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# LA CONCHA

Newsletter of American Pilgrims on the Camino  
December 2016

## You Are Not in Charge

by Sonya Varea Hammond, Greenville SC

Thirty years ago, I read about the Camino. Finally, this year, the planets aligned.

Ten miles from the airport and three hours prior to flight, the highway sign flashed "ACCIDENT AHEAD." My mental conversation: "Maybe we should get off the freeway," and then "Oh, it'll be fine."

The freeway was closed for rescue vehicles and helicopters for a truck accident. Stalled for an interminable time, I called the airline's customer service twice.

Finally, we reached the only exit being used to divert three lanes of traffic and arrived

ten minutes before my plane's departure. The unsympathetic, blasé counter attendants said my only recourse was to purchase another round-trip ticket, at full fare, for the next day.

I burned with anger, frustration, and self-recrimination. (If only I had said, "Let's eat in the car" instead of picnicking; if only I had said, "Let's get off the freeway" earlier; if only...) My face flushed, my heart pounded, so angry, I couldn't even cry. My husband calmly suggested we get a room nearby. In our hotel, needing to dissipate the hot adrenaline, I pounded a pillow to exhaustion. My husband, disappearing into a corner of the room, watching this uncharacteristic anger, let me work off my rage.

My premature lesson from the Camino: "You are not in charge!" If someone had said to me that day, "Well, maybe it's for the best," I would have decked them. But it was. The day I would have arrived, the husband of my friend who was to pick me up near St. Jean Pied de Port suffered a detached retina. On what would have been my first and hardest day of hiking, over the Pyrenees, it rained profusely. I even got a five euro refund on my train ticket. Despite many tense moments, I grasped that I received the Camino I was destined to have. I met so many people, had adventures, and

### In this issue

Chair's Message .....	2
Book Review	
<i>In Movement There is Peace</i> .....	8
<i>Camino de Santiago Practical Preparation &amp; Packing</i> .....	14
<i>Pilgrim Tips &amp; Packing List Camino de Santiago</i> .....	14
Chapters .....	12-13
Hospitalero Happenings.....	20
New Members .....	21

### Member Writings & Photos Throughout!



*I walked the Camino this year, leaving Greenville, SC on Aug. 25 and returning on Sept. 22. This photo of me was taken between Roncesvalles and Zubiri*

saw sights I would never have experienced had I arrived on my original date. Call it chance, divine intervention, whatever. I learned that the Camino is in charge, and as I loosened and rode the waves, my experiences became more rich, more meaningful. I was grateful. I felt guided.

I never expected to learn so early in my trip that "The Camino provides, not necessarily what you want, but what you need." ♦

## Message From the Chair

Dear *La Concha* Readers,

At year end I will hand over the role of chair of the board of directors to Jeff Stys, who has served as vice chair for two years. I'd like to use this final message to share my thoughts on why I so value my membership in American Pilgrims on the Camino.

Probably like you, I joined American Pilgrims because I wanted the Camino to continue as part of my life. I wanted to share stories with people who understood, and I wanted to find a way to make the Camino even better.

So, I am wondering – Did it work? Did we do what we wanted to do when we became dues-paying members of American Pilgrims? For me, the answer is certain. The Gatherings, chapter events, and hospitalero training have kept the Camino in my life. And, our grants, international collaborations, and hospitalero members have made the Camino even better.



I'm convinced that a membership in American Pilgrims is a way to carry our Camino with us even when we have put our backpacks aside. We are American Pilgrims on the Camino – a community of pilgrims who support each other and the Camino. My membership is part of who I am.

Will you join me in renewing your membership, when it is time to renew?

Will you consider making a gift of a membership to a friend or family members?

Will you take the step of upgrading to a life membership, making a lifetime commitment to the Camino?

It's been an honor to serve as your chair these past several years and wonderful to walk with you. ♦

Ultreya!

*Cheryl Grasmoe*

Retiring Chair, Board of Directors

[www.americanpilgrims.org/membership-join](http://www.americanpilgrims.org/membership-join)

☞ He or she who serves almost always benefits more than he or she who is served."

~Gordon B. Hinckley. ☞

## Pilgrim Association Representatives Walk to Improve an Historic Camino Route

Earlier this month, representatives of 15 pilgrim associations including Ireland, USA, Holland, South Africa, Canada, Hungary and Japan walked the Camino Inglés from A Coruña to Santiago. American Pilgrims were represented by our vice chair, Jeff Stys. The event was sponsored by the Tourist Department of A Coruña. Participants formed three working groups to provide input on areas for improvement, before and after the Camino, and sustainability. They walked for five days, met with mayors and other officials in the towns along the way, and enjoyed a wine tasting and a queimada ceremony.

American Pilgrims has a strong working relationship with the other Associations. Both our current board chair Cheryl Grasmoe and our international relations committee chair Yosmar Martinez are in regular contact with them on topics of mutual interest and concern. The event was an excellent opportunity to strengthen the ties by having Jeff meet them personally and walk and work with them to help the Tourist Department improve this historically rich Camino route. ♦



## Going Cuckoo

*by David Jennings, Kings Beach CA*

In April and May, 2012, my wife, Monica, and I walked the 500 miles of the Camino Francés. To our delight we discovered the Cuckoo bird, not as much by sightings as by his unique call, “Coo-koo, Coo-koo.” Hearing the call was a daily uplift to the spirit.

Since then, we always ask fellow pilgrims returning from the Camino about their feelings when hearing the call, “Coo-koo, Coo-koo.” They react dumbfounded, as anyone knows, that sound only comes from clocks, hand carved in Bavaria.

