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LA CONCHA

Newsletter of American Pilgrims on the Camino
July 2016

Camino Angels

by Maureen Ball Field, Birmingham MI

Our fifth Camino in April 2016 was just 90 miles from Conques to Cahors on the Chemin Saint Jacques de Compostelle in France. After three perfect days of walking, my right knee began to hurt on day four. Seven miles later, I had to take a six-mile bus ride from Figeac to Facelles.

Not knowing the location of our chambre d'hôtes, I headed in the wrong direction. After seeing how poorly I was walking, the compassionate woman, from whom I asked directions, drove me. Caroline, our kind innkeeper, drove our group a short distance to the bistro for dinner, and the owner brought us back. The next morning Caroline delivered me to the bus stop for a 14-mile ride to Cajarc. After a few minutes an older gentleman arrived. We chatted in my halting French. When I told him I was from the U.S., he switched to perfect English and told me his daughter had four Americans at her inn the night before. Caroline's father was also going to Cajarc on the same bus! He helped me on and off the bus and slowly walked me to my accommodations. I learned later that Caroline's father has walked the Way to Santiago twice.

On the sixth day I took the transport to Limogne-en-Quercy, and on the seventh day I managed to walk ten miles from Limogne

to Vaylats with the encouragement of my husband, our friends and a church group of 12 from Paris. One Parisian loaned me a knee brace and gave me ointment.

On the eighth day, I was transported 16 miles to Cahors in the Parisians' "sag" wagon with an injured woman from their group. They shared their delicious lunch with me.

After my husband had walked to Cahors, a volunteer at the Pilgrims Office spent 30 minutes on the phone making sure we found each other. She called the monastery where we had stayed the night before, and the monastery called the injured Parisian who relayed the message to me. The volunteer also called the gîte where the Parisians were staying. When I arrived there, the hospitalero asked if I was the American with the bad knee. On my way to meet my husband, two women inquired if I was the American with the bad knee. I felt welcome.

Of course, I was disappointed that I could not walk the entire route, but meeting so many Camino angels made my experience magnificent. I was protected. ♦



Camino Francés,
photo by Donna Collins, Houston TX

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Message From the Chair

Dear Friends,

Once again, almost 200 pilgrims from around the U.S. and Europe joined together at the 2016 Annual Gathering in the St. Louis area in April. The Gathering is a unique opportunity to experience fascinating presentations by top academics and Camino devotees, exceptional musicians, fun social events and many chances to share our Camino experiences or to prepare for a first Camino. Visit our website for more about it. If you missed this Gathering or have yet to come to one, please join us next March 23-26, 2017, in the Atlanta area. You won't be disappointed.

Often we are honored by the presence of official representatives from Santiago at the Gathering. This year, Rafael Sanchez, Director of the Xacobeo (the Galician government unit that oversees the Camino), was not able to attend but sent a very warm greeting and expression of gratitude for the close relationship between the Xacobeo and American Pilgrims on the Camino. His letter reported on recent several

actions taken for the benefit of pilgrims:

- The new International Reception Centre for Pilgrims in Santiago in the Rua das



The inviting bell pool at Our Lady of the Snobs-Gathering 2016

Carretas is now open, including the Pilgrims Office as well as information centers for the Camino and for Galicia.

- Camino signage is being standardized on the Camino Francés and will soon be under way on the Camino Primitivo, El Norte and the route to Fisterra-Muxia.

- All government-run albergues in Galicia (Xunta albergues) have been equipped with Wi-Fi.

- A new Camino website has been launched by the Xacobeo.

- A new Xunta albergue has been opened in A Fonsagrada on the Camino Primitivo and the Xunta albergue at Verin has been updated.

- Finally, six new road crossings for pilgrims have been established at the most problematic points on the

Camino Francés in Arzúa and O Pino to improve road safety for pilgrims.

As we see the number of pilgrims on the Camino in 2016 breaking records, it's good to know that our friends in Spain are working hard to ensure a good pilgrim experience. ♦

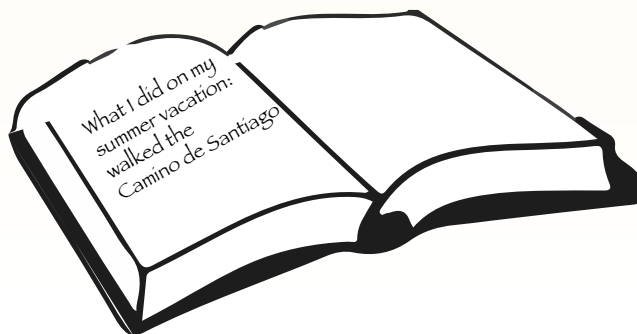
¡Buen Camino!

Cheryl Grasmoe

Chair, Board of Directors

Call for Book Reviewers

From time to time, La Concha receives review copies of newly published Camino-related books. If any of you, members, would be interested in reviewing a book, we would love to hear from you. Email us at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org ♦

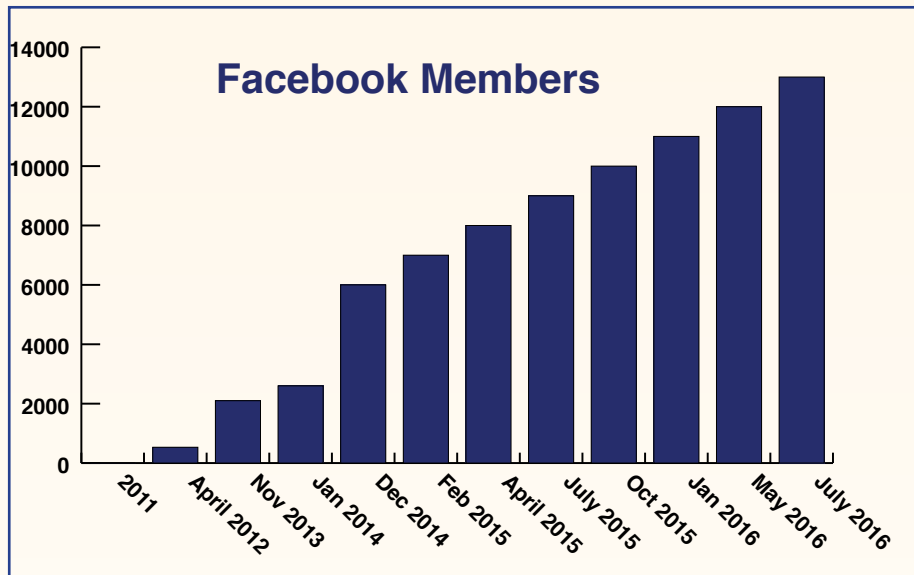


American Pilgrims on Facebook

by Yosmar Martinez, Miami Beach FL

Launched in 2011, the American Pilgrims Facebook Group embodies one of the pillars of our Mission: to provide information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims. The group was slow to take shape, and it took over a year to reach the first 500 members. Nowadays, we easily add 400 pilgrims a month (even more in the Spring) and we have grown to a community of 13,000 strong, opinionated, and enthusiastic pilgrims! We get anywhere between 25 unique posts on a slow day to about 75 on a busy Saturday or Sunday. Topics range from the basic

