

Onderstaande tekst is in oktober 2015 integraal overgenomen van de site <http://galiciaguide.com>. Galiciaguide.com was helaas niet via mail te bereiken om toestemming voor overname te verkrijgen. Oorspronkelijke foto's zijn op verschillende plaatsen vervangen door actuelere foto's uit eigen archief.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 1 – Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles

Total distance: 25 kilometers

Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port is a French town situated on the banks of the river Nive at the foot of the Pyrenees mountain range approximately 8kms from the border with Spain. Dating back to Roman times this area has been an important passage through the Pyrenees and dating back to the 10th century it has been the meeting point of the Caminos de Santiago that come through from various points in France such as Paris, Vézelay and Le Puy. In the 12th century this part of the Pyrenees was part of the Spanish kingdom of Lower Navarra and the kings of Navarra rebuilt the town in the late 12th century after it had been destroyed by the British king Richard I, the Lionheart in 1177. Over the centuries the town's ownership changed numerous times between the French and Spanish as they fought for sovereignty over these lands. Finally during the French Revolution of 1789 to 1799 the Kingdom of Lower Navarra was abolished and has remained in French hands ever since.



Citadel in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port



Église de Notre Dame

During the late 15th and early 16th centuries, following the French Wars of Religion between French Catholics and Protestants, the town was fortified by Cardinal Richelieu who commissioned the building of the Citadel on a hill overlooking the town. The Citadel is now a college. While you are here there are a couple of places worth visiting, most of which can be found off the cobbled street of Rue de la Citadelle where you will have picked up your credencial. The first is the 13th century La prison dite des Evêques, or the Bishop's prison. Some claim that it had been the Bishop's residence but the local tourist office doesn't believe there was any link. It did however house those good for nothings that plagued the early pilgrims. The building now houses a museum on the Basque region as well as a museum on the Camino de Santiago. A little further down the street is the 14th century church Église de Notre Dame butting up against the imposing Porte de Notre Dame with its small statue of Santiago up above the arch. The current Gothic church was part of a former priory hospital and was built over the foundations of an earlier 13th century church that had been built by the Navarran King Sancho VII, el Fuerte. In

front of the church is a fountain decorated in scallop shells.

Accommodation can be found in a number of different places mostly hostel but there are some more upmarket hotels. Most of the accommodation can be found along the Rue de la Citadelle or the Place du Général de Gaulle. You may have to reserve before you leave your country of origin as places are booked up a long time in advance, especially in busy periods. To obtain your "credencial" or Pilgrim Passport make your way to Accueil St Jacques at 39 Rue de la Citadelle, the main street through Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. On your first proper day on the Camino de Santiago it is recommended that you leave early in the morning as most of the route is uphill and you don't want to be caught up in the mountains when the light is fading. Also make sure that you



Pilgrimsbureau in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port



Overall zijn gele pijlen geschilderd

have a hearty breakfast and take enough food and drink with you to last the remainder of the day and to have something to eat for breakfast the following morning. The Camino de Santiago is clearly marked by yellow flashes.



Begin van de Camino

Pilgrims usually depart on the Camino from the church Nôtre Dame du Bout du Port, continuing down le Rue d'Espagne towards the bridge over the River Nive, exiting the town walls through le Port d'Espagne. Here the pilgrim is faced with a decision, do they take the route up over the Pyrenees or take the lower, mainly asphalted, route. The route over the mountains is known as the "Route de Napoléon" and the asphalted route (the D428 road, becoming the N135 when you enter Spain), taking you through the village of Valcarlos, is known as the "Chemin de Compostela".

The Chemin de Compostela is more suitable during the winter months as the mountains experience bad weather such as fog and snow. This route is also more suitable if you are doing the Camino by bike. A word of warning, if it is very windy down in St Jean Pied de Port then you must take the Chemin de Compostela. The Route de Napoléon is quite exposed the higher you get and you can encounter severe weather even in the middle of summer.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 2 - Roncesvalles to Larrasoña

Total distance: 27 kilometers

Leaving Roncesvalles you will pass the Cruz de los Peregrinos erected in 1880 by Prior Don Francisco Polite. After about 200 meters you will come across a map of the Camino and the beginning of a woodland track which leads you towards Burguete (known as Auritz in the Basque dialect). Not to spook anyone who walks through these woods but they do have a couple of legends attached to them. The first is that in the 16th century a coven of witches was believed to be based here. Whether this is true or not it unfortunately led to nine people being burnt at the stake by the Inquisition for practicing witchcraft. Another story pertains to that of the Queen Juana de Labrit who was Enrique IV's (Henry IV) mother who died from poisoning in Paris in June 1572. A rumour circulated at the time was that Catherine de Medici, Henry's future mother-in-law, sent Juana a pair of perfumed gloves that had been poisoned. She did in fact die from natural causes but then that spoils the mythology of it all.



Cruz de los Peregrinos

A Catholic who chose to convert to Calvinism upon ascending to the Navarran throne, Juana banished priests and nuns from the region, destroyed catholic churches and prohibited the Catholic ritual. Her body was reputed to have been stolen by Lamias, creatures with serpent's bodies and women's faces, and brought to the forest surrounding Irati. On stormy nights they would come out and destroy churches until the locals found that those that had been built on a Saturday were not touched, therefore the locals would then build their churches this way and therefore liberated themselves from the spirits.



Iglesia de San Nicolas

Approximately 3 kilometers out of Roncesvalles, Burguete is a beautiful village with most of the whitewashed houses having been built in the 18th century in response to the increase of pilgrims through the region. It is a calm and relaxed village surrounded by woodland filled with oak, hazel, ash and poplar. Ernest Hemingway, the novelist, is reported to have stayed at the Hostal Burguete on his way to the Fiesta de San Fermin (the running of the bulls) and mentions Burguete in his book "The Sun also Rises". He had stopped to fish for trout in the River Irati and even wrote to his friend and fellow writer F Scott Fitzgerald saying "heaven would be a big bull ring with me holding two barrera seats and a trout stream outside that no one else was allowed to fish in". For the pilgrim there are a number of cafés, hotels, a bakery, a bank and for those already suffering from blisters, the welcome sight of a pharmacy.

As you continue your Camino you will pass 17th century Iglesia de San Nicolas de Bari, a saint closely linked with the Camino de Santiago and a protector of pilgrims.

Using the wooden bridge cross over the Rio Urrobi (more a stream than a river) and after about 200 meters take a left over another bridge onto a minor road. Soon this road becomes a track and will eventually take you through some woods, all the while going uphill.

After approximately 4 kilometers you will reach the Iglesia San Bartolomé at the entrance to the village of Espinal (also known as Aurizberri). Founded in 1269 by King Teobaldo II, like its neighbour Burguete it was destroyed by fire by the French in the 17th century.

In the village you will find plenty of places to eat and drink including bars, restaurants and a bakery (panaderia) and small shop. There are also a couple of guest houses (casas rurales) here if you were unable to find somewhere to stay in Roncesvalles as well as a private Albergue.

Following the signs out of the village you will come across a quiet road that will lead you to a track and up some steps towards the beech woods and towards the Alto de Mezquiriz 1.5 kilometers from Espinal. Here you will find a plaque written in French, Spanish and Basque to the Virgin and Child, asking the pilgrim to pray for Nôtre-Dame de Roncevaux (our lady of Roncesvalles). From the Alto de Mezquiriz there is a steep downward path which runs parallel with the main road. In recent years this has been resurfaced and can be slippery when wet and can be extremely dangerous when icy.

