

# LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

## *Collecting Tinder: Our Pilgrim Resource Issue*

*Inside:*

Favorite Books

Online Communities

Insightful Documentary Films

Pilgrims as Resources

## *Final Reflection:*

**President's Day in the North Atlantic**

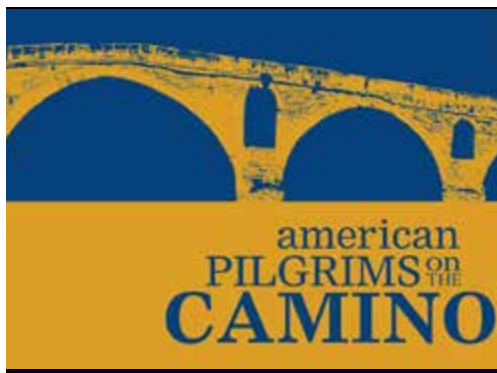
SPRING 2022



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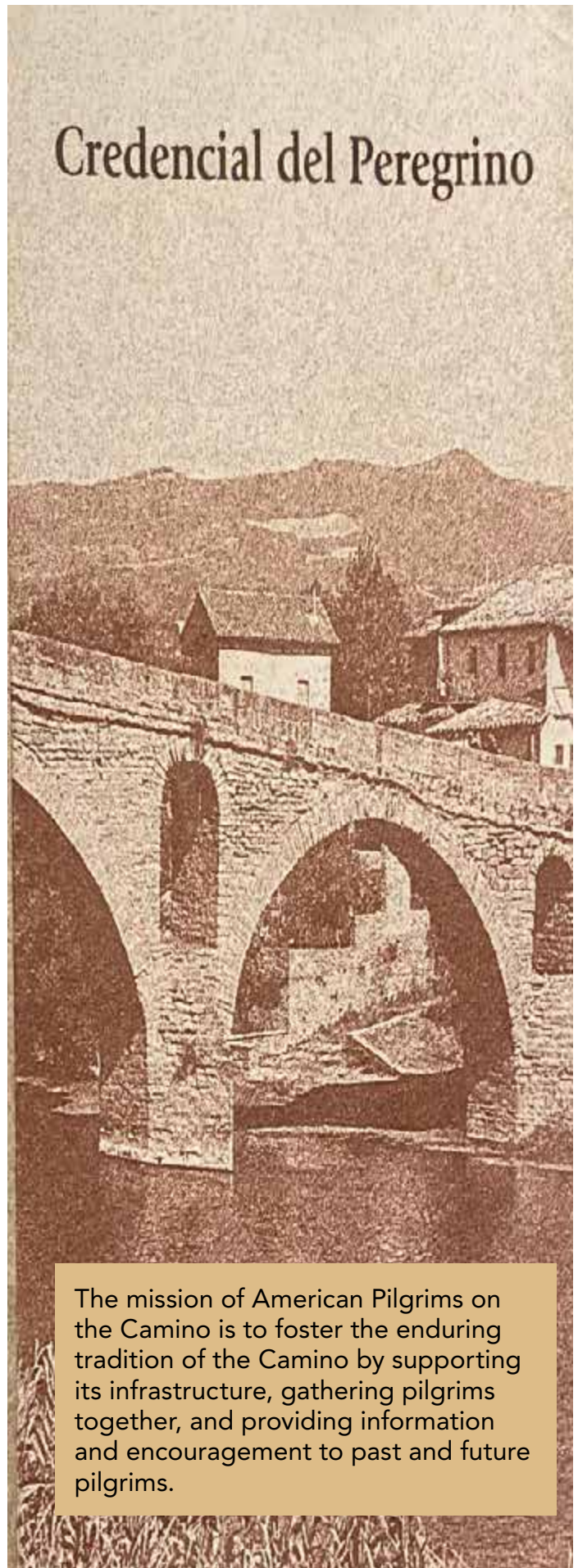


COVER Photo:Collecting Tinder  
Photo by Amy Horton.

American Pilgrims Credencial (at right)  
Photo by Amy Horton.

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## Credencial del Peregrino



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.

# LA CONCHA

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Fellow Pilgrims,

This second year of the St. James Jubilee, many more of us are preparing to return to the Camino than when Spain opened its borders last summer. All of us, however, have had two years or more to turn within ourselves and to other pilgrims in new and old ways, as we continued the deep and intentional activity of being, and ever becoming, pilgrims.

This year's issues are devoted to the life cycle of that pilgrim fire which is sparked somewhere in our life, and which burns in us thereafter. In this issue, *Collecting Tinder*, we invited you to share images and reflections on the resources that you would like other pilgrims to know about. Thanks to those of you who took the time to spread the good news about one or more books, films, or podcasts that have made a difference in your pilgrim's journey, or who provided a personal interest story about the events and people that have provided that spark you needed to deepen your engagement as a pilgrim. More such resources are regularly added to our [YOUTUBE](#) site, [WEBPAGE](#), and [FACEBOOK](#) groups, too, so stay connected!

As we look forward to the upcoming issues, consider sharing your wisdom, your insights, and your stories. Here's an overview of the themes:

### **Summer 2022 Issue**

**Re-igniting the Spark.** How has the spirit of the Camino come alive for you in strange, unexpected, and wonderful ways this past year? Submit your 400 or fewer word story by **May 21, 2022**, for consideration.

### **Fall 2022 Issue**

**Sharing the Fire.** Since having become a pilgrim, how have you tended the fire of your pilgrim spirit to create warmth for others? How have you protected it to create light for others in the darkness? Submit your 400 or fewer word story by **August 21, 2022**, for consideration.

### **Winter 2022**

**Tending the Embers.** When and how did you move out of the activity of "being on pilgrimage" and into the heart space of "being a pilgrim"? What does that immersion in the pilgrim identity look and feel like for you? Submit your 400 or fewer word story by **November 21, 2022**, for consideration.

In peace,

*Megan*

Megan Muthupandiyam, Editor in Chief



Steve Lytch,  
Newest Chair of the  
American Pilgrims On the  
Camino Board of  
Directors.

**Most of us who** have gone on pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago, as well as those who aspire to become pilgrims, can identify something that sparked the flame of our pilgrim spirit. For me it was the gift of a guidebook given to my wife and me shortly after our daughter moved to Spain in 2007. We wanted to know more about her adopted country. We started our Camino just to see more of Spain. We quickly learned as we encountered other walkers along the way and shared our life journeys that this was more than that. We were becoming pilgrims.

How does a pilgrim keep the spark alive? For us it is the fellowship of American Pilgrims on the Camino. It is the tinder that maintains and grows the experience that was ignited. The stories we share of our pilgrimages expand the warmth and light of learning. Through the **FACEBOOK** community, *La Concha*, and the resources on our web site we keep the fire alive. We add to it through our **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

of those who are maintaining the paths and *flechas*, improving the albergues, training hospitaleros/as, and providing **CREDENTIALS** for the pilgrimage.

During the worst of the pandemic, the Camino spirit did not fail. Even as the number of people embarking on pilgrimage decreased, **DONATIONS** increased and membership is growing. We are in a strong position to help associations in Spain refurbish the Camino's infrastructure through our grants. Our members are eager to return to the Camino as hospitaleros and volunteers at Ribadiso. Our enthusiasm is evident in how quickly the spaces for Gathering were filled, and a waiting list had to be created. We are eager to kindle the flame of our lives as pilgrims.

The board of directors is eager to hear your ideas, expand and improve the programs we have in place, and explore new opportunities for service, while ensuring that we always adhere to our value of simplicity. At the beginning of this second Camino Holy Year, we are grateful for your fellowship and blessed to work alongside so many creative and passionate pilgrims.