In September and October 2016, we again returned to Santiago on the Portuguese Camino

and were disappointed that we never heard the call of the Cuckoo bird any time during the walk. What happened to the Cuckoo bird? Google knows; it says that only the male bird makes that sound as a courting song in the spring. That is why the European common Cuckoo is called “the harbinger of spring.” More importantly, the Cuckoo does not like cold weather so in late August or early September they migrate to the warmer climates of Africa. Therefore, if you happen to walk the Camino in the spring, listen for his song, “Coo-koo, Coo-koo.” ♦



# 20th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims

## *The Camino Community: Past, Present and Future*

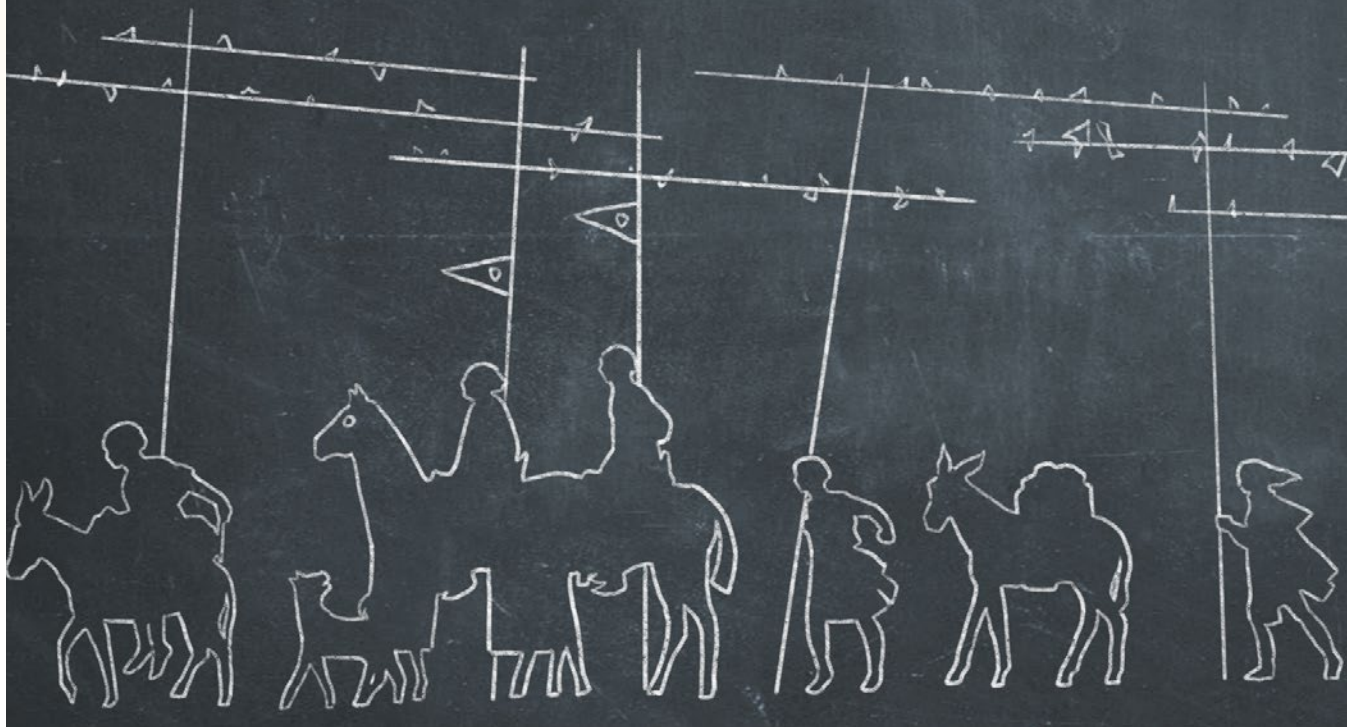
The 20th National Gathering of American Pilgrims will take place March 23rd-26th in Atlanta. There will be a myriad of amazing speakers talking about the evolution of the Camino community and what awaits us pilgrims in the years to come. Attendees will be treated to a wonderful flamenco performance as well as the screening of a *Walk to Fisterra*. As

always, we will have new pilgrim favorites such as *What to Pack... or Not*, *Pilgrim First Aid*, and *New Pilgrim Q&A*. Finally, there will be our infamous Camino Cabaret and Camino 5x5 where you will have the opportunity to share your Camino experiences and talents! Visit our website in mid-January to register. ♦

### *The Camino Community: Past, Present and Future*

Thursday, March 23 - Sunday, March 26, 2017

The Calvin Center  
Hampton, Georgia (Just outside Atlanta)



Graphic by Luis Javier Martinez, @Luigipanda

## American Pilgrims - Helping to Make the Camino Better

In 2016, American Pilgrims grant program awarded over \$46,000 to associations in Spain and France. It was the most money ever awarded.

Our grants help develop the infrastructure of lesser-known Caminos by supporting efforts to mark these routes:

On the Camino de Levante (from Valencia to Santiago), the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago de la Comunidad Valenciana will mark routes in the provinces of Ávila, Valladolid y Zamora, using standardized international symbols of signposts, arrows and panels.

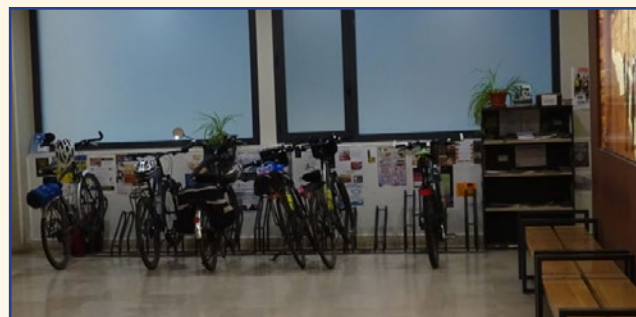
The Asociación Jacobea de Almeria-Camino Mozárabe began marking of the Camino Mozárabe de Santiago throughout the Province of Jaén using granite marker stones.

The Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago en Cádiz employed an Andalusian approach using a combination of stone markers, typical Andalusian colored tiles and metallic signs to mark the ancient “Vía Augusta” route from Cádiz to Sevilla.

This year’s awards also funded the construction and upgrading of albergues.

Les amis du chemin de St. Jacques en Pyrénées Atlantiques in St. Jean Pied de Port will build an urgently needed albergue in Bayonne, France to serve the Camino del Baztan (Bayonne-Pamplona).

