in a bedroom off the courtyard, was awakened by our conversation, and he came out to give us a tour of the collection.



Traditional farming Implements used on the Vía de Plata, Fuenterroble de Salvatierra, Summer 2016.
Photo credit: Terrence L. Williams.

As we walked amongst the pitchforks, rakes, shovels, ploughshares, wheels and more, we marveled that this couple had once worked the land with these rudimentary tools, some of which are still in use today on farms along this stretch of the Vía de Plata. While most Americans would be amazed to find such rustic implements still being used for farming today, there is a practical explanation. According to a recent Spanish agricultural census, the number of small farms in Spain is decreasing while the number of large ones (100 or more hectares) is increasing. Despite that trend, more than fifty percent of Spanish farms are five hectares or smaller, making them ideal for the use of these traditional farming implements.

Two weeks earlier in Salamanca, we had visited the Convento de Santa Clara, which houses the Museo Etnográfico. The museum was the brainchild of Father Serafín Marcos de Paúl, a Spanish cleric from Salamanca, who donated an extensive collection of rural Spanish farming memorabilia to the convent where it is currently displayed. The Sisters at Convento de Santa Clara are cloistered, so be sure to check on the museum's hours before visiting. The farming implements in Father Marcos's collection bear a striking resemblance to the ones Doña Teresa and her husband have on display in their home in Fuenterroble.

As you walk through rural Spain, be on the lookout for these hand-crafted treasures. And if you happen to spot a Spanish farmer wielding an ancient scythe or winnowing fork, marvel at the ingenuity that gave rise to these tools and take a moment to appreciate their rugged durability. ☺

Hospitalero Training in the Time of COVID-19

By Daniel De Kay
Sebastopol, CA

Were you dog tired, limping on blisters, parched with thirst, faint from hunger when you arrived? Who was that stranger who welcomed you with a smile and a cool glass of water and said, "Let me help you with your pack. Of course we have a bed for you"?

Your Camino experience may have been profoundly impacted by a hospitalero in an albergue somewhere along your way to Santiago. Maybe you've heard about volunteering as an hospitalero. Maybe you're looking for more Camino juice in your life. Well, serving as a volunteer hospitalero might be for you!

American Pilgrims on the Camino has partnered for 17 years with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends on the Camino to provide hospitalero training and placement in donativo albergues on various routes to Santiago. Typically these trainings are offered several times a year across the US. COVID-19 upended much in our lives, and that includes hospitalero training.

Recently I received this message from the Spanish Federation:

"Due to the current health situation, hospitalero training courses, as required by the Spanish Federation, have been suspended in Spain, the USA, Germany, Argentina, Canada, France, Brazil, Italy, the Netherlands, Great Britain and South Africa for the rest of the year. Pilgrims interested in becoming volunteer hospitaleros will have new information regarding courses to be offered in 2021 once the situation on the Camino is clearer."

For those of you who have been trained as hospitaleros, this year there is little need for volunteers. Only two donativo albergues are open at this time, with the possibility of two more opening in September or October. Once things on the Camino stabilize, we will know more about the need for volunteer hospitaleros. Please watch the American Pilgrims on the Camino website for information on courses offered in 2021 and opportunities to serve fellow pilgrims in a meaningful and fulfilling way.

For anyone curious about how albergues are adapting to the COVID-19 threat, here is a link to a video on albergue safety: <https://youtu.be/AonDq9D4Qg0>. ☺



Albuquerque

Planning and Storytelling: Bookending the Camino Experience

By Linnea Hendrickson
Albuquerque, NM

It was not until July 19 that I invited Albuquerque pilgrims to celebrate St. James's Day 2020 (July 25) with a pilgrimage in place. Restrictions had recently been tightened in New Mexico; restaurants were ordered to close again, and masks were required even when exercising.

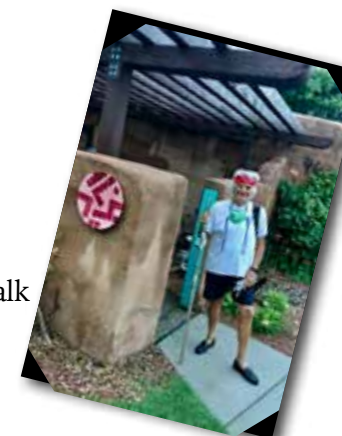
Nevertheless, 10 people responded. We met on the evening of July 24 via Zoom (my first time hosting!). We introduced ourselves and shared our plans and meditation or prayer intentions for the following day. Three people read lovely, suitable poems (all new to me). Instead of one of the traditional pilgrim blessings I'd planned to give, I closed with [a meditation on blessings by Pierre Pradervand](#) that Joyce Rupp had shared in a recent column.

Our walks (and one bike ride) varied greatly. Ned O'Malia walked the length of the North Valley through the Rio Grande bosque carrying his pilgrim staff and backpack, leaving home at 6 a.m. to beat the heat. Lola and Roberto Garcia walked 11.2 miles in the foothills (and reported that they walk three or four times a week and have logged 415.2 miles since they started staying home in March). Suzanne Blazier and Teresa Gonzales also walked in the foothills.

Dante Jericho and Lynn Kelly walked separately in Santa Fe, Dante visiting four historic churches and Lynn picking up trash. Inspired by [Karin Kiser's program](#) for picking up trash along the Camino, Lynn plans to implement a similar program in New Mexico. Others walked around the University of New Mexico golf course. Some of us walked our usual walking paths, and one pilgrim rode her bicycle to historic Old Town. Many of us prayed for our troubled world, an end to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for our families.

Facing page: Sarria. Photo credit: Thom Rying

One person said her walk was her prayer. Many had photos to share.



Ned O'Malia sets out with his original pilgrim staff (once a tomato stake) and pilgrim pack. Photo by Donna Anderson.

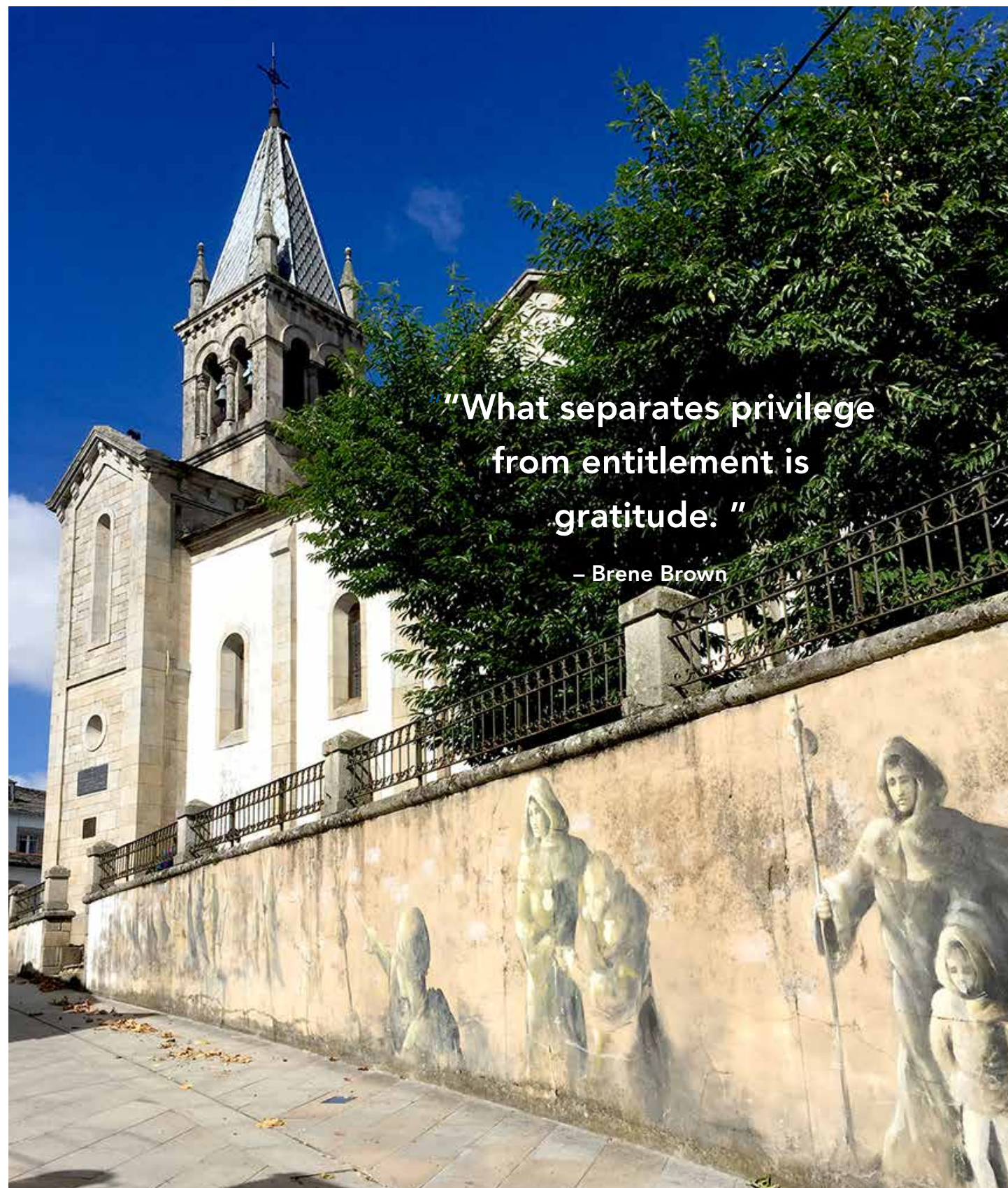
We were all somewhat tired, and some of us had had a bit too much sun by the time we shared our pilgrimages via Zoom on Saturday evening. (In true pilgrim fashion, one pilgrim had fallen asleep and missed the meeting.)