About 3 kilometers further along the path you will come to the village of Viskarret (Biskarreta in Basque) where you will find a café. You can also get your Credencial stamped at the village church. Upon leaving the village you will come to the River Erro where you can cross the river using the stepping stones then walk past the cemetery. Once past the cemetery take the middle of the three paths then cross the main road and down a track into the small hamlet of Linzoan. Walking under a wooden bridge linking one of the hamlet's stone houses with a high walled garden, this path leads you to a steep uphill dirt track which begins to level out a bit after a couple of kilometers before it begins to descend.



Gedenkplaat

After a further kilometer or two you will reach the mountain pass called Alto de Erro where once there was a refuge for pilgrims called the Venta del Puerto but which now stands in ruins. Thankfully from here on in the path continues to descend towards the town of Zubiri approximately 4 kilometers away. Zubiri is located about mid way between Roncesvalles and the city of Pamplona and is considered an essential stop on the Camino Francés. Here you will find the medieval Puente de la Rabia from which the town gets its name (Zubiri means village with the bridge in the Basque language). Legend has it that this bridge has a supernatural power. It is said that if a rabid animal is led around the central pillar three times it will be cured of the disease. Some say the reason for this is that a local saint named Santa Quiteria is buried beneath the bridge.



Puente de la Rabia

In Zubiri you will find a couple of Albergues (one private/one municipal) as well as some hostels and pensiones. Within the town there is also a grocery store, a bakery and a bank. When you leave Zubiri you will follow a well marked path past an industrial estate called Magnesitas because of its magnesium factory. The path will then lead you through the small villages of Llarratz and Esquiroz following the Arga river valley towards Larrasoaña 5.5 kilometers away. Soon after leaving the hamlet of Esquiroz you will come to a map of the Camino. At this point you have a choice to make, do you continue on the Camino, or do you take a slight detour into Larrasoaña? Well we will be taking the slight detour.

To get to Larrasoaña you need to cross the 14th century gothic bridge Puente Larrasoaña, also known as el Puente de los Bandidos (the bridge of the bandits). The bridge got its name in medieval times due to opportunistic bandits lying in wait to rob the pilgrims coming to the village. Thankfully this doesn't happen anymore. In Larrasoaña you will find the very popular Albergue Larrasoaña, which is actually run by the village's mayor. There are also three pensiones as well as a bar which offers a Pilgrim's menu and a small shop. Larrasoaña is the first of the villages along the Camino known as a Pueblo Calle where the village is built around the main street rather than around a church or monastery. This was a good design as it focussed the centre of economic activity on the centre of the village.



Puente Larrasoaña

Camino de Santiago - Stage 3 Larrasoña to Pamplona

Total distance: 15.9 kilometers

Leave Larrasoña the same way you entered, via the Puente Larrasoña and passing the map of the Camino the path takes an uphill track heading towards the village of Aquerreta 1 kilometer away where there is a single hotel. From here the path takes you through the village and through some pine woods and down a steep descent and some steps until you reach a modern bridge across the Rio Arga and after 3 kilometers, the village of Zuriáin. About 400 meters down the main road you will be re-crossing the Rio Arga through another pine forest heading towards the village of Irotz, a walk of 2 kilometers, where you will find a fountain to fill up your water bottles. From Irotz you again cross the river via a medieval bridge and follow the path through the village of Uroz and towards the village of Zabaldica where you will find a statue of St James in the Iglesia de San Esteban. The church is usually locked but the key is available from one of the nearby houses. Once again on the path and heading uphill once more you will arrive at the small village of Arleta. Here there is a nice manor house and the Iglesia de Santa Marina. The area around Arleta is particularly beautiful in spring and summer when the path is lined with orchids.



Brug over de Rio Ulzama

The path continues for approximately 1 km until you reach the tunnel underneath the main road. Taking this route you will reach a medieval bridge over the Rio Ulzama and the hamlet of Trinidad de Arre. Here you will find the Albergue situated behind the Basilica de la Santisima Trinidad de Arre, which is the white building as you cross the bridge, as well as a number of bakeries and other places to eat. At the Basilica de la Santisima Trinidad de Arre there is an old monastery and the remains of a pilgrim hospice. Not far along the main road from Trinidad de Arre you will come across the village of Villava, birthplace of Miguel Ángel Indurain Larraya who won the Tour de France on 5 consecutive occasions between 1991 and 1995.

Villava is also a suburb of the first major city on the Camino Francés, the city of Pamplona.

After 1,5 kilometers the route takes you through the suburb of Burlada and past a house known as la Casa de las Conchas due to it being decorated in scallop shells. You will once again have to cross the Rio Arga using the medieval bridge Puente de la Magdalena which is decorated with stone statues and a cross which was donated by the city of Santiago de Compostela in the 1960's.

Just after this bridge is an Albergue to your left. The path then takes you through the public gardens called Playa Caparoso towards the city walls surrounding the medieval part of the city of Pamplona. Here you walk over a draw bridge through the Portal de Zumalacárregi also known as el Portal de Francia and into the old town of Pamplona.



Stadspoot Pamplona

Pamplona was originally a Basque village called Iruña until 74BC when the Roman General Pompeyo Magno founded the new Roman town of Pompaelo, naming it after himself obviously. Over the centuries the city was populated by Visigoths and the Moors. During the 12th century at the height of the Camino there was an influx of people, particular French (or Franks) and they settled within the city and the city was segregated into 3 burgos or boroughs built around a parish church. Two of them, San Cernin and San Nicolás were Frankish and the other Navarrería, was where the Basques settled. Internal walls divided each of the boroughs mainly because of many disagreements between the different peoples. In 1423 King Carlos III el Noble (the noble) pulled down the walls and banned the building of any walls within the city, basically making the settlers integrate.



Casa de las Conchas

The city walls and the Citadel were built between the 16th and 18th centuries because of the city's strategic importance being so close to the French border and also to repel any possible invasion. In the 19th century as the city grew some of the walls, at the south side, were demolished to allow expansion of the city. Pamplona is most famous for the Fiesta de San Fermin when they run the bulls through the streets. The Fiesta was made world famous by Ernest Hemingway who first attended the Fiesta in 1923 and made it the backdrop of his novel "The Sun Also Rises". He returned a further 8 times with his last visit in 1959. The city council paid tribute to Hemingway by unveiling a monument next to the bullring on the Paseo Hemingway, the street that had been named in his honour. The Fiesta takes place in early July so be aware when making plans to travel that accommodation may be a little hard to come by at this time. There are a number of places in Pamplona worthy of a visit including the walls and some of the lovely squares and parks.

One of the most impressive buildings in Pamplona is the gothic cathedral, la Catedral de Santa Maria la Real, and is a must see whilst you are in the city. The Cathedral was built during the 14th and 15th centuries over the remains of a Romanesque church that had collapsed but archaeological investigations have found that it was built over a Roman capitol. The façade is Neoclassical but the interior is gothic, apparently taking its inspiration from the French cathedral at Bayonne. In front of the presbytery is the impressive mausoleum of Carlos III el Noble and his wife Leonor de Trastámara but the jewel in the cathedral's crown is that of its gothic cloister. Built between 1286 and 1472 it is one of the very few intact cloisters of this quality to be found in Europe. When the archaeological investigations were taking place in this area they discovered the remains of a Roman market, forum and baths.