“how to” questions of first time pilgrims to more philosophical posts from veteran pilgrims. On average, each unique post receives about 20-30 comments, but sometimes that number easily surpasses 100! It is no wonder that our members Carlos Mentley and Ann Howley keep themselves super busy being our Facebook admin superstars. If you would like to join the conversation, ask questions, learn or mentor the future generation, join us at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AmericanPilgrims/> ♦

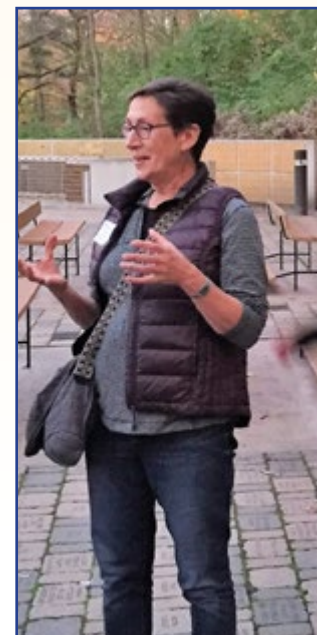


Growth Stats

2011	0
April 2012	532
November 2013	2,100
January 2014	2,600
December 2014	6,000
February 2015	7,000
April 2015	8,000
July 2015	9,000
October 2015	10,000
January 2016	11,000
May 2016	12,000
July 2016	13,000

Thank you Martha Crites

We salute Martha Crites, who leaves the board of directors after countless hours of service to American Pilgrims on the Camino. Martha's wide-ranging contributions include playing a key role in forming the first chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino in the Puget Sound area, developing the first formal and ongoing partnership between a chapter and an albergue on the Camino, serving many times as an hospitalera in Spain, acting as board liaison in the formation and support of many chapters, serving on the Grants Committee and chairing the 2016 Gathering. Martha will be missed for her sharp thinking, reliability and sense of humor. ♦



The 2016 Gathering

photos by Joann DeFeis, Needham MA & Peg Hall, Gainesville FL

The 19th Annual Gathering took place at Our Lady of the Snows in Bellevue, Illinois on April 7-10, 2016. This year's theme *Telling the Way Within* focused on storytelling and the stories we heard were inspirational, funny, sad, and off-beat.

One thing all pilgrims have in common is they all have stories that they want to share AND they want to hear yours. The Gathering is the perfect venue to hear and tell why we feel called to walk the Camino and share our experiences. If you were not able to be at the Gathering and share your tale, think about weaving it into a story for a future *La Concha*. ♦



The women of the hour: American Pilgrims on the Camino Board Chair, Cheryl Grasmoe and Gathering Coordinator, Martha Crites.



Famous Camino pilgrim storytelling in action.

The Camino: A Journey to One's Self

by David Jennings, Kings Beach CA

"Okay, pilgrims, saddle up!" John Wayne was not starting out on the Way of St. James, but he was talking to a group of people who had sailed to America and were preparing for the arduous trip across the unknown country in search of religious and political freedom.

A pilgrim is defined as a person who makes a journey, often a long and difficult one for a religious reason. Then, as now, none of us has answered all of life's questions, or at least the questions of "Who am I, and why?" Man has walked on the moon but has yet to take the first step in the basic relationship of man to himself.

Therefore, while we are all on the pilgrimage of life, a growing number of people of the world are again seeking answers by hiking the historical pilgrimage routes, particularly the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

The Camino is an exercise for the body, mind and soul. The physical challenge awakens all the senses. The natural beauty, the interaction with

fellow pilgrims and locals, and the more solitary sections of the route combine to reacquaint us with our inner person. This recognition of the inner person, who has remained a stranger to many of us, plays a key role in our quest. Plato called the inner person the "I," or the real person, while others call it conscience or soul. By whatever name we call it, this communication with our real-self, "to know one's self," may be the major benefit provided by the trek.

All that is required for the Camino are an open mind and the time to absorb the nuances of the experience. It is not, "Oh yes, I walked the Camino" in the past tense. It is living day to day in the spirit of the Camino. Be warned: the Camino may call you back for a refresher course.

After trekking the miles, as you leave the Pilgrim's Mass at the Cathedral in Santiago, remember the words of Meister Eckhart, "If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is 'thank you,' it will be enough." *Ultreia!* ♦



A mural painted for the 2010 Holy Year



A contemplative Jennings who, along with his wife, has walked Geneva to Le Puy (Via Gebennensis); Le Puy to St. Jean Pied de Port (Via Podiensis); and the Cammio di Francesco from Dovadola to Rome in Italy.

Prayers by the Camino Chaplaincy

Every year hundreds of thousands of pilgrims make their way to Santiago. During their journey, they might pray about many different things. And, they might be asked by other people to pray for them on their pilgrimage.

At the Camino Chaplaincy Mass, which is offered daily in English in the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Soldad in the Cathedral of Santiago, pilgrims are invited to write down any special prayers or petitions they may have. They do so in

considerable numbers. Every year over 10,000 such prayers are left by pilgrims. They are prayed for every day from May to October.

In 2016, the Chaplaincy is offering to pray for the intentions of people not able to make the journey to Santiago this year. All they need to do is email their prayers request to: prayersantiago@gmail.com. Prayer requests are confidential and emails are deleted after they are received. ♦

Thank You...And a “Lifetime” History

by Maryjane Dunn, Arkadelphia AR

Thank you to the American Pilgrims on the Camino for awarding me a Lifetime Service Award at the 2016 National Gathering. It was wonderful to be in such esteemed company as Lynn Talbot, George Greenia, and most especially, Sandy Lenthall, although I feel much too young to celebrate a “Lifetime” award!

