

*Taking my Soul for a Stroll*

*A Camino Chronicle*

*90 days; 800 km*



*August – October, 2010*

*Ann Kirkland*



*These notes are compiled from my daily posts on Facebook from*

*August 23 – October 1, 2010*

*"No thirst at first."*

*Emily Dickenson*

*"Travelers, there is no path, paths are made by walking."*

*Antonio Machado*



## Mon., Aug. 23 – Toronto to Paris

I leave today for a 500 mile walk - the ancient pilgrimage, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.



Pilgrims in 2007

I have conjured this pilgrimage since I was in Santiago de Compostela with a Classical Pursuits trip several years ago. I was captivated by the presence of pilgrims - tired, dirty, tan - but radiant. I may have been the only one on that trip who knew that I would find a way to walk the camino.

## Day 1 – Tues., Aug. 24, Paris to Bayonne

*Ici, je suis...à Bayonne.*

After an uneventful overnight flight, a tedious five hour wait at the train station at Charles de Gaulle airport, and a beautiful train ride south, I am settled for the night in Bayonne. Sleepy but pretty town on a river. Tomorrow I catch another short train to Saint Jean Pied de Port, the ancient capital of the Basque region. Then Thursday I get underway in earnest *a pied*. French keyboard is almost biggest challenge so far.

Now, after endless planning, acquiring and then discarding gear, until I had just The Right Stuff, and walking everywhere and asking myself why I wanted to do this, and learning all there is to know about blister prevention and treatment, here I am poised for lift off.



My exceptionally light pack

I leave tomorrow for a 500 mile walk - the ancient pilgrimage, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela.

## Day 2 – Wed., Aug. 25, Bayonne to St. Jean Pied du Port (1/2 hour on the train)

I have made my way, by plane and two trains, to Saint-Jean-Pied-du-Port, a fairy tale town of white and terra cotta in the French Basque country.



**A hearty welcome at the train station.**

A pile of pilgrims filled the train from Bayonne to St. Jean. I surveyed the passengers and their gear. Everyone seemed to be much younger and with someone else. No one spoke to me, and I was not inclined to initiate any conversations. Only one pair were speaking English, a young woman seeming to try to evangelize a curious but not very receptive young man. I felt doubtful about this undertaking and out of place.

At the station, a gaggle of young students created a canopy of bodies and arms overhead for the exiting pilgrims, shouting, "Olé" and "Bon Chemin." Don't know who they were or why the mix of languages.

St. Jean is abuzz with pilgrims both eager and nervous. I have a great room at Hotel Ramuntcho. I pretty much had the day to wander all over town, up to the citadel and along the ramparts.



**The official Camino office, issuing credentials to pilgrims. I got mine in Canada. The blonde is the evangelist.**



**A pilgrim hostel, or albergue, this one with a sign saying "complet" (full).**



I am sitting on the terrace restaurant of my hotel overlooking the darkening silhouette of the Pyrenees. Were I a simple tourist, I would gasp in awe at the majesty and grandeur. But tomorrow my feet and I are headed straight up. Easy to type the words. Impossible to fathom doing it. But the day will be relatively short since I decided to break up the most difficult walk of all – 27.1 km from St. Jean (in France) to Roncesvalles (in Spain).

**I ate delicious Basque chicken as the sun set over the Pyrenees.**

I hope all my prep will see me up and over. Lots of fellow pilgrims of all ages and nationalities. So far, I do not feel inclined to talk to anyone. At the station we were met by piles of kids screaming "Olé!" and making a canopy for all the disembarking pilgrims.

[Deborah Black](#) likes this.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) great, am just catching up today on your reporting - well done - so far so good and it will continue, no doubt

[Kathleen Overcash Favrow](#) Thanks for posting!

At dinner time I wandered to a wine bar I had passed earlier. It was full of groups enjoying the atmosphere, the wine, food and one another. I felt a little lonely and headed back to my hotel. I passed church and went in. A mass was underway. I stayed, took communion and was then surprised when the aged priest called up all the 'pelerins' for a blessing. There were about 20 of us - all ages and nationalities. The two other Canadians were Québécois. It felt good to be part of this centuries old tradition.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow," As Annie says, "the sun will come up tomorrow." I trust I will go up and down and make my way to Roncesvalles.



Ready, get set, *Ultreia!* (Basque for *Bon Chemin* or *Buen Camino*)

[Sheila M. Donohue](#), [Lisa Nabieszko](#) and [Joe Shields](#) like this..

[.Alice Dunlap-Kraft](#) We'll miss you at Limerick Lake and maybe do a little envying too!

### Day 3 – Thurs., Aug. 26, St. Jean to D’Orisson (8 km)

MORNING -- I am sitting in lovely cafe in St. Jean sipping coffee and reading yesterday's paper before setting out on my first (and probably most difficult) day of walking. I am thrilled to have made it this far and pray that I am up to the physical and emotional days ahead.

I chose a dumb time to set out - 10 am. But I slept badly and it took me a shockingly long time to pack my gear, figuring out what I would need easy access to. A work in progress. Big gulp. Here I go.



Leaving St. Jean.

EARLY AFTERNOON The best cafe au lait. As I sit in the shade at cafe at Hunto with feet bare and propped on a chair, I think surely I can do this. It is breezy and the views across the valleys below are so beautiful and so peaceful that it is hard to imagine strife or suffering anywhere.

Only 2.5km to go today.

Walked with Frenchman Jean Pierre for a bit this morning. He is young but has had bypass surgery. Courageous to do this.

Time go press on.



Hard to tell how HOT it is!

LATE AFTERNOON I have made it to D'Orisson. Honestly, I don't know how but bit by bit. It was blistering hot but the views were exquisitely beautiful. I am here perched in the mountains with the fresh warm breeze. This will be the only night I share a room - with two Québécois, one Quebecoise and a Dutch couple. My fellow roommates are all napping. Even with earplugs, the snoring keeps me awake. Wish I could sleep like a baby. Wonder when I lost the knack.



Tomorrow will be nearly three times longer than today.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) Of course you can do this, and you were wise to break up the hardest part into stages. Remember there will be the view from the top, and then you just keep going. ♥

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) this is very exciting, just checking my map can't find D'Orisson but obviously you know where

[Suzanne L. Lampka](#) like this.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) Isn't the internet a marvel? You can write to us from your little balcony overlooking the Pyrenees. Keep up the good work, Ann

[Stephen Sloan](#) As you are on a pilgrimage, appealing to a higher power for strength on the path ahead seems like an option. No? It is so fun sharing in this adventure with you virtually. Wonderful that you have undertaken it and that you are sharing it with others.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) This is one more thing you will overcome! The snoring, I mean.

[Rika Alvo](#) I hope you have those really good orange foam earplugs. They're the only thing that work for me with snorers and construction equipment on our street at 7 a.m. My friend Darlene walked the Camino a few years ago and it seems to have been an amazing experience.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) hi Ann - I second the motion for earplugs, no doubt a big seller on the Camino - I look f/wd to your next report - I know you will reach Roncesvalles and that the journey tomorrow will be rewarding.

[Classical Pursuits](#) I am only now, on my rest day, finding my way in to FB and these lovely encouraging comments. In the spirit of the Arabic proverb about the man praying that his camel not be stolen but also tying it to a post, I will pray for whatever sleep I need and I will go in search of the orange earplugs. Thanks, all.

Who thought this would be a gastronomic adventure? Dinner in St. Jean last night was one of those rare, memorable meals. A chicken is NOT a chicken is NOT a chicken. and tonight at the alberge, the soup, lamb, beans, wine and warm gâteau Basque - what can I say!



Now comes the scary part. It is time to go to bed and at least half of my roommates snore loudly. I am hopeless with snoring. And tomorrow is probably the most grueling day of all. I will take any karma, prayers or crossed fingers that I make it to Roncesvalles in one piece and manage to enjoy the journey.

#### **Day 4 – Fri., Aug. 27, D’Orisson to Roncesvalles (19 km)**

Be it known that I have arrived in Roncesvalles. I am now in Spain. France slipped into Spain without a noticeable border.



**Breathtaking beauty and near silence.**

After yesterday's grueling climb covering the shortest distance along the entire camino, all of us at dinner last night were mighty anxious about the much longer ascent and steep descent into Roncesvalles, just inside the Spanish border. Especially after being awake much of the night due to loud snoring of my fellow pilgrims. Instead, the cooler weather and gentler slope meant that the five+ hours of walking were pure pleasure.

From time to time I walked in stride with a Frenchman. A Quebecois, two young German guys and a Dutch woman also doing this for her 65th birthday. My shoulders ached when I stopped and I discovered a bloody crack at the tip of a middle toe. (How did that happen?) After a shower, laundry and going horizontal for a bit, I have been out to explore this legendary place - think Charlemagne and *Chanson de Roland*.



**Roncesvalles**



There is a pilgrims' meal here at my hotel followed by a pilgrims' mass at the church next door. Seems that just about everyone goes to these. English is not heard much. German, French and Dutch are the common tongues. My efforts to learn some Spanish will not serve me well. I am too tired to try and they speak at lightning speed.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) hope you are sleeping better now

[Joan Gregson](#) Lesson #1 - always carry ear plugs if you have to share a room!

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) hope the toe injury is healing

I never packed so carefully before for any trip. The aim is to take the bare minimum and that each item serves a necessary purpose, be rugged and dry quickly. After many purchases that I later discarded, I think I did a masterful job - with the exception of neglecting to bring a belt. With things for ready access in my pockets it feels like my pants are falling down.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) You will have to teach a mini-course on this! what to pack, what not to pack, and why.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) brava! nice photos, too, keep smiling.

Many have heavier packs and are having them transported each day or planning to jettison stuff or mail it ahead. The mindfulness is in what to put where. I am still working this out and it takes a long time to get organized each morning. My panicked default response. "I have lost my ...?? has been unfounded so far.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) take good care, Ann - especially of the toes...what a great adventure!

I have 3 kinds of ointment - plain old Vaseline, a German cream made out of deer fat and some hydrating healing ointment from a US drug store. I use all of them so can't comment on the effectiveness of any one in particular. The pharmacies along the camino have entire walls devoted to foot care and the pharmacists themselves treat foot wounds at no charge.

[Joan Gregson](#) I'll bet they do - there must be thousands each year who suffer agonizing blisters. Take good care of those toes. And yourself. How fascinating to have met the WYD Cross enroute to Madrid.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) and [Cristina Gomez](#) like this.

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## Day 5 – Sat., Aug. 28, Roncesvalles to Zubiri (23 km)

That first difficult but beautiful day was 38 C (106 F) I think. Since then it's been perfect walking weather.

As I emerged out of a gorgeous wood of oak trees and dairy farms this morning, I found this little truck selling *cafe con leche* and fruit. What enterprise and so welcome.



**Basque village of Burguette, where Hemingway came to write.**

My spirits are soaring. I recommend most highly the Navarre region of Spain, the home of the Basques.

The villages are exquisite and so tidy and clean that you think you are in Switzerland. Very peculiar, though, that the villages seem empty of residents.

And the Basque food is unbelievably good.

Average age of pilgrims is about 50 with a fair range on either side. One surprise is how few native English speakers I have run into. Three Americans -- from California, Oregon and Alaska. All the Canadians have been Québécois, *et il y en a beaucoup*. Have finished 23 km for today and will walk into village square to look around before laundry, shower, siesta and a *menú del peregrino*.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) likes this.



The cyclists are the fashionistas on the camino - sleek and muscular bodies with colorful spandex painted on where shorts and t-shirts would be. We walkers are a dumpier lumpier lot - we are older, less trim and outfitted like beasts of burden, with all manner of stuff hanging off us

The village of Zubiri is tiny and hugs a lazy river spanned by a beautiful Roman bridge. I talked to some people along the way but mainly preferred keeping my own pace and my own company. I will enjoy conversation over dinner.

I am sitting in the grass by a shallow but rushing river enchanted by iridescent blue green dragon flies playing in the reeds. The breeze is blowing. The sun is beginning to go down. The only sounds are the breeze in the trees, the movement of the water and children playing in the distance. The walk today was varied and beautiful. Should do my laundry so it will dry by morning but hard to leave the water's edge.



[Sheila M. Donohue](#), [Lisa Nabieszko](#) and [Joe Shields](#) like this.

[Alice Dunlap-Kraft](#) We'll miss you at Limerick Lake and maybe do a little envying too!

After dinner, and I am sitting on a wooden park bench at the edge of Zubiri after a dinner with a Dutch couple I met at D'Orisson. She is suffering badly in her hip and ankle. He is hurting too. Casualties are everywhere. They

told me only 21 percent of those who start the camino make it to Santiago. Never heard that. Lots never intend to do it in one go. And the start T so

I don't want to get cocky and presume anything. I am doing well now thanks to Pilates and lots of walking at home and a light pack. I have heard of so many casualties. The first short day, the hardest by far, was made much worse by 38 C heat. People got sun stroke and really sick.