Binnenplaats (cloister) van de kathedraal

Inside the cloister you will find a small museum which shows the evolution of both monumental and decorative gothic sculpture from the 13th century. Close by to the cathedral is one of the most beautiful parts of the city. This is the highest point in Pamplona, an area known as the Bastion de Redín and the building here is called el Meson del Caballo Blanco (white horse inn). Built on the remains of an old palace of which only the Cruz de Mentidero remains the Caballo Blanco has the most outstanding views out across the city. This building



Meson del Caballo Blanco

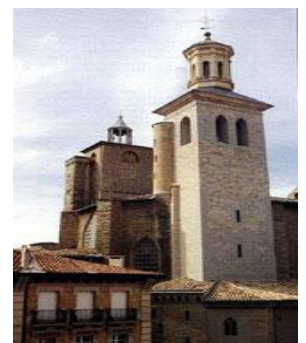


Iglesia de San Nicolás

used to be a pilgrim hostel but it is now a restaurant. This area is still regularly visited by the pilgrims who entered the city through Portal de Francia. The fortified 12th century church la Iglesia de San Nicolás was the main religious building in the borough that was named after it. Its main function was to defend against its neighbours and it did this through its thick walls, iron doors and 3 watch towers, of these 3 only one remains. This is one of the main landmarks to be found in the Casco Antiguo or old town. Most of the interior is gothic but little remains of the gothic exterior because of many alterations undertaken in the 19th century. Inside the church you can find a rather large baroque organ built in 1769. In one of the other boroughs is the 12th century Iglesia de San Cernin or San Saturnino. The church is believed to have been built over the remains of a Roman temple dedicated to the goddess Diana. Like the Iglesia de San Nicolás it is a fortified church and was the central point in the borough known as San Cernin. It too had a military and defensive function helped again by its thick walls and two high towers. On the top of the one of the towers is a weather vane in the shape of a cockerel. Known as the Gallico de San Cernin the cockerel is one of the most popular emblems of the city.



Kathedraal Pamplona



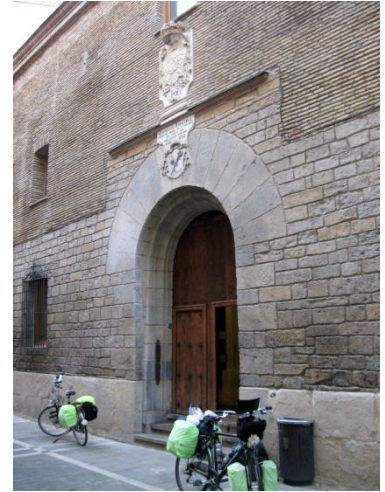
Iglesia de San Cermin

The clock in this same tower is used every morning during the Fiesta de San Fermin to announce the moment when the rocket is let off to announce the beginning of the Encierro or the running of the bulls. The Casa Consistorial is Pamplona's town hall. In 1423 when Carlos III decided to tear down the walls between the 3 separate boroughs and reunited the city he built the original Casa Consistorial to house the singular city council. The original building was demolished in 1752 and a new one built in 1760. Of this second building only the façade remains. For those of you that come during the Fiesta de Fermin it's around this building that everyone congregates on the first day of the fiesta waiting for the Mayor to start the festivities. Thousands of people gather here waving their red pañuelos (handkerchiefs) high above their heads and chanting "San Fermin" waiting for the first chupinazo (rocket blast). At noon the Mayor comes out onto



Gemeentehuis van Pamplona

the balcony and fires the first chupinazo shouting in both Spanish and Basque "People of Pamplona! Long live San Fermin". There are a number of hostels in Pamplona both private and municipal as well as a number of places for the pilgrim to have a meal and a drink. During the Fiesta de San Fermin many of the hostel's prices skyrocket and the albergues usually close. So it is probably a good idea to spend the night at one of the albergues on the route into Pamplona or stay at one of the next stops on the Camino.



Albergue in oud schoolgebouw

Camino de Santiago - Stage 4 - Pamplona/Iruña to Puente la Reina

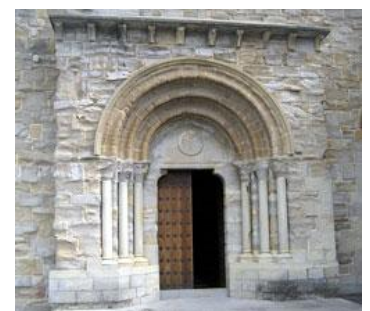
Total distance: 23.5 kilometers



Citadel

The Camino de Santiago is very well marked through Pamplona and takes you past the Citadel which is set in 69 acres of public park known as the Vuelta del Castillo which is surrounded by moats, trees and lawns. If you have time it is well worth resting a while here before you start back on your journey. The Camino also takes you through the campus of the University of Navarra which was founded by Jose Maria Escrivá de Balaguer, the 20th century catholic priest who founded Opus Dei and who was canonised by Pope John Paul II. Once through the Vuelta del Castillo you will find markers towards the village of Cizur Menor, a walk of approximately 4,5

kilometers. Along this path you will cross a bridge over the Rio Sadar and not too far away you will come across another bridge which crosses the Rio Elorz. The path will take you across the railway track and up the hill which overlooks the village of Cizur Menor. The village of Cizur Menor has played host to the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem (which later became known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) since the 12th century. In the 13th century the Order built a monastery and pilgrim hostel. What remains of the monastery has been converted into an Albergue which is still run by the Order of Malta. Worth seeing is the recently restored 13th century la Iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel and in particular its Romanesque-Gothic doorway.



Albergue van de Orde van Malta

Surprisingly this church has been used as a place to store grain for well over a century. Like so many churches in this region it is a fortress or fortified church. There are two Albergues in Cizur Menor, one is located here next to the Iglesia San Miguel Arcángel and the other, as we have already mentioned is part of the old monastery complex. There are a number of bars to get a meal as well as a small shop and a chemist. From here the Camino de Santiago starts to leave the green and lush foothills of the Pyrenees and enters into the more arid regions of Navarra and into La Rioja. Both regions famous for their wines.

Leaving Cizur Menor the road goes downhill and after about 100 meters you will fork to your right through a tree lined footpath which brings you to a steep track leading up to the Alto del Perdón. Up here you will find a wind farm with around 40 modern turbines providing electricity for the city of Pamplona.



Fuente Reniega

Before you reach the Alto del Perdón ('Mount of Forgiveness') and around 6 kilometers from Cizur Menor you come across the abandoned village of Guenduláin and the remains of a former pilgrim hospice.

A little further along you come to the village of Zariquiegui. In Zariquiegui you will find a Romanesque church called la Iglesia de San Andrés which was built in the 12th century. Most of the other buildings within the village are of a much later date ranging between the 15th and 16th centuries. This is mainly due to the village being ravaged by the Black Death (bubonic plague) which spread throughout Europe during the 14th century. Also in the village you will find a fountain known as the Fuente Reniega which means the Fountain of Renouncement or Denial in English.

There is a legend surrounding this fountain as it is said that a Pilgrim travelling the Camino, thirsty and exhausted from his walk was confronted by a fellow traveller, this traveller turns out to be the Devil in disguise. The Devil offers to show the

Pilgrim a hidden source of water but only on the condition that he renounces God, the Virgin Mary and St James. The Pilgrim held steadfast to his faith and even though it could have meant dying of thirst he refused to do what this man asked. At that moment St James, also disguised as a Pilgrim, appears and leads the thirsty and exhausted man to the hidden fountain, and using a scallop shell, provides the traveller with water to quench his thirst. After taking advantage of quenching your own thirst at the fountain continue along the path soon arriving at the Alto del Perdón. Here you will find a sculpture depicting a number of Pilgrims either on foot or on horseback as they make their way along the Camino to Santiago. There is an inscription which reads "donde se cruza el camino del viento con el de las estrellas" which in English means "where the path of the wind crosses that of the stars".