My connection to the American Pilgrims on the Camino is really “prehistoric.” In 1979, immediately after graduating from the University of Nebraska, I walked the pre-yellow-arrow Camino from St. Jean to Compostela with a group led by David Gitlitz (who also led the 1975 pilgrimage which included

Lynn Talbot). I earned my Ph.D. in Spanish in 1985 (emphasis on allegorical pilgrimage texts), and led a group of students on the Camino in 1986.

The pre-history of American Pilgrims on the Camino (APOC), however, really begins on July 25, 1989, when, thanks

to the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain’s Ministry of Culture and the U.S. Universities, I was able to launch a newsletter, the “Friends of the Road to Santiago” (George Greenia was one of the first subscribers). In the pre-Windows, pre-Internet age, these newsletters were not pretty, but they informed readers of upcoming pilgrimage conferences (both domestic and European), and of books or articles about the Camino. They also contained a list of subscribers and their addresses. Soon, pilgrims began sending practical tips and notes about their experiences.

In 1994, I, along with Linda Davidson were invited to attend the Primer Encuentro Mundial de Cofradías de Santiago where we began the first steps of making the Friends of the Road to Santiago an officially recognized Association. As a step in this direction we created a Friends’ Pilgrim’s Credential, pre-controversy over the “official” or accepted Credentials, or controversy over Compostela or Certificate.

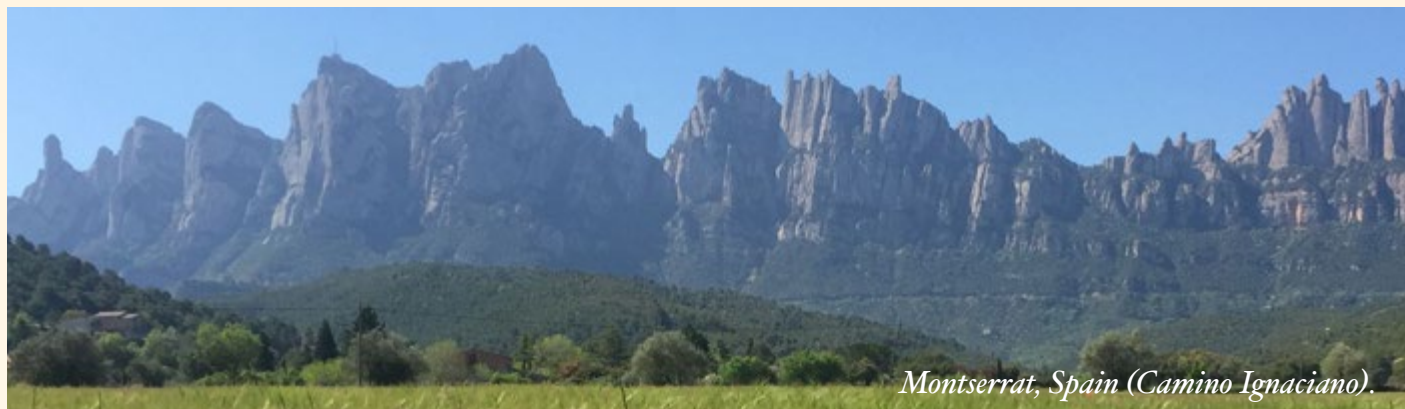
In 1997, (pre-APOC Gathering), Sandy Lenthall called and asked if I thought persons might want to come together to talk about their pilgrimage experiences. I thought they would and so the Newsletter of October 1997 opened with this: CALL TO A GATHERING OF PILGRIMS! ♦

Editor’s Note: [Click here](#) to read the rest of this letter on the American Pilgrims on the Camino website.



Maryjane Dunn

photo by Joan DeFeis, Needham, MA



Montserrat, Spain (Camino Ignaciano).

Following the Orange Arrows

by Jessica Johnson, Rochester VT

Have you ever had a seed of an adventure plant itself in you, and it just takes hold? Of course you have. You are a pilgrim reading this newsletter and most likely have walked to Santiago or are planning to in the near future.

My seed this year was the Camino Ignaciano - a 640 km, peaceful walk through the Euskadi, Rioja, Navarra, and magnificent Catalunya regions of Spain.

I set out from Loyola, the birthplace of Saint Ignatius, knowing of his journey to Manresa, but not realizing that with everyday and every step, I would feel a closer bond with this saint. The Camino Ignaciano fulfilled my love of solo walking, exploring more of Spain, having solitude for 25 days and getting to know the life and teachings of Saint Ignatius.

This Camino is not for everyone. When I say solitude, I mean there is a chance you will see no other pilgrim for days, even weeks. For this peregrina, that is heaven. Two days after starting out from Loyola I was in knee-deep snow walking up to Arantzazu. A week later walking through Rioja I was amazed how different the vineyards looked in the spring, naked of their leaves and fruit, compared to the fall. Logroño was the “social” stop of the Camino Ignaciano where it collides with the Camino Francés. I kept to myself in a quiet place for the night so as not to break the “magic spell” of my solitude.

The Rio Ebro and the Canal Imperial were my friendly companions for days and days, with the train tracks being my amusement at times. I would find myself waving when the train went by and 8 out of 10 times the conductor would blow his horn in recognition of the solo girl hiker. There were a few

days that I found myself talking to my backpack and laughed at the Tom Hanks/Wilson images in my mind. Zaragoza was a special treat that I had not expected.

The Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar has risen to my third favorite church in Spain. The Los Monegros with its unique desert landscape hosted some unforgettable picnic lunches for me. Dramatic Montserrat and an emotional walk over the bridge into Manresa ended my journey. A day and night at the Spiritual Center above the Caves in Manresa was the spectacular end to this peregrina's favorite Camino. ♦



*Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar
Zaragoza, Spain (Camino Ignaciano)*

Camino de Santiago by Raimund Joos

reviewed by Russ and Peg Hall, Gainesville FL

The search for the perfect guidebook..

When we began walking on the Camino, only one practical English-language guidebook was available. Since more are coming online, we have been on the lookout for the perfect one. Our perfect guidebook would have: 1) exhaustive up-to-date lists of accommodations 2) a free-wheeling planner that doesn't crowd hikers into predetermined "stages" 3) accurate maps conveying the nature of trails to be covered, and helping walkers navigate larger cities 4) succinct descriptions of features of interest and 5) compact size, without unneeded and unwanted text and photographs.