Buen Camino,

*Steve*

Steve Lytch

Chair, Board of Directors

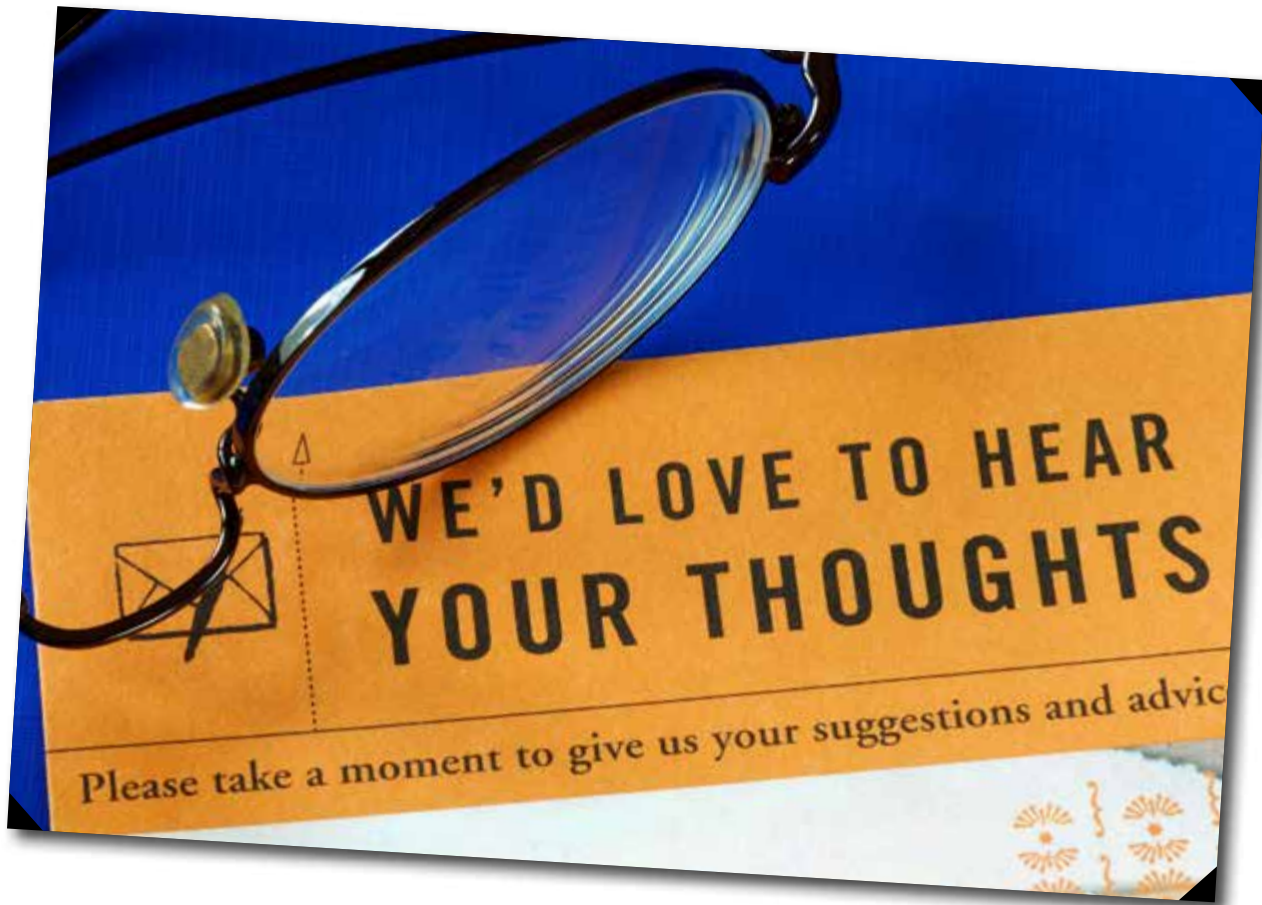




## MEMBERS ONLY

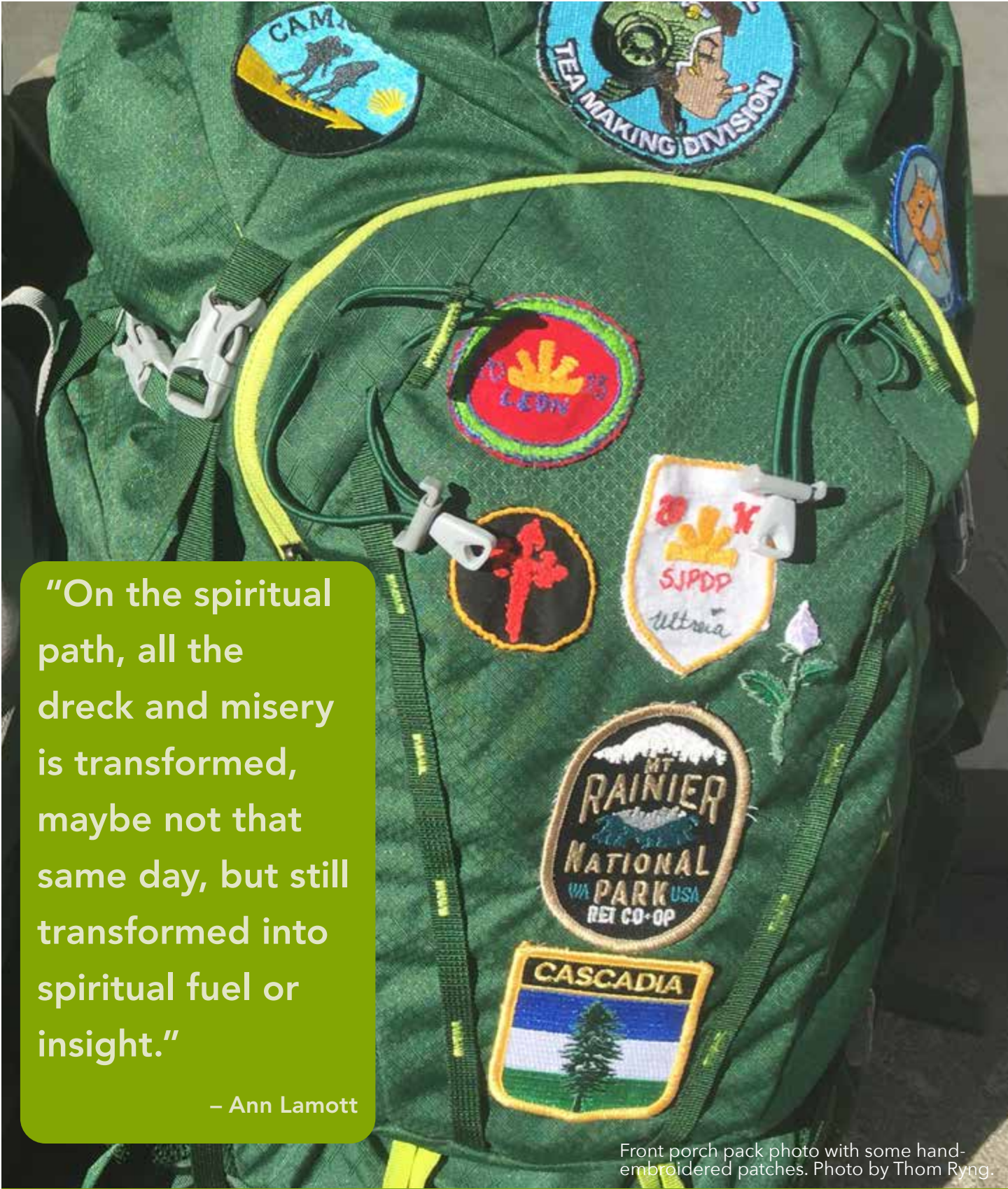
### Thank you for your Continued Membership in American Pilgrims. Your Membership Survey is Coming Soon!

by Tom Labuziowski  
South Bend, IN



**If you received this issue of *La Concha* via an email from American Pilgrims,** you are one of the Pilgrims who took the time, initiative, and generous action to complete a membership form and become a fellow official member of the American Pilgrims on the Camino. Ours is a national not-for-profit organization. The all-volunteer membership team asks you to please renew your membership each year. Your renewal is more important now than ever before as this pandemic is challenging the non-profits on the Camino in Spain. Help them re-boot as we come out of COVID-19 closures. This past two years has also seen fewer new and renewing American Pilgrims on the Camino. This is your American Pilgrims, and your continued membership is valuable, admired, and deeply appreciated. May we count on your continued helpful support in 2022? And perhaps email this issue of *La Concha* to a fellow pilgrim, and invite them to join us in making a difference.