On a clear day you will get some spectacular panoramic views over the valleys below and you will be able to see the next village on your travels, that of Uterga, as well as the village of Obanos and if you are really lucky the town of Puente de la Reina, your ultimate destination on this leg of the Camino. The path down from the Alto del Perdón becomes a stony track through vineyards and almond trees, and in spring is bordered by Hyacinths and Orchids. After around 3 kilometers and after crossing the river you arrive at the village of Uterga. There are two very small



Beeldengroep van pelgrims op Alto del Perdón

Albergues here and a bar as well as a small gothic church called la Iglesia de la Asunción, but that is pretty much it. 2.5 kilometers down the road and past an almond grove you come across the village of Muruzábal. Walking past the high walled Iglesia de San Estaban and into the main square you will find a bar and a chemist. Close by you will also see the 17th century Palacio del Marqués de Zabalegui also known as the Palacio de Muruzábal. The Palace is owned by the Pérez de Rada family, descendants of the first Marqués de Zabalegui and is now a Bodega (vineyard) producing different types of wines such as Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo, which is exported to places such as Japan, Germany and the United States. Near to la Iglesia de San Esteban there is a sign which points to Eunate which is about 3 kilometers away. It is worth taking a detour to visit the beautiful church there.



Iglesia de Santa María de Eunate

Eunate is also where the Camino Aragonés joins the Camino Francés. La Ermita Santa Maria de Eunate is believed to have been built in the 12th century but little is known of its origins. The octagonal shape points to there being a connection to the Knights Templar. Certain aspects of the building's construction also point to the building possibly having been used as a funeral chapel for the pilgrims that passed this way. There are a number of graves in the grounds that show the scallop shell symbol. There is a tiny 7 bed albergue next to the church if you wish to stay. The Camino from here follows the Camino Aragonés alongside the Rio Robo meeting up with the Camino Francés in Obanos.

If you haven't taken the detour to Eunate walk out of the village of Muruzábal and turn right at a metal cross where you will begin to walk up a hill towards Obanos, 2 kilometers from Muruzábal, passing the beautiful Iglesia de San Juan Bautista. The village is well worth spending some time in and if you wish to stay the night there is an Albergue as well as a small hostel, a restaurant, bar and bank. Obanos is a peaceful village but it does have a rather murderous past which culminated in the legend of San Guillén and Santa Felicia. Felicia was the sister of Guillén of Aquitaine who, following the family tradition started by William the 10th Duke of Aquitaine, decided to embark on a pilgrimage to Santiago. Upon returning from her pilgrimage she could not settle back into her life of privilege and wanted to help those less fortunate than herself. Leaving the French court she headed back to Navarra to live as a recluse and servant in a village called Amocáin.



Iglesia de San Juan Bautista

Her family was understandably furious and her brother, Guillén, was dispatched to try and bring her back. After much searching Guillén finally tracked her down to the village of Obanos, but despite much begging and pleading Felicia refused to return to France with her brother. He was so angry at this response that in a fit of fury he stabbed his sister with a dagger.

Racked with guilt Guillén decided, as a penance, that he would follow in his sister's footsteps and make a pilgrimage to Santiago. Once he reached Santiago he now understood why his sister had felt the way she did and he too decided to dedicate his life helping others. On returning home and still inconsolable over the death of his sister, he returned to Obanos and built the shrine Nuestra Señora de Arnotegui where he lived out his days helping other pilgrims and dedicating his life to prayer. Both brother and sister were made saints. Santa Felicia's grave is in Labiano where villagers believe that by venerating her remains they will be cured of their headaches. San Guillén's relics can be found in the Ermita Nuestra Señora de Arnotegui and every Maundy Thursday his silver covered skull is used to bless the wine that is given to the villagers.



San Guillén

Leaving Obanos you follow the yellow arrows out of the village and past the Ermita San Salvador. Here the route is pretty much just a dirt track and as you head downhill through vineyards and fields you see the town of Puente la Reina in the distance. Soon you will come across a statue of Santiago in his Pilgrim robes. This marks the point where the Camino Francés and the Camino Aragonés meet. After about 300 meters and following the Carretera Pamplona you will enter the town of Puente la Reina. This town was founded in the 12th century by Alfonso, el Batallador (the battler) and is another example of a Pueblo Calle where the town is



De routes naar Santiago worden één geheel

built around the main street. This street is a wonder in itself with all the impressive manorial style houses along it.

As you enter Puente de la Reina the first building you come to is the former pilgrims hospital which is now an Albergue situated opposite the Iglesia del Crucifijo which was built in the 12th century by the Knights Templar. This church gets its name from the Y shaped crucifix which is said to have been brought here by German pilgrims some time in the 14th Century who supposedly donated it to the church in thanks for the treatment they received at the hospital. They were said to have carried the cross on their shoulders throughout their pilgrimage.



Albergue bij binnenkomst Puente la Reina

The church had originally been named Santa Maria de los Huertos but after the Knights Templar were driven out of the town in the early 14th century the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem took it over in the mid 15th century. They added a convent (San Juanistas) next door and a hospital to care for the pilgrims. In 1469 la Cofradía del Crucifijo (the Brotherhood of the Crucifix) took the church over thus giving it the new name of Iglesia del Crucifijo. It is now run by los Padres Reparadores who took over the complex in the early 20th century. Close by is another church la Iglesia de Santiago el Mayor. As you approached Puente de la Reina you will have seen its vast bell tower which dominates the skyline of the town. Originally built in the 12th century it was substantially rebuilt in the 16th century.



Santiyako Beltza

The church has a number of sculptures but the most notable is that of the Santiyako Beltza (beltza means black in the Basque language) because of its dark face. Puente la Reina like many others towns and villages along the Camino owes its existence solely to the Camino de Santiago. In the 11th century there was only one way of crossing the River Arga, by hiring someone to take you across in their boat. Unfortunately, seeing an opportunity to make money, these people overcharged the pilgrims for the privilege of being ferried across the river. Queen Doña Mayor the wife of Sancho III ordered a bridge to be built over the river and thus gave the town its name.

Puente la Reina in English is bridge of the queen. The bridge can be found at the far end of the town and you will pass over this as you continue your journey onwards.

There is a little legend associated with the bridge that of El Pajaro Txori (txori means bird in Basque). For many years after the Puente de la Reina was built there was a little niche in the bridge which held the image of la Virgen del Puy. One day in 1834 a mysterious little

bird suddenly appears and starts to clean the image of the Virgin. He would use his wings to clean the dust off the figure and his beak to break off any other dirt. The locals were fascinated by this and celebrated this in fiestas for many years. The statue of the Virgin was removed many years ago and now resides in the Iglesia de San Pedro. In Puente la Reina you will find two Albergues, the first as we mentioned earlier you will have passed on the way into the town, as well as a private hostel. You will also find a number of cafés, bakeries and places that offer a Pilgrim menu. There are also a number of banks and other shops.