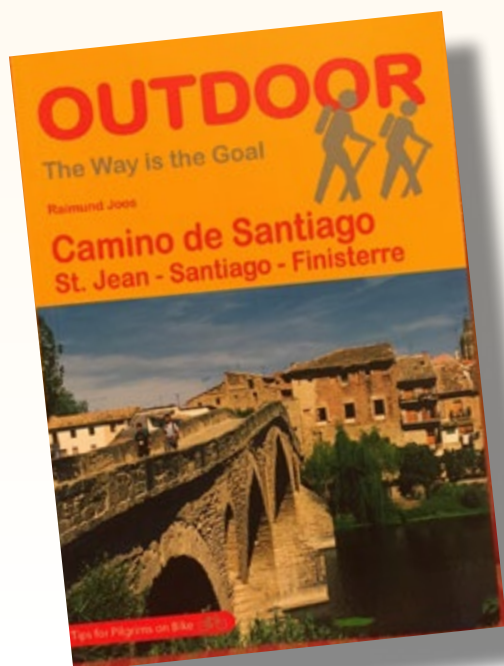
The just-released English-language translation of Raimund Joos' *Camino de Santiago: St. Jean-Santiago-Finisterre* is a welcome addition to the growing list. Like its competitors, it falls short on our first criterion, which is clearly achievable only while dancing with angels on the head of a pin. Author Joos states that 120 new refuges appeared on the via Francés between 2009 and 2014, and no print guidebook could possibly provide up-to-date information on all of these and others coming online.

By our second criterion, this new guidebook does well; its 22 "stages" in Navarra, for example, average just over 6.5 km, encouraging pilgrims to exercise wide latitude in planning. The route maps and city maps, though small, are quite good. They are oriented with north at the top, and progress to the west, taking readers' eyes from right to left. Unaccountably and annoyingly, accompanying elevation maps read from left to right. The city maps look promising and superior to the simplified and confusing cartoon maps we've dealt with in other guidebooks. This one does well in descriptions of features of interest, and may be at least as good as its counterparts.

Finally, this book is small (about 4.5 x 6.5 inches) and lightweight, as we like a guidebook to be. However, we might have preferred to forego the several lovely photos that are included in favor of larger maps and print size.

Translators faced a daunting task in accurately converting detailed instructions from German to English. As a result of this difficulty, in a few places, plodding through sentences with Germanic structures can be laborious.

Our perfect guidebook will probably never be written. Each one now available has its strengths, and this one measures up well, particularly when paired with online or other sources of near real-time lodging information available to pilgrims. ♦



Camino de Santiago
St. Jean - Santiago - Finisterre
 by Raimund Joos
 An Outdoor Guidebook-2015
 288 pages

Initiation

by Janet Meskin, Los Angeles CA

Part I*: We shall not cease from exploration

Wanderlust is how the Camino to Santiago all began

Especially in the beginning 24 years ago

Seeding in the psyche

Hiding within the imagination

Already a calling

Long ago pulling me to its

Luminous center, the

Nucleus to birth the vision having appeared in a dream;

Over the course of 42 days I would come full circle arriving at

The place where I started completing the ending of the beginning-1991

Camino Francés, "The Way" to Santiago de Compostela

Edged into reality when my train pulled into Pamplona 14 May 2015

And I entered my first Albergue Hostel Aloha! with 6 bunkmates

Silent nights of yesterday are replaced with snoring, slamming doors, cell phone pings

Eating, bathrooms, lounging are all communal living spaces...the

First sello stamp in my credential to mark the journey has begun; I'm elated!



Image from my dream before walking the Camino

Researching the weather forecast I hope to escape the severe, cold air by

Orchestrating plans to bus/train to warmer places or stay put and wait it out.

Marking this the first lesson about Life - unpredictable, like the weather

Equally...if the weather can change its mind on a whim, so can I.

$x + y = z$ equals accept the things I cannot change. And I identify as a

Pilgrim now, walking the path one step at a time

Leaving knowns to embrace unknowns toward the

Origins of prayer to direct me into the

Realm of the divine

All universe where I seek a meaningful relationship with god; it will

Take time to trust "The Camino Provides," however



One of many rose windows matching my dream image from the cloister grounds in Estella.

Impermanent life truly is...we are all the same

On the Camino, off the Camino, there's

No forward No backward - the path is the way - toward the Light. ♦

*This is one of four parts written in acrostic form.



Through the Myths of Time

by Steve Lytch, Lancaster PA

There is a thread on a Camino website addressing the question of whether or not someone over 60 should do the Camino. All the responses are encouraging, but most carry caveats or advice. At age 62 I take notice.

One year when I returned home with blisters after spending a few days on the Camino, someone told me my blisters were an encounter with aging. I dismissed his comment out of hand. I prefer to think of blisters as marks of initiation into the company of pilgrims. My wife had to cut short a pilgrimage because of blisters when she was only 53. On the bus back to Logroño that year, we accompanied a college student who was packing it in because her knee had blown out. What does age have to do with the true spirit of a peregrino?

Much of the appeal of the Camino is its timelessness. Guidebooks point out historic sites – old monasteries and churches, pilgrim stops, battle scenes and other places that have stayed the same through the centuries. I'm interested in those. That is part of the Camino's appeal for me. But the Camino is modern as well. A common complaint is

that parts of it run alongside highways or through the hearts of cities. I prefer to walk through the mists of the Pyrenees or among the vineyards of La Rioja. I prefer the narrow streets of a medieval village like Castrojeriz to the thoroughfares of Burgos. But if the Camino is in any way a metaphor for life or the journey of faith or anything real, then it can't be a complete escape, a pseudo Disney where we pretend that we're in a place that doesn't really exist except in the imagination. The Camino incarnates itself alongside cement factories, combine repair shops, urban grit and suburban sprawl. It goes through the places where life happens, blisters and all. It exists in the present. In the Middle Ages hawkers, entrepreneurs, and others touted it. Today it's supported by the EU and regional development offices. It is a creation of its time.