In the meantime, please watch for—and submit your input to—your membership survey in the weeks ahead.



"On the spiritual path, all the dreck and misery is transformed, maybe not that same day, but still transformed into spiritual fuel or insight."

– Ann Lamott

Front porch pack photo with some hand-embroidered patches. Photo by Thom Ryng.

# Camino Tinder



# || CAMINO TINDER ||

## Tinder to Light the Pilgrim Flame: A List of Camino Resources

by Amy Horton  
Warrenton, MO

We asked pilgrims what resources they've encountered that might inspire others as they prepare to walk or seek to deepen their pilgrim experience. Following is a list of books, films, podcasts, and virtual communities that have been tinder to light the flame of our pilgrim spirit, particularly in this challenging period during the pandemic when many of us could not walk the pilgrimages we had planned, and instead explored different paths closer to home. These lists are by no means exhaustive of all the pilgrim resources and inspiration available, but serves as a small sampling of what pilgrims may find helpful, wherever they may be in their pilgrim journey.

*Editor's note: Resources listed in alphabetical order. Over the next few pages this list will be interspersed with reviews of the sources listed.*

### Books

- *A Furnace Full of God: A Holy Year on the Camino de Santiago*, by Rebekah Scott
- *A Million Steps*, by Kurt Koontz
- *Beyond Even the Stars: A Compostela Pilgrim in France*, by Kevin A. Codd

*"His simple, captivating style and endearing storytelling feel like a friend telling you their reflective account of what they experienced on pilgrimage." – Amy Horton*

- *I'm Off Then: Losing and Finding Myself on the Camino de Santiago*, by Hape Kerkeling
- *Pilgrim*, poems by David Whyte
- *Returning from Camino*, by Alexander John Shaia
- *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, by Phil Cousineau

*"It spoke to me about how to be in pilgrim mindset, an attitude that positively affected my pre-Camino prep, my Camino experiences, and my post-Camino pilgrim life." – Deborah Weltman*

*"This book was the bible to my first solo adventures, and I've read it multiple times in the 20 years that have passed. It increased my gratitude and helped me develop a way to talk about my experiences without alienating people. Priceless." – Mary Williams*

- *The Camino Way*, by Victor Prince
- *To the Field of Stars: A Pilgrim's Journey to Santiago de Compostela*, by Kevin A. Codd
- *Walking to the End of the World: A Thousand Miles on the Camino de Santiago*, by Beth Jusino

There is a large and continually growing body of literature about the Camino de Santiago specifically and pilgrimage generally. View an extensive list of printed resources at: [AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG/BOOKS/](https://americanpilgrims.org/books/)

# CAMINO TINDER

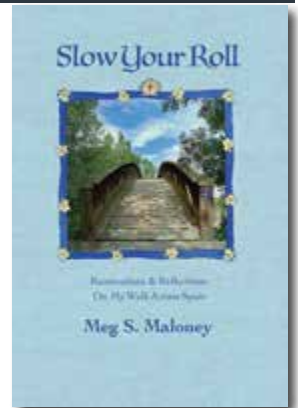
## Slow Your Roll

## Book Review

*Slow Your Roll*  
by Meg Maloney  
Bobtimystic Books, 2021  
354 pages

*Reviewed by Joseph A. Curro, Jr.*  
Arlington, MA

After raising her children and recuperating from an injury, Meg Maloney decided in her mid-50s that she wanted an adventure of her own. She embarked on a pilgrimage along the Camino Francés, seeking to undertake most of the spiritual and physical journey on her own.



Spain was not new to Maloney. She had spent her junior year of college in Madrid and was fluent in Spanish. During her time in the country, though, she had never heard about the Camino. She only learned of the pilgrim trail when her sister-in-law and niece walked it. And she later encouraged her son to trek across the Camino after his own study-abroad experience in Spain.

In so many dimensions, this is a book about family. Maloney opens her memoir with a discussion of her parents' divorce and how this led to the development of self-reliance and problem-solving capabilities. She writes extensively about her children and spouse, sharing notes of encouragement from her kids and a beautiful poem by her son, Jackson. Maloney worries about how her Camino will change once her husband, Tom, joins her in Sarria, and she expresses gratitude for the opportunity to share her experience and to walk into Santiago with her partner.

As important to the author as all of this is, Maloney describes with great feeling the phenomenon of the "Camino family." Her family includes Debbie, a fast-talking New Yorker who hilariously butchers the Spanish language and has a propensity for messing up her room reservations. Laura is hobbled by an injury, but she several times makes the effort to taxi from her stopping point to rendezvous for dinner with the others. And then there is Alfie, who entertains the others with impromptu, freestyle rapping—and as luck would have it—is a college acquaintance of one of Maloney's sons. (Along the way, a sort of "Camino kismet" leads the author to meet individual pilgrims who each know one of her three children.) To her Camino family and other pilgrims, Maloney is known as "Margarita," her adopted Spanish name.

The author writes frankly about challenges she faced after booking her entire trip in advance through a travel agency. She also struggles with the judgment she encounters from a fellow pilgrim, who is unrestrained in his criticism of those who send luggage ahead or stay in private hotels.

Overall, [\*Slow Your Roll\*](#) is a joyous and heartfelt book, and a worthy addition to the genre of Camino memoirs.





## Every Step Together on the Camino de Santiago

## Book Review

*Every Step Together on the Camino de Santiago*  
by Ken and Kathy Privratsky  
Printed by BookBaby, Pennsauken, New Jersey, 2018  
545 pages on Kindle

*Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele*  
*Anchorage, AK*

After watching a Zoom presentation on “The Camino Frances in the Time of COVID” for the Anchorage Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino in January, I immediately downloaded the **EBOOK VERSION OF THIS BOOK** [on my Kindle app on my iPhone]. Ken and Kathy Privratsky had walked the Camino Frances in September and October, 2021. I had walked from Pamplona to Burgos just a week or two later. So it was fun, watching their Zoom presentation, to figuratively be walking right behind them, enjoying their same sights and similar experiences. Reading their book in the next few days, with its beautiful photographs, gave me another post-Camino glow and inspires me to return to the Camino.

A retired military couple, Ken and Kathy had already visited Spain several times before walking their first Camino in 2017. Taken by the Camino Francés, they walked it two more times, from St. Jean Pied-de-Port to Santiago, Finisterre and Muxia. The book title’s beginning, “Every Step Together . . .” is no exaggeration. I have walked Caminos with my wife and three of my four adult children. But not every step together. We walk at our own paces. So not only is this book a wonderful Camino memoir and an excellent detailed and beautifully illustrated guide to the Camino Francés, it is also a love story by and about this long married couple. They truly did walk every step together every day. They share their story, and the story of the Camino Francés, with both exuberance and humility.