We all agreed it was great to see each other, even virtually, and that we'd like to do this again. I closed this Zoom session with the final poem, "The Path Home" from Albuquerque poet Sarah Kotchian's book "Camino."

We learned it is possible to walk safely together as pilgrims, even when we are apart. ☪



Dante Jericho visited four historic churches in Santa Fe. Photos by Dante Jericho.



"What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude."

– Brene Brown

chapter news

Virtual Meetings Maintain Pilgrim Community Connections

By Logan Vincent Pratt
Charlotte, NC

The Charlotte Chapter has conducted several virtual open topic coffee discussions via Zoom since April and one chapter meeting with a focused discussion topic and more structured participation than for the open discussions. Our results have so far been very positive.

We find that our Camino community sorely misses the regular opportunity to gather socially and share Camino and other experiences. The virtual gatherings have proven popular and a valuable tool for keeping our community connected and engaged with each other. One unexpected and delightful result of substituting virtual gatherings for our regular in person events is that we are seeing folks we have not seen in some time. These pilgrims are now separated from us by either physical distance or commitments to school or work. The virtual connection makes it possible for them to participate. It has been a real joy to reconnect with Camino friends now in Florida, California, Chicago and other parts of North Carolina.

We do not want to lose this newfound sense of connection with our extended Camino family once social restrictions are relaxed. We gain a lot from their experiences and feedback. We expect to incorporate virtual meetings into our regular schedule of events or even possibly have hybrid events allowing remote pilgrims to participate in weekly gatherings in our local coffee shop.

We have read much about security concerns related to virtual meeting tools, and we continue to improve our meeting protocols to reduce risk. So far, our conclusion is that benefits outweigh the risks. We currently use Zoom but remain interested in alternatives that might be more secure.

As much as we have learned from the new experience of virtual meetings, we all eagerly anticipate a time when we can gather again in person locally and later return to the Camino and meet fellow pilgrims from the international community. ☞



Peregrino Poster in Santiago. Photo by Francine Mastini.

Chapter Coaches Here to Help

By David Cook
Indianapolis, IN

Dear fellow chapter coordinators:

- Is your chapter suffering from Zoom fatigue?
- Does your chapter need help with Mailchimp?
- Do you have trouble navigating Google Docs?
- Do you have a burning desire to add another co-coordinator?
- Does your chapter need new ideas on keeping current with COVID-19?
- Have you always wanted to submit a poem/picture/story to La Concha?
- Do you need ideas for venues to practice safe distancing?

Your chapter coaches are here for you. We are ready and willing to tackle anything you can throw at us. Don't be shy about asking.

Just email us with any question or concern you might have at chaptercoaches@americanpilgrims.org.

Don't forget to wash your hands and wear your mask! ☞

Editor's note: The Chapter Coaches volunteered at the March 2020 coordinator workshop in Lake Tahoe. They are experienced, talented and skilled. And they're already helping their fellow chapter coordinators. Just send them an email request.





Jacksonville Shell Ceremony in Time of COVID-19

By Miriam S. Gallet and Susan Peacock
Jacksonville Chapter Co-coordinators

Predicting what's next for the Camino de Santiago and how the pilgrimage will ultimately change as a result of COVID-19 is anyone's guess. This year the Jacksonville Chapter was seriously considering the postponement of its annual shell ceremony, which honors departing pilgrims, in light of the health crisis. It seemed doubtful that we would be able to celebrate those members whose pilgrimages were on hold or canceled due to the global pandemic. But we were persistent, and with a little creativity, celebrated seven members of the Jacksonville Chapter in a shell ceremony held July 25, the Feast of Saint James.

The small but spirited ritual was a reminder that we are symbolic beings. Held outdoors on the lawn of Saint Augustine Diocese's Marywood Retreat Center, the ceremony was a feast of spirituality and symbolism. The St. Johns River provided a beautiful backdrop as Deacon Michael Elison of the San Juan del Rio Catholic Church officiated.

The perfectly imperfect strict social distancing and mask-wearing event unfolded without the excitement or fanfare of previous years. In the best of times, our chapter's summer hike and beach picnic are synonymous with the annual shell ceremony. But this year, instead of a sandy beach and wooded trail,

participants were greeted by red X's six feet apart marking the seating areas. Big X's drawn with blue powder chalk on the grass delineated where the honorees were to stand, and bottles of hand sanitizer adorned the sign-in table. Hand gestures and symbolic COVID folding arms hugs replaced handshakes and hugs.

Under sprawling branches of centuries-old live oak trees, we chapter co-coordinators welcomed the participants, and the ceremony began. Deacon Elison blessed the shells with holy water saying:

"As signs of the pilgrim, may these scallop shells mark us as travelers on the Way of St. James and on the unique journey we travel with you.

Lord, grant that the sign of our shells increase in all humanity devotion to the principles of faith, rejecting the works of the enemy. Grant us peace and calm, despite the chaos of the storms marking our lives."

At the end of the ceremony shell recipient Paula McPhaul said, "In these uncertain times, the shell presentation was especially meaningful to my husband, Danny, and me. We are still planning our



Co-coordinator Susan Peacock (center), leads the Jacksonville Chapter Shell Ceremony, July 25, 2020, at St. Augustine Diocese's Marywood Retreat Center and shares the meaning of the scallop shell and Beatitudes of a Pilgrim with participants.



A variety of masks adorn the faces of attendees at the Jacksonville Chapter Shell Ceremony, July 25, 2020. Front row, from left, chapter co-coordinator Susan Peacock, Paul and Danny McPhaul, Vanessa Conchi Soto, Deacon Michael Elison, Cheri and Tom Ward. Back row from left, chapter co-coordinator Miriam S. Gallet, Beth Gutman, Tom and Pamm Eutsler, Christine Allegro and Robert Doyle. Not pictured, Dawn Frazier and Juan Monserrate.

first Camino next May, but we don't know what the future will bring. The blessings and message of the shell presentation remind us that, while we haven't embarked on our physical journey, our Camino started with our decision to make the walk."

In the end, we all realized how healing Camino camaraderie can be and rejoiced in the bright and uplifting hour we spent together.

Robert Doyle, who walked the Camino last year, added, "The shell ceremony is like the hug you get as you prepare to leave after a meal with your family or friends. The food was delicious. The company was great. You got to talk about what you're doing and what you plan to do. And your family and friends got to tell you



Deacon Michael Elison of the San Juan del Rio Catholic Church, St. Johns, FL, blesses the scallop shells with holy water during the chapter ceremony held July 25, 2020, at St. Augustine Diocese's Marywood Retreat Center.

what happened to them when they had that experience. And then, as you're getting ready to leave, you get a hug that says we love you and can't wait to see you again."

Although the ceremony required radical trust, in the end, we were emotionally enriched. For one hour, we nourished our spirits, and the Camino was alive. ¡Ultrea! ☪



Midwest Region* St. James's Day Celebration Planned

By David Cook
Indianapolis, IN

Chapters in the eight states of the Midwest Region* of American Pilgrims on the Camino cordially invite all pilgrims interested in the Camino de Santiago to attend the first-ever St. James's Day Regional Celebration.

The local chapters of the Midwest* plan to gather at

Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN, July 23–26, 2021.

- Stay in single- and double-occupancy rooms in the historic Le Mans Hall, a French Chateau-style dormitory.
- Listen to nationally recognized speakers and entertainers.
- Get to know other pilgrims during daily guided hikes and service projects.
- Attend a Feast of St. James religious service.
- Continue to celebrate with a bonfire and fireworks display while relaxing in the evenings.
- Dues-paying members of American Pilgrims receive discounted registration.
- All are welcome.

While the annual Gathering of Pilgrims has been cancelled for 2021 due to COVID-19, we wanted to provide a different opportunity during the summer for pilgrims from multiple chapters to gather as a community and celebrate the Holy Year.

Please stay tuned for more details as our plans firm up.

iBuen Camino!

Midwest Chapters* ☞



*Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin.

Hiking During Our Pandemic Time

By Bob Masucci
Chino Hills, CA

We are currently not in “normal” times in our lives, and by the looks of things, normality is further off than any of us wish it to be. Staying home more than usual, with occasional masked market outings, is far from fun, and this was not a good year to walk any Camino. So, I suggest we all go “social distance” hiking, as long as we follow local health and safety guidelines.

This pandemic will not last forever and staying closed within the four walls of your home is not only physically restricting, but mentally depressing as well. This is especially true if you had planned a Camino this year and now have to rescind those plans.

Our newly formed Orange County chapter recently completed an 8-mile loop group training hike above the beautiful Newport Coast in Southern California.

We found when organizing this group hike that we had to make considerations we would not normally make for a hike at any other time of our lives.



During our planning we considered the following safety-related items:

Avoiding Overcrowding:

- Choosing a geographically large meeting/starting point.
- Planning an earlier-than-usual starting time.
- Limiting the number of participants to 20 total.
- Splitting the entire group into two, 10-person groups.
- Staggering our starting times (7:00 a.m. and 7:10 a.m.).

CDC Compliance:

- Encouraging the wearing of facial coverings.

Cleanliness:

- Open restrooms with handwashing basins.
- Encouraging carrying water for hydration and for hand washing.