Brug over de rivier Arga

Camino de Santiago - Stage 5 - Puente la Reina to Estella

Total distance: 22 kilometers

Walking down the Calle Mayor you will reach the medieval bridge over the river Arga and the route out of Puente la Reina. Turning left and following the road you will walk past the Convento Comendadores del Espíritu Santo and the Barrio de las Monjas. After about 100 meters you will come to a metal cross with a scallop shell, at this point you will need to turn left down a dirt track. This track follows the flow of the River Arga and after about a kilometer you will pass a factory to your right. The track here begins to go uphill and it is here you wave goodbye to the River Arga. The track continues through fields and past the remains of the 13th Century Monasterio de Bargota and after having walked around 5 kilometers you reach the town of Mañeru. As you enter the town you come across a medieval cruceiro or cross. Here you will find a private hostel, a couple of shops and café bars as well as a chemist. The town contains some remarkable houses with stone balconies and impressive family crests on their facades as well as a neo-classical 18th century church called la Iglesia de San Pedro. Leaving the village the path takes you through some olive groves and vineyards and past a cemetery. After about 2.5 kilometers you pass through a gothic arch into the medieval hilltop village of Cirauquí. A little unusually the Camino passes through a building where you can stamp your own credencial. The 12th century Iglesia de San Román has an impressive doorway which is mainly Romanesque but also shows Cistercian influences.



Iglesia San Román

There is an Albergue here which can be booked in advance and which serves both dinner and breakfast. Leaving through one of the gothic arches the Camino takes a downhill track which leads to an old paved Roman road considered to be one of the best preserved examples along the Camino. After

crossing a rather dilapidated Roman bridge the route meanders through rolling yet arid hills. Every now and then the Roman road disappears only to reappear again. After nearly 5 kilometers you will cross the medieval bridge over the Rio Salado (salt river). In Aymeric Picaud's 12th century guidebook the writer warns the pilgrim:

"Beware of drinking from it or watering your horse in it, for this river brings death".

Once over the bridge you will pass through a tunnel under the road and down an asphalted road with the village of Lorca ahead. There are a couple of private hostels here that offer accommodation and a Pilgrim menu. Both hostels have cafés but there are also some vending machines as you leave the village. Leave the village passing the church and travelling down the main street. Turn left onto the NA-1110 but then take the left down a track that winds through fields adjacent to this main road. After 5 kilometers you will come to another tunnel under the NA-1110 and a Roman bridge which crosses the river and leads to the village of Villatuerta where you will find a couple of bars and a chemist as well as a recently renovated Albergue. At the top of the hill you will find the gothic 12th century Iglesia de la Asunción, an ideal place to rest a while. Leave Villatuerta by following the tarmac road called Camino de Estella and after a short while you will come across the track that takes you past what remains



Iglesia del Espiritu Santo

of the Ermita de San Miguel. Continue along the path, passing the picnic area, and across the small footbridge over a stream and after approximately 4 kilometers you will pass the Iglesia del Espiritu Santo and the church of Santo Domingo. Pass through the tunnel under the road and enter the town of Estella. Estella is another town that came into existence because of the large number of Pilgrims that followed the Camino de Santiago in the middle ages. A romantic place it has a number of palaces, stately homes, churches and beautiful buildings which earned it the name "Toledo of the North". In his Pilgrim guide, Aymeric Picaud said "Estella is a city of good bread, excellent wine, much meat and fish and all kinds of pleasures." The town was founded by King Sancho Ramírez in 1090 and one of the most impressive buildings in the town, the Palacio de los Reyes de Navarra built in the early 12th century, is considered a rare example of a civic Romanesque building, one of only a few remaining non-religious buildings from this era. If you are a

fan of architecture, and you still have a little energy after your trek, this town is a little piece of heaven as there are so many buildings worth seeing including two 18th century palaces surrounding the Plaza de los Fueros. There is also the 16th century Eguía Palace, the 17th century Governor's Palace and the house of Fray Diego de Estella, a 16th century stately home to name but a few. If you are interested in religious buildings there are the ruins of the medieval church Iglesia de San Pedro de Lizarra. Alternatively, there is the Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa with its 12th century cloister or the 14th century Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro as well as a number of others. The Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro in particular has a very interesting 16th century façade. Above the main door there are 3 rows of sculptures. The highest row of sculpture depicts the crucifixion, the next row depicts the 3 Mary's at the sepulchre (Mary of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and John), the rescue of the innocents and when Mary Magdalene recognises Jesus following the crucifixion, the lowest row depicts the last supper. The door is also surrounded by the 12 apostles. Most importantly after having walked so far you will want somewhere to eat and sleep. The town has 2 refugios and a few hostels as well as a number of restaurants, bars and cafés which are found over the Rio Ega.



Puente de la Cárcel over de rio Ega



Iglesia Santo Sepulcro

Camino de Santiago - Stage 6 - Estella to Los Arcos

Total distance: 21.8 km

Leave Estella via the Plaza San Martín and along the Calle San Nicolás passing through a gate with a carving depicting the Crucifixion. At a roundabout you will need to cross the main road and follow the road signposted Camino de Logroño where you will come across another roundabout that is decorated with a large sculpture of a star. Cross the road and walk up the hill along a dirt road heading towards the village of Ayegui, now a suburb of Estella, where you will find an Albergue, some shops, a bakery and some cafés. As you reach Ayegui follow the yellow arrows and head towards the Monasterio de Irache.

The monastery was one of the first Benedictine monasteries in the Navarra region and will soon become a Parador (hotel). Building commenced in the 11th century and in its long history it has been a pilgrim hospital, a university, a military hospital, a wine museum and a religious school. One of the interesting sights is the monastery's cloister which had been started prior to the counter-reformation brought on by the Council of Trent. What is unusual about it is that half of the cloister is classically decorated including nude figures but the other half, built after the Council of Trent, is decorated



Monasterio in Irache

solely with religious themes. Just across the way from the Monastery you will find the Bodega de Irache where pilgrims can fill their bottles with free wine from a tap. The wine fountain was built in 1991 and the 2 plaques invite the pilgrim to take a drink. The 2 plaques say:



Wijntap Irache

“A beber sin abusar te invitamos con agrado. Para poderlo llevar el vino ha de ser comprado”.

(“We are pleased to invite you to drink in moderation. If you wish to take the wine with you, you will have to buy it.”)

“Peregrino si quieres llegar a Santiago con fuerza y vitalidad de este gran vino echa un trago y brinda por la felicidad”.

(“Pilgrim, if you wish to arrive at Santiago full of strength and vitality, have a drink of this great wine and raise a toast to happiness.”)

After partaking of the free wine head back up the hill past the monastery and through the Plaza de Irache down a gravel road lined by vines towards a group of new houses and the Hotel Irache. Pass behind the hotel and along the road passing under the NA-1110 and continue along a gated track through some woodland. High on a hillside you can see the Ermita San Esteban, built from the stones from el Castillo de Monjardín. After about 5 kilometers you arrive at the village of Azqueta. Walk through the village and continue along the path towards Villamayor de Monjardín, the church spire can be seen just over the ridge. The path takes an uphill route and at the top you reach el Fuente de los Moros (fountain of the Moors), a 12th century gothic fountain that has recently been restored. A little way in the distance on top of a hill you can see the remains of el Castillo de San Esteban de Deyo. Passing by the Bodega Castillo de Monjardín you soon reach Villamayor de Monjardín where there are a couple of Refugios, one private and one public, along with a café. Worth visiting is the 12th century Iglesia de San Andrés on your way out of Villamayor. Walking along a concrete path you soon come to a gravel path which takes you through vineyards, wheat fields and woodland, passing the ancient Fuente del Pozo de Baurín and through more fields. The 12 kilometer route between Villamayor de Monjardín and Los Arcos is a relatively flat and clearly marked route, but one with little shade, so make sure you have plenty of water with you. There is a fountain along the route but there will still be at least 10 kilometers to the next point where you can replenish your water supply. The route continues through wheat fields and olive groves and eventually reaching the outskirts of Los Arcos. Here you will find a fountain to quench your thirst, forking left take the Calle Mayor into the town of Los Arcos. The town is located on the banks of the Río Odrón and is dominated by the Iglesia de Santa María, a church dating originally from the 12th century, but which wasn't completed until the 18th century. Inside the church is a mixture of Baroque and Gothic, there is also has a gothic cloister and a Renaissance bell tower, which can be visited by Pilgrims after mass.