## Pocket Guides that Pack a Punch

## Book Review

*by Kathy Stearns*  
*Phoenix, AZ*

My most interesting conversations about the Camino typically start in the most unassuming way. Someone might comment on my Cross of St. James pin. I’ll strike up a conversation with someone reading a Spain guide book, shopping for Albariño wine, or taking note of a yellow arrow. These benign interactions often lead to the discovery of a fellow pilgrim or a person longing to start his own pilgrimage. As many of us know, you cannot tell someone how to “do” a pilgrimage. Logistics are very necessary, but the best advice is to be open to the awe moments and to the new people, places, and personal revelations. To the things that take pilgrims back to their own experiences. Personally, I dislike giving advice, but I do enjoy sharing, and often gifting, a few little (often smaller than a credential) books that I wished I’d read before my Camino.

*[Your Inner Camino](#)* and *[After the Camino](#)*, by Karin Kiser, are pocket-size guides to inspire and transform during the Camino and to integrate the pil-



grim experience into your daily life once you return home. *Your Inner Camino* is full of ponder points I find useful now, nearly five years after my own Camino adventure. *After the Camino* is a guide that helps propel you forward on your life journey and integrate the revelations that came with your pilgrimage: simplicity, staying open, gratitude. The books pushed me to be more curious, more accepting of others and myself, and more forgiving. Both are lightweight enough to tuck into a pocket or purse as reminders of the power of pilgrimage.

# CAMINO TINDER

## Michener on the Camino

## Book Review

*Iberia*

by James Michener

Published by Dial Press Trade Paperback, 2015

976 Pages

Review by Julie Gianelloni Connor

Houston, TX

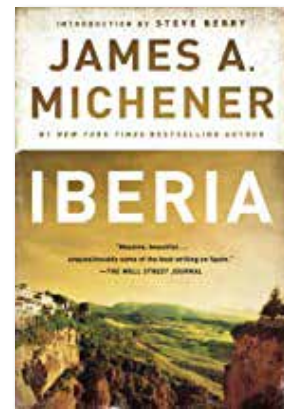
In my memoir/guidebook on the Camino, I start by explaining the three motivating factors that led me to setting out on the Camino Francés in May 2016. I can say without reservation that “the tinder” was Chapter 13 of James Michener’s book *Iberia*. (My other two reasons can be thought of as fuel added to Michener’s tinder).

I first read [Iberia](#) in 1971, while living in Portugal. My New Zealand roommate at the time loaned me her copy and said that, since I was living in Portugal and visiting Spain frequently, I really needed to read the book. She was right.

I fell in love with the historical narrative immediately. It became my guide to Spain. Written in 1968, it focuses on Spain, but does cover Portugal somewhat. In Chapter 13, Michener talks about his journey on the Camino. He did not walk except for a very small portion. Still, his account of his experience on the Camino is well worth reading. In particular, his retelling of the miraculous happenings in O’Cebreiro is so vivid and compelling that I was never able to forget it, nor his rapturous description of the beauty of Leon Cathedral’s stained-glass windows.

Beyond the Camino, Michener’s book is the best exploration of the Spanish character and culture that I have found. Through Michener I learned of important festivals (Pamplona for the running of the bulls, Sevilla for Holy Week and the spring fair, etc.). Michener informed me about the continuing effect of the Spanish Civil War on the Spanish psyche and Spanish politics. Moreover, Michener answered a question I had wondered about—why do Americans embrace France and Italy and even Greece so much more readily than Spain, despite Spain’s importance to world history, art, architecture, and many other fields?

Before my departure for the Camino in 2016, I reread *Iberia*. I found that it is still relevant on culture, art, and the Spanish character. The book is unfortunately dated on politics since it was written before the death of dictator Francisco Franco. Michener spends a lot of pages in the book speculating on, and consulting Spaniards about, what will happen after Franco’s death. We already know the answer to that puzzle, so those pages are no longer relevant, though still interesting in regards to understanding the mindset of Spaniards.





## The Way of the Wild Goose

## Book Review

*The Way of the Wild Goose: Three Pilgrimages Following Geese, Stars, and Hunches on the Camino de Santiago*

by Beebe Bahrami

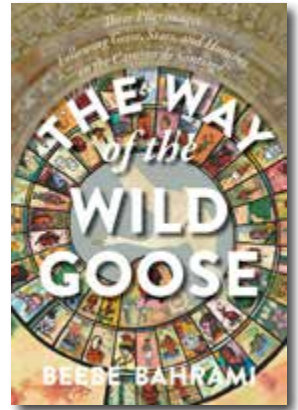
Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2022

418 pages

Reviewed by Shoshana D. Kerewsky

Eugene, OR

If you have walked or researched the Camino Francés, you've probably encountered Beebe Bahrami's *Moon* and spiritual traveler guidebooks. You may also be familiar with her genre-defying and wide-ranging accounts that include the regional and local history of Spain and France, archeology, anthropology, and spirituality, as well as tender descriptions of local people, delectable foods, and walking adventures. [\*The Way of the Wild Goose\*](#) is her third such memoir. Though it easily stands on its own merits, it is also a delightful sequel to *Café Oc: A Nomad's Tales of Magic, Mystery, and Finding Home in the Dordogne of Southwestern France* and *Café Neandertal: Excavating Our Past in One of Europe's Most Ancient Places*.



Bahrami here takes the reader through three of her Camino pilgrimages, though not entirely on the Francés. All follow her exploration of the Game of the Goose and the ancient, syncretic symbolism of the goose, including pre-Christian “bird-footed beings” that are associated with European Marianism.

These are also pilgrimages of spiritual renewal and self-discovery. Bahrami articulates the difficult and sometimes unattainable balance between being present, following one's memories and associations, pursuing goals, and immersion in the pilgrimage. She moves by turns through her personal and professional engagement with the Camino. Asking “Why not let it all be a mystery?” she nevertheless delves into the conversations, scholarly reading, and guidance from other pilgrims, locals, and friends that foster her understanding of the communal and personal meanings the goose may hold. While her manifest quest is tracking the goose, recognizing and holding onto joy in the moment is the true prize.

Those who have walked the Camino will appreciate Bahrami's loving descriptions of villages, pilgrim life, meaningful discussions, the Camino's churches, environments, monuments, meals, exhausting days, and the other symbols she encounters and considers as she walks. Her knowledge of the region is extensive and her deep engagement with the Camino (and her friends, stone markings, Neandertals, and the French town of Sarlat-la-Canéda) shines through in this intimate, moving, and informative memoir.

Watch as well for the updated edition of Bahrami's *Moon Camino de Santiago: Sacred Sites, Historic Villages, Local Food & Wine* this spring.



# || CAMINO TINDER ||

## Podcasts

- My Camino: The Podcast, hosted by Dan Mullins
- Sacred Steps: A Pilgrimage Journal, hosted by Kevin Donahue
- The Camino Café, hosted by Leigh Brennan
- The Camino Podcast, hosted by Dave Whitson

These and other Camino- and pilgrimage-related podcasts are available through most smartphone podcast apps or wherever you get your podcasts.