Social Distancing:

- Encouraging participants to keep to the right side of the trails when walking to avoid contact with hikers walking in the opposite direction.
- Identifying a route with very wide trails.

Sue Skelly, my co-coordinator, and I enjoyed meeting the many members of our newly formed chapter and look forward to planning many more of these get-togethers, educational talks and social gatherings in the future. iBuen Camino! ☞

Strategies for Keeping the Camino in Our Lives

By Diane Moxness
Anchorage, AK

Many of us were planning to walk the Camino this year and are disappointed. Here are four ideas (with links) to bring the Camino to your home. Buen Camino from the Anchorage Chapter!

Eat like a Pilgrim

Desayuno (Breakfast)

→ [Tortilla y cafe con leche](#)

Almuerzo (Lunch)

→ [Jamon bocadillo y limonada](#)

Cena (Dinner)

→ Vino tinto, [pan](#), [ensalda mixta](#), [jamon](#), [papas fritas](#) y [tarta de Santiago](#)

Learn a bit of Spanish

Mono-linguistic? Why not learn a bit of Spanish for your future Camino? Four-time pilgrim and Spanish teacher, Lisa Farrand, has a YouTube series, Quarantine Camino Spanish for learning some basic Spanish phrases.

→ [Intro and bit of French](#)

→ [Basic Spanish Lesson #1](#)

→ [Simple Food and Drink Words](#)

→ [Directions around town](#)

→ [How to order coffee](#)

Get in Camino shape

Work those feet and abs!

→ [Yoga for your feet](#)

→ [Work out with your backpack](#)

Walk (or bike) a Camino in your community

Sarria to Portomarin (22k/14 miles)

→ How about a quiet country road or path? Can you find a route that replicates the steep medieval staircase into Portomarin? Too long for one day? Stop in Ferrerios (12K) where you might have enjoyed the panoramic view of the reservoir.

Portomarin to Palas de Rei (25k/15 miles)

→ How about a hike around a lake followed by a stroll through town? Stay well hydrated by stopping at coffee shops along the way. Don't forget a chocolate croissant to keep your energy up. Too Long? Stop in Ventas de Naron (12.8K).

Palas de Rei to Ribadiso (26k/16 miles)

→ Walk 15K to Medide and celebrate with take-out pulpo. No octopus in your town? How about a tuna bocadillo instead? Want to break this day in two? Stop here, then walk the remaining 10K along a riverbank to Ribadiso's medieval bridge another day.

Ribadiso to Pedrouza (22k/14 miles)

→ Find a forested walk for this section. Arzua is known for delicious cheeses, so don't forget pan and queso for your picnic stop.

Pedrouza to Santiago (20k/13 miles)

→ Your final day! Can you have a family member drop you off 20K from your home? Plot a route through forests and towns. Be authentic by walking around an airport. Maybe end with a prayer of thanksgiving at a local church? Buen Camino! You made it! 🍷

Coordinator Resource Library Seeks Volunteer

The Coordinator Resource Library ("CRL") is a depository created solely for the benefit and use of chapter coordinators. It is currently housed on Google Drive and organized into three primary folders: Policies and Guidelines of American Pilgrims on the Camino; Technical Tools Available to Coordinators; and Coordinator-submitted Material.

JOB TITLE: Curator

TIME COMMITMENT: 5-10 hours per month

SKILLS/EXPERIENCE REQUIRED: Working knowledge of Google Drive is ideal but not required; good communication skills

JOB DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS:

The curator has overall responsibility for the CRL and information housed in the library. The curator will:

- Develop and implement a strategy and process that will result in library content that is useful and helpful to chapter coordinators as they manage their chapters.
- Ensure that the content remains relevant by developing a process to add new information.
- Assist coordinators with navigating in the library and finding information and content.
- Be a dues-paying member of American Pilgrims on the Camino.
- Report to the chapters committee.

If you're interested in volunteering for the curator position, please contact chapters@americanpilgrims.org with CURATOR in the subject line. Thanks! 🍷



A dozen pilgrims in the South-east Virginia Chapter hiked the five-mile Noland Trail in Newport News on August 1, 2020. We held our breaths to quickly cluster for a photo then scattered to appropriate distances to stay safe.

Photo credit:
George Greenia.

Debriefing, Examining and Sharing Your Camino

By Stacey Wittig
Munds Park, AZ

YOU ARE NO LONGER who you once were, but you might not yet be who you hope to become. You could allow your pilgrimage experience to produce a shift in your life. Or once you get home, you could let yourself get sucked back into old routines.

For me, it takes time to process my pilgrimage experiences. I can't readily answer questions from well-meaning friends upon my return home. "What did you learn?" one colleague asks. I want to reply, "It's not a learning experience. Learning happens in the head. The Camino changed my heart."

But isn't heart-change a sort of learning, too? Maybe it's all a matter of semantics, but it seems to me that when I get home, I'm speaking another language. I can't quite find the words to explain my experience because what comes to mind isn't understandable to others. My homies have not had the same experience.

"Your heart was changed? What does that mean, Stacey?" A fair question, yet I can't put into words a comprehensible answer. For instance, did I 'learn' humility, or was it merely that the physical journey wore my body and mind so much that my spirit had to take over? Physically exhausted, I couldn't trust my brain or my body. I had to rely on something else from within, my God-filled heart, my humble center.

This spiritual journey is the one that I have trouble communicating with my friends back home.

But isn't that what epiphanies are all about? It's not easy to explain the "aha moment" – suddenly seeing something that has been there all along. A thing so simple that when you tell it to others, their reaction is "uh-huh" rather than "aha!"

Think about some of your "aha moments" as you transition back home. Ponder how you could explain

them to others. It is easy to talk about the physical pilgrimage – the number of miles and days spent walking. It's more challenging to put into words the inner journey.

For Reflection:

- What gentle shifts in your life have this pilgrimage produced?
- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being 'Very Good,' how good are you at letting go of your anxieties and relying on God?
- How can you choose to overcome future challenges as you did on the road? Lighten the load, slow down, look for help from others or?



Zuzana Tomeckova meditates on the way from Mauleon to St. Just Ibarre, France, on May 6, 2015. Photo by the author

Adapted from "Spiritual and Walking Guide: Lourdes to St Jean Pied de Port" (Stacey Wittig, *Spiritual and Walking Guides*, 2016). You will find an excerpt from Wittig's "Spiritual and Walking Guide: St. Jean to León" in the March 2020 issue of *La Concha*, and a review of Wittig's "Spiritual and Walking Guide: León to Santiago" in the March 2019 issue of *La Concha*. ☺

Opposite page: Los Arcos. Photo credit: Thom Ryng.



The Next Right Step

By Robyn Fisher
Olympia, WA

I STARTED WALKING the Camino Francés on April 22, 2018. I was a new widow, broken, unmoored and in search of healing. On that hot, sunny morning two Earth Days ago, I trudged over the Pyrenees carrying a heavy, bone-deep exhaustion from grief, anxiety and lack of sleep.

My Camino actually began when I quit my teaching job in 2016 to care for my husband, who was being ravaged by Lewy body dementia. I simplified my harried life to give him my full attention, having faith that I would know what to do and that the money would hold out. I called on our community to help, and they showed up.

Those first two weeks on the Camino were slow going. I stopped often. I took photos, adjusted my pack and lit candles in ancient churches where centuries of prayers palpably greeted me upon entering. I delighted at living my own pace of life, but I also limped into my albergue each evening, set up my bunk, lay down and sobbed, releasing anxiety I had been holding in for so long.

Then, somewhere after Castrojeriz, a miracle happened. I arrived at my destination, set up my bunk, showered, put on my sandals and noticed that

Looking back on Castrojeriz after a thunderstorm. May 8, 2018. Photo by Robyn Fisher.

I didn't want to lie down and cry. I wanted to walk around and see the sights. Healing was happening!

Life is simple on the Way. Follow the arrows and take the next right steps toward Santiago. Pack, boots, walk, sleep, repeat. Carry only what you need. Stay in the moment. Share.

After I returned home with my Compostela, I wanted to hold onto those lessons, so I sold my home of 25 years, let go of most of my possessions and paid off all of my debt.

If it weren't for the pandemic, I would be preparing to serve in Bercianos del Real Camino this September as a newly trained hospitalera. I will still take that step when it is clearly mine to do in a season to come. Instead, I have been serving in a different way, staying with my daughter and son-in-law, helping to care for my 3-year-old grandson while they work from home. The future is foggy for me, but the Camino has taught me to take the next right steps in faith, even if I can't see very far along the path. 🌿



Leaving Leon, May 15, 2018. Robyn Fisher. Photo by Laurent Fox.

Rhythms of Life in my "New Normal"

By Ron Ottenad
Long Beach, CA

THE FIRST DAY after returning home, I woke up in the middle of the night disoriented. The room was empty, quiet and unfamiliar. I wondered what town I was in. I searched my memory for the name of the albergue where I was staying. I scanned the dark room for clues. It took me a moment to realize that I was in my own bed. I was home. I did not know it at the moment, but this would become a metaphor for re-entry into my "normal" life.

The Camino was not simply an experience, it was transformational. The journey significantly shifted my posture in life. This made my "normal" life feel unfamiliar. I realized I had no desire to get back to normal. I longed to integrate this shifted posture into life at home. To do this, I engaged in practices, or rhythms, that have helped me develop a still deeper understanding of the transformational experience, orienting myself to a "new normal." Here are the rhythms I set.