Wanted to write about those Italian and Portuguese porch sitters in my neighbourhood at home, who, night after night, sit, mainly in silence. What do they think, see hear? I am trying to do the same, watching clouds drift by, and what am I doing? Tap tap tap on the damn phone!

I booked private rooms all the way but the second night after the tough walk where the only option was an albergue. I was in a lovely place with the best food but six of us in the room. I hardly slept. But that's nothing. In Roncesvalles where others slept 120 to a room, I had my own small but lovely garret room in the Posada Hotel.

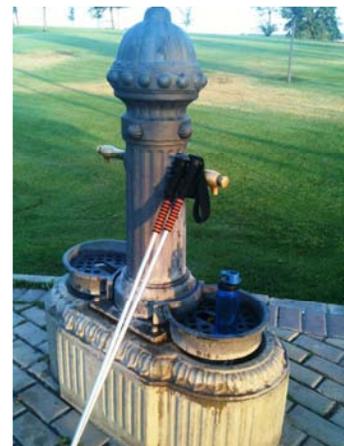


I do my own laundry each afternoon. Today I was lucky to have a balcony to dry it. The albergues have outside ringers and clothes lines.

Tonight I am in a spotless and charming pension. My accommodations will be a mix of hotels, monasteries, and a room in private homes, all with breakfast. I'll stay where I am. Will now listen to chapter or two of *Middlemarch* on my iPhone in the hope of falling asleep.

### **Day 5 – Sun., Aug. 29, Zubiri to Pamplona (22km)**

Filling up with fresh water. I try to make sure to have plenty of water until the next fountain but not to carry unnecessary weight. Always better to carry the water *in* my body than *on* my body.





At a welcome rest stop this morning with delicious cafe con leche, fruit and an accomplished accordionist, the daughter of the bar's owner.

I walked the last bit today with three Germans. Manfred is walking the camino for the 4th time. He is walking with his wife and sister-in-law, both of whom gave up smoking two days ago in St. Jean. So Manfred decided to *start* smoking. He was very funny, but his jokes got a little tiresome, so rather than join them for ice-cream I have chosen some time on my own.



Pamplona - what a change from sleepy Zurbiri! After a 22 km walk through woods and farmland, I am sitting on the main square with a cold *cerves* and a plate of *paella*. I have not yet been to my hotel or inspected my feet. Pamplona is a bustling metropolis that will be fun to explore after a shower and siesta. I am surrounded by the buzz of locals and tourists enjoying a lazy Sunday afternoon at one of the many outdoor cafes on this huge traffic-free square. Not sweaty pilgrim in sight.



I cannot imagine how pilgrims in albergues keep their stuff safe and organized so they can find things. Still need to get the hang of what is where and still feel sure I have too much.



[Sheila M. Donohue](#) likes this.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Hello Sheila. Nice to know that you are interested.

I had no idea how joyous every day would be, full of special moments of exquisite beauty, the sheer physical pleasure of walking and the richly rewarding encounters with fellow pilgrims.

Thoughts on Pamplona. I will never be able to inhabit the mind of the locals to know what the running of the bulls and bull fighting mean to them. But Hemingway haunted me during my 18 hours there. A much smaller place then, with few foreigners. Still, passages from *The Sun Also Rises* were vividly present and I think I have some new appreciation of the pull of this part of Spain and even the culture of the bull fight. If Hemingway were alive today, I wonder where in the world he would go. Not Pamplona. Not Key West.



**Ernest Hemingway in front of the bull ring in Pamplona**

Tapas and two glasses of Rioja in Pamplona with engaged couple from Germany and older extreme-fitness man from New Zealand.

Can't believe I am constipated, even with Molly's Metamucil. Trust it will start working soon. Sitting on toilet in middle of night. Should I write to tell her?

I would like to find a religiously sophisticated person to speak frankly and confidentially to.

Left plug adaptor in the wall in Zubiri and charge is running out on my phone. First item I have lost. Will need to find a replacement.

### **Day 7 – Mon., Aug. 30, Pamplona to Puente la Reina (25.6 km)**

This morning I hooked up with a fascinating young Swedish journalist, Ylva Carlsson, and we walked 8 hours together. We had the same pace and the time flew. The mystery of these gorgeous villages of Navarre is that they are utterly spotless and manicured yet appear all but uninhabited. Vineyards, almond trees, wonderful conversation.



**Ylva Carlsson from Gothenberg, Sweden.**

Ylva recently spent two months in Jordan researching an article on the women's movement among religious Muslims, including those wearing the niqqab. She spoke of a very gentle Wahhabist imam whose mother is in the Jordanian Senate and whose wife both chooses to wear the niqqab and works out at the gym. Ylva's concern is that EU development efforts in Muslim countries miss the mark by avoiding collaboration with religious women. It will be fun to compare notes with her after my trip to Jordan and Egypt.



**This marker, in the shape of a menorah, must be in memory of a Jewish pilgrim who dies on this spot.**



**The pretty town of Puente la Reina**

Funny how the pilgrims whom I grew up celebrating the 4th Thursday in November never evoked in me any semantic connection. Maybe because I think of pilgrimage as an intentional journey TO a sacred place, whereas the pilgrims with the funny black hats were fleeing FROM persecution.

I had dinner with Ylva at her albergue. Wine served in huge beer steins. Greedily picked up a book on an exchange table, *The Space Between Us*, by Thrity Umrigar. A great find, since this is a book we will be discussing in India. I have been missing the written word.

### **Day 8 – Tues., Aug. 31, Puente la Reina to Estella (21.9 km)**



After six days of walking, I (and seemingly, all the others) are obsessed with our bodies- heels, toes, knees, shoulders and our stomachs. No one is very hungry during the day, but we are ravenous by mid afternoon when we have made our destination. But everything is closed. I am sure the focus will shift as time goes on. For now, we are all animal - very happy and congenial beasts.

I don't want to tempt fate, but so far my feet are blister free. I baby them shamelessly but missed a spot on my calf with sunscreen this morning and now it looks like the Japanese flag. A young Danish woman joined a group on the main square for dinner in tears from the kindness she received at the pharmacy where three staff tended tenderly to her bleeding and infected heels.



**Trinidad de Arre, another beautiful village devoid of people.**



**Blackberries were at their peak. We feasted on them.**

Today we walked through rolling hills of vineyards and farmland. Wild dill and blackberries in profusion. Villages are out if a fairytale but too spick and span and devoid of people to feel real.



**An ideal spot for lunch and cooling of feet.**



**Easy to stumble on old Roman road.**

I am surprised both by how many Québécois there are on the camino (*et il y a en a beaucoup!*) and that I have not met a single other Canadian Anglophone.

I have lost track of the day of the week.

## Day 9 – Wed., Sept. 1, Estella to Los Arcos (21.1 km)

Arrived at Irache at 8 am and used the scallop shell attached to the back of my back as improvised cup to sample free wine and water fountains provided by local winery.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) such clever marketing by the local winery...



**Free fruit of the vine for breakfast at Irache**



**A shepherd**

It started out overcast today, a welcome break from 8 hours under the direct sun yesterday. Another day of rolling hills of pasture, meadows, vineyards and the spotless villages mysteriously absent of people. Absolutely no sign of economic digress in this part of Spain.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) "spotless villages mysteriously absent of people"??? should we be worried???

[Classical Pursuits](#) Reminded me a bit like *The Truman Show* or *The Prisoner*.

Walked again today with Ylva from Gothenburg, Sweden. We teamed up with Ally from Sofia, Bulgaria. Ally is an internationally travelled IT entrepreneur who sold an article and photos to Geo magazine to finance her stay on an eco-farm in Namibia. I learned about geo-caching from her. Do you know what it is? Also what a walnut tree looks like and how to open the pod and how delicious the raw white meat is.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) Geo caching is cool.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Lisa, Of course YOU would know what geo-caching is - and even how to spell it. Cache as in "hidden." I am getting a glimpse into a world that I have known nothing about - and from a BULGARIAN!

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) just recently there was an article in the Toronto globe and mail about geo-caching - first I'd heard of it - sounds like fun, are you hiding something on the Camino, Ann?



**Ally, from Sofia, Bulgaria - eating raw walnuts straight from the tree**

## **Day 10 – Thurs., Sept. 2, Los Arcos (rest day)**

This morning as I was strolling around in search of a belt to hold up my shorts, I met the first English-speaking Canadians - a couple from Vancouver. And I was joined at a cafe by a wonderful older English couple from Gloucestershire who arrived here today and were setting up after cafe con leche to continue the camino where they left off last year. Felicity developed a big toe problem on a walking holiday in Italy and she hopes she will be able to manage.

I have managed to get the little wireless keyboard I brought with me to work and have move the tiny desk and chair out to my balcony overlooking the main square. Siesta time, so things are quiet.



**A familiar sight - Pilgrims backpacks outside a grocery store.**

It rained this morning and the photo is a common site of several packs outside a little grocery while pilgrims pick up provisions for the next stage of the walk. The kind of food that gives sustenance along the walk is heavy, so one thinks carefully before buying apples and hunks of cheese or a salami.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) It will be so wonderful for you to have this detailed report and the photos as a lifelong reminder. And I am enjoying following along!

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks Susan. I am ravenous and found a rare place to serve a meal at 8 pm. Logroño is a very lively town. Everyone out walking, talking and drinking - but not eating until way past my bedtime.

Now early afternoon and it has been a welcome lazy day although I will miss the continuation of the conversation that started last night over dinner. We were 6 - the Swede and the Bulgarian women I had walked with, both about 40 years old; Cosimo, the Italian of about my age from Brindisi; Richard, a suffering Irishman who is having a hard time of it; an elderly German man who will find his way home today due to back troubles; and young Monica from Lake Balaton in Hungary. Oh, and me.

Either because it has taken some time to get to know one another or because we are only now able to think about matters other than our physical well-being, we started a frank and fascinating conversation about why we are here. Monica is the only one who is clearly on the camino on a deeply religious pilgrimage in a very traditional sense. I admire her simple and unapologetic way of being able to describe her purpose - in a second language, no less.

Richard, is a curious case. He is a man who seems to agonize over much. He sounds English, is married to a Japanese woman, lives mainly in Tokyo, is suffering many aches and pains, and is a religious anomaly - a confessed doubter but a member of Opus Dei. I think I've never before met a member of Opus Dei but have associated it with tightly bound tradition and certainty and secrecy. Richard represents none of those things.

But the restaurant was closing and we were asked to leave just as the conversation was warming up...

Just getting to read your notes now on my first day of rest. Thank you all so much for your good wishes. It really is an experience unlike any I've ever had and I am sure that it will continue to change. Every day is full of unexpected and nearly all wonder-full moments. Alice, I will miss being with you in The Woods.

A lesson today in non-attachment. I missed the folks I had been meeting here and there over the first week. I looked around at the new crowd that drifted into town on my rest day and didn't feel much like mingling. But I just happened to strike up a conversation with a Dutch woman in her early 40s. Aster and I spent the late afternoon and early evening together, first enjoying a cervesa in the village square with a 21-year old Austrian fellow who has walked since Aug. 1 from Veزالay in France and will return to do an MBA in Oct.

Then met piles of English-speaking Canadians, including a very beautiful mother/daughter pair from Halifax and a father/daughter pair from Toronto.

Over paella on the terrace, I learned from Aster that in the last year her father, a renowned professor of Spanish literature died at 64 of locked-in syndrome; her Spanish boyfriend of 16 years left her; and her job as a teacher went sour. And now she has infected feet and been advised not to walk until they heal. She too is trying not to be wed to any particular plan or outcome on the camino. I thoroughly enjoyed our time together and hope to meet again in Burgos. But if we don't, there will be others. I feel in the swing of being happy to be with whoever happens along.

The photo is of the lavish church in this tiny village. Aster and I went to the 8 pm mass and found the church 1/2 full of locals and the other 1/2 with pilgrims of much, little or no faith. The young Austrian fellow was there and so were the couple from Vancouver. At the end pilgrims are called up for a blessing and each asked by the priest where s/he comes from. We were given prayer cards in the language of our choice, part of which says:

*"Be for us, a companion on our journey, the guide on our intersections, the strengthening during fatigue, the fortress in danger, the resource on our itinerary, the shadow in our heat, the light in our darkness, the consolation during dejection, and the power of our intention"*



**The beautiful church in Los Arcos**

Last thought of the day: I was remembering the awe felt by Saint-Exupery when he landed his little mail plane, during WWI, in places that no person had ever seen or set foot (Wind, Sand and Stars is the name of the book). What one is constantly aware of on the camino is the centuries, in fact, more than a millennium, that pilgrims have been walking this same path, sometimes on Roman roads. And yet, both experiences have something in common, I think. A breath-stopping sense of connection with both the very particular in the here and now and at the same time to something so much bigger.