## Virtual Communities

Pilgrimage in Place, a private Facebook group and occasional Zoom meetings hosted by Annie O'Neill. Join the group at: [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/ANNIEONEILPILGRIMAGEINPLACE](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ANNIEONEILPILGRIMAGEINPLACE)

Camino Wisdom Stories, monthly Zoom events hosted by Adam Wells and Kathy Kehe. Register at: [WWW.HEROSCAMINO.COM/EVENTS](https://www.heroscaminowisdom.com/events)

Camino Pilgrim International Discussion Group, a private Facebook group hosted by Johnnie Walker Santiago and Annie RM Cee. Join the group at: [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/CONFRATERNITYSAINTJAMES](https://www.facebook.com/groups/CONFRATERNITYSAINTJAMES)

American Pilgrims on the Camino virtual programs, available on demand at the group's YouTube channel: [WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/CHANNEL/UCRLSQK4TNUPUZZMGEPK2ZT3A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRLSQK4TNUPUZZMGEPK2ZT3A)

The American Pilgrims on the Camino Facebook Group, a Facebook group full of supportive conversations and resourceful information for all pilgrims: [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/AMERICANPILGRIMS/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/AMERICANPILGRIMS/)

*"Honestly, the things that have kept the Camino spirit alive for me the last two years are people who have created spaces for pilgrims to continue to commune, even during lockdown. Being able to come together with pilgrims, share stories, revisit Camino memories, and continue to grow together. That has been my tether to the Camino spirit." – Roni Kay*

## Articles

Go for a Walk, by Arthur C. Brooks, *The Atlantic*, [WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM/FAMILY/ARCHIVE/2021/09/HAPPINESS-WALKING-PILGRIMAGE/620075/](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/09/happiness-walking-pilgrimage/620075/)

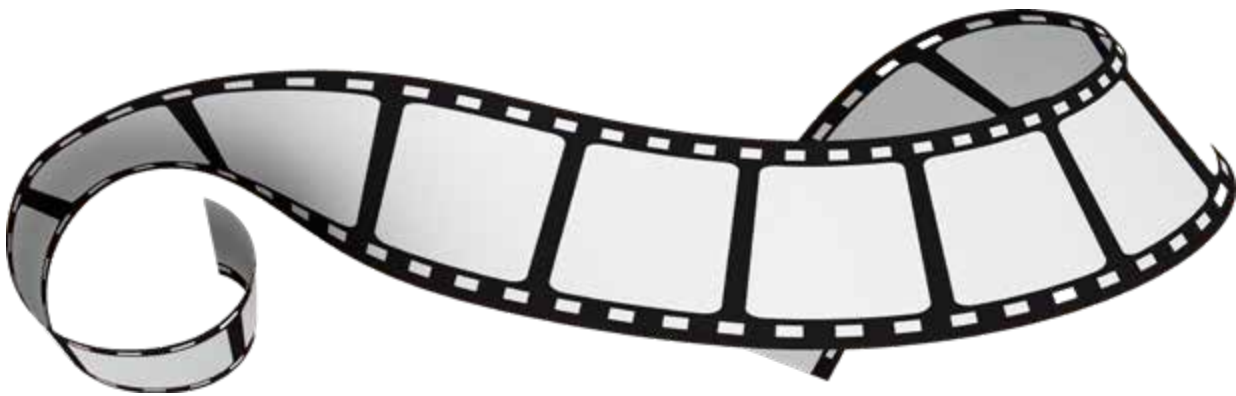


# || CAMINO TINDER ||

## Films

- *Camino Skies*, directed by Fergus Grady and Noel Smyth
- *Footprints: The Path of Your Life*, directed by Juan Manuel Coteló
- *I'll Push You*, directed by Terry Parish and Chris Karcher
- *Perpetual Journey*, directed by Douglas and Laurie Challenger
- *Phil's Camino*, directed by Annie O'Neill
- *The Way*, directed by Emilio Estevez
- *Walking the Camino: Six Ways to Santiago*, directed by Lydia Smith

Many films and videos have been made about the Camino de Santiago and pilgrimage. See a longer list of films and videos at: [AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG/FILM-VIDEO/](https://americanpilgrims.org/film-video/)



# CAMINO TINDER

## Perpetual Journey: A Semester on the Road to Santiago

## Film Review

*Perpetual Journey: A Semester on the Road to Santiago*

Produced, directed, and edited by Douglas and Laurie Challenger

Chrysalis Media Arts Productions, 2021

Run time: 100 minutes

Reviewed by Amy Horton

Warrenton, MO

**PERPETUAL JOURNEY: A SEMESTER ON THE ROAD TO SANTIAGO** is a documentary film that follows the pilgrimages of five Franklin Pierce University students—Luke Walsky, Alexis Vantrees, Samantha Cordiliko, Michael Bona, and Matthew Maher—who walked the Camino Francés in 2017 as part of a study abroad program.

“To me it’s like the best way to teach,” says faculty leader Douglas Challenger, who, together with his wife Laurie, co-led the study abroad program and created the film. “Setting up a learning experience for them and putting them into it and coaching them through it.”

The students and program leaders each had a hand in filming the documentary, using handheld compact cameras they carried in their backpacks. As they walked and filmed, they caught candid commentary from each other, along with capturing a beautifully realistic account of the Camino experience:

The sounds of the Camino. The crunch of gravel beneath footsteps. The clipping of walking poles against pavement. And the “snoring orchestra” encountered in an albergue, as described by Bona.

Characteristic sights. Dairy cows passing by in a village. Long, sweeping vistas. Crossing busy highways. The desolation of the Meseta. Albergue bunk beds. Camino laundry hung out to dry.

Tastes of the Camino. Paella. Cheese. A refreshing cola. A well-earned vino tinto at day’s end.

A Camino soundtrack. The singing *gîte* host in France. A singing paellara. The singing nuns of Carrión de los Condes.

The challenges. Blisters and blackened toenails. Debilitating tendonitis that might end a Camino. Navigating wildfires. Saying goodbye to Camino family.

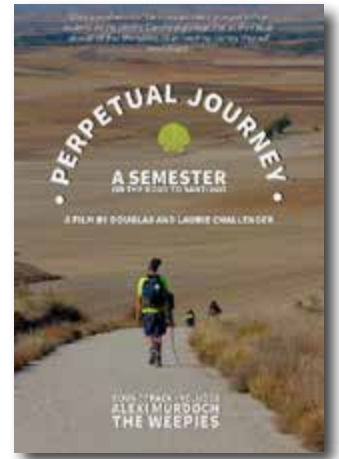
The joys. Amazing hospitaleros. Enjoying the 4,169th paella that has been prepared for pilgrims. Reuniting with Camino family.

A Camino angel. The doctor who provides healing and hope to Cordiliko.

The requisite epilogue. A Cape Finisterre sunset. Reflecting on lessons learned and the things they’ll carry home with them.

As one student reflects: “You don’t get what you want from the Camino. You get what you need.”

Editor’s note: This film is available for streaming at [VIMEO.COM/ONDEMAND/PERPETUALJOURNEY](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/perpetualjourney).





## Retrospective: Reflections on a Perpetual Journey, Five Years On

by Amy Horton  
Warrenton, MO

The Franklin Pierce students featured in the documentary film *Perpetual Journey* walked their Camino five years ago. I caught up with some of them to learn what sparked their interest in the Camino as a study abroad experience and what Camino lessons they still carry with them.

### Camino As a Study Abroad Experience

**Alexis Vantrees:** I was studying anthropology, and [something that] involved so much history was extremely fascinating to me. Plus, I have always thought the best way to learn is first-hand experiences.

**Matthew Maher:** Prior to the Camino, I had traveled abroad to several countries through foreign exchange programs, but never had I strapped 25 pounds to my back and carried it across a country. This didn't seem like a vacation, but rather a challenge and a change, both of which I needed.