Don't stop walking - While my body did need time to recover, as soon as I was able I returned to walking. I woke early and walked while the sun was rising. This had been my habit on the Camino and it served me well at home. This quiet hour provided the necessary silence to listen to my heart and its response to being home, its desires, tensions and invitations.

(continued pg. 28)



New growth on the vine, supported by a trellis of post and wire, near Viana in the province of Navarre. Photo by Ron Ottenad.

Discover Your Calling

By Kristin DeCou
Port Angeles, WA

WHEN I RETURNED from the Camino I did a lot of "soul-knowing."

Soul-searching was a significant part of my pilgrimage, but what came after was the knowing part and was not to be missed. Post-pilgrimage processing is all about tapping into that 'knowing,' intuitive side of who you are and why you're here.

It was in this season that I discovered a philosophy called "Ikigai," which the Japanese call the secret to a long and happy life. At its heart is your life's purpose, your "reason for being." A lot of things that will determine how long and happy your life is, but these are important:

- ➔ What do you love?
- ➔ What does the world need?
- ➔ What are you good at?
- ➔ What can you be paid for?



Image source: Bodetree, adapted from Francesc Miralles

Once I understood this, as simple as it sounds, I found my calling was to go and do that, to be curious and open to discover my path as it unfolds.

I fully believe if you focus on what you love, on meeting needs and contributing to what the world needs (and there are LOTS of needs right now) - you will find your reason for being, what makes you jump out of bed in the morning, your calling.

The Camino begins the process and opens our heart. It is our role to continue to walk in love and truth by living out our calling every day, by investing in the important things in life and encouraging others on their own path. It's here where you'll discover more of who you are meant to be. 🌿

(Rhythms of Life continued...)

I talked to God and listened to what He might want to speak into these things.

Integrate simplicity – The simplicity of the Camino allowed for a depth of reflection that the noise of “normal” life often drowns out. I wanted to turn down the volume by bringing simplicity home. I went through my possessions, especially my clothing, and only kept what I needed. I trimmed my schedule, making space for things like eating meals in the garden, savoring solitude and having long conversations. I also sought to limit my choices. Fewer choices create capacity to think deeply about important things. These practices enabled me to be more present to life as it is actually lived.

See others – Rather than returning to the rush of life, I wanted to hold on to the experience of walking with others, offering the gift of being seen. When I passed people in the park, or encountered them throughout the day, I looked them in the eyes, offered a friendly greeting and engaged in whatever conversation could be had. In these interactions, I discovered that the life-giving conversations which were so natural on the Way could be found at home. This helped me stay present to the experience of walking the Camino.

Put it into words - I disciplined myself to sit down every other day and write. The days in between

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”

– Søren Kierkegaard.

allowed for thoughts and insights to surface, which the writing helped to articulate clearly. It did not matter if I was writing in the journal no one would read or the book I would end up publishing, the act of writing distilled my experience, helping me separate principle from circumstance. This gave birth to meaning and understanding, which gave shape to the “new normal” I was living into.

Share my story – Having put my pilgrimage into words, I began to tell my story to others. I learned to have different versions: the 60-second recap, the five-minute overview and the long deep conversation.



The hilltop village of Cirauqui overlooking a vineyard in the province of Navarre. Photo by Ron Ottenad.

Speaking the words out loud brought me greater clarity and understanding. It took the experiences off the page and into life, making them solid and helping me to both internalize and act upon them.

A familiar sight on the Camino is the trellis, the post and wire system that holds up the rows and rows of grapevines that line the path. Trellises are crucial to the life and development of the grapes, providing support for new growth, and holding up the fruit as it ripens. My simple rhythms are like these trellises, aligning my experience on the Camino with re-entry to life back home and rooting my heart in the transformation made possible by pilgrimage. ☪

Post-Pilgrimage Processing on the High Seas

By Michael Ostrowski
Honolulu, HI

WHEN THE SAILS of our boat scarcely cleared beneath Lisbon’s 25th of April suspension bridge, I understood the physical journey of the Camino de Santiago was over. I was on the top deck of the vessel, along with my girlfriend, J’Nell, and 200 other passengers, breathing in the salty air, saying goodbye to Europe and starting a two-week, 3,500-mile Atlantic Ocean crossing.

Being surrounded by water turned out to be the perfect place to contemplate our pilgrimage on the Camino Francés.

After finishing our walk on the rocky coast of Finisterre on October 31, 2019, we were fortunate not to be under any pressure to go home. We could have easily found flights home to Honolulu, but we sought a travel experience more befitting of our grand adventure. What would be the best way to get back and give us a chance to reflect on the Camino?



J’Nell Thomas and Michael Ostrowski at Finisterre, October 31, 2019

While we gazed down over Lisbon’s old-world rooftops to the ocean, we got an idea. Could we take a boat? We didn’t know any of the departure schedules or where the cruise ships anchored nearby were headed, but we felt crossing the Atlantic, traveling the way our ancestors had done a century ago, would be a new kind of pilgrimage home.

(continued on page 30)

The Story of My Camino Story

By Esther Jantzen
Albuquerque, NM

MY POST-PILGRIMAGE processing has taken 12 years. That’s not an exaggeration, nor is it over yet. By my post-pilgrimage processing, I mean something beyond the gratifying changes in lifestyle I attribute to my Camino experiences.

I committed to writing a children’s book for, to my knowledge, there were no novels for kids that featured the Camino. Back in 2008 I thought, how hard could it be to write one? How long could it take? (And how much innocence, ignorance and arrogance can one brain contain?) My grandchildren, the audience I had in mind for the book, were then four and six.

Oh, I learned the long, hard way. I now feel only gratitude toward the naïve woman I was then.

Writing this children’s book for ages 8-13 has been a most expansive experience. I went twice more to the Camino for research in 2011 and 2013. I watched movies. I read the best in children’s literature (more than 300 Newbery award winners). I studied Camino lore and history. I went to American Pilgrims on the Camino Gatherings to learn.

I wrote drafts, tossed them and wrote more drafts. I learned to take feedback that stung. I joined critique groups. I blogged and photographed. I explored architecture. I studied Spanish. I approached agents and editors. I followed the book industry. I changed the title four times. I practiced bold asking. I edited and proof-read repeatedly.

I learned humility, neutrality and perseverance. And now, in this quiet time of pandemic, when my grandchildren are now 16 and 18, I’m self-publishing that book with pride.

“WALK: Jamie Bacon’s Secret Mission on the Camino de Santiago” is a travel and mystery tale about the missteps, adventures and heroism of an 11-year-old American who walks the 500-mile Camino de Santiago with his home-schooling family.

For me, publishing this book is as much of an accomplishment as trekking into Santiago. ☪

(Post Pilgrimage Process continued...)

We found a 600-foot-long sailboat departing in one week. On the day we were to embark, we once again strapped on our backpacks like we had each morning in the albergues and walked, this time to the boat terminal.

For 12 days, I sat on a sunny deck and read my Camino journal and looked back at our thousands of photos. Over cocktails, J’Nell and I recalled little details that brought us joy, such as the street singer in Castrillo de los Polvares who serenaded us on the way into town. We shared stories with another couple on the ship who had just completed the Camino Portugués.



Sunset on the Atlantic Ocean, contemplating the Camino de Santiago 1,000 miles from Spain, December 3, 2019. Photo by Michael Ostrowski.

With each nautical mile, my Camino took a new shape in my mind.

In St. Jean Pied de Port, the night before we started walking, I journaled about why I was walking, and wondered how it would change me. Now, only a tiny speck in the middle of the vast Atlantic, I revisited my words.

My original intention was to get away from my entrenched routines as a means to evaluate myself as a person; I also hoped that in walking the Camino I would reconnect with the spirituality/energy that flows through everything but had largely disappeared in my life. Looking back, I could see how I engaged in a lot of self-reflection, especially on the Meseta; with every church we visited, every vista we surveyed, and with the physical nature of the walk, I felt spirituality everywhere.

But the Camino de Santiago turned out to be infinitely more. I learned to slow down and truly pay attention to whatever was happening. I bonded with so many incredible people, whether it was in a brief encounter, someone I walked with for a few days, or the many who will be my lifelong friends. I gained

knowledge that while we may be from different cities or countries and have various worldviews, none of that mattered; at the core we were all the same, we were all pilgrims.

Learning from the Camino would be an ongoing process, I know, and I would happily keep at it long after the ship crossed the Atlantic Ocean and we returned home. ☪

Finding Simplicity on and off the Camino

By Richard Rindone
Santa Fe, NM

UPON RETURNING HOME from my Camino, I was eager to tell anybody and everybody about it, down to the smallest details. But I quickly found that I had to limit what I talked about. So, what really was the essence of my experience?

There are some hardships on the Camino. There is no escape from the heat on the Meseta, or the rain and mud in the mountains. The backpack straps can dig in, then there are the hot feet or blisters. And, if you are riding a bike there is the sore derriere after long and bumpy miles.

Being on the move by oneself for days, without distractions, your “baggage” begins to fall away. For example, because the Camino doesn’t have elevators, escalators, moving sidewalks and a Starbucks on every corner, I believe you become a simpler person. The daily regimen requires self-discipline. The daily diet of (mostly) the pilgrim’s menu was basic. The less you carry, the more you will realize you don’t need a lot of “stuff” to sustain yourself.

The essence of my Camino experience was that I found simplicity and the self-discipline required to help keep my daily focus.