## Day 11 – Fri., Sept. 3, 2010 - Los Arcos to Logrono (27km)

This is the pretty town of Viana, which unlike so many of the white and terra cotta villages of Navarre, is actually populated with people who are out and about. All of the cities, towns and villages we pass through owe their origin and continued existence to the Camino, One wonders how different life is when one departs from the path.

[Joan Gregson](#) That's another trip at another time. Nice photo - pilgrims or residents?

[Classical Pursuits](#) These are residents. No mistaking the two. The Spaniards are very fashionable as I am sure you know. Pilgrims are sporting grubby but high tech gear.



Town of Viana



**ETA is an armed Basque nationalist and separatist organization. Gora means VIVA!**



**These turned out to be the abandoned boots of Richard, the crazy Irishman.**

27 Km. The longest walk so far, and although not terribly steep, either up or down, much of the path was an old Roman road and very uneven stones. Mostly in the direct sun.

Tomorrow is an equally long day. So far, my feet are holding up, but I don't want to press my luck by overdoing it. My "stages" range from 15 km to several at 30 km. Pilgrims are all moving at a different pace. I have met some who are taking two leisurely months; others have no plans, just go with the wind and their whim; and I met an Irishman whizzing by at a clip of 40 km a day.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) and [Jennifer Momjian](#) like this.

[Keith McDuffie](#) What? No speed limit...?

So, after the walk, a shower and laundry, I am moving slowly and feel quite stiff. This seems to be the pattern. I will go out to snoop around this capital of the Rioja region and will limber up.

This is one page of my "credencial," a document that one gets stamped along the way and if, one makes it to Santiago while respecting the spirit of *Comunitas* along the way, a pilgrim can solicit the *Compostela* (kind of a diploma) at the Pilgrim Office in Santiago.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) I love it.



My "credential" to prove I'm a pilgrim

[Chris Hammer](#) Very cool Ann! I'm cheering for you. Meanwhile you're the third friend doing walking vacations this summer! One friend finished his last leg of the Appalachian Trail (a journey he's done in different legs over his life time). Makes me think of Least Heat Moon's book about walking Kansas! Go girl! Chris

[Joan Morse Gordon](#) my friend Annala will get there with her faith and figure intact.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Joanala, we are way overdue for a long chat. Will call when I get back, Oct. 7. I am so hungry. Haven't got the hang of eating here, where restos don't open until after 8 pm and I am famished and need to go to bed unfashionably early.

[Keith McDuffie](#) Can you take along a bocadillo (bun with cheese and perhaps some serrano ham) and have it around 5 o'clock? It's the only way I go through graduate school at the Universidad Complutense long ago. You can usually buy them in any bar.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Chris, who is Heat Least Moon and why have I never heard of the book about Kansas? It was such fun seeing you at Asilomar and then at the Goldman Awards in SF. Hope you've had a good summer.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks Keith, that is what I did today and will stave off starvation until dinner is served. Lots of salt, fat and carbs. Fruits and vegetables are hard to come by. I bought a banana at a bar in a lite village mid-morning. It was so dry and hard I couldn't bite through it. I am sure I will get the hang of managing to eat. Next two days are long and knee is starting to hurt so want to keep weight to a minimum. Here in Beldorado, they are celebrating the final day of a five day onion festival.

[Sheila Wright](#) I'm filled w Camino envy. Did you plan this on your own? I know all about those winding hills, but never made the arduous early steep climb/

[Classical Pursuits](#) I did plan it on my own. Read a lot and talked to many people. Sometimes the hot sun is tougher than a steep hill. If you think you might like to do it, I'd be glad to share details of my experience.



Just a little smile for those with even a smudge of Latin.

Mark Camp likes this.

Mary Benedetto A big smile!

### Day 11 – Sat., Sept. 4, 2010 - Logrono to Najera (29.4 km)

You may wonder if it is easy to get lost or if we need to have our nose in a map all the time. The answer is no. The markings are everywhere - most commonly a yellow arrow or a scallop shell; sometimes a stone cairn. Most are informally done by volunteers, Each town has its own markings and, along highways, the EU has got into the act. Check out the camino photo album for more examples.

Susan Zimmerman and Victor Levin like this.



Camino Markers – *las flechas amarillas*



Roadside crosses

A long stretch of the path ran parallel to a highway, separated only by an ugly chicken wire fence. For several kms. the fence was full of impromptu and improvised crosses. They went on and on and on. I wondered how long many had been there; who took the time to stop on a long day of walking and remove the pack to place a cross. I saw no one doing it, but clearly hundreds have.

### Day 11 – Sun., Sept. 5, 2010 - Najera to Santo Domingo de Calzada, 21.2 km

A hard day with pitiless sun and no shade. Even though considerably shorter than yesterday, I feel really whooped, sore and achy all over. Still, happily, no blisters or joint problems. I developed a sore throat and I think it is taking a more generalized toll.



**The road to Santo Domingo de Calzada**

The other matter is food. Breakfast is never more than very good coffee and a piece of dry white bread. Then there is no where to eat along the way, so you need to shop for provisions the day before - not always an easy proposition with the long siesta. And there is the consideration of weight. I think twice, for instance, about an apple.



**Lobby of parador where I found food, wine and a cool place to hang out.**

Then, when I arrive in a town, it is shut down tight until about 8 pm, and I am ravenous. Today, being Sunday, no groceries open at all. Thankfully, this town has a parador, one of those very fancy historic hotels with a bar that just about never closes. I spent a long time in its cool luxury, slowly savoring a goat cheese and onion sandwich and two glasses of white Rioja.

I dragged my aching bones to the pilgrim Mass at 8, which turned out to be a funeral. I did not make it to the end. I found a bar afterward and bought a sandwich for tomorrow. A woman from Atlanta staying in the same Cistercian guest house plans to take a bus or a taxi tomorrow to Beldorado, our next stop. I will see how my throat feels in the morning.

## Day 12 – Mon., Sept. 6, 2010 - Santo Domingo to Belorado (24.1 km)

558.2 km (346.9 mi) to Santiago de Compostela. It was not just my throat that made yesterday tough. Seems that the heat under unrelenting sun did a lot of people in. Today, there was some cloud cover and afternoon breeze.



Have left the vineyards of the Rioja region and am now in the region of Castilla y Leon where I will spend most of my time before entering Galicia. The landscape is mainly freshly cut fields of grain. The sunflowers have past their peak and here you can see what pilgrims have left for those who follow.

### Instant messaging on the Camino.

I am eager to walk tomorrow, but my throat has worsened, rain is forecast all day, and the route is 29 km with very steep ascents and descents. I could go as planned, or walk and have my backpack transported or I could take a bus.

Confounding that decision is food. I never had any dinner tonight due to a fiesta in town or last night because it was Sunday. I am living on junk food and salty pork products. The bars are full of smoke and I gave up tonight at 8:45 and nothing was open. An advantage of eating in an albergue is that they generally serve a *menu del dia* there at a reasonable hour.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) hi Ann, I am very much enjoying your entries; it is a very informative read and I admire your courage and perseverance.



**We could get drinks but there was not food to be had.**

## Day 13 – Tues., Sept. 7, 2010 - Belorado to Atapuerca (29 km)

Today I nearly didn't walk. Sore throat had predictably turned into a common cold. It was raining and the walk was long. I am so glad I didn't opt for a bus. It was the best day yet - the only day with no heat and the mix of rain and sun and dark and light clouds created amazing light. Walk was through pine and oak forest, hedgerows of pink and purple heather.

The days are getting shorter. Some keeners leave before 6 am with miners' lights on their heads to guide the way. There doesn't seem to be a need for this as far as I can see. Plenty of room in the albergues (the communal accommodations that the vast majority of pilgrims use.)



**Leaving Belarado in the rain about 7:30 am.**

Some albergues are run by the municipality; others by the church; and still others are private. But all offer clean accommodation and other services such as communal meals (at a reasonable hour!), and some have a swimming pool, foot care, massage, laundry, library, etc. I am a much better walker than I am a sleeper, so I have opted for private rooms along the way. All are fine, and I am happy to be able to unload my stuff and unwind at the end of the day in my own room.



This afternoon I bumped into Patricia Good, a Camino veteran from Toronto, who kindly came over a couple weeks before I left to look over my gear. I also met crazy Manfred and his wife and sister-in-law again. They wanted to dine together at the local resto, but I will stay here in the cozy inn and eat with Marie from Atlanta (she runs a walking tour business) and Monika from Germany.

**Patricia Good of Toronto.**

Today, is the best yet. a wonderful old stone inn at the top of a hill, next to the church. Lovely interior and they were willing to serve food when I arrived. It was so nice to dump my pack, wash my hands and come down stairs (like a cripple) for a delicious slice of cold white asparagus soufflé with parley and mint and a large glass of extraordinary vino tinto from Rioja. Even better, the inn serves dinner from 7 pm on and will prepare whatever I wish for breakfast at whatever hour I ask. Then Marie, my pal from Atlanta turned up. We had a great long talk over an amazing meal before hobbling up the stairs to bed.

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[Sheila M. Donohue](#) great report - especially the part about having private rooms, now you are sleeping alright, good!

[Susan Zimmerman](#) Hope you feel better soon. But goodness you are bravely soldiering on!

## **Day 14 – Wed., Sept. 8, 2010 - Atapuerca to Burgos (20 km)**

Loved the tiny windswept hamlet of Atapuerca, which UNESCO has ascertained contains the earliest human remains ever discovered in Europe and dating back over 900,000 years.

It was a jolt to walk through 10 km of noisy and ugly urban sprawl to reach the architectural jewel (the historic centre, that is) of Burgos. In addition to its enormous link to the Camino, Burgos was also the seat of Franco's government until 1938, an indication of its nationalist and establishment leanings. It was also the home to El Cid.

I could hardly bear the commotion and commercialism of the endless outskirts of Burgos. I also felt overwhelmed by the enormous cathedral with its big and little spaces and so much to look at. I did take note that all the little sarcophagi had figures on top holding a book as if they had fallen asleep while reading and an angel perched at the toes holding another book or two.

The most I could do was focus on the small details, such as a ray of early evening light catching an arch at a striking angle.

I am feeling a bit dislocated at this point. I feel out of place and all alone in this bustling city but am anxious about the days ahead. Called the Meseta, it is said that this part of the Camino is where people can feel unsure of their bearings and sanity. It is not that the walking that is arduous. It is that it is without feature in the landscape -- miles and miles and miles of flat empty land without a tree for shade or a sign of human life.

It will be essential to carry plenty of water. Up to now there have been exquisite natural beauty, difficult climbs or descents, or distracting city life to keep us pilgrims focused. I am not sure how many days I will be on the Meseta or what it will be like for me, but I do feel uneasy about it.

Tomorrow, I have some time in Burgos and will wander along the river bank, visit a monastery and perhaps this little book museum that I stumbled upon this evening. I said goodbye to crazy Manfred, his wife Sonia and sister-in-law Sylvia, who are heading back to Germany tomorrow via Bilbao. They will be back next year to finish. Many here have been doing this for years, admitting to Camino Fever.



**Burgos gate.**

[Barbara Zabel](#) I saw yesterday friend Gunther's DVD from his Camino walk in 2008. He had put it nicely together. when you are back and in Ottawa we can have a little camino gathering with Ottawa goers. I was also at a wedding of a camino couple!! He German she Canadian...camino ..camino ...camino everywhere!!

[Classical Pursuits](#) That would be fun. By chance, I bumped into a veteran camino walker from Toronto who had come over and looked at my gear. Thanks to Hirschtalgreme, I am the only person I know who has had no blisters or muscle or tendon problems. And that includes the Germans! But I still have a long way to go so will keep toes crossed (and lubricated).

## Day 15 – Thurs., Sept. 9, 2010 – Burgos



Entrance to the Law Faculty at the university in Burgos.

After a siesta, I met, as agreed several days ago with Aster, from Holland, in front of the cathedral and had a wonderful conversation about how we both feel at this stage of the journey. Next I went to a lovely little museum on the history of books, sat with Richard in a plaza, went to (but left) the 8 pm Mass at the cathedral.

I decided to spend the day exploring Burgos, perhaps a mistake. I walked quite far out of town along the canopied river path to the university (this image is new entry to the law faculty) and a large monastery with many beautiful Moorish architectural details. Then spent a long stretch in the plaza with various pilgrims also passing the day here. Next I went to a brand new Museum of Human Evolution, which was far more than i could take in. I fled.