And that is what I am. I bring my own issues, needs, desires, and fantasies to The Way. There will come a time when I won't be physically able to engage it, but I should no more expect it to be unchanging as I should expect myself to be. ♦

Hospitalero Happenings

American Pilgrims continues to be a strong volunteer presence along the Camino. We work closely with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino to provide hospitaleros in the seventeen donativo albergues the Federation assists. Many of our hospitalero volunteers have served in private, municipal, and parochial albergues also that are not connected with the Federation. Hospitalero opportunities also exist in France, Portugal, and Italy. ♦

In 2016 we have 48 American Pilgrims members volunteering so far on three camino routes (Francés, Norte, Vía de La Plata)... the most ever in one year. We are having a tremendous impact on the Camino experiences of people from around the world. As ambassadors from our country we represent the heart that drives so many Americans' decisions in their daily lives along the Camino.

If you've been looking for a way to say thank you for all that the Camino has given you, consider hospitalero training and volunteering on the Camino!

Our next training will be August 19-21 in Milwaukie (Portland area), Oregon

We are planning another training in November; location and dates to be decided shortly. Please check the American Pilgrims website for registration details. If your chapter would like to arrange for a possible hospitalero training to take place in your area, please contact: hospitalerotraining@americanpilgrims.org ♦

Güemes

by Jim Reed, Gig Harbor WA

When I stayed at Güemes, I met Ernesto Bustio, a Catholic priest who has dedicated his recent life to hosting pilgrims. Each day he makes a presentation to “increase knowledge and understanding of the pilgrimage experience.”

He considers The Way to be a master class in life. He described the Camino del Norte as “a little hard with mountains, asphalt, rain, highway intersections, hard to follow routes, and few albergues.” However, he thinks the biggest problem is that we are too dependent on modern technology and often walk without thinking just following arrows. This stifles our creative ability to find our way.

His mother had five children, four girls and Ernesto. In 1946, his family abandoned Güemes and moved close to Barcelona. In 1963, Ernesto completed his studies as a priest. His first parish assignment was in the Picos de Europa region. The pictures he showed were of very high green mountains with narrow walking trails up steep slopes. He worked with simple people, miners and farmers, who had “a wisdom not recognized by society in general.”

In 1979, Father Ernesto and four friends took a “sabbatical year” that became 27 months of what they called “the journey of the university of life” in

which they traveled Spain, France, Africa and then Central and South America. This trip had three themes: travel to learn about other cultures, endure hard physical labor, and capture images to share with others.

For his “doctorate thesis” he returned to his childhood home to begin building an albergue. He became the local priest for Güemes. The current albergue, which was expanded from horse stables to a small hostel, became a “collective endeavor using recycled materials.” It is not commercial nor is any organization involved. It operates completely on donativos. In 2012, 7,000 people from 70 countries spent the night.

“You may be going to Santiago physically, but the real journey is spiritual and you will arrive with joy,”

Father Ernesto notes just as he arrived at his current life station after his “sabbatical.” You will try to explain your journey to friends, “but they will not understand unless they too walk.” Father Ernesto is a wonderfully kind, genuine and humble person. Güemes is a special place and experience. As I once heard an actor say about teenagers watching a thought-provoking play, “The story has been told. The lesson has been taught. Their lives have been changed forever.” ♦



Father Ernesto and Jim (L to R) 2013



Dogs and people-this way to Santiago!
photo by Donna Collins, Houston TX

Chapter News

American Pilgrims membership continues to grow throughout our 38 chapters around the country. The map on the American Pilgrims website shows where chapters are located, and you can find a listing of activities in local chapters. If there isn't a chapter near you and you would like to explore the possibility of forming one, visit the local chapters page on the website <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/local-chapters> and complete the online Chapter Formation Application. ♦

SoCal Chapter



SoCal members gather after 10-mile hike in the Sycamore Canyon. Shells were presented to six pilgrims leaving for the Camino



Kurt Buckley, So Cal Chapter hike leader, with sendoff cake. Kurt left in mid-April and is walking 2000 miles from Medyka, Poland to Santiago, Spain. Follow Kurt on his blog: <http://walkpuravida.com> ♦

Co-coordinators: Anita Baroldi, Marla Keesee & Kurt Buckley

Orlando Chapter



Orlando Chapter members kicked off the Spring season with a beach party.

It was just another lazy Saturday afternoon (April 23, 2016) at New Smyrna Beach, FL, when 21 brave Orlando pilgrims were joined by three dogs (Blondie, Scatchet, and Tux) for a four-mile beach walk, enjoyed a 'get ready' Camino discussion led by Professor of Humanities Casey Blanton, and then, shared some Spain-produced vino tinto and a dynamite Paella Valenciana.

The beach walk featured warm-but-not-hot weather, low humidity, a low tide, and lots of sand in their shoes – as the in-shape II get ready Camino walkers strolled south to the Pelican – and then back-tracked.

It was apparent that La Profesora's students were all paying strict attention to her every word – which covered subjects such as where to start, what shoes to wear, what to take/not take in your backpack, what to eat, where to stay, what to see, a bit about the country's political history, where to get credentials – and how to end, and how long to stay in Santiago de Compostela. And then of course . . . whether to continue on out to Finisterre (the end of the earth).

In early voting, the 'ugliest shirt' award was won hands-down by Rick – who was then ordered by Linda D. to go change! ♦

Co-coordinators: Richard Baldwin & Casey Blanton

Santa Barbara Chapter

The Santa Barbara Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino was honored to be visited at November 2015 "Winter" Saturday Walk in Santa Barbara by Eric Hochberg. Eric (photo, far right) walked the Camino Francés in 1965 – over fifty years ago! He is still an avid walker, though he now uses a walker to get around. Eric encouraged all of us to carry on with our personal objectives and to always walk The Way. ♦



Co-coordinators: *John Harrison & Helen Mountford*

Colorado Front Country Chapter

Things are going great guns out in the Rocky Mountain West!

Since the first of the year, the Colorado Front Range Chapter has hosted these events:

- January 11th: A cross-country ski/snowshoe outing. There were only about 7 or 8 of us who actually got out on the trail — would have been more except for the cars-in-the ditch affair!
- January 16th: The chapter hosted its (usually) twice-annual "Packing 101" seminar. A sizeable number of about-to-be-veterans showed up to learn



The Chapter's 4th Annual Shell Ceremony, Capital Heights Presbyterian Church, Denver CO. Saturday, April 30, 2016.



The Chapter's now-annual cross-country ski/snowshoe outing". Hefferman Gulch, Clear Creek County CO

and to have their packs dissembled.

- February 17th and March 9th: The chapter presented its 6th annual introduction to the Camino talks at the REI Denver Flagship and Boulder stores with about 210 and 90 respectively in attendance. The Camino is alive and well in Colorado!