**Luke Walsky:** I was in Doug's Documentary Studies class and he asked if I would consider taking this trip to help him document it. I love to travel and had been feeling like I was kind of in a rut in my personal life so, without thinking too much about the logistics, I agreed.

**Michael Bona:** I needed something different from my everyday life. What could be more different than leaving most of your life behind and walking every day for over 500 miles?

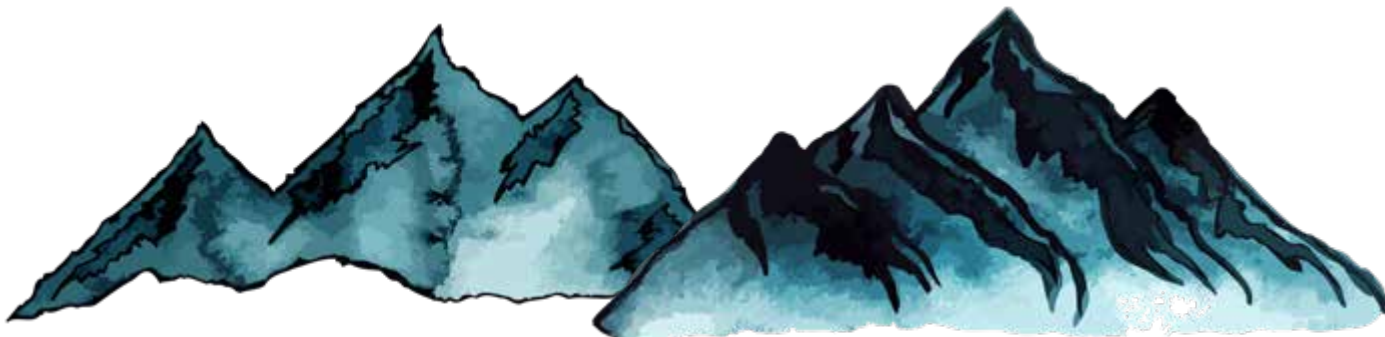
### Camino Lessons

**Matthew Maher:** One thing I learned along the Camino is the harder the journey, the more rewarding the destination. The Camino gave me confidence and strength but also taught me to be more open minded and empathic. Through all, the Camino brought me peace, for which I am most grateful.

**Alexis Vantrees:** I learned you are capable of doing anything you set your mind to, and stronger than you think. And to appreciate the stunning world around you.

**Michael Bona:** The most significant lesson the Camino taught me is about self-reflection. [It] is the key to personal growth. To be able to step back and reflect on how your life is and where your life is going.

**Luke Walsky:** What I learned more than anything is to not take anything for granted. When you're on the Camino, some of the best times you will have will be sitting around with a group of friends you might have just made that very same day talking about everything and nothing all at once over some bread and a cheap bottle of wine.



*Reviewed by Barb Tidd  
Salida, CO*

The monthly Zoom events that have been the most meaningful, thought-provoking, spiritually uplifting, emotionally supportive, and fulfilling, are the **CAMINO WISDOM STORIES** hosted by Kathy Kehe of Longmont, CO and Adam Wells of the UK. These events are well organized with hosts' opening remarks, quotes, and/or video clips to set the stage and get one thinking and feeling immediately about the theme and how one might relate to it. Monthly themes give attendees an opportunity to share their stories whether having been on the Camino once or numerous times and whether as a peregrino or hospitalero or as a future peregrino. Participants are from different countries. I have been grateful for pilgrims' willingness to share their deep feelings, personal experiences, weaknesses and growth and/or continued struggles in their lives, which may have surfaced and which they explored and may be continuing to explore as a result of their Camino experience.

One of the best ways to communicate is through stories. As a life coach, Kathy is skilled in reflecting back, highlighting, and asking questions to further delve into stories shared. Humor is sprinkled throughout the events.

My first Camino, on the Camino Francés, will start in late August 2022. Thanks in huge part to my participation in Zooms of the Camino Wisdom Stories; Colorado Front Range, St. Louis, and Charlotte Chapters of American Pilgrims on the Camino; the American Pilgrims on the Camino Open House and National Events; recommended books and videos/films; and talking with friends who have walked the Camino, I feel like I've already started my Camino. *Who am I? What/who is the real me? What is my purpose?* While the answers to these questions may change on the Camino, for now, they are 'helper,' 'connector,' and 'organizer.' While I will be totally open to Camino angels helping me, I hope to be a Camino angel to others. The more I help, the more I am blessed and feel joy!

Of the many themes and points made during these events, these stick with me: The end of the Camino is the beginning of another journey. Like the Alpha and Omega that are reversed on the Cathedral in Santiago, one's Camino continues long after returning home. It never ends.

Also, I'm looking forward to Beebe Bahrami's new edition of her book, *Moon—Camino de Santiago* being released on April 26, 2022. I've enjoyed listening to and learning from Beebe on Zooms. ☺





View from the Cathedral rooftop.  
Santiago de Compostela, Photo by Amy Horton.

"The thrust of continuous action is  
the firewood which fuels motivation."

– Steve Backley

# Gathering Kindling



## Visitation by a Camino Angel . . . and Other Gifts.

by Laura Sumner  
Plymouth, MA

**IN APRIL OF 2016** I walked my first Camino and celebrated my 41<sup>st</sup> birthday backpacking in Spain. Just divorced, I left my job of twenty years and was ready for a journey of personal exploration.

My friend Sarah committed to joining me and we planned, executed, and set off to St. Jean Pied de Port to walk the Camino Francés.

Our journey was grueling, challenging, physically painful, and at the same time exhilarating. We met people from all walks of life, from different parts of the world, and we received many special gifts along the way.

A night we spent at San Bol was one of these gifts. We washed our clothes in a stream and soaked our tired feet in a well that is said to have healing powers. That evening we enjoyed a communal meal and afterwards a pilgrim gave our small group massages. It was a night of laughter and pure bliss.

Another memorable day was heading to Astorga. It was pouring and we went from walking in mud to muddy red clay that stuck to our boots like cement. We came to a place on the trail that was complete-



Flooding rain.  
Photo by Laura Sumner.



Washing clothes in the stream. Photo by Sarah Daley.

ly flooded, and we stopped to assess the situation. Sarah wanted to sit down and cry, and I was just fed up. Just then our Camino angel appeared (wearing only a raincoat and we think boxer shorts). This angel came out of nowhere and diverted us to where he was standing. He had placed boards and rocks on the ground, and one by one he held on to us and instructed us where to step to get to safety. To this day, I think of how he just appeared and gave us what we needed. I should also mention he looked like Jesus.

I reflect on this Camino often and the lessons I learned. Don't underestimate the kindness of strangers; you don't need so much stuff; don't stress over things you can't control; enjoy the journey.

I returned once again to walk the Camino Primitivo in the fall of 2021. I know my Caminos are not yet done. In the meantime, I read, reflect, and listen to My Camino the Podcast to keep connected.

I'll end with the inscription found at *Alto del Perdon* that to me describes the feeling of the Camino. "Where the way of the wind crosses the way of the stars." ☞



## The Camino Calls: How the Mt. Rose Event Kindles the Flame

by David Jennings, co-coordinator of the Lake Tahoe Chapter Incline Village, NV

**IN RESPONSE** to the death of her father and sister in 2011, my wife Monica wanted to do something memorable, and though she had no hiking, backpacking, or similar experience, she wanted to walk the Camino de Santiago. So, we trained and in 2012 walked the 500 miles of the Camino Francés. As a result, we were hooked on the Camino.



Homemade ice cream sandwiches are enjoyed by Norcal & Sacramento Chapters. Photo by David Jennings.