Later, while I continued to value simplicity and self-discipline in my life, what became more important, because of what helped to relieve the hardships, were the personal contacts I made every day.

On the Camino, I met people from all over the world. I enjoyed meeting most of them, walking or riding with them, hearing why they were there, listening to their complaints (not always enjoyable), eating with them, drinking a beer or wine with them. I met people whose names I never knew, but with whom I still enjoyed talking. I would not trade the memories of any of those personal connections. They have broadened my perspective so that I can better understand people.



The author, his daughter Pier, and wife Pauline in Santiago, August 2019

My wife and I have continued to eat a more basic diet, foregoing heavy sauces and opting for simple grilling. My wife now incorporates Caldo Gallego into our menu during the colder months. And we enjoy Rioja wine, available locally. While simplicity works out well on the Camino, it is obvious by the way my wife looks at the garage that I have not been able to incorporate that fully into my post-Camino life. So I will treat that part of my life as a work in progress. ☪

Godcidence

By Willie Williams
Winfield, IL

“A circumstance that looks like a coincidence, but is obviously a ‘God thing.’” – Lorraine D. Nunley

“Sometimes I just look up, smile and say, ‘I know that was you God.’” – Unknown

During each of my three Caminos, whenever I was anxious, confused or physically challenged, I would pray for God to intervene – and it seemed he would respond exactly when I needed Him. Coincidence? No! I call these Godcidences. (continued)

(*Godsidence continued...*)

I was 40 kilometers west of Burgos, the southern sun a heat lamp striking my left side. I stopped to rest under a broad shade tree. There, I had a flashback to some advice pilgrims posted about three stages Camino walkers experience: first physical, then emotional and finally spiritual. I could relate. My irrational and emotional well was rising.

I refilled the water bottle I'd been carrying for weeks. Crazy as it seemed, I had developed a sentimental attachment to it.

A Canadian couple arrived, and we shared a lively exchange answering that most popular Camino question, "Why are you walking the Camino?" Then, I said my goodbye, threw on my backpack and started the 300-foot descent of Alto Mostelares. It was a steep, but manageable kilometer or so – until I dropped a trekking pole. Upon bending down to retrieve it, gear spilled out of my backpack's upper pouch. I collected myself and continued down the steep slope. As the trail leveled off, I realized my water bottle was gone. Must have fallen out of my pack somewhere up the trail.

The Camino's induced emotional stage surfaced in force. I must find my water bottle. So, I huffed and puffed the nearly three kilometers up the incline. It was nowhere to be found. I surrendered and began the descent again.

I knew it was silly, but my emotions wrestled with me. I prayed, God, *It's just a stupid...plastic...water bottle! I don't want to care about a "thing." Help me let it go.* After a few kilometers, my "blues" evaporated, and I felt free from the water bottle obsession. This all changed two hours later.

With no water, I became parched. My tongue thickened and stuck glued to the roof of my mouth. I detected the early signs of dehydration – prickly skin, a cold sweat and faintness. Each weary step was accompanied by a pounding headache aggravated by Spain's relentless, baking sunlight. *I need water; I need some fast!* Alarm was growing louder in my mind. The only pilgrims in sight were several kilometers ahead, and the next town lay ahead of them. I confronted my panic with a simple prayer. "OK, God, I'm in trouble. Please help me."

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

– C.S. Lewis

As I staggered along a couple more kilometers, staring down to avoid fixating on the distance before me, an inexplicable surprise: on this gravelly trail, no wider than five feet, a grey minivan approached, a clay-colored dust cloud stirring behind it. *What?! Cars don't drive on the Camino!* The driver skidded noisily to a halt beside me, leaving me choking on Camino dust. The passenger window dropped, and a stubbly-faced Spaniard leaned toward me holding out an icy cold plastic bottle of water.

Speechless, I exchanged my dumbfounded look with the man's big-grinned expression, then stood in disbelief as the van pulled ahead leaving me lost in more billowing dust and holding my answered prayer. *What just happened?* I quenched my thirst and walked ahead, awestruck.

Five kilometers from my albergue, I chose a shady rest stop. To my surprise, the Canadian couple resurfaced. Then another gentlemen approached, a man on a mission. "I saw that you left your water bottle at the rest stop earlier. Something inside me said you might like to have it back. I've refilled it for you." He smiled humbly as he held the bottle before me.

The Canadian paused my gushing gratitude to extend a profound gesture. He removed his canteen and held it up to initiate a toast. "Here, we drink as brothers."

Further conversation revealed the stranger encountered no minivan, no free water bottle. *Hmm.*

I later asked myself, *Did what just happened, really happen?* I prayed. I trusted. God delivered. And, what perfect timing! Coincidence? No! *This was a Godsidence.* ☪



Allison Monro, the author's daughter, climbing the Pyrenees above St. Jean Pied de Port, October 2014. Photo by Peter Monro.

It's Never Too Late

By Peter Monro
Portland, ME

IT'S STRANGE to think that, at the age of 70, I marked my pivot into true retirement on the Camino. Until then, despite not working on billables for several years, I'd taken on so many pro bono projects that the word retirement for me had come to mean simply "tired again."

At the start of my trek, that overdoing habit from back home accompanied me on the Way—I had to quit the trail, return home, unload the major civic legal battle I'd undertaken, and then restart my Camino.

Walking proved to be a form of meditation for me. I was more present in the moments of putting each foot down on the Way than I had been in years of planning (scheming?), projecting results that were often foiled but always pursued. Since coming home, I've taken up walking in the neighborhood as a form of meditation—so helpful and satisfying in COVID time!

Since I discovered that I could live for more than a month in Spain out of less than 25 pounds on my back, without regret and not lacking anything of consequence, I asked myself why I had a home stuffed with stuff from attic to basement? Simplifying my life via multiple trips to thrift shops, community tool lenders, libraries, relatives and Dumpsters created more physical space. And (surprise!) physical space created mental space. I feel more relaxed, less burdened by so many things around me.

Further yet, I get more done. I read more books in my pared down library. I complete more projects with hand tools in my newly open basement than I did in a crammed basement full of electric tools.

And the beat goes on. I've converted the journals I scribbled on the Camino each day—an hour midmorning at a picnic table by a stream, another after dinner at the albergue's common table—into a memoir I'm now seeking to publish. The writing, and rewriting and rewriting, is providing me with so



Self-portrait of Peter Monro above Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille, France, Via Gebennensis, October 2017.

many opportunities to re-visit conversations I had with other pilgrims, to rethink their meaning and importance to the new normal of my post-Camino daily living.

In short, the Camino has taught me that it's never too late to shift one's life onto a path of greater satisfaction and outright joy. ☪

On My Camino 2020

Shut not open
Home not gone
I begin

Up hills
Becoming mountains
Of loneliness
Turned to contemplation,
Prayer
Talked to myself
Answered
Sang half songs
I remembered
Hummed the rest

Nights came
Cooked one pot meals
Ate lots of pasta
Baked cinnamon apples
Slept exhausted
From nothing

I am on trail
On trial,
Sentenced to learn
I stop at my own altar
Hear my own confession

My penance
To experience
Loneliness,
Compassion
Empathy
Of others.

Say ¡Buen Camino! to my contact list
Of home pilgrims
Send photos of flowers and trees
In my garden
Let people know
I am OK.

I am on my Camino.

By Elin Babcock
Ashland, OR



To Be a Pilgrim

By Miguel Garcia
Rio Linda, CA

IT'S A GREAT MOMENT when you say, “I’m walking the Camino, I’m in Spain, and I’m a pilgrim.” Having walked two Caminos by myself, I understand there are some journeys that must be taken alone. It’s the challenge. The feeling of “I did this for myself. By myself. On my own.” Completing a Camino solo does wonders for self-confidence. It is a massive achievement.

For some, it fulfills the need for time alone to enjoy a period of reflection and inner peace, to unplug from everyday life and recharge in nature. Many don’t have a choice as they may not have a travel companion and can either miss out on an adventure of a lifetime or be brave and go alone.

Whatever the reason, I understand why it is daunting. Travelling to a foreign land to walk with strangers following yellow arrows all the way to Santiago de Compostela is not your average holiday. There is much to consider, but you don’t need to handle these mundane details by yourself.

My family and friends looked at me strangely when I told them I was going to Spain by myself on a religious walk. Their confusion was understandable and part of the attraction. My statement “I’m a pilgrim” was met with little to no understanding of how my life would change.

You’ll find yourself alone with your thoughts. Your fears, regrets and struggles will all surface along the Way—sometimes one by one, and other times all at



The author at the 100-kilometer mark, Camino Francés, 2018.

once. The following day you’re refreshed, recharged, renewed and full of life.

The Camino will give you time and space to see the good, the bad and the ugly about yourself, and with every step you learn to follow the rhythm of your heart. When you find it, you begin to believe in the magic of pilgrimage. As the days go on and the exhaustion sets in, you will realize that you are free: free to think, free to breathe and free to be yourself.

For those still thinking about walking, I say “just do it.” Yes, you will be challenged and every joint and muscle will hurt. You will cry, and you will laugh, but you will be amazed you were able to accomplish an incredible journey.

Once you walk, you’re a pilgrim. You remain a pilgrim throughout your life. ☪





Stone bridge to Castelo Do Neiva, on the Camino Portugués Coastal Route, September 2016. Photo by David Jennings.