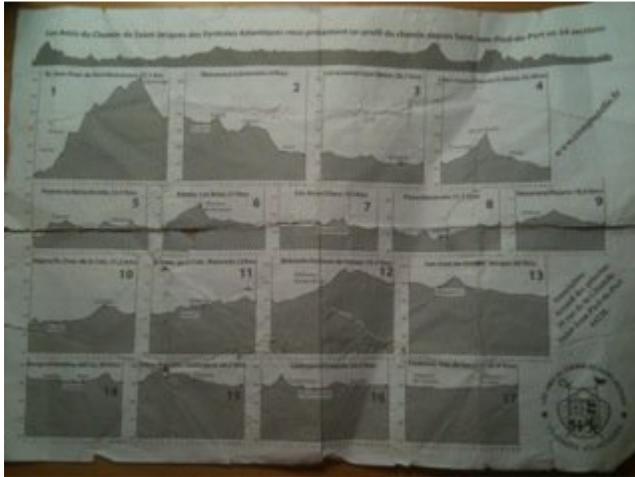
A little book museum in Burgos.

All in all, a pleasant day, but I am eager to get out of Dodge and back to the simple path without all the distractions of throbbing city life.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) Hi Ann from looking at the map I think you are nearing the half way mark, unless I am mistaken. You are very brave and courageous, I admire your strength in this project. It is so good to read your notes and picture your location and to le...See More

[Barbara Zabel](#) Wonder **h o w** you feel at this stage; hope these feelings will find entry into some journal. mark the moment.  
with all my admiration, Barbara

[Dorothy Crawford](#) Wow if Burgos is throbbing city life how will re-entry into Ronto be?



Map of the elevations along the Camino.

I was packing up my things for tomorrow and thought this sheet might be of interest. It shows the distances and elevation of the first half of the camino. Not sure if you can see this in the photo, but you can see why the bit in France was tough - in the first square - especially in 37 C heat. Now, if you look at the bottom 3 squares, you can see that it going to be very flat until Day 24.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) likes this.

[Victor Levin](#) does anyone walk it in reverse, so that the last day is a killer downhill?

[Classical Pursuits](#) Victor, I have met two smirgrip (pilgrims going in reverse). One was a young Québécois who started somewhere like Leon and was walking to Burgundy in arrange to work on the grape harvest. He had old, broken-down basketball shoes and a wonder-full joie de vivre. The old was an older Dane. I cannot remember why he was going backwards. How is your knee?

[Classical Pursuits](#) I have met 2. A young Québécois was walking to Burgundy in France to harvest grapes & then wherever the wind & the stars take him. An older Dane said it was difficult to follow the way marks in reverse.

[Victor Levin](#) Knees good. Looking forward to climbing a pyramid with you.

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## Day 16 – Fri., Sept. 10, 2010 - Hornillos to Castrojeris (18 km)

Can't say how happy I am to be out of an urban environment, me, such a city girl! I breathed in the spare wilderness of the Meseta, the generally flat and shadeless landscape that is said to drive many pilgrims loco. I loved the simplicity and beauty of the day's walk -- little butterflies of varying colours, including periwinkle blue, seeming to lead the way. The shepherd with his flock of sheep and several working dogs. The unexpected splendid 11th century ruins of an ancient monastery and hospital for pilgrims. It was a wonderful day of walking and a fantastic old stone accommodation here with several rooms. An altogether fabulous day.



**Day 16 - the intrepid walker!**



**Monika, from near Cologne in Germany and Marie, from Rome, Georgia**

My dinner companions: Monika, from near Cologne in Germany and Marie, from Rome, Georgia, are both staying in private rooms. We have come to know each other quite well and spent the evening talking about national stereotypes and prejudices that are regrettably not altogether absent from the Camino.

Have also met people from Namibia, Brazil, Luxembourg, Finland and Japan. Had a great meal of longed for vegetables -- white asparagus and flat green beans. I have over-dosed on cured pork.

Tomorrow is a long 27-km day. I have provisions and plan on skipping breakfast here to get an early start. I am so grateful that my feet and legs have given me no trouble. I think that if I can avoid stumbling on a stone, root or step, I should be ok from here on. I will reach the half-way point on Sunday.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) likes this.

[Sue Hammond](#) LOVE this account! Glad your feet are holding up, Ms Intrepid. Keep them coming (both the feet and the feeds!)

[Nicky Garvan](#) Hi Ann, I love hearing about your journey. I missed you this summer its been a long time. I hope our paths will cross this year. Take care and keep us informed.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Hi Sue and Nicky, Glad you are following along. Sue, I have thought if you and your mom's funeral. And Nicky, I remember our conversations about our mothers while in Galicia. I have had much time to undertake a life review as I walk. Today, I finished high school. I am amazed at memories that have been buried

for half a century that find their way to the surface. Sue, see you in Oct. Nicky, I don't know when, but it sure us good to hear from you and as I make my way to Santiago, I I will recall our time here together.

[Joan Gregson](#) I dreamt about you the other night - you had taken a break from the camino and were back here with your feet bandaged in various places. I took you grocery shopping and helped you unpack! Go figure. I'm so enjoying your reports and think of you slogging along. 27 K!!!! Wow! Incredible. You're a strong woman.

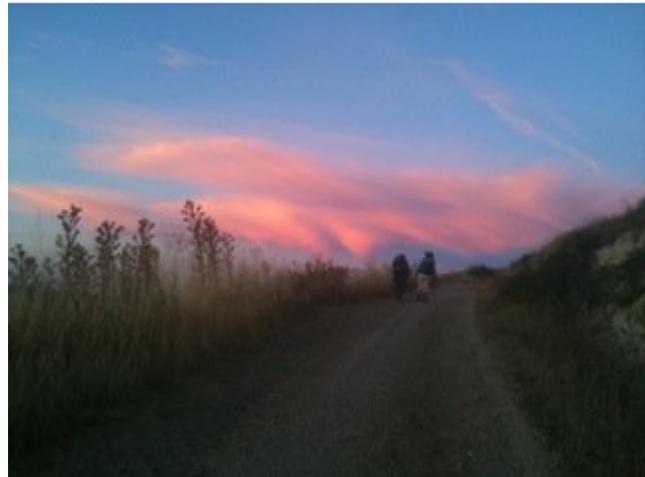
[Susan Zimmerman](#) now that is a great photo of a stalwart woman pilgrim!

[Victor Levin](#) I guess that climbing a pyramid next month will be duck easy!

## **Day 17 – Sat., Sept. 11, 2010 - Castorjeriz to Fromista (27 km)**

Set out before dawn this morning, using my miner's headlamp for the first time to help me find the way out of town. This image is about 7:30 am, with dawn's rose-red fingers finding her way to this remote part of Spain.

I love the early morning and have pretty well decided to forfeit the included breakfast to get an early start. On long days, such as this, it also minimized the hours in the direct and beating sun and gets me to my destination in time to shower, do laundry and go out for a real meal before the restaurants close between 3 and 4 pm, not to be reopened until 8 - 9 pm. I would not choose this routine but it seems to be the most practical way to get a real meal.



**An early start on Day 18.**

I have been undertaking a gradual life review over the last while as I walk in this beautiful but somewhat monotonous landscape. I graduated from high school today - to the triumphal march from Aida. I have been so surprised at both the level of detail I have been able to dredge up and the very strong emotions that accompany these long undisturbed memories.

I am bone weary and going to bed with my book - *The Space Between Us* by Thrity Umrigar. We will be discussing it in India in March of 2011. I brought no books due to weight and wanting to keep my focus on where I am. But I found this back on Day 5 at a pilgrims' meal at an albergue on a table for people to take. I am tearing off the pages as I go. I also have several audiobooks on my phone and am currently listening to *Middlemarch* as I do laundry or pack up in the morning.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) this is one of my favourite entries, cuz I totally get it top to bottom

## Day 18 – Sun., Sept. 12, 2010 - Fromista to Carrion de las Condes (20 km)

Bits of song lyrics keep going through my head, Today it was, "I got plenty of nothing'; nothin's plenty for me." This seemingly featureless landscape of recently harvested grain has great beauty, especially in the early dawn and as the shadows lengthen throughout the morning.

I wrote a longer post, but somehow deleted it. Will leave it at this for now. Still having a magnificent time and feet and legs are still fine - though lots of casualties still hobbling along.



Endless fields.

## Day 19 – Mon., Sept. 13, 2010 - Carrion de las Condes to Calzadilla de la Cueva (17 km)



Trees planted along the route to provide shade for pilgrims.

A lovely comparatively lazy day. Stayed for breakfast and headed out of town about 8:30. There are so many acts of kindness along the camino. A long and hot stretch is gradually being shaded for pilgrims. You can see the trees are planted only on the south side, casting across the path. Parts have immature trees and other parts have recently-planted saplings. At one parish-run albergue, pilgrims are given seeds of trees to plant along the way. I don't know if these trees come from that source. It was not too hot today, but I understand the coming days will be hotter. I will again set out in the dark and try to cover most of the distance in the early day. I will welcome any shade I find.

Another kindness...As I walked along a dirt road, a local Red Cross van pulled up to ask if I was ok. When I arrived at the tiny hamlet that was my destination for the day, there was the van, set up to provide on the spot first aid to the many who continue to suffer from blisters, tendonitis and joint problems. Many grateful pilgrims were waiting their turn. I don't know why I have been spared these troubles and do not yet consider myself home free.



**First aid help for the pilgrims.**



**Ally, from Bulgaria.**

Another happy surprise. This is Ally, the young and effervescent Bulgarian I walked with for several days but lost track of when I took a rest day. We passed a couple hours exchanging stories before she headed off again. We hope to meet up in Astorga to explore a church and other buildings by Gaudi. Among the folks walking the entire Camino in one go, there is now an intersecting meeting and re-meeting and catching tales of those you haven't seen for a long time. Life for me, here and now, is abundantly rich.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) It sounds wonderful--the meetings and partings over time--social time and time for meditation. WOW. I am blown away at every entry you make here.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) another great report, I enjoy reading these - keep smiling...

Well, since I am feeling chatty, here is a bit to add to today..

Thanks to all of you who have been commenting on my posts. For whatever cyber reason, I have been unable to get my personal replies accepted. So, here is a generic response so a couple questions.

One of the best things about the Camino is the personal choice of how much time you spend with others and how much time you spend alone. Without question, the people are fascinating from the young Brazilian endocrinologist who looks like she should be wearing pigtales to the Korean couple who walk with full face masks (and I am told that she wears curlers to bed in the albergues) to the pair of girlfriends from Namibia to a very quirky and independent Japanese woman I met today.

And, at this point in the journey - we are halfway today - the conversations become more sympathetic and more quickly meaningful. I had dinner with a beautiful cartographer from the former DDR in Germany who was walking with her father until he had to return to work. We talked of the changes in Germany and our shared struggles with insomnia - even after all this exercise and fresh air. She is at the point of exhaustion.

But equally valuable is the time alone. I generally prefer walking alone and meeting people at rest stops and at the end of the day. Such a luxury to have undistracted time let one's mind wander to all sorts of unlikely places. I had planned to review as much of my life so far as I could recall while walking - as a kind of tribute to the first 65 years. I am up to age 20 and have been so surprised at the memories that have presented themselves to me when all I need to do is put one foot in front of the other.

Another great thing about the Camino is that there is no one way to do it, which makes it possible for a great many people. People speak of 'My Camino.'

Here are some of the choices:

1. Do it all in one go or come back in later years to pick up where you left off.
2. Start at various points. A large number start way back in the middle of France. Others begin in St. Jean Pied du Port Still more in Roncesvalles. Pampolona is a popular place to start. And you can begin only 100 km (or is it mi?) from Santiago and still receive the Compostela.
3. Distance per day and length of daily walks and pace of walking. These are all open to wide variation. In most sections, there are accommodation options every 5 - 8 km.
4. Most people choose to stay in the albergues and love the camaraderie and warm spirit there, especially in the parish-run albergues. Others, like me, miss that because we have opted for pre-booked hotel rooms. Many do a mix. And it is quite possible to find a private room without booking it in advance, leaving flexibility that I do not have.
5. Baggage - Quite a few elect to have their bag transferred each day to their destination, thereby avoiding carrying a heavy pack on their backs. Some do this only on the days where there will be steep climbs or they have sore muscles or feet.
6. Many people take a bus here and there - either due to infirmity or because they are running short of time.
7. A fair number (mainly Spaniards, it seem so me) do the camino by bike in very sleek cycling wear. I met a Croatian couple who were doing a very complicated mix of waking and biking and driving.

Not sure how many will be interested in this level of detail, but there is for those who are.

[2 people](#) like this.

[Jennifer Momjian](#) I like the detail. I would love to make the pilgrimage but don't know if I would be up to it.

[Classical Pursuits](#) If you wish, I would be glad to talk to you about the physical demands of the camino when I get back.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) I also like the detail and look forward to more, either online or on your return Ann - you may have to book Convocation Hall!