In Spain, grants will help fund the construction of Albergue “Betania” in Cadalso de los Vidrios on the Camino Sureste by the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago en Cadalso de los Vidrios and also an albergue by the Asociación de Amigos Camino de Santiago de Miranda de Ebro.



*Ready for bikers in Cádiz.*

The Asociación de Amigos Camino de Santiago de Burgos, which operates a gigantic albergue, was awarded funds to build wooden lockers on the 5th and 6th floors of the albergue. Funds were also allocated to build an aluminum roof to an outdoor terrace on the 4th floor.

Two other highly innovative proposals received funding this year.

Ditch Pigs Cleanup Project is an annual initiative of Peaceable Kingdom Spain that has volunteers picking up and disposing of litter left on the Camino de Santiago trail along its 88 km.

CaminoArtes was awarded a grant that partially funds the conversion of an abandoned ermita of mixed 13th and 17th century construction at the entrance of Carrión de los Condes into a functioning welcome center and small concert hall.

It is a point of pride for all of us in American Pilgrims to be part of the work of these associations on the Camino. ¡Buen Camino! ♦



*A ditch pig cart is pretty handy for hauling litter.*



# Cooking the Camino

by Laurie Ferris, Oakland CA

Whenever I travel, I try to find a cooking class to learn how to prepare cuisine of the region. A few years ago when I was in Andalucía, I took a class on making Paella and Tortilla Española. I was excited to host Spanish-themed dinners at home with my new kitchen skills. We can buy good Spanish wines in America, but don't we all wish we could reproduce some of the dishes we enjoyed on the Camino to share with family and friends back home? I didn't have time to take a cooking class on my Camino this May, but lo and behold, I recently had the opportunity to "cook the Camino" close to home!

A mix of fourteen pilgrims and Camino newbies gathered at Back to the Table Cooking School and Production Kitchen in Lafayette, California, where we donned red aprons, rolled up our sleeves, and worked for our supper. Experienced pilgrim Yosmar Martinez was guest chef and planned a delicious four-course meal based on recipes from Spain and her new cookbook.

- Pan con Tomate y Jamón Serrano (Toasted Bread with Tomato and Serrano ham)
- Espinacas con Garbanzos (Spinach with Chickpeas)
- Paella Mixta (Chicken and Shellfish Paella)
- Tarta de Santiago (St. James Almond Cake)



Laurie Ferris and Lilly Henning with their Tarta de Santiago.

Under Yosmar's guidance, we chopped, peeled, diced, sliced, puréed, sautéed, whisked, folded, baked, and sprinkled.

Yosmar gave us the basic instructions about mise-en-place (putting everything in place), sautéing



Cooking Class at work.

and slicing techniques, and salting.

She also had menu-specific tips on making paella with saffron, sofrito, chicken, and shellfish. Mussel debearding was a tough job, but someone had to do it! It wasn't me, for I kept myself busy with the food processor.

When it was time to decorate the Tarta de Santiago that we had prepared earlier, we got to use Yosmar's cross stencil from Santiago. The Tarta tasted as good as it looked!

And when it was time to enjoy the fruits of our labor, we celebrated the feast with wine at a big communal table, Camino style!

Yosmar and I chatted about our Caminos, and I thanked her for sharing with us her passion for both the Camino and good food. She said, "It's easy when it's from the heart." Amen, Camiga! She signed my cookbook, which now has a special place in our kitchen. ♦

**Editor's Note:** The cookbook *Tastes of the Camino* by Yosmar Martinez was reviewed in the September *La Concha*.

# The Life & Death of the Cantina—La Casa de los Dioses

by Gene Cheltenham, Los Angeles CA

It was a chilly, windy morning, but fortunately, there was no rain. I decided to take the dirt road or right hand path through the hills from Villadangos del Páramo to Astorga. After about 10 km, I came upon pilgrims at the side of the trail. They were at La Casa de los Dioses, or “The House of the Gods,” a kiosk with fruit and drinks offered to pilgrims. The only cost was a donation. The offerings were provided by David Vidal Figuls, whom I had met here three years ago.

I spotted him back by the old adobe barn. It was good to see him again. He saw me and remembered me from our brief meeting three years ago. David had been living at this location for over eight years. He came to this spot after leaving Barcelona and bought the property about three years ago. David introduced me to his girlfriend, Suzanne Smithson. We talked about the improvements to



*Pilgrims pause for refreshment at the cantina.*

the internet. David was also organizing volunteers on the Camino to help clean up the trash on the trail.

Since my Camino and sadly after eight years of service to pilgrims, David said good bye to La Casa de los Dioses and has closed it. La Casa de los Dioses is no more, and along with it, the spirit that David brought to the Camino has moved on. ¡Adios, David! ♦



*La Casa de Los Dioses.*

the property. The grounds have been turned into a garden with fruit trees, grape vines and pathways winding through it. David credits Suzanne for the transformation. Compared to what it was three years ago, it is substantially improved. Occasionally, pilgrims would stay at his property, but the comforts were few.

David and Suzanne, along with their cats, live year round on the property—even during the cold winters. As we were speaking, Suzanne was cooking a stew on a stove next to the food and drink stand. Every week she went into Astorga to get mail and use



*David Vidal Figuls and Gene Cheltenham  
June 2016.*



## In Movement There is Peace

by Elaine Orabona Foster, Ph.D. & Joseph Wilbred Foster III

*reviewed by Jerald Stroebele, Anchorage AK*

Elaine and Joe Foster are a couple who walked the Camino Francés in September and October and recorded their daily progress each evening on their iPhones. Sometimes their daily reflections are very different. Their backpacks were light, but they carried a lot of emotional baggage, which they share with the reader. Elaine had just recently retired as an Air Force psychologist, overloaded with the anger and anxiety of her war-weary patients. On the