- February 27th: Our first hike of the year, on a new (for us) stretch of the High Line Canal in the northeast Metro area. About a dozen and a half of us did it as a one-way walk with a car exchange for an 8.5-mile trek. We had a mini shell ceremony along the way.

- March 2nd: We presented "On being an hospitalero" with all the nitty-gritty of being trained for and serving as an hospitalero. We had several veteran hospitaleros present which allowed us to portray both the joys and pains of the experience. ¡No es todo una cama de rosas!

- March 18-20: We co-hosted the three-day Camino en Colorado with Walk2Connect. Schedule a three-day camino in Colorado in March and there's a possibility of walking in snow!

- April 30th: We held our Fourth Annual (formal) Shell Ceremony with 50 (!) recipients. We were blessed to have Lisa Crismore from Indiana with us to serve as officiant!

- May 7th: We returned to the High Line Canal for a slightly damp 6.5-mile hike in the south Metro area. Actually this ended about 15 minutes before we would have been soaked!

- May 21st: About 50 attended a potluck dinner and showing of *Walking the Camino: Six Ways to Santiago*. ♦

Co-coordinators: *Gene McCullough & Kris Ashton*

Lessons from Other Pilgrims

by Suzanne Ball, Manhattan IL

A journey is many things: an adventure, a new experience, a lesson, a passage. Certainly it is always unique to the traveler, even if you're part of a couple or a group. If you go alone, maybe more so.

What makes it even more rich? Finding the people who are on the same path, walking the same direction, sharing the moment. People who point things out, make you think, or make you laugh. These are the folks who you remember years later and for whom you are so thankful.

Let me introduce you to two people I met during my 500-mile pilgrimage. When you walk the Camino, people appear and disappear during the experience. Sometimes someone will pop into your day and tell you where the best albergue is; you'll have a glass of wine or dinner with fascinating people who share a story that is exactly what you needed to hear; you may walk together until the next bar, and never see him again. Or you will meet several times over, weeks apart, in complete surprise.



Suzy (left) and Kathy in Los Arcos, Spain

Lesson One: You never know when it will be the last time you see someone

First came Kathy. I came to call her "Kathy the Hippie" in my head because she was a total granola-organic-natural woman from Eugene, Oregon. She even dressed like a hippie! I saw her on the first day, the day of the climb over the Pyrenees. In fact, she stepped into a photo as I was trying to capture the sheep that were everywhere. I thought I was taking a picture of a pilgrim from behind surrounded by the sheep. As I clicked, the pilgrim turned, and I got her face...pure excitement.

We both continued on, and I didn't see her again. Until the next morning. I couldn't sleep and decided to start out early. I carried my belongings into the bathroom to get ready. She was already there doing the same thing. We didn't say anything to each other until we stepped out of the albergue at the same time. "Do you know which way to go?" she asked me. I pointed to the famous sign: Santiago de Compostela, 790km and off we went. I took her photo by the sign. We walked the day together and got acquainted, stopping frequently so she could get fresh fruit. She was a bottomless pit when it came to fruit. Me, I wanted coffee, but Kathy didn't drink caffeine. ♦

Editor's note: For Lessons Two and Lesson Three, [Click Here](#) to go to the Essay page on the American Pilgrims on the Camino website and read Suzanne's full narrative.

My “Vicarious Camino”

by T.L. Williams, Ponte Vedra Beach FL; photos by K.C. Caldabaugh



K.C. and Tama Caldabaugh

The photos appear in my Instagram account with the constancy of the sunrise and sunset. Our friends, K.C. and Tama Caldabaugh, are walking the Camino Francés this spring. Whimsical images of pilgrim boots and walking poles line the tiled floor of Albergue Beilari in St. Jean Pied de Port; a festive depiction of a pilgrim communal meal, replete with an immense paella that will feed 40, in a village



A colorful batch of paella in a traditional paellera

near Astorga; a painter's palette of wildflowers: gorse bushes, elder flower orchids, butterwort, lilies, rosemary, and too many more to count, strewn like a living carpet from mountaintops and valleys to meseta; majestic cathedrals and humble hermitages; and pilgrims of every type.

This “Vicarious Camino” brings to mind our own Camino in 2012, when my wife, Carol, and I trekked from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago. For us it was a spiritual quest, indeed an awakening of all the senses working at capacity to absorb the rich texture of life on the Camino. I had planned to blog about our pilgrimage, although I was torn between wanting to share that experience with family and friends and not being willing to tether

myself to a computer once we had arrived at our day's destination. Nonetheless, I tried to write every day or two and shared our experience on a website that I had set up before I departed the U.S.

When we returned to our home in Florida, I discovered that a good friend had been housebound all summer due to an unexpected physical condition requiring rest. To help pass the time, he had decided to follow our progress on the Camino and did so with keen interest. He put a map of our route on a wall in his home, and traced our daily activities. He acquired reference materials that allowed him to take a deep dive into the history of the Camino and Spain and immersed himself in Spanish culture. He told me that our Camino had meant everything to him. It had given him succor at a low time in his life.

The increased use of electronic devices on the Camino has given rise to a debate over technology's negative impact on the pilgrim experience. As in all things, moderation is the answer. When we walk the Camino Portugués this summer, just maybe we'll be someone else's “Vicarious Camino.” Buen Camino. ♦



Wildflowers in hiking boot near Los Arcos

Homecoming for a Train Wreck

by Ann Loar Brooks, Baltimore MD

Seventy-nine passengers
expected to complete their rendezvous
with lovers
friends
relatives
associates

Seventy-nine passengers
hurtled toward the final bend
outside Santiago
at twice the authorized speed

Seventy-nine passengers
rode the train
that jumped the steel track

Seventy-nine passengers
realtors
students
musicians
electricians
soldiers
priests
daughters
grandparents
brothers
wives
sisters
uncles
cousins
at random
flew from the train

For thirty-eight days
I carried them in my heart
from Baltimore
to the Pyrenees
to Pamplona
to the Meseta

to Galicia
to Santiago

For thirty-eight days
I carried these seventy-nine passengers
who had not completed their
pilgrimages
had not bid farewells
had not pressed their lips to lovers
before leaving the earth

I carried them with me
daily chanting their names
a ritual act before my evening meal

They became my pilgrim comrades

On day thirty-nine
before the Pilgrim Mass
at the sacred Cathedral
in Santiago
I said their names
one-by-one

I carried them
to St. James' tomb

Pressing my lips to their names
on my list
I left them there

I placed the list
inside my dusty boots
the ones that carried the eighty of us
to this saintly sepulcher

then left my boots at the foot
of the main column
in St. James' final home ♦

The Song of the American Pilgrim

by Dennis Brooke, Pacific WA

Over the course of the Camino, locations tend to blend together, but some places touch your heart. In my case, the people, the village itself, and a song sung by French peregrinos helped me to fall in love with Castrojeriz.