[Barbara Zabel](#) Overwhelming, thinking this is just a partial of all the impressions and encounters. It must be much to process. It must be very involving and stirring. There will be long talks when you are back..I am sure.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) Fascinating. Great and valuable travel notes, Ann. You are sharing all the different ways people can have a part in the experience

[Jo-Ann Minden](#) It's the fear of the unknown, the 'out of my comfort range', which has me hesitating about doing this kind of thing. Of course, that's the only way to grow... Jo-Ann

## **Day 20 – Tues., Sept. 14, 2010 - Calzadilla de la Cueszato to Sahagun (22 km)**

Time for every purpose under heaven.

As I take in not only the international make-up of the pilgrims, I also notice the vast age span - from mid- 20s to mid 70s. I wonder about what difference age makes in the motivation and the experience. It is just the right time for me - as I turn 65, it is a chance to mark this milestone by looking back, looking forward and being fully in the wonderful present all at the same time.

I have also had no earlier opportunity to take off for 6 weeks. So, I wonder how so many in their 30s and 40s seem able to get away. This seems to be the time of life when one is usually most tied to job and family and saving for a rainy day. I wonder particularly about the single women and whether they have chosen to remain single and childless or whether they are trying to make peace with circumstance.

For example, Guy from Belgium, age 75. He bought me a beer this afternoon and is walking the camino for the 4th time. The first time was in the mid 70s with his wife; they were unable to finish. His wife died soon after. He walks the Camino for many reasons, including staying close to his wife. This is a true pilgrimage for him and he now has a network of Camino friends from around the world.



**Guy from Belgium.**



**Yoku from Japan.**

And finally, two Italian policemen who live and work near Milan. The one on the left is from Calabria in the south and the one on the right is from Abruzzo, the location of the very first Classical Pursuits trip.



**Two policemen from Italy.**

[Lisa Nabieszko](#), [Sheila M. Donohue](#) and [Heather Raff](#) like this.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) I'm dazzled by all this, Ann. The undertaking. The determination. The walking!!

[Heather Raff](#) Just looked at fine Camino album here. You are doing so well. Glad it is cooler.

### **Day 21 – Wed., Sept. 15, 2010 - Sahagun to El Burgo Ranero (18 km)**

The bells tolled every 15 minutes in Sahagun and I think I heard all of them, even after plenty of wine and with the use of earplugs. Hence I got off to a late start this morning. And the breakfast in the smoky bar consisted only of coffee and the equivalent of a Twinkie.

The walk today was quite dreary, mainly along new highway construction. And my walking companions were a swarm of flies that managed to hover around my face. Nonetheless, I enjoyed a nice break mid-way with a young French couple who on their fifth year of walking the Camino in stages, having started in Vezaley in France.

And I am up to age 25 in my life review. Unless I pick up the pace, I will not finish. What a rich experience this part of the camino is turning out to be. I am not recording it but hope that the act of active recall will keep alive memories which have lain dormant for many years.



The villages have grown progressively poorer since the prosperous (but vacant) Navarre. It is also clear that while most local people are unfailingly kind and helpful, some understandably seem to resent the presence of pilgrims and can be rather rude.

**Quite different from the spotless villages of Navarre.**

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) and [Laurielle Penny](#) like this.

## **Day 22 – Thurs., Sept. 16, 2010 - Burgo de Ranero to Mansilla de las Mulas (19 km)**

These shorter flatter days have a certain richness I'll try to convey through photos in this blog post:



**Rush hour traffic leaving town this morning.**



**No question about who had the right of way.**



Walking in the rain



A couple hunchbacks of the Camino



Today's pilgrims, weary, after a long day's walk



Lots of help for injured or sick pilgrims. This was a rare sign in English.

Thought you might like to see something of life at an albergue. I really wish I slept well enough to stay in them. I hear such nice stories. Actually, when in the small villages, everyone congregates in the main square and it really doesn't matter where you sleep. But in the cities, like Pamplona and Burgos and, tomorrow, in Leon, we get separated from one another and they usually have communal meals at the albergue.



**Laundry at an albergue.**



**The boot rack at an albergue.**

### **Day 23 – Fri., Sept. 17, 2010 - Mansilla de las Mulas to Leon**



**My boots - half way through the Camino.**

These thirsty boots, alas, did not walk this stage today. The advance guidance was that the “way” was nearly all in industrial sprawl with many dangerous highway crossings for pilgrims. So, I opted to share a ride with Marie to Leon in favor of having a full day to explore this fabled city. I inspected my boots and was surprised to find them quite worn, thinking more in terms of age than steps walked.

The decision not to walk into Leon and the fact of being in another city combine to create a sense of dislocation. The utterly exquisite stained glass windows in the cathedral and other architectural wonders still leave me longing for the simpler landscape of the countryside.

I know we are getting closer to Santiago because it is getting cooler, rainier, and I heard my first bagpipes today.

I had finished my book and was happy to stumble on a great bookstore with an excellent selection of English books, including both of Anne Michaels' novels. I spent a long while rereading the bull fighting passages from *A Sun Also Rises*. I had forgotten the word 'afficiando' to describe the person who could understand deep down that bull fighting was all about.

I finally selected Jan Morris's *Spain*. Short, beautifully written and helpful to connect many missing dots in Spanish history and culture.

In the afternoon, I wandered to the edge of town the magnificent and elegant parador - both to see the building and to find a quiet and smoke-free place to read. Way too fancy for a pilgrim, but I enjoyed by glass of Rioja and olives in the company of Ms. Morris. Then I noticed this unmistakable pilgrim at the bar. Turned out to be from Mexico City and just beginning to walk tomorrow, in the company of a childhood friend who is walking for the 12th time. We passed a pleasant hour together.



**An unmistakable pilgrim at the bar at the elegant parador in Leon.**



**Part of the medieval wall that encloses the old part of Leon.**

Here is part of the medieval wall that encloses the old part of Leon and abuts the exquisite Romanesque Basilica of San Isodoro (patron saint of gardens).

I went to the 7:30 pm pilgrim Mass with Marie and, although most of the attendees seemed to be local citizens, at the end about 40 pilgrims came forward for a special blessing and a beautiful song sung by the locals for us. Again, we were all greeted individually by the priest and given a prayer card in our native language.

Here is part of what it says:

*"Be for them their companion on the way, their guide at the cross-roads, their shelter on the road, their shade in the heat, their light in the darkness, their comfort in weariness and their resolve in intentions. So that through your guidance, they arrive sound at the end of their road and enriched with grace and virtue, return home healthy and fully of worthy virtues."*

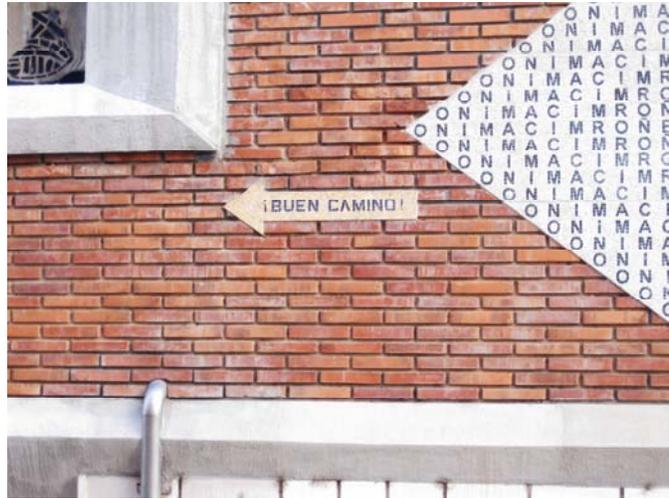
Who could ask for more?

[Jo-Ann Minden](#) wow! goosebumps reading that prayer... glad to know there are perks you can choose to indulge in on your way.

[Mary Benedetto](#) A beautiful prayer!

## Day 24 – Sat., Sept. 18, 2010 - Leon to Villadangos del Paramo (21.4 km)

Not many photos because this was an interior kind of day. Dreary industrial sprawl leading out of Leon and then continuous walking on flat semi-developed land next to a highway. Destination was a dismal hamlet divided in half by the major road. Only sign of life is occasional stray dog or cat. Even the pharmacy is closed.



On the side of a new church leading out of Leon.

Walked for a bit with a midwife from Ottawa and a woman from somewhere in the former Yugoslavia, but mainly a solitary day. I kind of welcomed the time alone, even my 4pm meal. I was not hungry but did not want to wait until 8 pm since I hope to get an early start for long walk tomorrow. Am now up to age 35 in my life review. Continue to be surprised by the powerful memories that come to mind and my many insecurities and missteps compared to the many younger people I have met here and elsewhere.

Have had some time with Jan Morris's fabulous book on Spain. Extraordinary skill and insight to absorb and then synthesize in compelling language the history and soul of a country as complex as Spain in less than 150 pages.

This leads me to think about the simultaneous truth of individual uniqueness and common bonds across humanity. Pilgrims look pretty much like members of a common tribe, with high-tech packs and quick-dry attire and sturdy footwear. But we come from almost all corners of the globe. And although I suspect that most come from whatever the middle class looks like in those countries, the politics and culture differ hugely. Some have lived through repression and war, the fall of the Soviet Union, all sorts of things I cannot imagine. Even the Norwegian sheep farmer and sheep dog trainer I walked with the other day - when she goes home, her life is very different from mine.

And I think of the few, invariably poor, inhabitants of the villages we pass through. What do they make of us? Several have appeared quite rude. Although there are many Spanish pilgrims, I doubt that many come from such poor villages.

You might expect to find many similarities between Spain and Italy, but I am struck by a quite different flavor. Morris speaks of the "magnificent balefulness" of things Spanish. While one finds a taste for the grandiose in both Latin and Catholic countries, in Spain the church interiors feel even more overbearing and I find much of the religious art bleak and cold. Apologies for unfair generalization, but the sense I have is of a people who have a harder edge, a fierce pride, and to whom 'la dolce vita' is a newer concept. Somehow, I don't think the bull fight would catch on in Italy. Wish I spoke Spanish though so I could form more informed opinions of my own.

I went downstairs to check on time breakfast would be served and ended up chatting with a group of three women from Hawaii, one Japanese, one Chinese, one Korean. They were travelling with the Anglo husband of the Japanese woman. They hike together at home and started only a few days ago and are exhausted and sore. Guess I have gained in strength and endurance over the past three weeks.

As I was coming up, I saw what I thought was a person dressed up as a pilgrim of yore on the street and went up to get my camera, thinking that this was a silly gesture. Well, it turns out that this is a bona fide Capuchin monk from Rome (who also holds US citizenship) and is walking with a very macho- looking Italian guy and his beautiful sister. All three were very friendly and I had fun conversing in whatever Italian I could summon up.



**A bona fide Capuchin monk from Rome.**

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) another great report, thanks Ann

### **Day 25 – Sun., Sept. 19, 2010 - Villadangos del Paramo to Astorga (27 km)**

Set out in the dark with headlight from dreary way stop. About 10 am, when about to bypass a teensy hamlet, several locals were at the crossroads to lure pilgrims to ?? wasn't quite sure, but cafe and fiesta were mentioned.

Turned out to be a local harvest festival to showcase all the best fruits and vegetables of the season. Also, a local family, who have been resident in the same home for five generations, has set up a huge refectory table in their courtyard and were hosting breakfast to all pilgrims passing through. Wonderful food and hospitality. They had an amazing house. A great treat at a good point in the day to have a rest.



**What you can't see are the man and woman at the back of the tractor with piles of flowers and grain, continuing to decorate the tractor for the festival.**



**Free breakfast for pilgrims at the local harvest festival.**

[Joan Gregson](#) How fabulous. Imagine 5 generations having lived in the same house. I have heard that the people can be very generous with pilgrims.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) I can't believe you have been walking for 25 days. Can you? ♥

Wonderful day, but too tired to write more so I am posting photos instead:



**My German pal Monika with Yves, a true mendicant who has walked from his home in Arles, France with terrible shoes and no money - playing the flute and braiding thread bracelets for spare change.**



**Part of what the path looked like today. Corn fields, cow pastures, and much more interesting terrain than the last couple days.**



**My room overlooks this lovely plaza in the lively hill town of Astorga.**



**The Bishop's Palace by Gaudi.**

**Day 26 – Mon., Sept 20, 2010 - Astorga to Rabanal del Camino (22 km)**



**A beautiful walk today through rolling hills and fields of pale lavender heather.**



**Toward the end, there was about 2 km along a rough wooded path with gnarled roots and a wire fence where pilgrims over the years have stuck crosses of various plant materials or whatever they have on hand.**

Pilgrims stick notes and prayers in the fence as well. Looking at the endless parade of crosses that are all both the same but infinitely various, I was struck by the simple parallel between this fence and all the pilgrims on the Camino and, by extension, all of humanity. The cross represents the human form reduced to its simplest essentials, and in the great variety of size, shape, and materials used, I saw humanity in its abundant diversity.

I also thought about the instinct that prompts one to disrupt the rhythm of his/her walk and thoughts to leave such a mark for others. I am convinced that not all of those crosses have been left by orthodox Christian believers. And, eventually, I, too, gathered a couple dry oak twigs with tufts of leaves still attached and hastily wove my own small cross on the wall.