### **In Movement There is Peace**

by Elaine Orabona Foster, Ph.D. & Joseph Wilbred Foster III

PsyConOps - 2013

297 pages

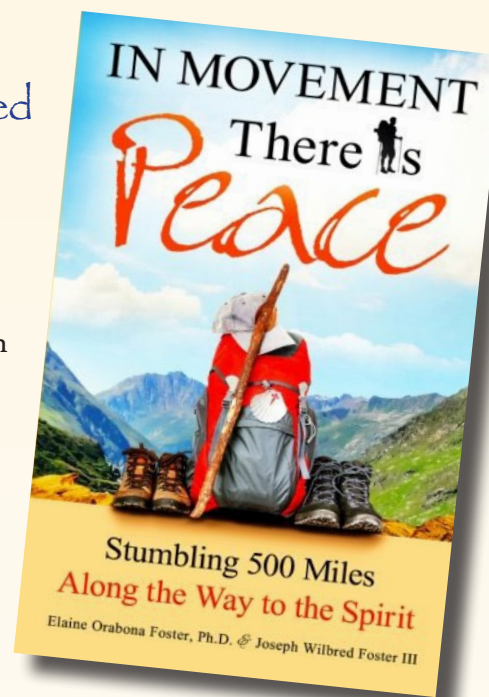
Camino, she learned that her father was very sick, the prognosis: cancer. Her next dilemma became whether to end her Camino, or continue. As she had walked the Camino, her Catholic faith had become increasingly restored. She continued walking and made a promesa to God that she would not take any more pain medication or anti-inflammatory drugs. This abrupt discontinuance caused her pain and misery and baffled her husband, who was unaware of her vow to take no more painkillers. Meanwhile, Joe was battling his own demons. His father had invited him to walk the Appalachian Trail with him the year before, but Joe had declined. His father then died on

the trail. Joe walked the Camino with guilt and depression.

Both authors share much of their very personal inner anxieties and

spirituality. Readers may be excused for not finishing their story, but that would be a mistake. Their diaries provide a detailed account of days on the Camino, enlightening, educating, and entertaining the reader. There is great information here; this is as good a description of the daily ups and downs of the Camino as I have read.

Eight days before she limped into Santiago, keeping her promesa, Elaine learned her father's surgery revealed not cancer, but an obstruction, which was removed. Unlike my brother, who recently gave me this book as we planned our next Camino, I am not spiritual. Nonetheless, this was still a compelling read, and I highly recommend the book. ♦



## Thank you Michael

At the end of the year, Michael Romo will leave the American Pilgrims board of directors. We thank him for three full years of service. He has guided us through dramatic growth in our grants program, played a major role in establishing a solid relationship with the community at Ribadiso as we initiated the Welcome Project there, and been an excellent ambassador with our colleagues in Spain. Thank you for all of these contributions and more not mentioned. ♦







# Preparation for the Camino

by Janet Meskin, Los Angeles CA

"It takes three things to attain a sense  
of significant being  
God  
A Soul  
And a Moment.

And the three are always here."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*

Part III: Will be to arrive where we started T.S. Eliot

Willing	Empathy
Indelibles	Returning
Liberally	Each
Leaning	Whispered Wish
Between	Elated
Enshrining	Solidly
Tomorrows	Timed
On	Arrows
Appreciating	Reach
Receptive	Tenacious
Raw	Earthlings
Imaginations	Declaratively
Valiantly	Impaling
Enticing	Alleluia
Winds	Innately ♦
Harness	

**Editor's Note:** This is the 2nd of a four part essay/poem written in acrostic form. Part I can be found in the July 2016 issue, and Part II is in the September 2016 issue. A poem in acrostic form uses the letters in a phrase, such as the T.S. Eliot quote underlined above, to begin each line of the poem. Photo shows waymarkers along the Camino de Santiago, 2015

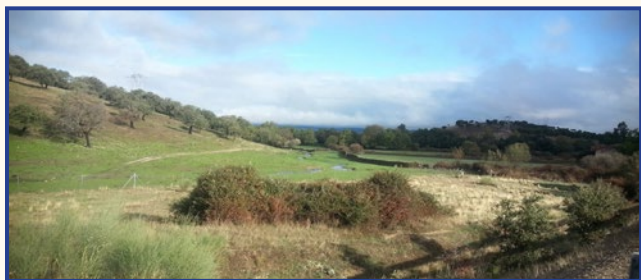
# The Second Leg

by Larry O'Heron, Rochester NY

My first Camino experience was in 2014. It was spiritual, and short-lived due to physical issues. My second experience, in 2015, was physical and everything that I wanted and needed.

I returned to the Camino both to continue my journey and also because the lessons from my first experience were slowly slipping away. I was - without much struggle - being pulled down into the quicksand of everyday life.

Living the Camino requires a change in outlook and relieves me of stress that previously affected me negatively.



*Blue sky green fields, Aldeanueva del Camino.*

I have not yet figured out what proportion of each Camino experience affects me so deeply:

The aloneness

The physical effort

The physical exhaustion

The interactions with pilgrims

The fluidity and relative uncertainty of each day

The connectedness to the environment

The disconnectedness from the world

The celebration of exceeding my abilities



*Larry and other pilgrims enjoying a late lunch, Rio Guadiana in Mérida.*

I am not a believer that the Camino changes one; I believe that one wants to change, and the Camino is the instrument of change. Since my first experience and I think even more so now, the Camino is an integral part of who and what I am. I could no more stop thinking about my 'pilgrimage' than I could deny an intimate part of my soul. The two are intertwined now. More than that, my soul and the Camino are interconnected, like neurons. To remove it from my history would be to introduce amnesia over a fundamental part of my individuality.

After my return to Rochester, I watched a show on the human brain that talked about how athletes enter the "slow mode" or the "zone". It is a state wherein the mind no longer operates on a conscious level but instead surrenders total control of the body to the unconscious mind. This frees the person from having to think, monitor and direct the course of the body. The physical just happens. That is what the Camino does for me; it frees me of the concerns and issues on my "way."

When I got on the plane in Spain to go home after my 2015 Camino, I decided that I would not return. The Camino was just too physically demanding for me. The funny part is that when the plane was landing in Rochester, I had my Via De La Plata stage planner out and was looking for a time in 2016 to return for my 3rd leg. ♦



*Sunset, Puebla Sancho Perez, October 2015.*



# First-Time Hospitalera: A Different Kind of Camino

by Janet Schwind, South Bend IN

On May 15, 2016, I wrote this entry as the first of my blog on my time in Spain.