Castrojeriz is a declining village with a population of about 500 or 800, depending on whether you believe the guidebook or the sign outside town. The ruins of a ninth-century castle look down benignly on the sleepy hamlet. As we walked in, locals gave us the traditional greeting of “Buen Camino.” In some places you get just a nod.

The rich past of this village is apparent in the beautiful monasteries, churches, and walls. Roman, Visigoth, and Moorish conflicts dot the history of the village, highlighted in James Michener’s classic book, *Iberia*.

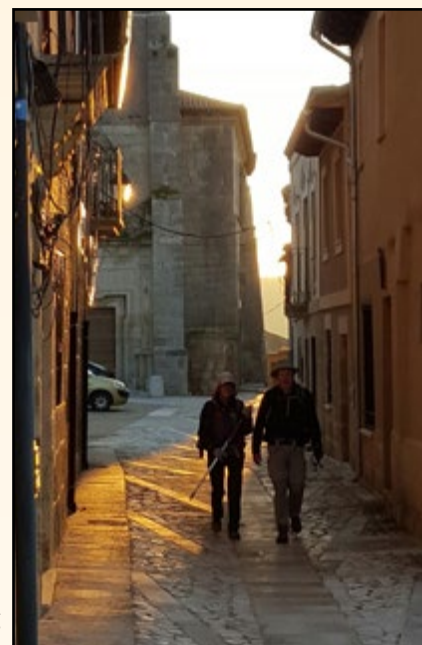
One plaza with a popular bar overlooks the valley beyond and was a popular gathering place with fellow peregrinos. There I overheard an Australian saying that he felt like it was home. However, the most touching experience took place later that evening, when the owner of the albergue, Ulteira, invited us to a wine tasting in the medieval cellar underneath the building.

We descended the stairs with a dozen or so other peregrinos. The owner relayed, in (sometimes translated) Spanish, how the cellar was once part of a tunnel system connected to the castle on the hill. He showed parts that dated to Roman times, and took us though a narrow passage that served as a pinch point to make invading soldiers vulnerable to

defenders. He enthusiastically used his laser pointer as a sword to demonstrate the point on latecomers.

As we tasted small glasses of wine, a group of French peregrinos broke out into song. One young woman later explained to me that it was the traditional song of French pilgrims on the Camino. It made me yearn for an English song of our own.

Among my circle of English-speaking peregrinos, “I’m Gonna Be (500 Miles),” by the Scottish band The Proclaimers, is a default anthem. But I believe that among all the talented American pilgrims there must be a songwriter who can create a suitable song for those who share the experience of the Camino. Is it you? I will be watching future issues of *La Concha* in hopes that one will show up! ♦



Morning in Castrojeriz as Laurie and Dennis leave the village. photo by Magdalena Vanderkooy



Iglesia Santa Maria, with ruins of The Castle of Castrojeriz on the hill



Medieval wine cellar in Castrojeriz

Here & Now

by J. Peter Monro, Portland ME

Now,
as I ascend
the mountain,
I touch the ground
firmly, gently.
I feel I belong to her
I draw strength from her,

But I leave
no mark here,
no sign,
for I know
thousands are coming,
and they will want
their walk,
not mine.

Here, I open my heart –
and eyes
and arms –
to the sky.
But I do not reach for it
or grab it
for myself.

The heavens
are giving me
all that I need
Here and now—
the touch of the air,
the taste of the rain,
the chill of the fog,
the warmth of the sun —
without my asking.

I open my ears
to the trill of birds,
the trickle of water,
here
and now.

Now, I let my fingers
brush lightly
on the bracken,
on the gorse,
and Scotch broom.

Here, I angle my eyes
down to the ground
to see where I am
not where I will be,
where I have looked
for too long now.

I savor the moment,
the only moment there is –
the constant
and forever
now

flowing with me
here
along the Camino.

Is all this true?
or
do I only wish it were so? ♦

Trabadelo, April 2016

An Irritating Pilgrim

by Megan M. Ramer, Chicago IL

I first encountered Ronaldo* on an insistently rainy day. I don't recall if it was a difficult day, sick of rain, aching feet, or just emotionally challenging for unknown reasons. Or if it was just an internal day when I was craving solitude?

Regardless, I know I was irritated immediately. I needed space and he was overeagerly chatty and irritatingly cheery. I was a bit rude, offering curt and less than kind responses, but he wasn't getting the hint. The oblivious chirpy chattiness persisted until I much more clearly dismissed him.

After that, I began to run into him quite frequently. While I felt a little bad about how rudely I'd treated him in that first encounter, I also grew in my irritation. This was strange because my typical judgmental attitude had been tempered in some beautiful ways along the Camino. Given the extremely close quarters we all kept, it was quite miraculous to have felt so free of that ugly judgy-ness I so often live with.

But here was Ronaldo. Getting deeper under my skin, pushing all of my buttons with his cheery, talkative, overeager presence that felt imposing to me. A few days from Santiago, my dear Camino friend and I were eating

dinner together at an albergue. I looked up to see Ronaldo walk through the door—alone—and glance around the room looking for a table to join. I quickly averted my eyes, and then my guilt got the better of me—and let's be clear here: it wasn't my kindness, it was definitely my guilt—and

I reluctantly gestured him over. He grinned and eagerly joined us.

During our dinnertime conversation that evening, Ronaldo shared an inspiring metaphor of the Camino that has stuck with me ever since. It opened up something new for me, and I felt something like scales fall from my eyes. I knew that I'd encountered the living Christ in this bumbling, gangly man with the huge heart, and I was cured of my irritation with him. I was healed.