These villages are both beautiful and pitiful. You can see the building skill used in all the dry stone walls. But there is no one here. Many buildings are abandoned and decaying.

Occasionally, you see a new home under construction, a vote of hope in the future of these tiny places, some with a population of about 20. When I see a lovely young girl or a handsome young fellow serving us coffee in the only commercial establishment for miles, I wonder what their hopes and dreams are and what chance there is to realize them.

#### **Buildings with dry stone walls.**

Rabanal del Camino is a particularly beautiful little hamlet up on a hill and my accommodation is a renovated 17th century former pilgrim hospital. I was dining with the three Hawaiians and decided to splurge on a regional specialty. This plate below arrived with seven different cuts of meat. Then a plate after plate of other food arrived. I could make only a small dent, but what I did eat was delicious.



**I splurged on a regional specialty. More meat than I want in a month.**

Normally, a German order of Benedictine monks who live here sing Vespers every evening at 7 pm and then sit around and talk and drink with pilgrims. Turns out they left today to go on retreat. I was looking forward to this but am trying to practice appreciating what is rather than what might have been. Instead, I got to walk around town and now enjoy a fabulous view out my balcony window over the red tile roofs and stone houses and the purple mountains in the distance.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) and [Sheila M. Donohue](#) like this.

## Day 27 – Tues., Sept. 21, 2010 - Rabanal to Riego de Ambros (20.8 km)

Left beautiful Rabanal in the dark with two French pilgrims and soon met three Canadians - two francophones from New Brunswick and Ottawa and Heather from Toronto. I learned about an impromptu Celtic concert at the albergue last night. When it became known that the monks would not be chanting, a group of Irish pilgrims pulled out their portable instruments and broke into song. The sociable and exuberant part of me regrets not being part of these experiences. But the solitary part welcomes the privacy and time alone.



**A closeup of the kind of stuff that gets left at Cruz de Ferro.**

Cruz de Ferro is the highest point - 1504 m of the Camino. A simple iron cross sits atop a weathers pole and has come to be a place where pilgrims toss a stone they have brought from home. As you can see, far more than stones are left behind. The tradition is that one also leaves behind worries, cares or unproductive thoughts. In addition to the pebble I picked up from my street the day before I left home, I left behind three other things I had brought with me - the self-critic, the pessimist and the perfectionist. My pack actually felt lighter after leaving Cruz de Ferro.

All these sometimes silly but symbolic acts suggest something that makes this more than a long-distance walk. Without question, the Camino is an earth-bound, embodied experience. I have never been so conscious of my body and what it can do and what it needs. You literally have to watch every step and you try to walk faster or farther than your particular body can go at your peril. But, in as many ways as there are pilgrims, it is also a gesture toward something beyond, a yearning for a glimpse of the transcendent.

[Joan Gregson](#) I just got Paul Coehlo's book, *Pilgrimage*, from the library yesterday and look forward to reading it and learning more about the Camino. You are certainly having a wonderful deep spiritual experience and I look forward to hearing about it when you get back.

The sounds today were so few and so beautiful. As we climbed up and up, my eyes could gaze across at endlessly receding ranges of mountains. And the sounds were of distant bells on grazing sheep, the soft moo of this nursing calf, occasional song birds and the pierce of a crow's caw. And always the rhythmic sound of one foot in front of the other. On the ground was what looks like wild alpine crocuses. A Dutch woman many days back told me that under the right condition, they have a second blooming.



Another effort to share the magnificent part of the world where I am today. I am staying in a private home perched at the top of the hill in the village. I am on the balcony looking out over quiet mountains where In one direction, I can see a dark and dramatic storm with shafts of light breaking and, in the other, blue sky and the sorts of side-lit clouds you see in lots of Italian Rococo paintings of heaven. Also staying here are young fellow from New Zealand and two Dutch women from Holland who have cycled all the way from home. We will all wander down to the only restaurant in town for dinner where we will be joined by pilgrims staying at the albergue.

[Joan Gregson](#) and [Barbara Zabel](#) like this.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) beautiful

### **Day 28 – Wed., Sept. 22, 2010 - Riego de Ambros to Ponferrada (14 km)**

A short *etap*, the Spanish name give to the distance walked each day. Averaging about 25 km a day, one can cover the 800 km between St Jean-Pied-du-Port and Santiago in 34 days. Some go faster; others go slower. I took two days to cross the Pyrenees and chose before I left home to take two rest days.

Had long conversation with young New Zealander, a lawyer with a yen for adventure, last night until the proprietor kicked us out. Mainly about the common topic of prejudice, stereotype and cultural distinctions.

A beautiful mountainous walk but quite rugged underfoot. Ponferrada is a sizeable town of 60,000 and big enough to have a vibrant street market, a fabulous castle, several museums and numerous plazas teeming with activity. But also big enough for me to feel a little lost.



**Ponferrada, originally a Templar castle.**

I walked intermittently with a number of people but came into town alone. I checked into the hotel and happily wandered around, having lunch alone but feeling just a little forlorn when I was ready for dinner. I don't like to insinuate myself in a group speaking other than English or French because I don't want people to shift into English (if they can) on my account alone. Then I bumped into Francois and Georges, a pair of brothers-in-law from Brittany and they invited me to join them. They speak no English and French is the only other language on which I can hold a reasonable conversation. Then a foursome from Hawaii spotted us and I saw the lovely couple from Vancouver. So forlorn no longer!

[Joan Gregson](#) Ann what you are accomplishing is incredible! Did you train for all this walking? I have finally brought out my atlas and begun tracing your footsteps. I am in total admiration. May the Power be with you.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) am enjoying your reports so much and following along on the map

[Irene Walters](#) enjoying your stories.

### **Day 29 – Thurs., Sept. 23, 2010 - Ponferrada to Villafranca (22.7 km)**

A day in the horn of plenty. Much time through vineyards and all the harvesting of grapes is by hand. Ate handfuls of the purple grapes. Sweet and flavorful but skins too tough to swallow. Orchards of all kinds of fruit including pomegranates. A man stopped by and offered succulent figs - just a gift.



**Grape harvesting seems to be done by hand.**



**Tons of open wagons heaped with green and purple grapes.**

Happy to reconnect with my American and German buddies. All those travelling alone agree that we are glad to be doing it this way but that there have been lonely evenings with no one to eat with. There are perhaps ten people at this stage of the Camino that I know and enjoy well enough to seek out at meal time. Others are either ahead of me or behind or have had to cut their time short (commitments or injury). That too is part of the Camino - knowing that either someone will turn up or, to quote a more famous Annie, the sun will come up tomorrow no matter what.



So many things here remind me of New Mexico, even though the influence goes from Spain to NM.

**It had never occurred to me that New Mexico adobe and colours originated in Spain.**

Water is in short supply both here and there and seems to be meted out in very much the same way - informally, with little dams that can be raised or lowered as indicated.

The CP trip to Santa Fe will be off soon and will include a visit to the garlic farm of Stan and Rose Mary Crawford in the little Hispanic hamlet of Dixon. Participants on that trip will learn first-hand from a former 'mayor-domo' of the *acequias* just how it is done. I wish them a wonderful time together.



**Little homemade dams to manage the meagre water supply.**



**A local at his siesta.**

[Victor Levin](#) likes this.



**Hawaiian pals. 195km to Santiago.**

## Day 30 – Fri., Sept. 24, 2010 - Villafranca del Bierzo to Ambasmestas (18 km)

The rain in Spain did not stay mainly in the plain today. I elected to take a more demanding walk through the mountains today instead of the flatter walk along the road. It was richly rewarding, in part because of the off and on showers. The geography and weather are changing as we approach Galicia. Cooler, wetter, greener. Here I am walking with a German with blistered feet and a corporate communications woman from Panama (who writes fiction in her spare time). She is walking for the second time.



**Walking companions from Germany and Panama.**



**A friendly beast along the way.**



**Nice to be in the dappled light of the woods.**

The omnipresent representation of a 'peregrino' (pilgrim) is all based on the legend that St. James preached the Gospel in Spain soon after the Crucifixion and after his martyrdom in Jerusalem his body was smuggled back to Galicia by a party of Spanish disciples. There are stories that his miraculous presence saved a man carried out to sea who was covered with scallop shells. The sarcophagus was lost for centuries but a star revealed its whereabouts - Compostela means 'field of a star' and there the city of Santiago was built. Santiago is portrayed both as a pilgrim and a great warrior, smiting the Moorish infidels even though he died several centuries before Islam was conceived.



**Here is San Tiago kindly showing us the way.**

But it is perhaps not surprising that this illusion has taken on a quixotic life in the Spain for so long that it has achieved a kind of truth. Apparently many Spaniards take it for granted that Don Quixote actually existed and in La Mancha, locals will point out his birthplace.

This is the land of knights and saints.



**I love this statue of San Roch.**



**And Santiago Matamoros, St. James the Moor Slayer.**

Wound licking is an instinctive response in humans and many other animals to an injury. Dogs, cats, rodents and primates all lick wounds. There is a common folk belief that animal saliva, especially that of dogs, has healing properties for human wounds, and there are a number of legends surrounding the healing properties of human and animal saliva.

Saint Roch in the Middle Ages was said to have been cured of a plague of sores by licking from his dog.

I was busy admiring the huge variety of colours and textures of the alpine flowers and scrub growth when I chanced to look up there was a stunning rainbow that lasted for about ten seconds before the dark clouds rolled in and obliterated it.



I have seen men pensively carving these beautiful wooden walking sticks. It is customary for pilgrims, once they have been to Santiago, to walk another several days to Finisterre (the end of the earth) and toss their sticks into the ocean. I am walking with two high tech trekking poles from Mountain Equipment Co-op but sometimes wish I had a wooden stick lovingly carved by a local in a place where they have been created continuously for more than a millennium.

[Heather Raff](#) Bravo, Ann!

[Marjorie Miller](#) Hi Ann, I have been following your pilgrimage with much admiration for your bravery, fortitude and resoluteness. No doubt you are reaping the rewards and the lessons I earned along the way will fill your lifetime. Blessings!

[Classical Pursuits](#) Salud Marjorie, I had trouble posting comments from the road. But i wanted to let you know how nice it was to hear from you. I loved seeing Chelsea in NY last Dec. I plan to be there again this year and perhaps we can get together once more....See More

## Day 31 – Sat., Sept. 25, 2010 - Ambasmestas to O'Cebreiro (17 km)

Yesterday was an exercise in both mindfulness as I passed several afternoon hours in a tiny hamlet observing the pattern of chickens pecking around their yard, the joining of two streams into one, the movement of cows grazing, inspecting a plant new to me (turned out to be hops, from which beer is made).



**Hops. New to me.**



**The little church in Ambasmestas.**

I sat in the local church for a while. I watched the pattern of light and shadow change on the street and buildings. But that was nothing compared to the old people who sit still and silent and alone on stone benches in these little towns for hours at a time, probably day after day. What do they think about? Do they think?

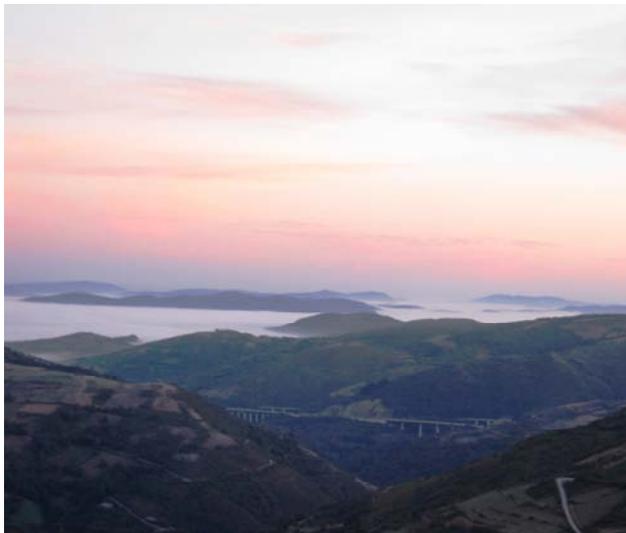


**A steep climb up to O'Cebreiro and into the mist.**



**Entering the region of Galicia, the celtic part of Spain.**

This image is entry into today's village with a mysterious air about it up in the clouds - O'Cebreiro, our gateway to Galicia, the final stage of the Camino. We are now fully socked in with fog. Based on what I had read and been told before leaving home, I decided to spend an extra day here tomorrow before the final descent into Santiago.



Those are not lakes but clouds. Sweeping views in all directions.



Sloping thatched roofs on stone buildings, this village is unlike anything I've seen.