Re-education After the Camino

By David Jennings
Kings Beach, CA

A PILGRIM IS a pilgrim, is a pilgrim, nothing more, nothing less. Whether butcher, baker or candlestick maker, regardless of who or what a person may be otherwise, on the Camino we are all equally pilgrims. The stock market, politics, social media and what Kim Kardashian is wearing are not of major importance to pilgrims. Their concerns are primarily life's basics: eating, sleeping and navigating the distance in between these activities. On the Camino, life is lived in the now.

Returning home after 30 or more days on the Camino requires a re-education back to the life of old: a life of role-playing at home, work and social encounters, bombarded with mis- and dis-information where the insignificant becomes major. What is Kim wearing? It depends on the individual psyche, but re-entry after Camino may not be easy, as indicated by the number of pilgrims who return to the Camino multiple times.

Once returned, I am back trying to outrun the past, ignore the hectic present and sprint toward a future goal. Ah, life is again normal. Hurry hurry 24/7! Then hidden away in a drawer I find my scallop shell or a Camino photo album. Or I happen upon a YouTube Camino video, and I flash back to my own Camino experience. I recall the simplicity, the lack of stress, the value of living in the present and the appreciation for—and the joy from—the basics: food, shelter and friendship. Regardless of my beliefs, the basics include elements of spirituality.

Now with a new Camino outlook, I return to my former grind, but now I walk, hike, meditate, journal, photograph and communicate with other pilgrims. The Spirit of the Camino is now a constant partner through my daily routine.

Hooray! I realize I can be a pilgrim at home or away. It is not about location; it is a state of mind. I now peruse the guidebooks for which Camino is next.

¡Buen Camino! 🍷

Homecoming

By Jamie Tucker
Melba, ID

I WALKED the Camino de Santiago in the fall of 2019, after spending two nights in St. Jean Pied de Port honoring the anniversary of my husband's death five years prior. My dreams and hopes for the future were riding on this Camino, and so my entire attention was on my travel in Europe; little thought went to my return home.

I walked into Santiago on October 15, completely unprepared for the coming days. Returning home sent me into a tailspin.

A fellow pilgrim suggested I read Alexander John Shaia's book "Returning from Camino." In the introduction, he writes, "The Camino is filled with a 'muchness' that requires sorting"—that is exactly how I felt. It wasn't until months later that I could look at my photos or read through my journal entries. I found comfort in Shaia's shared experiences.

"Coming home can, indeed, be quite strange. I thought returning from the Camino was the easy, joyous triumphant part. What I found was increased energy, wildly differing emotions, burning zeal, deep peace, an upsurge of agitation and a gnawing disquiet followed by months of wondering and sorting."

My body still craved movement, and I began an online yoga practice to help me mentally and physically. The instructor challenged me to hold a pose, even if it was uncomfortable, assuring me my effort would transfer to real life. How much more flexible could I be, I wondered? I had walked 500 miles, slept in albergues with snoring strangers and laughed and cried with friends farther down the path.

I fell in love with the spirit of the Camino, the culture of Spain and its people. On the path, it didn't matter what you did for a living; everyone was equal. There was a camaraderie because we were all on this

epic journey together—a journey that many of us planned, prayed and saved for. When I returned to the United States, I desperately missed this sense of community, shared meals and walking everywhere.

To combat my discouragement, I started walking daily with my hiking poles to remind me of the Camino. I trained as a hospitalera in November 2019. I planned a New Year's Eve party for friends and made tortilla española, tarta de Santiago and caldo Gallego. I took a two-month online Spanish course to keep up my language skills. Doing homework and talking with my tutor from Venezuela gave me a broader global perspective.

This spring I planned to travel to Italy, Greece and Spain. I was scheduled to volunteer at Grañón for a fortnight, then in Carrion de los Condes. All of this was canceled, and I remain thankful that I walked my first Camino when I did.

During all of this, my mother's health became increasingly worse, and I put her in hospice care in April. Today, with the blessing of hindsight, I am grateful for the time that COVID-19 provided, allowing me to be by my mother's side as she lived her last months on earth.

"Sustainable growth and transformation do not happen while you are walking," writes Shaia. While on the Camino, I was absorbed by what I saw and by what my body felt. Clarity came in its own time afterwards and can be summarized by another quote from the book: "Learn how to be curious about yourself and become comfortable with uncertainty. To be at ease with 'not knowing' is a sign of one's growing maturity." 🍷



Early morning in Tosantos, Spain, on the Camino Francés, September 23, 2019. From left: Jamie Tucker, Tina Clark, Joseph Dudley. Photo by Joseph Dudley.





The Awkwardness of “Santiago Matamoros”

By George Greenia
Williamsburg, VA

We sometimes joke that over the centuries poor St. James got so many makeovers, he’s become a costume-party version of himself.

The historical James was a fisherman from Galilee who followed Jesus as a disciple, one of the inner circle of twelve. Iconography in Eastern Orthodox churches still shows him simply as an apostle, one of Christ’s closest companions and spiritual heirs.

The discovery of his tomb in Compostela in the ninth century yielded new images of a “Western” James. The first monumental statue of Santiago that shows him as a traveling preacher, outfitted like the pilgrims on their way to visit his shrine, is probably the one at Santa Marta de Tera near Zamora, from the 11th century. His classic image in the 12th century Pórtico de la Gloria, however, skips the usual pilgrim accessories like traveling bag, shoulder cape, scallop shell, hat and gourd. The James of the Pórtico is a missionary bishop with a scroll in his right hand and a tau-shaped staff under his left.

The St. James that makes us squirm today is Santiago Matamoros, a mounted warrior, the “Slayer of Moors.” Images of this militant James survive by the thousands in paintings and sculpture. The earliest representation of St. James mounted on a horse is carved on the stone wall of the cathedral’s south transept. It shows no defeated foes, just worshipers kneeling before a robed rider holding a sword of victory. Visiting pilgrims may notice several other Matamoros images inside the cathedral, including one shrewdly surrounded by banks of flowers that conceal his trampled foes. Another set of vividly painted wooden Matamoros figures crowns the baldachin high above the main altar.

How did simple St. James find himself mounted on a horse and saddled with this violent reputation?

Protective warrior saints were everywhere in the Middle Ages, and Spain loved similar images of St. George and St. Martin as well as plenty of others. A re-costumed St. James got the same treatment, perhaps in part to forestall competition.

Popular explanations into our own days tell of a warrior James who protected the Camino and its pilgrims from raiding parties from the non-Christian south. The appearance of Santiago aiding Christian troops at the mythic Battle of Clavijo (844) was first promoted long after that skirmish was fought. By the time Santiago Matamoros became a staple in mass-produced religious art in the fifteenth century, the Moorish threat in Spain was nearly extinguished. A close examination of the conquered Muslims in the artwork shows men wearing turbans, which were never a Moorish accessory. Turbans were Turkish headgear, and it was the Muslim Ottoman Empire that rattled Europeans at the end of the Middle Ages, so they became the enemies trampled under the hooves of Santiago’s horse.

A final linguistic note: “Matamoros” sounds upsetting in English, but its impact is milder in Spanish. There are lots of compound words like *matamoscas* (flyswatter), *matarratas* (rat poison), and *matasellos* (postmark, stamp cancellation mark). There are funny ones too, like *matapasiones* (‘passion killer,’ underwear), *matasanos* (‘healthy-person killer,’ a quack doctor), and *matasuegras* (‘mother-in-law killer,’ a party noisemaker).

Saints are endlessly flexible characters, so modern pilgrims can generously shrug off old nicknames and release James from his military service and garb. A civilian again, he is free to be the companionable apostle and fellow pilgrim of old. ☞

Facing page: Side alcove statue of Santiago Matamoros in the cathedral at Santiago Compostela
Photo credit: Thom Ryng.

Lessons on and off the Camino de Santiago

By Ruben Mendoza
Katy, TX

IT HAS BEEN over two years, and my body and mind are still anxious as I sit here—it feels like the happy dog sled team waiting for the command “mush” to go and run. My body became a machine focused on just a few simple things: walk, eat and sleep. My only expectations were to walk 500 miles, learn the land and culture of my ancestors, visit the major cities along the Camino and ensure that my wife and daughter made it safely.

These are some of the lessons I learned on Camino.

- The Camino has three unique phases:
 - **1.** The first phase of the trip was filled with **gratitude**. Hiking for hours in the “classroom of silence” allowed me to truly understand how much I have to be thankful for. The silence tuned my senses and made me see what had happened in my life and how thankful I am for both successes and failures.
 - **2.** The second phase of the trip was all about **will power and resoluteness**. After the initial excitement of starting the Camino wears off, I realized that this was more of a test of my will and discipline. It made me resilient to any adversity.
 - **3.** The final phase of the trip was all about **rejuvenation**. At this point, I could see and feel the prize was within my grasp—Santiago was only 200 kilometers away. I also felt that lots of baggage and dust accumulated over the years dropped off with each kilometer I walked, bringing me closer to becoming a better version of myself.

- I learned to appreciate the small things in life, like a hot shower, a cotton bath towel, the singing of birds, the numerous and diverse native flowers, a sip of coffee without hurry and the smile of a loved one next to me.
- Meeting wonderful people on the Camino reinforced my beliefs in the goodness of people. The selfless of the human being and the joy of laughter in many languages.
- Life on the Camino shrinks your world to just a few basic things. You wake up, start walking, eat, talk to other pilgrims (if you want to) and sleep. You start to realize that maybe you don’t need all the stuff in your pre-Camino life.
- On the Camino, I never slept in the same bed or ate at the same place twice.