*Tree with heart shapes*

and haven't even begun walking. I think, Is this how it's going to be this time? How will it be when my Camino actually starts?

Then, I knew. I was wrong. My Camino began the minute I got on the plane. The Camino is the way you go, the adventure of each day, the new places and situations, the challenges, the people, and the emotions. They are not on hold until you walk.

I wondered how I would be as a hospitalera. Do I have what people will need? What will I encounter?

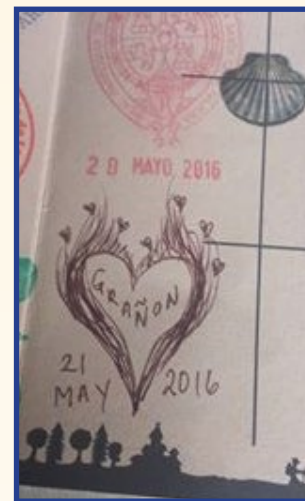
I keep saying to myself, I have not started my Camino yet.

I do not start walking my second Camino until June 2; my first I did alone in 2013. However, I arrived in Spain on May 9 to begin three months here in Europe, which first includes a visit to friends in Santiago and now my two weeks as a volunteer at a very special albergue on the Camino in a small town called Grañón. I have experienced a lot of nervousness already

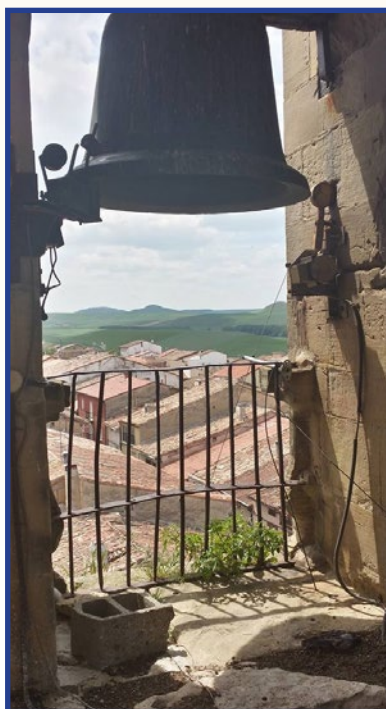
I arrived in Grañón yesterday, one day before my hospitalera time begins. So I wasn't even "on the clock" yet, and I immediately met a distraught Aussie who wanted a ticket back to Burgos; she absolutely had to leave the Camino. As we sat together to try to understand the bus schedule, I noticed drops of water silently falling on the paper. I did not understand at first. Is she sweating? No, she is crying. She was very emotional about having left her friend who had gotten injured and stayed behind. She felt guilty for going on without her. She is homesick for Australia too. She just wants to quit the Camino. Coming out of my own self-thinking, I had to remember fast what the Camino is about... putting yourself aside to think about others which was my biggest lesson from my first Camino. I need these lessons again and again so they will sink in.

She went to lie down as another hospitalero and I worked out which bus she needed and where to catch it. We came to get her when we had it all figured out, and she was very grateful. ♦

**Editor's Note:** (You can read the rest of the blog entry on the [American Pilgrims website's Essay Page.](#))



*Heart Sello, hand drawn by the hospitalera.*



*Belltower in Grañón*

# Chapter News

American Pilgrims continues to grow. Across the country, the chapters are working to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by gathering pilgrims, providing information, and supporting the Camino. If you are interested in getting involved or forming your own chapter, visit <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/local-chapters>. The 41 chapters of American Pilgrims on the Camino give life to our organization. From bird-watching walks to pub meet-ups to partnerships with local universities, the chapters bring the Camino home. Here is a snapshot of our activities during the last quarter of 2016 from a sampling of 19 of our chapters:

**Hikes:** 70

**Movie Nights:** 4

**Shell Ceremonies:** 2



**Coffee Groups/Meet-Ups:** 40

**Welcome Home Gatherings:** 4

**Meals/Potlucks:** 8

**Speaker Events:** 12

**Orientations for New Pilgrims:** 7

**Chapter Hikes in Portugal:** 1



*Chapters (this page right to left) Anchorage, Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Portlandia, Northern California, & North Carolina. Chapters (page 13 right to left) Colorado Front Range, Hoosiers, Orlando, Orlando in Portugal, Raleigh, Sacramento, Kansas City Southern California, Philadelphia, and Valley of the Sun.*







# Camino de Santiago Practical Preparation & Background

by Gerald Kelly

## Pilgrim Tips & Packing List Camino de Santiago

by S. Yates with Daphne Hnatiuk

*reviewed by Jerald Stroebele, Anchorage AK*

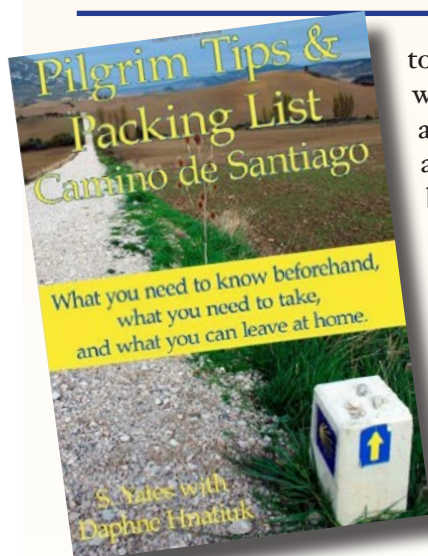
Kelly is an Irishman who has walked numerous Caminos and published walking guides to the Caminos Francés, Via de la Plata and Sanabrés. This book is subtitled: "An outline of its history and culture and a Camino phrasebook." Ms. Yates is an Englishwoman and her editor Ms. Hnatiuk is Canadian. Their book is subtitled: "What you need

enliven their chapters with "Pilgrim Anecdotes": "A pilgrim arrived at the refugio where I served as a hospitalera and she was a vegetarian. Out of curiosity I asked her how she was finding being a vegetarian on the Camino. She responded that she did fine as she lived on the amazing bread and chocolate in Spain. You see, with a bit of cheerfulness, there is always a way ;-)"