Every time I saw him after

that I had an overwhelming sense that Jesus had come to me in Ronaldo. It had taken a very long time for me to recognize him, but thanks to God's grace, I had gotten over myself just long enough to glimpse Christ in this man. And, thanks to God's grace, Ronaldo hadn't given up on me. ♦

* name changed



Pilgrim Dinner

On the Primitive Way: Two Texan Brothers' Journey to Santiago de Compostela by Landon Roussel

reviewed by Annie Argall, Baltimore MD

Landon Roussel's first-person narrative of his 2013 Camino with his brother Cory is more than the story of two twenty-something brothers walking the Camino Primitivo. It is a story of the strength of family ties and fraternal love even under difficult circumstances, the importance of being present, and the devastating impact of substance abuse not only on the user, but on the entire family.

Although only a year apart in age, the two brothers' lives diverged early. Landon, the elder, went to medical school, married, had a family. Cory was in drug rehab in his teens and eventually in prison. Their relationship was often strained. Even though time and money were in short supply, veteran pilgrim Landon proposed a walk on the Camino as a way for the two of them to reconnect and for Cory to experience a new perspective.

As a priest in the Oviedo Cathedral reminds Landon at the beginning of their Camino, "every day is a new stage."

In many ways, their Camino is not unusual. They meet and engage with other pilgrims. They appreciate the beauty of the Primitive Way and endure its hardships, including a blizzard as they climb to the highest pass. They carry not only backpacks, but

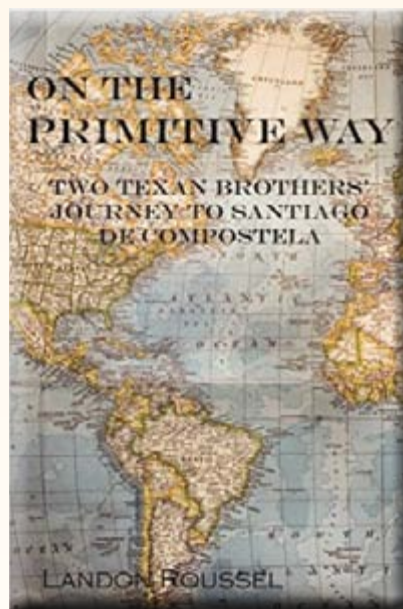
baggage from the past. In flashbacks, Landon writes about incidents in their past that relate to where they are in the present.

The Camino has its effect. Of the long day's walk into Lugo, Landon writes, "At times, Cory and I were silent, just walking in each other's presence. We had, it was clear, a peace with each other, one which we had not shared in our adult lives, a peace in which words did not need to fill the gap that each other's presence did."

Their time on the Camino became particularly meaningful for another reason. The author reveals in the epilogue that his brother died tragically the following year.

Roussel writes in a straightforward narrative style. One wishes, though, that the editor had been paying more attention. Extra words left in or out of sentences and occasional lapses in grammar were distracting.

Nonetheless, this is a story worth reading of yet another way that the Camino deeply touches its pilgrims. Landon dedicates the book to his brother, "who encouraged me to never stop trying to reconnect with those we love most." The two brothers never give up on each other, and that is a lesson worth remembering. ♦



On the Primitive Way: Two Texan Brothers' Journey to Santiago de Compostela

by Landon Roussel

Communitas Press 2015

216 pages

A Table on the Road

by Stacey Wittig, Munds Park AZ

Today, as I was walking the Camino in France (Via Podiensis), I saw a beautiful young Italian woman laughing at the weather with snowflakes clinging to her dark eyelashes. The flakes were large and falling slowly. It's the last day of April near Le Puy, France, and I didn't expect snow.

After the falling snow subsided, I saw four men in the forest standing, talking and laughing next to a gate in our pathway. It seemed a good spot to stop and talk to fellow pilgrims. Evidently, this place had inspired others before us because scrawled across a "Yield" sign were the words, "I love mi lyfe."

Joseph, one of the men of the group, showed me a wooden, hand-carved shell the size of a small snail. The scallop shell held a special story for Joseph.

"Yesterday, it was hot, and I wanted something to drink. I saw a sign that read 'NENE.' After walking to the sign, I saw a man whose clothes were so dirty. He needed a haircut. Normally, I would not stop and speak to such a man. But I wanted something to drink."

"He sat at a roadside table on which were a bottle of red wine bottle, bread, and cheese. On the same table he also collected machine parts, old oil cans, petrol cans and rusty tools. The table was dark and dirty, and behind it, he sat in a wheelchair."

Joseph continued.

"But the guy was so happy that in a few moments we were discussing our families and lives. I spent 20

minutes with the man. He told me that he had a job to install high electric cable all over the world. But then he had an accident and fell. So he came back here, to his parents' house in this small village. He told me that it is his pleasure and his life to stay and invite pilgrims for something to drink and talk to them."

"He gave me this small shell," Joseph said, fingering it lovingly in his large hand. "I asked him, 'How much do

"Sometimes reaching out and taking someone's hand is the beginning of a journey. At other times it is allowing another to take yours."

~Vera Nazarian

you want?' The man said, 'No, it is a gift.'"

"It was my first unordinary happening on the Camino," Joseph shared. "When I finally walked away, within 200 yards of leaving his place, I had tears in my eyes."

"I heard, 'Joseph, do you now understand why you are walking the Camino?' This guy opened my eyes. I was wondering why I was on this way. It is for exchanging with others. I'm not only walking the Camino for myself but for the community that I find here. I am part of what is making this man's happiness and he is part of mine." ♦



Welcome, New Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who joined American Pilgrims on the Camino from March through May 2016. We look forward to meeting all of you at future Gatherings and events.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
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Camino Trail Markers-In the French Style

by Bill Arbaugh, Ft. Pierce FL

Along the French le Puy route there is no difference between markers for the Camino and national trail (Grande Randonnée-GR) markers! After walking 20 km

in the wrong direction in a rainstorm while following these universal trail signs, I started taking pictures and listening to "that's the way we do it in France." ♦





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

Do You Have Camino Impressions to Share?

With every issue we are delighted anew by the quality, variety, and abundance of submissions – and especially by the fact that so many are from first-time contributors. Your enthusiasm for the Camino and for La Concha as a medium for sharing that enthusiasm keeps us going!

So, please keep telling us, in 400 words or fewer, about your Camino. Consider a photo, a poem, or a new found understanding of an idea – a pilgrim's perspective. We have refined our guidelines, so please visit Newsletter on our website for suggestions and

our new guidelines.

The submission deadline for the next issue is, August 31 2016. We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

¡Buen Camino!

*Maureen Field, Peg Hall, Anna Harris, Zita Macy
Mona Spargo & Jessica Swan
July 2016 Team La Concha*

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