Villamayor de Monjardín



Iglesia de Santa María in Los Arcos

As with Estella, if you are a fan of architecture, the streets of Los Arcos are filled with 17th and 18th baroque style manor houses. Also in common with Estella and Puente la Reina, Los Arcos came into existence primarily through the Camino de Santiago. For those wishing to spend the night here Los Arcos has 4 Albergues, 3 private and 1 municipal along with a number of restaurants, shops and banks.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 7 - Los Arcos to Logroño

Total distance: 28 km

Leave Los Arcos passing the cemetery whose entrance has the following inscription:

Yo que fui lo que tu eres, tu seras lo que yo soi
I, who once was what you are, you will be what I am.

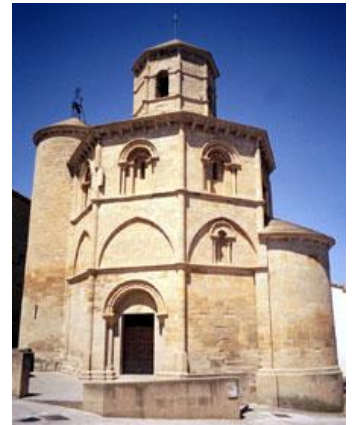
Passing through an arch and across the Río Odrón, take the route through farmland and more vineyards towards the hamlet of Sansol. On a hill not too far away is the Basilica of San Gregorio Ostiense. Legend has it that in the 11th Century the Navarra region had succumbed to a plague of locusts. Pope Benedict the 9th sent along San Gregorio de Ostiense to look at what could be causing the plague. He concluded that because the local people were of low moral character and had lost their devotion to the church, that the locusts were a punishment from



Basilica van San Gregorio Ostiense

God. He ordered this behaviour to stop and soon after the plagues ceased. The local people, so happy with what had happened, did not want him to leave and San Gregorio remained in Logroño until his death in 1044. Following his death two bishops, the bishops of Nájera and of Pamplona, wanted San Gregorio to be buried in their respective cathedrals and an unholy row erupted. It took the intervention of the King of Navarra, who ordered that a tomb be built on neutral ground, to end the row and subsequently the Basilica de San Gregorio Ostiense was built over the tomb of the saint.

After 7 kilometers you reach the hamlet of Sansol which gets its name from the patron saint San Zoilo. There is a private hostel here as well as a café and restaurant that offer a Pilgrim menu. From the forecourt of the Iglesia de San Zoilo you can see your next port of call, the village of Torres del Río, down below in the Río Linares valley 1 kilometer ahead in the distance. Leave Sansol by crossing the main road and walking down hill and across a stone bridge over the Río Linares, climbing up into the village of Torre del Río. The village has 3 refugios, a bar/restaurant, a shop and a bank as well a beautiful 12th century Romanesque church, la Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro. The church is octagonal in shape and is believed to have been built by the Knights Templar. Its design is similar to mosques found in southern Spain with Byzantine and Hispano-Arabic influences. If you want to visit the church you will need to ask for the key and possibly make a small donation.



Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro

Head out of Torre del Río up through some orchards, past the cemetery and onto a dirt track. Continue along this track past the Santuario de Nuestra Señora del Poyo. Looking out over the open countryside you should be able to see Viana and your final destination on this leg of the Camino de Santiago, Logroño. From here the route rises and falls as you walk in and out of the valleys. Following a dirt track you drop down into the Cornava valley and then back up again over the main road and into the outskirts Viana. Taking the Calle Algorrada walk through the archway through the high walls surrounding the town and onto Rua de Santa María. The heavily fortified town of Viana was founded by King Sancho III known as El Fuerte (the strong) in 1219 as a defence against the Kingdom of Castile. During peacetime the town needed to make alliances with the surrounding villages and therefore opened up the town as a trade route. Over the years the Kingdoms of Navarra and Castilla continually fought over land and in 1507 sees the town come under siege again. It is during this siege that the infamous Cesare Borgia loses his life. Cesare Borgia was the son of the equally infamous Pope Alexander VI and brother to Lucrezia.

A very capable general in his day, he was exiled to Spain by Pope Julius II and was imprisoned in the Castillo de la Mota. Cesare managed to escape and went to join his brother-in-law King Juan III of Navarra who made him captain of his army. This ultimately led to his death at Viana whilst trying to overthrow the Count of Lerin. One of the best buildings in Viana is the impressive gothic Iglesia de Santa María, built between 1250 and 1312, with the Renaissance style tower being added in the 16th century. Cesare Borgia's remains were initially buried in a marble tomb beneath the altar. His debauched and sinful past so angered the church that, following a visit by the Bishop of Calahorra in 1527, his remains were moved and buried beneath a cobbled pavement in un-consecrated ground to be "trampled on by men and beasts".



Viana, iglesia de Santa María

His remains were dug up accidentally by workmen in 1945 and moved to the town hall. Over the years there have been many requests by the locals to give Borgia a proper burial which the Catholic Church has constantly rejected. However, in 2007 the Archbishop of Pamplona finally relented and agreed that Borgia could finally be re-buried within the church on 11th March 2007, 1 day before the 500th anniversary of his death. There are a couple of Albergues in Viana as well as hostels and some hotels. There are a number of cafés, restaurants and bars where you can eat and drink before you start on the final leg of this stage of the Camino towards Logroño. Leave Viana through the Portal San Felices and turn left down Calle la Rueda and then take a second right down a street noting the tiny pilgrim situated in a small niche on the house numbered 1. Follow the yellow arrows past the allotments and towards the NA-1110 and after crossing the main road follow the track through the fields eventually bringing you to the Ermita de la Virgen de Cuevas (Hermitage of the Virgin of the Caves). Unfortunately this building is no longer a chapel but a private house where you will find a



Wapen van Logroño

fountain and a picnic area where you can rest awhile. The path takes you through fields, past woodland and finally through more woodland. You will pass a large paper factory (Papelería del Ebro) and after crossing the footbridge over a small river you have left Navarra and entered into the more famous wine region of La Rioja. There is a newly tarmacked lane here, unusually in red tarmac, which leads to a tunnel under the NA-1110 and under the flyover for the motorway. The path takes you through another tunnel and up towards the remains of the ancient city of Cantabria which is currently being excavated. Heading downhill you will pass the Casa de Chozo where Doña Felisa used to stamp your credencial whilst you enjoyed refreshments under her large fig tree. The path continues for approximately 1 kilometer and brings us to a cemetery on the outskirts of Logroño. Continue walking down Avenida de Medavia towards the 19th century Puente de Piedra over the Río Ebro, one of Spain's longest rivers flowing from here all the way to the Mediterranean. The current bridge, restored in the late 19th century, replaced a medieval pilgrim bridge which had been built in the 11th century. The original bridge had 3 towers and is included in the

Logroño coat of arms. Logroño is the capital of the world famous La Rioja region with a population of over 150,000 and is the third largest town along the Camino Francés. As well as being a university city it is also the centre of the region's wine industry. Because of its location, like its neighbour the fortified town of Viana, the city was often a battle ground between the Kingdoms of Castilla and Navarra which is the reason the city has a fortress-like appearance. Once over the bridge take the second right down the Calle de la Rua Vieja passing the Iglesia Maria del Palacio with its pyramid tower known as la aguja



Logroño: Iglesia de Santiago el Real

(the needle) and one of the hostels and continue down the Calle de Barriocepa into the medieval centre of Logroño. Entering the Plaza de Santiago you will see a chequer board paving depicting sites along both the Camino Francés and the Camino Aragonés. This is actually used a board game called Juego de la Oca, something similar to snakes and ladders. In the same square is the Fuente de los Peregrinos (the Pilgrim's fountain).