These three writers express great compassion for their fellow pilgrims and sensitivity to the local people they meet along the Camino. Both books provide links and references for other sources of information. Both are highly recommended -- no nice photos but lots of details. Read before the first, second, third... Camino, the reader will be well prepared. Buen Camino. Bon Caminho. ♦

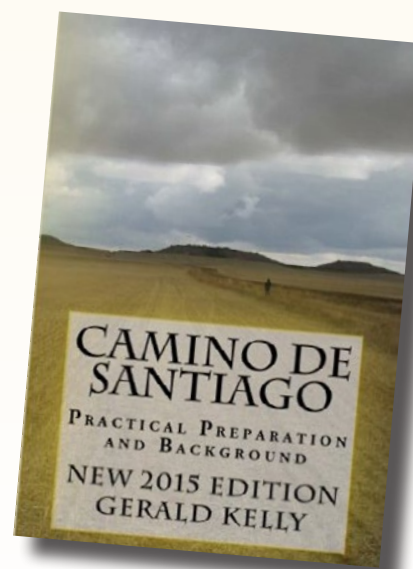
### **Pilgrim Tips & Packing List Camino de Santiago**

by S. Yates with Daphne Hnatiuk  
Imprint April 2013 (version 1.0)  
138 pages



to know beforehand, what you need to take, and what you can leave at home." They have both walked many Caminos in Spain and other European countries and also served as hospitaleras in Camino albergues many times. Based on their extensive experience all three know well of what they advise.

Although small lightweight paperbacks, these two books are not guides to be carried on the Camino. They should be read and re-read months beforehand. Easy, fun and quick to read, both are jammed with practical information of great use to both new and experienced peregrinos. Kelly includes information on food, wine and beer, tips for vegetarians and advice on Camino etiquette. That's for starters. There is a short history of the Camino. Yates and Hnatiuk provide practical information on everything from drinking water to bed bugs. They



### **Camino de Santiago Practical Preparation and Background**

by Gerald Kelly

[www.CaminoGuide.net](http://www.CaminoGuide.net) 2nd Edition January 2014  
143 pages



## What We Like About Spain

by Dick Carter, Seattle WA

Just being recognized can be taken as an act of kindness. It's heartwarming when people remember you from years or even a few days ago. In Carrión de los Condes, there was the owner of Bar España, Mariano, and his barmaid, Nieves, greeting me warmly when I walked in the door. There was Father Julio, the local head priest, being glad to see Jane and me when we first saw him this year. Best of all, there were the young Augustinian nuns who guided us in our hospitalero duties. They greeted us like homecoming relatives. And of course there were the pilgrims whom we checked into the albergue in Carrión. Some of them saw us in Ponferrada as much as ten days later, and it was a happy reunion.

Several times, as the pilgrims checked in, I had the occasion to say that this albergue was the best one on the whole 500-mile Camino de Santiago Francés. I wouldn't have thought to say that if I hadn't heard it from several pilgrims first. They came in hot, sweaty, and tired. Some of them were suffering from foot blisters and near heat exhaustion. This was especially true when the temperature was in the 90s. One of the nuns greeted each of them

with cold water, juice, or a slice of melon. Then they were asked about their pains and help was offered. Some of them were even invited to stay an extra day to give their bodies a chance to heal. One man started crying. He explained that no one else, in his almost two weeks of walking, had ever shown that they cared so much.

At the "Musical Encounter" at 6pm each evening, the pilgrims from all over the world sing together and are given a chance to introduce themselves and meet the other pilgrims. At the Pilgrims' Mass at 8pm, Father Julio gives each of them a personal blessing. At 9pm, the free community dinner lets them get acquainted in depth with their fellow pilgrims. Everyone pitches in to help clean up before bedtime.

The pilgrims leave early the next morning to get in their walking before the day gets too hot. They leave with the feeling that they have been cared for and rested. When Jane and I left after our two weeks of work, we also felt cared for. Not rested, maybe, but cared for. ♦

# Happy Holidays!



## Walking in the New Year!

# Ultreya and Suseya! We Did It!

by Lydia Banales, South Pasadena CA

We finished! After our first section of the Camino 15 years ago, where we walked the last 112 km from Sarria and received our Compostela, we completed the circle September 22nd in Sarria. The final day we took a taxi past O'Cebrero (I just couldn't do another uphill walk), left our bags at Hotel Roma, and had the taxi take us back 10 km so we could complete our pilgrimage walking. It was a little bittersweet and reminded me of coming into Santiago so long ago.

I remember being so tired I could hardly walk, but I didn't want it to be over. I didn't know at the time that we would come back five more times to finish the whole Camino. I didn't know it would take 15 years! I didn't know I would radically change my idea of what a "real" pilgrim is. The older you get the more understanding you become of each person's journey. This time it is really finished, but the memories will last a lifetime.

There have been so many changes on the Camino. It seems a lot less reverent now. Many commercial establishments have sprung up because of the number of pilgrims. On a positive note, many pilgrims are attending services in the churches along the way. What hasn't changed is the hearty "Buen Camino!" from everyone you meet. In our case, they

are usually passing us up on the path!

When we arrived in Sarria, we went to the first church we saw in the old part of town where a gracious gentleman welcomed us and gave us our final sello. We had to be up early for the train to Santiago, and as it happened (Thank you, Santiago), our hotel was right across the street from the train station. We got to Santiago and to our

Compostela Hotel—the best place yet. We were upgraded to a Junior Suite. (Santiago was working overtime!) I must have really needed a good rest.

It was great to be in the Cathedral again, to go through the Holy Door, and to experience the Pilgrims' Mass again. We had our photo taken in the main square and considered going to the Pilgrims' Office to see if there was a certificate of participation we could receive, but there was easily a two hour wait. So we will be satisfied that we did the Camino our way—the best way we could. ♦



*Joseph and Lydia Banales celebrate a long-awaited milestone, Cruz de Ferro, September 19, 2016, photo by hospitalero from Foncebadón.*



*Joseph Banales at the 111 km marker. Taken on May 9, 2001.*



*Joseph receives the final sello on his 15 year long Camino. Sarria, September 22, 2016*





Polish credentials.