It’s a great day to be a pilgrim—and I plan to be a pilgrim for the rest of my life. ☪



The author on Camino day 1, Pyrenees Mountains.





Maslow, Wisdom and Me

By Bridget Highfill
Los Angeles, CA

REMEMBER Abraham Maslow’s five-story pyramid, the Hierarchy of Needs, a concept introduced to many of us in Psychology 101? I’m thinking about it a lot these days. By the time you read this, I will have started another school year teaching fifth graders, albeit remotely, using Google Meets as our classroom. Our household to-do list is efficiently under control this fall, as my husband and I have been at home for more than 20 weeks. This is my post-Camino reality for 2020.

The plan was to walk the Chemin de St. Jacques from Cahors to St. Jean Pied de Port this past June. This year’s route would have completed a pilgrimage on the Chemin begun in 2007, from Le Puy-en-Velay to Conques. That first pilgrimage left me with blisters, bug bites and a calling to walk the Camino Francés, which I did in 2009.

But our lives have taken a turn this year. My aspiration to see the world and transform myself through the *comunitas* on the Camino has been changed. According to Maslow’s hierarchy, this aspiration places me on the level of Self-

Actualization, the highest level of needs, wherein I explore my creativity and fulfill my full potential. Today I work to keep myself and my loved ones safe. I am at Level Two of Maslow’s Hierarchy, focused on Safety, one level up from basic Physiological Needs. Down a bit from where I’d hoped to be.

My life has been blessed. As an American citizen, I am privileged to operate within the highest levels of Maslow’s hierarchy. This summer has been a disappointment as far as that trip to the Chemin is concerned. But the Camino endures. It will wait for humanity to heal from this pandemic. During this time I am given the space to move through the hierarchy from Safety to Belonging to Esteem, and perhaps even achieve the state of Self-Actualization through patience and hope.

My post-Camino experience is the wisdom to know I can wait. I will walk the Camino again when it is safe for me and all my international neighbors. I continue to be excited, to walk at home and to plan for that next pilgrimage. For those who missed walking this year, know that your Camino will happen when the moment is right. The Camino is waiting for you. ☺

Unpacking Your Camino

By Tom Friesen
London, Ontario, Canada

WE OFTEN HEAR “The true Camino begins at its end.” Many, if not most of us who have walked the Camino, would affirm that due to its transformational impact, the Camino becomes a watershed moment in our lives, and the time after and the roads we take as pilgrims are impacted strongly by the Camino experience.

It is crucial to prepare properly for the best Camino experience, and many of us relive our Camino by preparing new pilgrims for their journey. I often joke that “for goodness’ sake, if you are going on a Camino speak with an experienced pilgrim. You will probably learn nothing new, but you are giving us free therapy!”

As a chapter coordinator who plans regular spring and fall pilgrim meetings, I always try to have a presentation of universal appeal for the first half of the meeting. Then we introduce our experienced pilgrims and what routes and times of year they walked. The coffee break that follows allows people to network. Then we hold separate sessions to allow Q and A for new pilgrims and “unpacking activities for veteran pilgrims.”

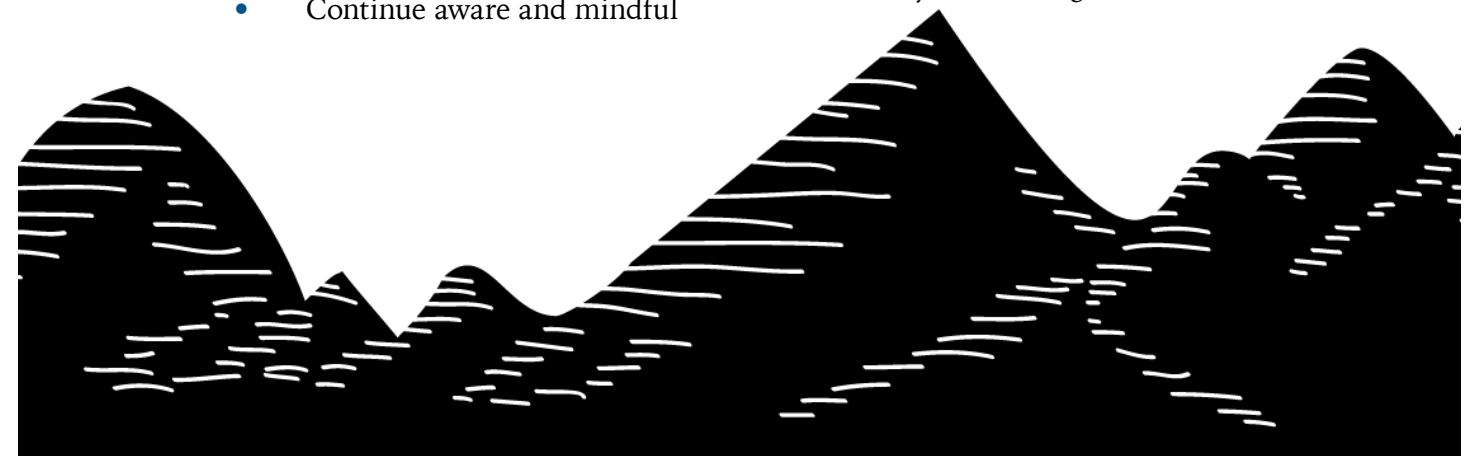
We use the material found in Arthur Boer’s book, “The Way is Made by Walking” that refers to the Camino as a “focal living experience,” where one’s values, goals and skills all align with the activity one is engaged in. I use his tests, answering affirmatively to: “There is nowhere I would rather be. There is nothing I would rather be doing. There is no one I would rather be with. This I will remember well.” For me, this helps to explain the Camino’s power to engage and transform.

We often have our participants respond to questions such as “What were your expectations? What were the surprises? What were the challenges? What do you miss now? How do you keep the Camino alive in your life now?” Hearing others express similar questions and concerns—with suggestions for directions to explore—can be most empowering.

We also pass out a handout that suggests books, blogs, experiences and activities that are reflections of the Camino and ways to keep the experience present in pilgrims’ lives.

Lessons the Camino taught selected Pilgrims

- Simplify
- Prioritize
- Meditate or reflect
- Continue aware and mindful
- Assume a state of peace
- Be other directed / contribute
- Appreciate / count your blessings ☺



Letter from Milepost 2,054

By Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims,

How are you? After 3 months of physical therapy and taping, I am happy to report that my Achilles tendinitis is slowly improving. I can walk farther and have returned to hills, preferring to do so in trekking sandals. I thank you for your prayers.

My virtual Camino route takes me from Spokane northeast directly over the earth to the Pyrénées. (It is interesting to think of southern France being in that direction.) In September, I will virtually reach Milepost 2129 in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada, north of Newfoundland. Then, I'll head toward Milepost 2880, in Sudproven, Greenland. From there, I'll make my way to Ireland, and then eventually to France. This walk forces me to think of the



St. John the Evangelist Cathedral in Spokane WA, where the author marked Milepost 2000 on her virtual Camino, August 9, 2020. Photo by the author.

world in three dimensions! A simple pedometer hangs around my neck to count my daily steps and miles. I walk wherever I choose, even on a treadmill. Strangely, walking this 5,055-mile virtual Camino seems perfect for a pandemic.

The walking is a spiritual experience for me. It takes me out of myself and my issues into the beauty of God's creation, which includes both magnificent forests, parks, gardens and the

After 3 months of physical therapy and taping, the author's Achilles tendinitis is slowly improving. She can now walk farther and has returned to hills, preferring to do so in trekking sandals. Photo by the author.



edgy urban experience of problems like homelessness and substance abuse. I see, hear and know Black Lives Matter. I pray the Rosary on the sidewalk outside an abortion facility, trusting that Love will prevail. Imagine Saint James walking in front of you. Imagine what it would be like to discuss our world with Ignatius of Loyola or Teresa of Avila. What would they do? When I am tempted or afraid, I call for Saint Michael or Our Lady. If I am sad, contemplating the love of Jesus and His mother profoundly helps me. At times, I just rest in the palm of God's hand or under His wing, mindlessly trusting in His care and power. And there is gratitude for all of it, seen and unseen, for my life, joy, and pain and for Jesus showing us the Way, how to live and love.

I want you to know I am praying for you, whatever your need. Let us pray for pilgrims everywhere. Help me pray for all the people of Nunavut, Canada. Let us pray for anyone who is suffering, for everyone affected by the pandemic, and for the repose of the souls of the departed. Until next time, keep walking and be at peace.

Love,
Leah

Editor's note: This is the sixth reflection from Leah G. 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, December 2019, March 2020 and June 2020 issues of La Concha. ☪

Returning Well

By Natasha Ravnik
Oakland, CA

PREPARING for the return from the Camino de Santiago is as essential as preparing for it.

For any pilgrim wishing to make this incredible, valuable, personal journey I recommend the following to promote safety and well-being on and off the Camino.

First off, I highly recommend the book "Returning from Camino" by Alexander John Shaia. This book should be required reading for any pilgrim attempting to walk the Camino de Santiago. "Returning from Camino" discusses the spiritual aspect of a pilgrimage, which is described essentially as a rite of passage. Shaia recommends having a spiritual mentor as well as performing rituals upon return. He encourages pilgrims to think about the meaning of their return as they train to walk.

This book also helps the pilgrim mentally prepare for re-entry home, which can be a psychologically difficult experience. This is very important: I trained well, I walked well. My whole Camino journey was about wellness. But I had a very hard time reintegrating into my life after the Camino because I did not know how to do so.