Schaakbord met Caminosteden

The Catedral de Santa María de la Redonda can be found in the Plaza del Mercado. Another church worth visiting is the Iglesia de Santiago el Real located on the route at the end of Calle Rúa Vieja with its impressive statue above the entrance of Santiago Matamoros (Santiago, the Moor slayer). The current building replaces the 9th century church which had been built to commemorate the legendary battle of Clavijo. Legend states that in 844 the Christians were fighting the Moors. Greatly outnumbered by the Moorish troops and facing certain defeat a knight on a white horse appeared brandishing a huge sword, who promptly set about slaying the Moors. The Christians believed the knight was Santiago returned from the dead and from that day onwards he became known as Santiago Matamoros.



Logroño: Santiago Matamoros

There is a large refugio as you enter the town near the Iglesia Maria del Palacio and a smaller one close to the Iglesia de Santiago as well as plenty of cafés, restaurants and bars.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 8 - Logroño to Nájera

Total distance: 29 km

Before you leave Logroño make sure you have had a hearty breakfast and take some lunch and plenty of water with you as the next town called Navarrete is 13 kilometers away and there are very few opportunities to stock up in between. To leave Logroño head back towards the Iglesia de Santiago down the Calle Barriocepo through the Casco Antiguo (old town) and leave the old town through an arch in the town's walls called la Puerta del Camino. Continue down Calle de los Depositos past a roundabout with fountains and head down Calle del Marques de Murieta. After a while this road becomes Avenida de Burgos and eventually takes you through a tunnel under the motorway. After about 2 kilometers you will begin to walk through open park land which leads you to a reservoir called Pantano de la Grajera. The path continues along the retaining wall and across a couple of bridges to a picnic area and café bar. The path follows the edge of the reservoir and along a gravel path and then a dirt track through fields and vineyards and across the motorway. Soon after you come across the restored ruins of the Hospital de Peregrinos founded in 1185 by the Order of San Juan de Acre to administer to the Peregrinos (pilgrims) undertaking the Camino and shortly arrive in the small town of Navarrete. Like so many of the towns along the Rioja/Navarra border Navarrete, sitting atop the hill Cerro Tedeón, owes its existence to the Castilian kings wanting to establish a fortress town to defend the border. A castle once stood at the top of the hill and its remains can still be seen. The area surrounding Navarrete is full of dark red clay and within the town you will find a number of pottery factories and workshops. The town is also famous for its Rioja wine, especially the rosé, and has at least 9 bodegas in the vicinity. The 16th century Iglesia de la Asunción is worth visiting with its gilded Baroque altarpiece with a statue of St James near the top. There are several cafés and restaurants offering a pilgrim menu and there are 2 albergues, one private within the town and another private albergue about 1.3 kilometers outside the town in a small village called Sotes. There are also a couple of Hostals for you to stay in.

Upon leaving Navarrete, take the road past the Iglesia de la Asunción and left down Calle Mayor Alta onto the main road passing the cemetery. The 12th century gates to the cemetery were originally part of the Hospital de Peregrinos which you passed on entering the town.



Iglesia de la Asunción

Passing the cemetery the road continues onto a gravel track taking you through some vineyards. From here on in the road is a little awkward, not in terms of difficulty, but it's a little fiddly because it has been designed to try and avoid the very busy N120. You will soon come to a junction where you have 2 options, keep on to Nájera about 14 kilometers away or take a slight detour into Ventosa, which will add a further 2 kilometers to your journey but where you can get something to eat at the restaurant that offers a pilgrim menu or you have the option of a café and bakery. You could also visit the 16th century Iglesia de San Saturnino Siglo and stay at the albergue just below the church. If you have chosen to go to Ventosa you will leave the village by an uphill dirt track heading towards the Alto de San Antón and the ruins of the Convento de San Antón, a former convent and pilgrim hospital. Continuing along the dirt track through yet more vineyards you cross the road just right of the Poyo de Roldán. It is here where, in the late 8th century, Roland is alleged to have killed the giant Ferragut.

Stories tell us that Ferragut was a Syrian giant said to have been a descendant of Goliath (as in David and Goliath) who had been sent to Spain to fight Charlemagne's Christian army. He is said to have had the strength of 40 men and feared no weapon. Many of Charlemagne's men were sent to fight the giant and were defeated every time. Finally Roland, one of Charlemagne's knights, was able to approach the giant and fought him for 2 days using anything at his disposal including swords, sticks, bare fists and stones.



Gevecht van Roland

Despite this Roland was unable to even wound the giant. On the third day the two men called a truce and sat down to discuss religion. During this conversation, and following the drinking of copious amounts of wine, Ferragut let slip that his weakest point was his navel. The next morning the two men began fighting again and Roland, remembering what the giant had told him the day before, slayed Ferragut by piercing his navel with a spear.

Back on the Camino you will cross a footbridge over the Río Yalde and walk past a gravel factory that has a poem to Pilgrims written on the side. Click here for the poem in its entirety as well as the English translation. The path continues through some vineyards which bring you to the outskirts of Nájera. From here follow the signs for the town centre and cross the bridge over the Río Najerilla. Nájera is an Arabic name which means "between rocks" as the town is situated between rocky crags. The town is historically important as it had been the base for many of the Navarran kings during medieval times after King Garcia Sanchez chose it as his base. In the early 11th century King Sancho III (the Great) ruled most of northern Spain, from Catalunya to Galicia, from here. Sancho III also modified the Camino route so that pilgrims could rest in Nájera. The town was ceded to the kingdom of Castilla in 1076 when King Sancho IV was killed by his brother Ramón and the kingdom divided. The town is built on the banks of the river Najerilla and along its banks you will find the Monasterio and Iglesia de Santa María La Real. Built in 1032, it has undergone a number of modifications due to damage sustained during the Peninsular war. The church has a Royal Pantheon bearing the tombs of some thirty monarchs including the mausoleum of the Dukes of Nájera. In the crypt you will find something unusual in a church, a cave.



Crypte in Monasterio Santa María la Real

archaeology, directly opposite the monastery is the Nájera History and Archaeological Museum. Nájera is a large town with several bars and cafés and facilities associated with a town of this size. If you wish to stay here there are two albergues, one private and one municipal.

According to legend King Garcia, Sancho's eldest son, was out partaking of a bit of falconry when his bird pursued a dove into a cave. He followed the falcon into the cave and was surprised to find both birds side by side in front of a figure of the Virgin Mary with a vase of fresh lilies at her feet. Over the next few years King Garcia was successful in a number of battles and he attributed this to the Virgin Mary and therefore decided to build a church in her honour. The siting of the church was to be over the cave where he first received the vision, which explains why there is a cave in the crypt.