**This is, Don Elias Valina Sampedro, the local parish priest, whom we can thank for the yellow arrows to help us find our way.**



**My first pulpo since CP trip to Galicia in 2007. It is a delicious octopus marinated in paprika. Monika and Marie and new acquaintance who had walked all the way from his home in Turino, Italy.**

### **Day 32 – Sun., Sept. 26, 2010 - O'Cebreiro (rest day)**

Today is Sunday and I had arranged before leaving home to to spend an extra day at this mountaintop village, the first inside the province of Galicia.

Here I am at breakfast with Marie who walked on today. She will therefore arrive in Santiago a day before me. We have a plan for meet as I enter the city.

We have had the same observation lately. Neither of us has never been as physically strong in our lives as we are now - and almost certainly never will be again. Marie is 66 and I turn 65 in 2 weeks. It is strange to reach one's height of fitness at this age. It also sharpens the realization that we are unlikely to be walking like this again and, no matter what we do, time will have its way with our bodies.



**Marie and me at breakfast before s he departs.**



**Young monks or priests celebrating Mass by themselves in the early morning before hitting the trail.**



I went to the noon Mass in the beautiful little stone church. It was packed to the rafters but with few pilgrims. Those who slept here were on their way and today's arrivals were not yet here. Far more canes and crutches in the church than walking sticks and trekking poles. I pray that I will be able to accept the losses of age with grace, whenever and however they come.

The young man with his head bowed was sitting in overflow space behind the altar. He has an artificial right hand and perhaps an artificial arm as well. Not the bionic type that would allow him to button his shirt. Yet, he is a pilgrim. How, I cannot imagine.

### **Day 33 – Mon., Sept. 27, 2010 - O'Cebreiro to Triacastela (22 km)**

A most magnificent walk along the edge and eventually down a mountain. This morning, it looked like lakes of clouds below. The village of O'Cebreiro was a great place to take a rest day and reflect on my walk now that it is in its last week. The village had an other-worldly misty and mystical feel about it - except to the Irish couple I talked to from Donegal, who felt right at home. The Celtic history of Galicia is everywhere evident, extending to the landscape and the weather.



**My accommodation in O'Cebriero.**



**Another day to pay close attention to what's underfoot.**

For some reason that perhaps only Lisbeth Salander would understand, my iPhone has been losing its charge early in the day and keeps turning on music or audiobooks that I am unable to turn off. Hence, I could not take phone photos of much of what I saw. The grand views do not photograph well anyway. Here is evidence of the lushness before the power went out.

Wanted to mention that I read all the comments and try to respond but, again for reasons I do not understand, my replies are not accepted. Thank you for your interest and sorry I am unable to reply directly.

Even the signs now anticipate Santiago with a big stone marker every .5 km announcing the remaining distance - 130 km (which means I have walked 670 km.) Hard to believe.



**More pulpo for lunch.**



**Some equestrian pilgrims.**

Joan Gregson Hard to believe indeed. Ann I don't know how you're doing it. I expect the end of your pilgrimage will bring mixed emotions. Can't wait to chat with you in person.

Sheila M. Donohue this is wonderful, almost finished! I've enjoyed the adventure at a distance, brava!

### Day 34 – Tues., Sept. 28, 2010 - Triacastela to Sarria (25 km)



A beautiful but long day. The wrought iron fence here is of scallop shells. Everywhere there are emblems of the Camino - pilgrim statues (old and contemporary, Santiago himself - as pilgrim or warrior, scallop shells, drinking gourds, wooden staffs, and the omnipresent yellow arrow.

Much of today's walk could have been along the Bruce Trail in Ontario. All lush ferns and mossy rocks and a mix of hardwood and evergreen trees.

Walked with a group of Spanish-speaking Germans who live in an exile community near Frankfurt. Seems they are descendants from Germans who fled to Nicaragua and other Latin American countries after WWII and have chosen to return to Germany but remain somewhat separated in their own Spanish community.

Also a Brazilian woman, a male nurse from Ireland and, mainly, with a young New Zealander who teaches the flute in Auckland and is a vegan - do not know how she manages that here!



**The Benedictine Monastery of Samos, one of the oldest in Spain.**



**Pilgrims have the impulse to leave stones everywhere.**

Stopped to visit this huge and beautiful monastery. A jolly monk who was full of curiosity and jokes showed us around. This stop (and choice of a longer route through the back country instead of by the road) meant over 8 hours of walking. Each day now starts off with hood up and gloves. But in a few hours, I have shed the gloves and fleece and then, soon after, rolled up my sleeves, converted pants to shorts, and pulled out the sun hat.

This night was in Sarria, a larger town with much advance promise. But it seems very much down on its luck to me, I had a very hard time finding a place to eat. Everything seemed permanently closed or, the one resto I found, didn't open until after 9. I found a supermarket, but they do not have take-out meals. Settled on a smoky, dirty and noisy bar and ate a bad pizza with acceptable red wine. This is one of those occasions where I am staying in a different part of town than the pilgrims at the albergues. And, uncommonly, I am here with only two other pilgrims - both Germans who decided to eat dried bread and sausage in their rooms.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) You must be getting as thin as a stick!! Seems like food is an ongoing issue. We are used to so much freedom and so much choice.

[Joan Gregson](#) I was thinking the same thing - You'll be thin as a rail and strong and fit.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Think I am about the same size. Some days I eat really - which means a lot but very tasty and nutritious food. Other days, it's chips and fries and candy bars. That's rare. And now, in Galicia, the seafood is outstanding and the Albarino white wine is even better. If you look, you can even find good vegetables. Walked yesterday with a vegan from NZ. Cannot imagine how she has survived.

## Day 35 – Wed., Sept. 29 - Sarria to Portomarin (22.9 km)



35 days ago, 100 km seemed impossible. Now, having walked over 700 km, the remaining distance feels very short

Many pilgrims start in Sarria, as it is the last place pilgrims can begin on foot and still receive the Compostela. They are feeling the aches and pains of the early days of walking. You really do train as you go.

Funny, in the final days of the camino, it will feel just right in length to me. I know some people walk much further - starting way up in France or even Germany, Holland or Italy; and many walk for a week or two. But, for me, this feels like just the right length. I am excited to get to Santiago and, after several days there, I will have a few hours at the Prado in Madrid and then, happily on my way home. I have never in my life had such leisure - work that is play and lots of time left over. I know nothing of the world's news since I have been gone, except the earthquake and flooding in New Zealand.



One could create a fabulous coffee table book just on the bridges of the camino. Big and well-engineered, small and improvised, Roman, medieval, and a few new ones. Nearly all beautiful.



**Portomarin - a dam up river caused the village to be abandoned and its remains are usually under water.**



**But when, as now, the water level of the reservoir is low, you can see the ruins of the old buildings and an old bridge. Very eerie.**

Tonight I plan to make up for my lousy eating in Sarria. I will send photos later if I am successful. I have been accommodated at a pretty fancy hotel with what looks like it has a great restaurant. The bummer is that dinner does not start until 8 pm and breakfast does not start until 8 am, making it tough to be early to bed and early to

rise. My next two days are quite long and arduous. I prefer to get an early start and then have time to shower, do laundry and go horizontal a bit before dinner.



**Pimientos de Padrón. Yum!**



**Not traditional pulpo on a wooden plate but delicious octopus nonetheless.**

It is raining and more of the same for the next several days. My next two days are long and arduous. Rain will create slippery and muddy (ergo, slower) conditions. With breaks, that could mean 10 hour walking days. But taking them bit by bit, all should be fine and even bring it's own, as yet to be even imagined, rewards.

Now, over and (with any luck) out.

[Mark Camp](#) .....not too many food pics please...I still have over three weeks till I get to Spain.....

[Kathleen Kirk](#) ....more food pics please....I live vicariously through you....

[Classical Pursuits](#) I plan to have my perfect meal tonight. I am in a small town of Palas de Rei and already scouted The Place to have pulpo, pimientos de Padrón, Albarino wine and local fresh sheep cheese with quince jelly. I promise to document it in photos. Mark, I'm thinking of a CP trip on an abbreviated part of the camino. Maybe ten days of walking. Not yet sure of the literature. Interested in being the walking guide? Hi Kathleen!!

[Barbara Zabel](#) \*Pimientos..hmmm, my memory lets me taste them, just like I had them the first time in Galicia. So special to me. Ann, I admire you, I love your pics and stories.I MIGHT EVEN ENVY YOU but not sure, when I look at my blistered heels after a...See More

[Classical Pursuits](#) Barbara, You must have forgotten your Hirschtalcreme!

[Barbara Zabel](#) Just to make it right it was 1.5. hours of walking, not 1.5 km  
!!! But, you are right and I am looking for solutions.  
Barbara

## Day 36 – Thurs., Sept. 30, 2010 - Portomarin to Palas de Rei (26.1 km)



**Me on Day 36.**

A couple comments have suggested I must be wasting away. No danger of that. Ergo, the photo below. It is just that some days the calories are both delicious and nutritious and other days it is salt, fat, sugar and white flour - and probably lots of nitrates and stuff like that. But tonight I plan to have a fabulous meal, which I will document in photos. I have already scoped out the place and it opens at 7 pm! Tomorrow I have my longest walk and want to get an early start. Mid-way tomorrow, the town of Melide is famous for it's pulpo, so I will take a nice lunch break there.

I seemed to have become stuck in groups of Spanish walkers who speak no English and Germans who do but are fully engaged in conversations in their native tongue.

This handsome Adonis aka Daniele started talking to me as I was leaving town this morning and we walked together at a very brisk pace until he wanted a break and I chose to carry on. He is from Seville and one of the few Spaniards who speak a second language (just like North Americans). Daniele is an electrical engineer who oversees the installation of high power systems where the installers can die if his calculations are wrong. He is a deeply happy person who has found his personal recipe for contentment from serious reflection. We talked a lot about that uniquely Spanish concept of 'duende'. Kind of looks like Zorro, no?



**Zorro?**

Some have said no more food photos; others have said please, more food. Well, after a couple big and near misses, tonight was perfect. I bumped into two Italian women from Turino, both recently retired (at 54!) from Fiat. No English, so we stumble along in my lousy Italian. But they are warm and familiar, way back in D'Orisson. We had a fabulous meal and great camaraderie in this very pleasant town.



**The extraordinary local  
Albarino wine.**



**The best pulpo so far.**



**More pimientos de Padron.**

We were all too tired to stay on for desert and local liqueur. A great evening after a long day. An even longer day tomorrow. Funny how anything up to 25 km seems easy to me and anything beyond makes me weary. And beyond 30 is simply too much. Everyone has a personal limit. For some, it is 15 km a day. Others do 40 or even more. Unthinkable for me. Only three more days of walking, but it will not be a piece of cake.

[Sheila M. Donohue](#) great report and pix, as you are approaching the last kilometres, keep 'em coming...

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks Sheila!

[Joan Gregson](#) Wonderful! Ah - the duende! Thrilling when you witness it in the corrida. 30 km per day??? Every day?! Wow.

[Classical Pursuits](#) No, not 30 km every day. In fact, only today and one or two others came close. Most are between 20 - 25. Tomorrow is only 19 and the last day, something like 22 or 23. Funny, how a few km can make a big difference. There are those who regularly walk 40 km. a day; Others never do more than 15. I find that after 23 or 24 I suddenly feel the weight of my pack pack and my legs are ready to stop. But they are no longer like jelly as they were in the early days.

[Joan Gregson](#) Even so my dear...

[Judith Gallant](#) I'm so proud of you!!! 30 km /day!!! Good Lord! Are you going to sell your car when you get back? lol

[Keith McDuffie](#) Finally caught up with you again...I've been on the West Coast: Seattle and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Southern Oregon (a fantastic 75-year-old project that Classical Pursuits might want to look into). Helen and I will be g...See More

**Day 37 – Fri., Oct. 1, 2010 - Palas de Rei to Arzua (29.4 km)**



**The mornings are darker now. This was at about 8:30 am. Octopus at Melide**

A few too many km for my liking today. Although the big picture looks relatively flat, it was up and down, up and down for 7 hours - with a break for pulpo in Melide, famous for this Galician specialty (but not nearly so good as the pulpo last night in Palas de Rei). Only two more days of walking. My original plan was to get up very early on Sunday and walk in the dark to make it to Santiago by about 11:30 so I could meet my pals who are a day ahead of me and go to the noon Mass at the cathedral together.

But as I read the description of the last 20 km. it is through confusing woods and across lots of major highways. Doesn't sound like a good idea to go it alone in the dark. I will try to contact them and arrange to meet up later in the day. Meanwhile, I am re-encountering people I met back at the very beginning and had lost track of. I don't know how we have ended up at the same place without sightings of one another. And time will tell who else materializes.

The folks who have just started can be seen at all the bar stops along the way nursing their blistered and bleeding feet, muscle spasms and tendonitis. I simply do not know how I escaped all these travails. But, even though my legs and shoulders were tired today, I think that unless I stumble, I should make it home injury-free. I tip my hat and lift my glass to all those who soldier on with various ailments. Many injuries take care of themselves and others seem to command a three-day rest, not really possible for those who are only walking a week or so. They will have to catch a bus and forfeit the Compostela. And funny how we adults go after these stamps with ardour and will line up for a long time to get this piece of paper.