Shaia further explains that on a pilgrimage one can have a 'turn around point' that can present challenges, even dangers, on a spiritual journey. Effectively processing such an experience is integral to "returning well."

My 'turn around point' would prove to be the greatest spiritual challenge I faced on my pilgrimage. In France, as I was making my way to my home, I narrowly escaped a sexual assault by a ride-share driver.

Sexual assault can happen anywhere. On the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, reported assaults are extremely rare. I want to stress that all of my fellow male pilgrims on the Camino and 99%

of males I encountered on my journey were total gentlemen. Until that one ride, I never felt unsafe. But the incident really hurt me and was devastating to my post-Camino processing. Nearly two years later, I am still weeding out trauma from my greatest personal triumph.

That said, for women walking alone, I recommend taking a self-defense class. Since my return to the United States, I have taken a day-long assault prevention course. The confidence it gave me to take care of myself was powerfully healing. I would walk the Camino again in a heartbeat. My Compostela is my most prized possession.

Buen Camino! Healthy Return! Ultreia! ☪



Keep walking

By Karin Kiser
San Diego, CA

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER the aftermath of my first Camino in 2011. After weeks of walking with no cell phone, camera or contact with anyone back home, I took my first taxi from Finisterre to the airport in Santiago. It was surreal. Whizzing by in minutes what took three days to traverse on foot.

Then there was the flight home. I was trapped in a tube flying through the sky in a cramped seat surrounded by hundreds of loud talkers with freshly laundered clothes and perfectly coifed hair. Meanwhile I had been wearing one of two shirts for the past six weeks.

And then came my friends, family, and clients. The most common question was, “What was the best part of the trip?” “What was the highlight?” It’s nearly impossible to summarize a pilgrimage this way.

They say the real Camino begins after you arrive in Santiago, when you take your experience home with you. They are right. The bigger challenge begins at home. How do we keep the spirit of the Camino alive in our daily lives?

One of the easiest ways to incorporate the pilgrim way at home is to keep walking. It doesn’t matter if there are no hiking trails or parks nearby. We can just put on our walking shoes and head out the front door. Being in nature on a regular basis calms the mind and connects us with something larger than ourselves. Nature has a way of putting things in their proper perspective. This is true now more than ever.

Unfortunately, it’s tempting to leave walking until the end of the day or the weekend when we “have more time” or after we “get X or Y done.” The mind uses various tactics like this to keep itself busy and focus on things that are seemingly urgent but not necessarily important. It’s not a question of having more time but rather, how we prioritize it.

Even if only for 30 minutes or an hour, consider your daily walks to be a sacred time to just be with yourself and connect with nature.

Adapted from “After the Camino: Your Pocket Guide to Integrating the Camino de Santiago into Your Daily Life” (Karin Kiser, Camino Chronicles Press, 2019). You will find a review of this book in the June 2019 issue of La Concha. ☞



The author takes a neighborhood stroll in Galicia, Spain, July 2018. Photographer Kathy Stearns.

One Step at a Time

By Daniel De Kay
Sebastopol, CA

EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO I walked my first Camino. It was such a great experience that after reaching Finisterre I turned around and walked back to St. Jean Pied de Port. The physical routine, the simplicity, the community of pilgrims, the food, the wine, the wide-open skies... these have drawn me back again and again.

There is something else that draws me back to the Camino: its hardships. Yes, the heat, rain, mud, blisters, pain, sweat, fatigue, hunger, thirst and loneliness. I have learned more about myself through these parts of the Camino than I ever learned from sunny days, lively conversation, lovely meals, another glass of wine or a soft bed. As in life, it’s the hardships that teach us patience, show us our strengths and stretch us into stronger and more resilient people. And in life, as on the Camino, it’s our fellow travelers, family and friends, who help us through the hard times. We carry each other.

There’s a common saying, “Your Camino doesn’t end in Santiago; that’s where your real Camino begins.” After hundreds (or thousands) of kilometers, you finally enter the Plaza del Obradoiro, walk up the well-worn steps and enter the fabled cathedral. If you’re lucky, you watch the massive botafumeiro swing high above your head. You hug the saint, visit the crypt and re-enter the plaza as an accomplished pilgrim. Now what? Where to go, what to do? Where are the arrows for the rest of one’s life?

In times like these we face today—with fire and smoke, threats of disease, uncertainty and the unknown all around—we can take lessons from our Camino experiences. As we say in Spanish, “paso a paso,” one step at a time.

If we can walk across Spain through heat, rain, mud, blisters and more, then we can make it through these times of uncertainty as well. Paso a paso, one step, one day at a time, helping each other along the way. Mask up, keep your distance, smile, lend a hand and give a glass of cool water. We’re always on the Camino. ☞

Pilgrimage: It's mostly in your head

By David A. Carpenter
Minneapolis, MN

BECKY AND I WALKED the Camino Francés in 2016. A few weeks after we got home, a friend asked whether a bedridden person could do a pilgrimage. A couple of years later, we walked the Pilgrims' Way to Canterbury. As we began, the Dean of Winchester Cathedral, Catherine Ogle, asked us why we were doing it.

To answer those questions, I had to clarify my understanding of what pilgrimage is. There are a lot of pilgrimages in the world, and they don't have a lot in common. Not all involve walking or carrying a pack. Not all are physically demanding. They might follow a traditional path, or they might not. Sometimes it's about the destination, but sometimes it's more about the journey. What they do have in common, though, is what I think makes an authentic pilgrimage.

The purpose of a pilgrimage is spiritual. In medieval times, people walked the Camino to venerate the remains of St. James, or to add weight to their prayers, or in the hope that God would look favorably on them. Today a lot of people are just trying to make sense out of their lives; God might not enter into it, but that doesn't make it any less spiritual.

Pilgrimage begins with a serious intention. "The Book of Common Prayer" says pilgrimage "is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately." We prepare ourselves, and we plan for success.

A pilgrimage might follow a traditional path, but it might not. The Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō said, "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise; seek what they sought." He didn't mean that we should shun traditional paths, but that we should follow whatever path we choose for the right reasons.

A pilgrimage is immersive. We set aside our day-to-day life to focus on the pilgrimage, and we maintain that focus until our pilgrimage is over.

Pilgrimage must take us outside our comfort zone, giving us the experience of being "a stranger in a strange land." Typically, that happens through travel, but there are other ways to achieve it.

A pilgrimage must have a significant duration. The experience of setting aside our ordinary life and leaving our comfort zone must be prolonged to have any effect.

In support of these principles, Catherine talked about how the path gets "walked into you." We notice it more in our sore muscles and scraped knees, but every step changes us. Our trainer, Jen, advised us that we "might have to change your definition of success." Most peregrinos hope to carry their packs and walk the whole way, but we met several who were obliged to take buses or trains, or to have their packs transported. In talking with them, there's no doubt that they had as genuine a pilgrimage experience as anybody. Becky suggested that even if you're not planning to carry everything on your back, it might be helpful to pack as if you were. As Thoreau said, "simplify, simplify."

Finally, we saw this prayer in Southwark Cathedral in London, the starting point for Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury:

Teach us, O God, to view our life here on earth as a pilgrim's path to heaven and give us grace to tread it courageously in the company of your faithful people. Help us to set our affections on things above, not on the passing vanities of this world, and grant that as we journey on in the way of holiness we may bear a good witness to our Lord and serve all who need our help along the way, for the glory of your name.

The core of this idea transcends any faith tradition: pilgrimage is a practice for real life. ☞

Facing page: Somewhere along The Way
Photo credit: Thom Rying.





Do American Pilgrims Leave No Trace?

By Connie Johnmeyer
Columbia, MO

A concern expressed on Camino websites is the presence of used toilet paper and human feces (hereafter called human trace) along Camino paths. As a pilgrim, I share this concern. As a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia, I conducted a self-funded pilot study to learn how American Pilgrims view this issue.

At the March 2020 Gathering of Pilgrims, 28 American Pilgrims completed a survey about human trace on the Camino. All but one who completed the survey were experienced pilgrims who confirmed that bathroom emergencies happen: 96.2% had seen toilet paper and 48% had seen human trace on or near the Camino. Seventy-five percent had gone to the bathroom outdoors while walking the Camino. All were bothered by the human trace they'd seen on or near the trail.

Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is a non-governmental organization that educates people how to be good stewards of natural resource areas by following seven principles of ethical conduct.

Two of its principles are particularly relevant to human trace on the Camino: plan ahead and dispose

of waste properly. Leave No Trace recommends packing a bag to carry out toilet paper and a trowel to bury human trace. Most survey respondents had taken toilet paper or wet wipes (92.6%) and packed bags to carry out litter (74.1%). Only 25.9% had taken a trowel. For their next Camino, more than half the pilgrims I surveyed intend to bring toilet paper and/or wet wipes (60.7%) and a bag to carry out litter (53.6%); 39.3% intend to bring a trowel.

Like me, most respondents had seen and were bothered by human trace on the Camino. When going to the bathroom outdoors themselves, most had taken the Leave No Trace advice to carry out paper litter on the Camino, but far fewer reported carrying a trowel.

Bathroom emergencies do happen. The best that pilgrims can do is to be prepared to deal with the emergency. Consider carrying a trowel or bags to carry out trace if the need arises.

When we follow the Leave No Trace recommendations to lessen our impact on the Camino, we project a positive American presence and do our part to assure a safe and pleasurable Camino experience is available to others for decades to come. ¡Buen Camino! ☺