## Again...You Started Where?...Medyka Poland!

by Kurt Buckley, Ventura CA

I answered the incredulous clerk at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago in September 2016. "Here are my Camino Credentials just for Poland," I said while showing them to her. She was awestruck. So was I, realizing at age 74 that I had just covered 1835 miles over 156 days. Why? And what were some of my challenges?

I asked, "What's after four times to Santiago?" Then I stumbled across a slice of medieval history that included a route called the Via Regia. Originally protected by local kings, it became an east-west trade corridor also used by Santiago-bound pilgrims. In 2015, I walked a small portion in Germany known as the "Ökumenische Pilgerweg." The lure of the Via Regia—the BIG Camino—had gripped me. I began preparations soon after I returned home.

My challenges came in three flavors: logistics, body, and relationships. Logistics challenges were many, but the 90-day Schengen limitation topped my list. Although Poland's agreement with the USA predates the Schengen Treaty and solves entry and exit, it doesn't solve the 90-day limitation in the other Schengen States! Language was next. A Polish native got me through Poland. I'm fluent in German, and my French and Spanish were passable

to meet my needs. Although I had electronic tracks for my entire route, I still had to struggle daily, in all but Spain, to find lodging, food/drink, and ATMs. Then there was always a balance to strike between preplanning and ad hoc traveling.

The challenge to keep one's body fit over 156 days shouldn't be underestimated. That may appear trite, but after losing 30 lbs., I realized that I had to focus on eating heartily and taking ample amounts of magnesium to prevent cramping. Blisters were never a problem, but Achilles tendinitis presented me with a two-month long challenge. I pushed through it, but learned my lesson not to overextend, even for a few hours.

I list relationships as a challenge because one needs to find a delicate balance between being connected with friends and family and being disconnected. There's also an emotional impact every time I had to break a bond with the Camino "family." And, it was always a constant battle to reclaim my independence.

Despite the challenges, this Camino ranks as one of the best ever. For more insights/highlights, see my blog: [walkpuravida.com](http://walkpuravida.com). ♦



Camino from Medyka, Poland, to Santiago & Kurt Buckley at St. Giron Plage, France, between Bordeaux and Bayonne, August 13, 2016

## THE SPIRIT OF THE CAMINO

*by J.P. Johnston, Orangevale CA*

I walk the Camino.

It called me, from so far away.

It does that, reaches out around  
the world for those souls who  
need to walk the Camino.

"Come to me. I will take your  
pain, I will carry your burden,  
I will tend your wounds and  
I will sooth your soul."

And we come - with our pain,  
our burdens, our wounded souls,  
our grief, our regrets, our fears  
our sorrows, and our needs.

I walk the Camino.

I have to walk, Rain, sun, wind,  
and even snow. It doesn't matter,

I have to walk.

What am I getting from this walking?  
Sore feet, pained legs and hips, I'm  
tired, I'm wet, then cold, then hot.  
I'm also thirsty, hungry, and hurt.

But the Camino Provides!

Pilgrims say, "Here, take my water."

"Take some of my food."

"I have some bandages."

Local people say, "No! That way."

"The Camino is that way!"

"The albergue is ahead."

And from all, "Buen Camino!"

The Camino doesn't take my physical  
pain. It gives me pain. Why?

So I will pay attention as it soothes my  
soul. ♦

*photo by Susan Alcorn, Oakland CA. Seen on Primitivo Norte (2016), a bit after Oviedo.*



# I Love My Feet

by Nancy Hamm Curren, Lakewood CO

I love my feet. Now. It hasn't always been so. We started out all right, but then the complaining began. "It's too hard." "My toes can't see!" "We're hot." "These socks stink!" On and on it went...one thing after another. Then my feet tried to enlist other parts of my body for a Camino revolt. Fortunately, my lungs and heart were totally in favor of the long walk from the beginning and just ignored my nagging feet. The arms didn't see a problem and remained neutral on the whole 'Camino thing' for the most part too.

After a while of feeling pounded upon, abused and neglected, my feet sent out some crazy street fighters. Blistering attacks ensued. The most notable terrorist had to be taken out with surgical precision, but others, though menacing, were only put under surveillance until they skulked away on their own. After a while though, my feet were getting some serious allies with sore back, shoulders, knees, shins, calves and tendons.

Negotiations began. "Better socks?" "Okay." "More rest stops - with the boots and socks off!" Well, the Camino world is a little different, and

removing your shoes for lunch stops is rather accepted practice, so I said, "Okay, but socks come off only on picnics!" This met with grudging acceptance by my feet, only if better creams and thrice daily massages would be provided.

I told a German Camino companion that my body is a democracy and until every part has its say and is accommodated, I can't go on. He did not take the joke and told me, "No! You just decide to do it and you make your Body do it!" I laughed. That 'just do it' stuff might work for Nike, but my world is a democracy.

My feet did have a point. After so many days of walking, they are now longer, flatter and puffy - like a pork chop flatted out for schnitzel. But now they are also soft and smooth (except where there were early casualties, which are now calluses), and we talk every day very lovingly. I enjoy the open air picnics as much as they do. I love my feet and they love me back. I think that I am lucky to have these feet and legs that reach the ground and a heart strong enough to move us on our Camino. ♦



*A foot picnic*

## 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 eighteen donativo albergues the Federation assists. Many of our hospitalero volunteers have also 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 Colorado Springs, Colorado, on November 20th, American Pilgrims welcomed 19 more hospitaleros into our ever-growing family of volunteers! From all over the United States and even one from England, these include Leslie Mitchell, Kathy Kehe, Michael & Ruth Ann Hoffman, Carmen Marriott, Jessica Swan, Bob Lowry, Sam & Joan Hull, Kurt Somerholter, Elaine Hopkins, Bruce Robbins, Kerin McTaggart, Susan Finke, Chad Roeber, Gilbert Gutierrez, Victoria

Drexel, Laura Villegas, and Sole(Maria) Mingo-Ordonez. Wonderful sharing and laughter with a bit of snow in the forest of Colorado. The trainers for this course were Cheryl Grasmoe and Annie Argall.