[Keith McDuffie](#) You have done an amazing journey! ¡Felicitaciones! I wonder if life now will seem a little more mundane after such an extraordinary experience.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Me too, Keith. But I think that every day will be enriched by the experience. No day need be hum drum. More, I think, an attitude of how I see and listen and notice. I am setting off now - 6 am - in a heavy rain, alone in the dark, through woods and across major highways - all in an effort to make it to Santiago in time to drop my pack (no longer allowed in the cathedral) and meet some buddies from some days back for the noon Mass. Probably a foolish thing to do, but here I go.

[Keith McDuffie](#) ¡ Buena suerte! And do be careful--although that may not exactly be the spirit of what you have been up to these past weeks.

[Irene Walters](#) i have shared your journey what a wonderful way to finish with a mass at the cathedral.

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) Thinking of you all day today ... you made it. Wow. It's just so amazing. Congrats, my friend.

### **Day 38 – Sat., Oct. 2, 2010 - Arzua to Rua (20 km)**

Tomorrow, tomorrow; it's only a day away. Anticipation about reaching Santiago is building in the nicest possible way. I left Arzua early and had a very peaceful day walking through farmland, eucalyptus forests, beautiful villages, late summer flower gardens. It was breezy and overcast and looked like rain, but the rain held off until later in the afternoon.

I seemed to breath more deeply and notice things more closely and be so full of wonder and gratitude that I have been able to do this.



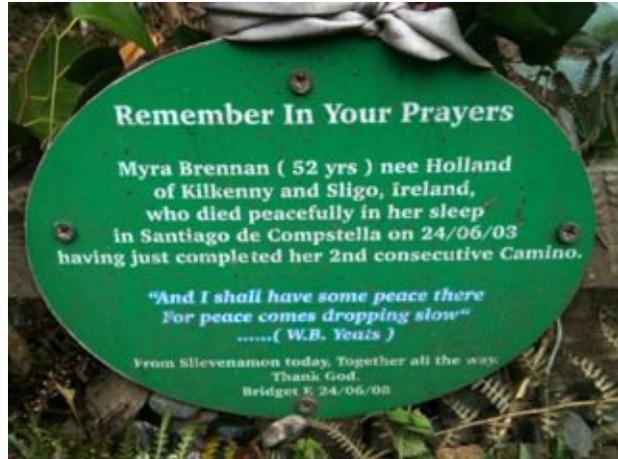
After I arrived at my wonderful rustic accommodation and had a fabulous lunch (with Albarino) and a nap,

I took my soul for a stroll. It was drizzling lightly and everything was glistening. All the pilgrims had passed through and I just followed my nose and curiosity, examining all sorts of plant life, picking a perfectly ripe fig, collecting little treasures for the grandkidlets.



There are various degrees of slow. In my normal daily walking, I am unlikely to have noticed this wonderful improvised mailbox. Imagine all that we miss as we zoom through life.

I zoomed in on this so you could read all of it. But there are little mementos left every day - fresh sprigs of laurel and eucalyptus, heather, and, of course, stones. This is just one example of the way people along the Camino care both for those who came before and those who will come after. A friend (Bridget) took great care to create the plaque and come here to install it. But no one passes by without stopping. It is very moving and I suspect I am not alone in pledging to take and show more care in my daily life.



Tomorrow, I plan to get up very early and set out in the dark by 6 am with my miner's light. The aim is to get to Santiago in time to drop my pack (they are no longer permitted in the cathedral - to make room for more people) and meet my old pals for the noon Mass. Unlikely I will find them even if I get there in time.

[Rosemary Hauseman](#) Congratulations. Quite an achievement.

[Sue Hammond](#) Congratulations, Ann! We can't wait to have you back here on time for autumn leaves ... and to hear your post-pilgrimage reflections. I wonder what you'll be thinking in the plane far above this earth.

[Classical Pursuits](#) I wonder what I will be thinking too. Thoughts flit in and out at the moment, often in the form of song lyrics or a line from a poem. Mostly, just a great sense of well-being.

[Keith McDuffie](#) ¡Felicitaciones! ¡Una gran aventura!

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## Day 39 – Sun., Oct. 3, 2010 - Rua to Santiago de Compostela (25 km, should have been 20)

Well, my triumphant walk into Santiago ended not with a bang but with soggy feet and wet through and through. I felt a bit like this beleaguered warrior.

Today, I really did face obstacles. I set out at 6 am, alone, in the dark, in teeming rain, heading into the woods - to make record time to meet my pals by 11 am. I must say that the woods were enchanting with my miner's light catching the underside of leaves and making everything look like it was dripping with silver tinsel.

But it was also very hard to see the waymarks and I got lost THREE times. Once, when on a very narrow path with ankle-high puddles, I searched in vain for any sign of litter to indicate that pilgrims had passed this way. Normally, I rued those who left any evidence other than footprints. Once I find myself on a major highway with no signs. I tried to flag down a car, but not even the Civil Guard stopped.



**Phew, I made it! A wonderfully apt statue in front of cathedral.**

But still, Colonel Pickering's tribute to Prof. Henry Higgins came to mind, as I sloshed across the portal to the city, not even stopping to take a photo.

"Tonight, old man, you did it!  
You did it! You did it! You said that you would do it,  
And indeed you did. I thought that you would rue it;  
I doubted you'd do it. But now I must admit it  
That succeed you did. You should get a medal  
Or be even made a knight."



I eventually found my way but was too late to meet my pals to get to the noon Mass at the cathedral. I did join the long line-up to get in and wondered why I bothered as I stood in a jam of Spanish and Italian tour groups with umbrellas, all pushing and shoving and accusing each other of jumping the queue. I was sure that my only injury would be the loss of an eye from an umbrella.

I did manage to make my way into the back of the cathedral to stand in several inches of water. After about a half hour of shivering, I left and made my way across the big plaza to the parador - the oldest continually operating hotel in the world (or so they say) and found some familiar faces and hot cafe con leche.

This is Mario and Julie from Vancouver. They were the first English-speaking Canadians I met – back in Los Arcos on Day 10.



Met Marie after Mass and had a great lunch, catch-up and goodbye. We don't know what happened to Monika.

[Victor Levin](#) likes this.

[Keith McDuffie](#) Sounds like the weather was trying to keep you una peregrina humilde. But in fact you were triumphant. Mi enhorabuena...

[Classical Pursuits](#) I actually feel mighty humble. Just sheer luck that I was had the working body parts to be able to do this. I heard yesterday about a Quebecoise who, upon entering Santiago, stumbled on a cobblestone and

gashed her forehead and broke her wrist. And, at the Mass today, a large contingent of severely disabled 'pilgrims' from Seville were rightfully given VIP seating for their wheel chairs.

[Keith McDuffie](#) Enjoy the seafood! Tonight I've fixed cod with potatoes, Kalamata olives and garlic en papillote, with Albariño wine. I will toast you with una copa!

[Barbara Zabel](#) Who could say it any better than Keith!!  
Una peregrina mucho admirable!! (. .and I know it's not Spanish)  
Love the statue.

[Sue Skerbec](#) "A journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step." - Lao Tzu May you always take a step in the right direction and let the spirit of adventure be your guide! You completed your amazing journey ! Bravo!

[Classical Pursuits](#) Muchas gracias, todos! Keith, thanks for dining with me. Last evening, I took a break from Spanish cuisine and went Turkish. But for last day in Santiago, it will be pulpo y pimientos du Padron y Albarino. In Madrid, I guess just tapas and table wine.

[Keith McDuffie](#) In Madrid , if you have time to go to the Plaza Mayor , you may want to check out the Restaurante El Botín, one of the oldest continually operating in Madrid. Their speciality is suckling pig roasted in ancient brick ovens.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Oh dear. Too late Keith. I had spent several hours in the Prado but frankly enjoyed my time more people-watching in Parque del Retiro and walking from Pza de la Independencia to Pza de Cibeles to Puerta del Sol and then sitting for some time...See More

[Keith McDuffie](#) I have always thought that you need to leave something undone or unseen in order to go back to a place. It took me 40 years to get to Galicia...So you have a reason (lots of reasons, in fact) to go back to Madrid and find time to find El Bo...See More

[Keith McDuffie](#) Forgot to say that I think Jan Morris' book is highly recommended by almost everyone. I have yet to read it but am ordering a copy.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks for dining tip, Keith. Alas, I got it too late. Early departure for home also incompatible with Spanish dinner hour.

## Day 40 – Mon., Oct. 4, 2010 - Santiago de Compostela



**My Compostela**

Here is the coveted Compostela - all in Latin. (Call me, Annam.) Sometimes the lineup to present your credential and passport and answer some questions goes on for hours. But I turned up at 8:45 am and there were about 10 people waiting. The door opened just at the church bells rang and I was out by 9:30.

Nice to have but really doesn't mean as much at the Credential, which shows my day to day travels.



**Beating the crowds at the Pilgrim Office early Monday morning to present our Credenciales.**



**Careful review of the Credenciales required to qualify for the Compostela.**



You would not know from this picture that I am squeezed into the cathedral an hour before the Mass started, lucky to have found a corner of a column base to perch on. I shared it with Rachel, the vegan flute teacher from New Zealand I walked with several days ago. If my eyes look funny, that's because they almost always do when I have my picture taken.

I am wearing a little scallop shell lent to me by Maureen Kelly. She was of great help and encouragement to me as I planned. I will return it with love when I see her back in Toronto.



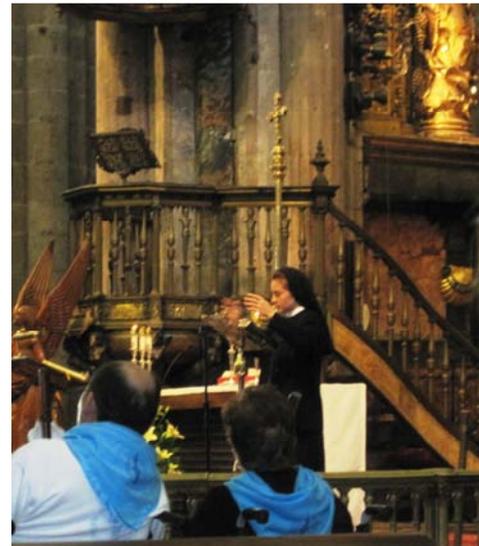
The cathedral is adorned by the scallop shell and the cross of St. James.



The Botafumiero is one of the largest incense burners in the world. It swings across the transept for about five minutes at the end of High Mass accompanied by a powerful organ.



Parts of the cathedral are always under maintenance or restoration.



A young nun leads the congregation in song. Those in front are physically disabled.

The cathedral is so vast, it is impossible to capture it either inside or out with a little phone camera.



The latest in votive technology. This is an LED screen. You put your Euro in a slot and choose a candle to "light." It flickers and glows for some appointed time until the candle has burnt out. No muss. No fuss. No risk of fire.

[Mark Camp](#) Congratulations....hope you enjoy Santiago...and the weather isn't too bad. Plenty of choices when it comes to eating!...are you going to carry on to Finestere?

[Lisa Nabieszko](#) I have a lump in my throat. Well done.

[Susan Zimmerman](#) amazing. Brava!!!

[Classical Pursuits](#) Nope to Finestere. No time to walk and don't want to take the bus. As for eating, I went Turkish tonight - but with Albarino. I sure will miss it. When and where are you going to be in Spain, Mark? YOU didn't answer my earlier question...

[Victor Levin](#) Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!

[Mary Benedetto](#) Excellent

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks so much. It has been fun sharing the experience. I didn't think it would be. I have tried to write about some of the quirky and surprising aspects. But please don't ask me what I've learned or how I've changed.

[Classical Pursuits](#) Thanks, Lisa!

[Mark Camp](#) Sorry! didn't pick up message at the time....that's the trouble with Facebook....will send you an email ....but yes I am up for it. We go to Spain on the 23rd...dry and barren eastern Andalucia....we hope!

[Joan Gregson](#) Felicidades Anam! Well done. I am so looking forward to hearing all about it when you get home. When is that?

[Classical Pursuits](#) Back tomorrow - Oct. 7. Have had a lovely afternoon meandering in Madrid. But really ready to come home.

[Heather Raff](#) So happy to see the photo at cathedral and welcome home, dear Ann!

[Joan Gregson](#) It will be wonderful to see you and hear all about it Ann

[Joan Gregson](#) Ann I was just reading Gardens of the Vatican by Linda Kooluris Dobbs. She mentions the thurifer at the cathedral. The reason it is so big was to combat the stench of early pilgrims finishing their journey! Thought you'd enjoy this little tidbit