At the first opportunity we went to a Hospitalero training session, at the end of which Monica stated to the group that we lived at Lake Tahoe and if anyone would like to hike with us, they were welcome. Sometime later, about thirty of the people responded that they would like to hike with us. Not exactly what Monica had had in mind.

No problem. We recruited pilgrim friends Frank and Carol Coughlin and a plan came together. The obvious date for the get together would be the weekend of the Feast of St. James. The location would be the Mt. Rose Campground, where we reserved campsites for tent camping. For the non-campers we planned homestays. Friday evening was getting acquainted and dinner, and we led hikes through the Sierras on Saturday & Sunday.

Socializing and meals were all in the campground.

The guest pilgrims contributed wines, cheeses and other appetizers, and the main meals were provided by the hosts, led by Chef Monica. Pilgrim Walt Scherer did a Saturday night paella. A Mass and pilgrim blessing were also important parts of the event. The event was run as a donativo—each guest offered what they could. Over the four or five years the event grew and was refined, but always ended with the question, “will you do this again next year?”

The Spirit of the Camino was truly evident in both the peoples and events of the get-together. The majority of the guests were members of the NorCal and Sacramento Chapters.

From 2013 till the pandemic, Monica and I did the Via Gebennensis; the Via Podiensis; the Vezelay; the Camino Portuguese; and the Italian, Way of St. Francis.

In 2019, I was asked by the National Board if I would consider forming a local Chapter of the American Pilgrims. Once again, I recruited Frank, and along with Carol and Monica we created the Lake Tahoe Chapter of the American Pilgrims. The Camino can be a life commitment. *Ultreia!* ☞



Social & Dinner at Mt. Rose Campground, Lake Tahoe. Photo by David Jennings.



## Remembering the Kindness of Strangers

by Babs Harrison  
Phoenix, AZ

Last fall, I walked the Camino from León, arriving in Santiago on my 65th birthday in an Año Xacobeo. Leaving Melide one foggy morning, after stopping at El Pequeño Oasis for a breakfast of Santiago cake and fresh raspberries from the adjacent field, my husband and I fell into an easy rhythm of walking and talking. As the sun rose, melting the dew in the meadows, we slowly shed layers, emerging from forest paths onto country roads, feeling lighter and invigorated for the day ahead, oblivious to time.

An approaching car slowed and stopped alongside us. The woman rolled down her window speaking rapid Spanish while pointing to the road ahead (from whence we had come). We nodded, mumbled “si” and “gracias,” and she sped off.

“Obviously we’re walking in the wrong direction,” I said to my husband. I hadn’t been watching for the yellow arrows, nor had I seen a pilgrim in a while. “Nope,” he replied. “She said we needed to walk on the opposite side of the road, for safety.”

We debated a few minutes more, and then he continued walking in the same direction, his red coat becoming a speck in the distance as I, unsure, fell farther behind, absorbed in photographing spider webs. Eventually, I heard shouts from across a field and saw a woman running out of her house while waving at me. I didn’t know anyone here; didn’t even know where ‘here’ was. She emphatically pointed behind me, repeating “peregrina,” and “Camino.” We were walking in the wrong direction.

Why had I not listened to my intuition earlier and saved us miles of backtracking? These two strangers went out of their way to help us two unaware pilgrims find our way. I thanked her, now sure of myself, and retraced my steps. As I crested the hill, I turned to wave at the red dot to return, and walked on till I found the yellow arrow we had missed, which was now so obviously visible on the opposite side of the road.

These women, who appeared for only an instant on



Spider web along the Camino. Photo by Babs Harrison.

the Camino, remind me that while I may not always be on the right path in life, I can always choose to keep an open mind, trust my instincts, and listen to kind strangers.

Because it’s kindness that will help us find the way home. 🍂





Somewhere between San Juan de Ortega and Burgos.  
Photo by Thom Ryng

## Camino Pool Table

by Robert Deming  
Fredericksburg, TX

On September 26th, I walked into St. Jean Pied de Port, having started in Le Puy in mid-August. As I did I thought of the pilgrims that I had met along my journey. There was Steve, a retired police officer from San Diego, whom I encountered early in my trip, and whom I last saw leaving St. Jean toward Santiago. In France at *Gîte Chappelle des Ursulines*, I had met Roman from Poland, who had started from his front door a month earlier. Roman's only languages were Polish and Russian, uncommon on the Way, but he was adept at Google Translate. Then there was David. After celebrating his 77th birthday at Abbaye St. Foy in Conques, David returned to the USA. As he walked, he had prayed for the people he met along the way, especially those who had suffered injury. And at a pilgrim shelter in France, I met Jeffery, a young Frenchman. He told me that he was on the trail because he had lost his job, had a little money and a lot of time, and wanted to change his life. Lastly, I thought of Donna, a fellow Texan who remained back at home. She has always asked me about walking in Europe. She has gotten very excited about the Camino and is making plans to join the stream of pilgrims next spring.

For Steve, the Camino was an adventure, for Roman it was religious, for David it was a wonderland, for Jeffery it was a reboot of his life, and for Donna it will be a celebration of turning 60, and perhaps much more. The Camino is like a pool table covered with balls: I tap the cue ball, which strikes another ball, which strikes two more, and in a second the entire table is rearranged, and the balls have all touched each other. And what is the Camino to me? Is it the landscape? Is it the hard work of walking? Is it the time alone and in contemplation? Is it the fabulous food? Perhaps, but I think it is the people—pilgrims, hosts, villagers, friends—who touched me along the way. ☪



Robert Deming (U.S.) and Josette Demande (Belgium) entering St. Jean Pied de Port at Porte Saint Jacques after walking the Camino from Le Puy en Velay, September 26, 2021. Photo by Robert Deming.



Somewhere between San Juan de Ortega and Burgos. Photo by Thom Ryn.





Burgos: making life difficult for pilgrims since AD 884. Photo by Thom Rynge.

## 500 Miles with an Inspiring Visionary

by Lynn Talbot  
Blacksburg, VA

Sometimes, if we are lucky, we meet a visionary who alters our perspective. For me, that visionary was David Gitlitz. I first encountered him in 1974. A flier on a bulletin board in my Madrid university asked, “Want to walk 500 miles across Spain?” Who wouldn’t want to spend ten more weeks in Spain instead of going home to job search? I was transfixed. I didn’t know that what started as an adventure would become a life’s calling.

To walk the Camino with David Gitlitz was exhilarating. His encyclopedic knowledge of art, architecture, literature, and history brought the Camino to life. We spent time searching for pottery shards in a Roman hill fort near Burgos, reciting Spanish ballads about the thrilling adventures of El Cid as we walked the Meseta, and analyzing the Romanesque sculpture of the Pórtico de la Gloria. I still share the superb educational parts of the experience with my students today.

From David, I learned to explore, open doors, ask questions, take chances, exceed the expected. That’s what he modeled. Sometimes that meant getting lost on the Camino (no yellow arrows, no GPS), then asking a farmer in a field, a shepherd with his herd, or a señora in her garden for help. That meant meet-

ing famous early modern pilgrims, including Walter Starkie in Astorga, Elías Valiña Sampedro in O Cebreiro, José María Alonso in San Juan de Ortega, and Pablo el Mesonero in Villalcázar de Sirga. That meant surprising experiences, such as being invited to share grilled lamb chops in a private wine cellar, staying in convents filled with young nuns, and sleeping in a hay barn in almost-abandoned Foncebadón. That meant experiencing the excitement, the elation, the celebration of arriving in Santiago, as memorable then as now.