Upcoming Hospitalero training courses include February 3-5 in Los Gatos, California, and March 21-23 in Hampton, Georgia. If you are interested in volunteering as an hospitalero please see the American Pilgrims website for further information on these courses. If you have specific questions regarding volunteering please feel free to contact [hospitaleros@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:hospitaleros@americanpilgrims.org). ♦

### Upcoming Hospitalero Trainings

**February 3-5, 2017 in Los Gatos, California**

**March 21-23, 2017 in Hampton, Georgia**

## Contributors

- ♦ Susan Alcorn
- ♦ Lydia Banales
- ♦ Kurt Buckley
- ♦ Dick Carter
- ♦ Gene Cheltenham
- ♦ Nancy Curren
- ♦ Laurie Ferris
- ♦ Sonya Varea Hammond

- ♦ David Jennings
- ♦ J.P. Johnston
- ♦ Janet Meskin
- ♦ Larry O'Heron
- ♦ Janet Schwind
- ♦ Jerald Stroebele





## Welcome, New Members!

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

- |                                  |                               |                                |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ◆ Melissa & Brian Bennington     | ◆ Lilly Henning               | ◆ Rolando Parajon              |
| ◆ Kathy Beno                     | ◆ John Hill                   | ◆ Debra Payne                  |
| ◆ Dave & Becky Bergevin          | ◆ Elaine Hopkins              | ◆ Karen Philipp                |
| ◆ Cornelia & Christiaan Botha    | ◆ Terrance Howell             | ◆ Deborah Proctor              |
| ◆ Jesse & Linda Brown            | ◆ Geoff Hunt                  | ◆ Lory & Greg Quist            |
| ◆ Tri Bui                        | ◆ Cecilia Huynh               | ◆ Virginia & Gordy Quist       |
| ◆ Rose Marie & Brittany Callahan | ◆ J P Johnston                | ◆ Rebecca Regan                |
| ◆ Paul & Jean Caltagirone        | ◆ Tracey Jones                | ◆ Kevin & Kevin Rogers         |
| ◆ Lori Carroll                   | ◆ Richard Juzix               | ◆ Daniela Romero               |
| ◆ Sue Casey                      | ◆ Kathy Kehe                  | ◆ Ann, Brody & Sean Saxon      |
| ◆ Colleen Cassidy                | ◆ Donna & Theodore Kinni      | ◆ Jacque & Don Schuster        |
| ◆ Joe Castano                    | ◆ Irene & William Lee         | ◆ Margie Sepulveda             |
| ◆ Julie Chadwick                 | ◆ Elle Lesley                 | ◆ Eric Sims                    |
| ◆ Carmen & Christopher Clements  | ◆ Linda Lindholm              | ◆ Tracey Smith                 |
| ◆ Grace & Daniel Clements        | ◆ Irene Lipshin               | ◆ Mary Spence                  |
| ◆ Lisa Collins                   | ◆ Susan Lopez                 | ◆ Jeanie Stirling              |
| ◆ Cynthia Combs                  | ◆ Blanche Malankowski-Smith   | ◆ Patrick Sullivan             |
| ◆ Frank Cone                     | ◆ Robert Marian               | ◆ Dan Sweeney                  |
| ◆ Susan Conley                   | ◆ Peter Mark                  | ◆ Dona Szak                    |
| ◆ Nancy Dawson                   | ◆ Christine & Steven Mark     | ◆ Mary Frances Taunton         |
| ◆ Victoria Drexel                | ◆ Vivian & Mike Marshall      | ◆ Mary Taylor                  |
| ◆ Peter Dulle                    | ◆ Rachel, John & Kyle Mason   | ◆ Mara Luisa Tejero            |
| ◆ Steven Dwyer                   | ◆ Andrew Matsumoto            | ◆ Thomas Tomasi                |
| ◆ Karen Forget                   | ◆ Donna Maturi                | ◆ Ashala Tylor                 |
| ◆ Renee Fuller                   | ◆ Abbe McClenahan             | ◆ Luis Valls                   |
| ◆ Bruce Giamalva                 | ◆ Cathy McNamee               | ◆ Donna Vennera                |
| ◆ David T. Giannini              | ◆ Patrick Mills               | ◆ Fernando Vigil               |
| ◆ Nicole & William Glennon       | ◆ Joseph Mills                | ◆ Laura Villegas               |
| ◆ Maria Golphene                 | ◆ Maria (Sole) Mingo-Ordonez  | ◆ Eve Vines                    |
| ◆ Janice Greene                  | ◆ Stephany Mollo              | ◆ Bill & Maxine Wallace        |
| ◆ Gilbert & Terri Gutierrez      | ◆ Marion Morris               | ◆ Travis Walsh                 |
| ◆ Miranda & Daniel Gutierrez     | ◆ Kathie Morton               | ◆ Diane Webb                   |
| ◆ Fran Hailey                    | ◆ Peter, Levi & Charlie Nolan | ◆ Michael Williams OSSM        |
| ◆ Sylvia Halpern                 | ◆ Mark Overton                | ◆ Judith & Steven Winchester ◆ |
| ◆ John Hawke                     | ◆ Bob Palmer                  |                                |



*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, February 8, 2017. We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

iBuen Camino!

*Peg Hall, Anna Harris, Steve Lytch, Zita Macy  
Mona Spargo & Jessica Swan*  
December 2016 Team La Concha

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### Board of Directors 2016

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Jeff Stys – Vice Chair  
Peg Hall – Secretary  
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Peg, Jessica & Zita  
Michael & Carmen  
Jeff, Yosmar, Cindy, Scott & Carmen  
Zita  
Yosmar, Jessica, Zita, Cindy & Peg

### Key Volunteer – Webmaster

Gene McCullough

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