What started as an adventure has today become much more. David’s visionary Camino in 1974 has blossomed, with the contributions of many others, into an international phenomenon that continues to draw many thousands of pilgrims. While David moved on to other academic interests, his vision of the Camino continues to inspire others. I continue to share the insights, both academic and personal, learned from my first Camino with students, family, friends, and fellow pilgrims. That, for me, is David Gitlitz’s lasting legacy. ☪

*Editor’s note: David Gitlitz and his wife Linda Kay Davidson were professors at the University of Rhode Island and joint authors of [The Cultural Guide to the Camino de Santiago and Pilgrimage: From the Ganges to Graceland](#). Gitlitz died on December 30, 2020. A memoriam to Gitlitz was included in the March 2021 issue of *La Concha*.*



## Reflections on 20 Years of Gathering Kindling on the Camino

by Daniel De Kay  
Sebastopol, CA

My first introduction to the Camino was in 1990, around a driftwood campfire on the rugged, remote west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. I'd met Pete and Betty a few days before. We shared a similar pace and so ended up camping on the same beach that night. Swapping stories of places we'd been, Pete said "I know a place you'd probably love." He described the easy companionship among pilgrims, the silence of the road interrupted only by the sound of one's own footsteps, the warmth of a friendly albergue at day's end. I was hooked.

Later, I read Nancy Frey's book, *Pilgrim Stories*. She recounted tales of pilgrims from before, during and even after their walk along the ancient route. It was there where I first read that "your Camino doesn't end in Santiago, that's where it begins."

What does that mean, exactly?

Walking the Camino thrusts us into the present. The sun, the wind, rain, mud. Blisters, thirst, hunger. Café con leche, wine, bread, conversation. The tap-tap-tap of hiking poles announces a fellow pilgrim. "Buen Camino," we say with a smile, as they pass. It doesn't matter where they are from, nor their station in life, we wish them "good way" as they continue on. We may meet again in a café or an albergue, we may never see them again.

The hospitalero greets us with a warm smile, hands us a glass of cool water, bids us welcome. Once again, we feel at home in a foreign land, surrounded by strangers becoming friends. What makes it so?

One step at a time, each day we make our way. We have become pilgrims. What was foreign is known. Our experience deepens, reaching Santiago no longer the goal.

Home once again, we recall the daily sounds, the tastes, the smells, how we felt. We have become pilgrims. What does that mean, exactly? What makes it so? This is what we carry forward; and thus our Camino continues. 🍷



Credenciales to Santiago plus the one for the Kumano Kodo. Photo by Yosmar Martinez.





Pilgrim Tinder. Photo by Amy Horton.

# FINAL REFLECTION

## Letters from the Camino: Somewhere in the North Atlantic

by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway  
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims, greetings from Milepost 3,272 on my virtual pilgrimage.

All is winter with plunging temperatures into single digits and hard-blowing horizontal snow. Compared to the streets of Spokane, where I have walked all my miles so far, I am certain conditions are more bitter in the North Atlantic. Imagine the storms and ice flows.

What a beautiful morning with the brightness of the white-drenched world! Traction footwear grip my boots, and I walk with assurance. The fine powdery snow rises in satiny smooth ridges, heaped like white caps, by the fierce northeast wind from the Arctic. Animal tracks announce the presence of unseen guests: neighborhood cats, a local skunk, a speedy raccoon, turkeys, squirrels, and songbirds. Frisky dogs race across the park. The pond is frozen solid, covered with drifts like whipped cream. There are places beneath the snow that are treacherous, smooth, slick slabs of ice, remnants from the last storms. One took me down last week in the park. Splat! I was supine on the ground laughing, my pockets stuffed with snow.

Snow frosts my glasses. Blinded, I peer over the rims at the whirling white. I can barely make out a sidewalk depression. On the hill, car tracks swerve far left then right. The schoolyard is silent, smooth, and white, its gate standing open. Onward up the steep hill I pace. Outside the church, I stomp and shake, and snow flies. I enter and repeat. My friend bustles in the sacristy, setting up the necessary items for Mass. We chatter, laugh, and hug. I light a candle at the foot of the Blessed Mother's statue; it shines forth in the darkness of the transept. A bell rings. Mass begins.

It is all a blessing, a gift. Today, I pray especially for peace in Ukraine, for those homeless and forgotten in the bitter cold, for all pilgrims and adventurers, for marriages, for the sick and suffering, for the down-trodden, for the dying, for small creatures, and especially for your intentions. Pray that every step we take will bring more goodness and light into the world, dear Pilgrims. May the Lord bless your Caminos!

Love,

**Leah**

*Editor's note: This is the 12th 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 Lourdes, France (approximately 5,097 miles). This is her Camino for now. Ultimately, her goal is to walk a pilgrimage from Lourdes to Santiago de Compostela. You will find Leah's previous reflections in the June 2019, September 2019, December 2019, March 2020, June 2020, September 2020, December 2020, March 2021, Summer 2021, Fall 2021, and Winter 2021 issues of La Concha.*



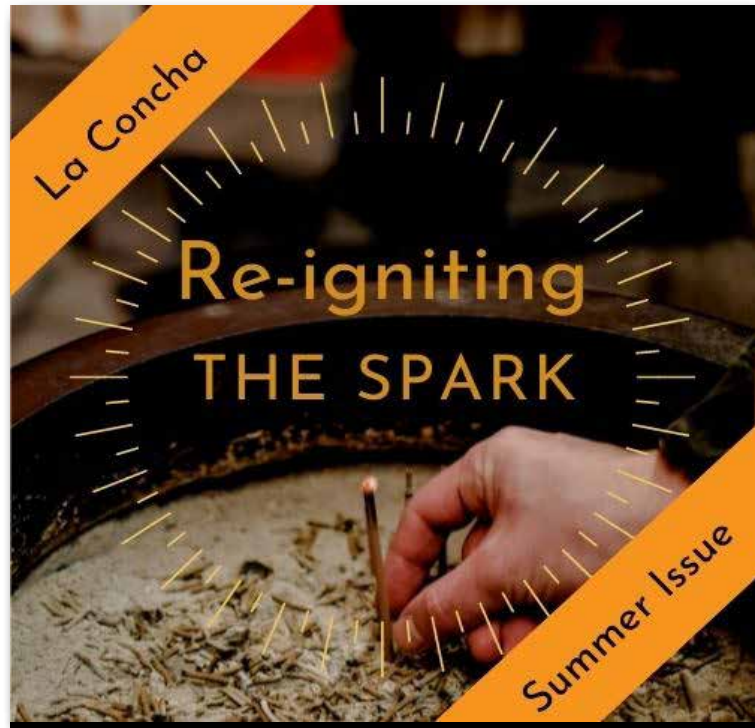


Leah on her virtual camino!

## || NEXT ISSUE ||

The Summer *La Concha* theme is  
Reigniting the Spark.

Submissions to our Summer issue close on May 21, and we would love to  
receive your reflections!



**RE-IGNITING THE SPARK.** How has the spirit of the Camino come alive for you in strange, unexpected and wonderful ways this past year? Submit your 400 or fewer word story by May 21, 2022 for consideration.

Please explore this theme for the Summer 2022 issue by sharing images and reflections on moments where the spirit of the Camino has been ushered in through surprise, synchronicity, and delight.

Please limit essays to 400 words maximum.

The form for submissions can be found by following this link: [La Concha Article Online Submission Form](#)

We include as many submissions as possible in each issue. We may defer some items to future issues.

Thanks! We look forward to hearing from you.

Team *La Concha*

American Pilgrims on the Camino

[www.americanpilgrims.org](http://www.americanpilgrims.org)