Monasterio Santa María la Real

Camino de Santiago - Stage 9 - Nájera to Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Total distance: 21 km

Leave Nájera down the Calle de las Viudas turning right in front of the monastery church and uphill along Calle Costanilla. The road continues uphill into some woods and through some vineyards. After about 6 kilometers you will come across the village of Azofra. In medieval times Azofra was the site of many pilgrim hospitals and there has been a hostel here since 1168 when it was founded by Isabel la Católica.

There is also la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles with a carved statue of Santiago Peregrino inside. The village has 3 albergues and a couple of restaurants offering a pilgrim menu. On the outskirts of the village there is a botanical garden and park dedicated to la Virgen de Valbanera, the patron saint of La Rioja, and close by are the remains of the Fuente de los Romeros, a mediaeval pilgrim fountain. Leave Azofra by going through the park and take a left onto a track and after about 1 kilometer you will come across a rollo or medieval pilgrim cross which marked the border between Azofra and Alescanco. From here the way markers take you through fields and up past the Rioja Alta Golf club into the village of Cirueña. It is worth stating that before you get to Cirueña there are



Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles



Monasterio San Millán de Yuso

signposts towards San Millán de la Cogolla where you will find the twin monasteries of San Millán de Yuso and San Millán de Suso, a UNESCO world heritage site. However, the site is 20 kilometers off the Camino so if you do wish to visit it's probably advisable to share a taxi. Coming back to the main Camino continue through Cirueña and along farm tracks until you come to the outskirts of Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Continue along the road and into the centre of the town and its old quarter where you will find an albergue and the cathedral.

The town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada was founded by a young shepherd called Domingo who had tried to join the monastery at San Millán de la Cogolla but was turned away because the young man was illiterate. After failing to enter the monastery he decided to become a hermit and set up his hermitage in some woods on a notorious part of the Camino and administered to the pilgrims who passed this way. A chance meeting with San Gregorio, who had helped rid Los Arcos of a plague of locusts, led Domingo to be ordained a priest. With the support of King Alfonso VI, who was keen to bring new settlers into the now mainly Muslim region, San Domingo began to build bridges and hostels and built a road between Nájera and Burgos. San Domingo died in 1109 at the age of 90 and became the patron saint of civil engineers. The saint was initially buried in a tomb at the side of the Camino, which he had built himself, but his admirers later buried him in the cathedral and named the city after him, a title awarded by Alfonso XI in 1334. The hospital he built is now a Parador, an



Kathedraal San Salvador

expensive 4 star hotel, not quite what Santo Domingo would have intended it to be used for. Santo Domingo de la Calzada's mediaeval streets have been declared a National Historic Interest Site because of its grand buildings, particularly the Catedral San Salvador and the old pilgrim hospital, its plazas and the city walls, built by Pedro I "The Cruel". The cathedral of San Salvador dates from the 12th century and is a mixture of Romanesque, Plateresque and Gothic. Inside you will find Santo Domingo's mausoleum. At the rear of the cathedral there is an ornate chicken coup, the permanent home of a cockerel and a hen (which are replaced once a fortnight).



Parador in Santo Domingo

The legend behind the chickens came about through a story begun in the middle ages. It is said that a German family (parents and teenage son) were attempting the Camino and stopped in Santo Domingo for the night. A flirtly barmaid took a fancy to the 18 year old son but the boy, probably because he didn't understand the language or was overly pious, was having none of it and turned her down. The scorned girl sought revenge and placed a silver goblet into his luggage (there are different accounts of exactly what was placed in the bag, some say it was a bag of money others say it was a chalice from the church). The next morning the goblet was discovered missing and the barmaid accused the young German boy of stealing. The boy's luggage was searched and the goblet found and he was promptly brought before the local judge, found guilty and hanged. The grief stricken parents continued on their pilgrimage and upon arriving at Santiago de Compostela, prayed to St James for the soul of their son.

On their return journey they again decided to stay the night in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Upon reaching the town they were surprised to find that their son was still hanging from the gibbet and more surprisingly, that he was still alive. The parents rushed to see the judge and explained what they had seen. So incensed was the judge that they had the audacity to interrupt his dinner that he proclaimed "your son is about as alive as these roast chickens I am about to eat". At that moment the two birds jumped off the plate and began to fly, so proclaiming the boy's innocence. In memory of this miraculous event a snow white cockerel and a hen, donated by local farmers, have been kept in the ornate gothic henhouse in the cathedral ever since. There are a number of houses on the main street, the Calle Mayor, worth visiting as well as the City Hall and Convento de San Francisco. Because of its position along the Camino de Santiago there are a number of religious monuments and Ermitas all around the town. Like many large towns you will find all the necessary facilities.

There are 2 albergues and at very busy periods the city council allows pilgrims to sleep in the sports hall. The Casa de Santos is the Pilgrims information office.



Levende haan en kip in kerkelijk kippenhok

Camino de Santiago - Stage 10 - Santo Domingo de la Calzada to Belorado

Total distance: 22.9 km



Puente del Santo

Leave Santo Domingo de la Calzada by following the way markers, metal arrows embedded in the road, passing the cathedral and turning left onto the Calle Mayor and then right onto the main road, Calle de los Palmajeros which soon becomes Avenida de la Rioja. The road leads you across the 148 meter long Puente del Santo (Saint's Bridge), the bridge Santo Domingo built with its 16 arches. Unfortunately the original bridge is largely hidden because of various embellishments over the centuries.

Cross the bridge over the Río Oja, following mainly farm tracks

you will shortly come across a T junction giving you a choice of 2 routes, one is slightly longer, approximately 3 kilometers, but it does avoid the main road or you could take the slightly shorter route of approximately 2 kilometers. Whichever route you choose you will come to the town of Grañón.

Dating back to the 9th century the town boasted a castle built by King Alfonso III to defend against Muslim invasion. The castle soon fell into ruins but the town prospered because of the Camino and at one time had two monasteries, a pilgrim hospice as well as fortifications. Unfortunately no traces of the walls remain and the only remaining building of note is the restored 16th century Iglesia de San Juan Bautista, built over the site of one of the old monasteries. Inside you will find a fine example of a Baroque alter piece or Retablo.



Barokke retabel

On your way from Santo Domingo to Grañón you most likely passed a simple cross called la Cruz de los Valientes. In the 14th century the towns of Grañón and Santo Domingo were in dispute over a piece of land situated between the two towns. There didn't appear to be any solution to the issue of who owned the land and the situation very nearly ended in all out war. Rather than letting the situation deteriorate even further, the elders of the two towns met to discuss the problem and the solution they came up with was a rather unusual one – a bare knuckle fight. The towns had to choose two men, one from each side who would fight for their respective towns. The man who won the fight would win the land for his town. Grañón chose a common labourer called Martín García as their champion, but Santo Domingo cheated a little and chose a professional fighter.

They put their prize fighter on a “power” diet and on the day of the fight covered him in olive oil so that his opponent couldn't get a grip on him. Despite all their shenanigans and following a long and bitter fight, it was Martín García, not the professional fighter, who came out victorious. Returning to the Camino, in Grañón there is an albergue called Hospital de Peregrinos which can be found next to the Iglesia de San Juan Bautista. Head out of the village following the markings, don't worry if you feel like you are going back on yourself, the route will eventually turn left past a modern barn and onto a minor road. Follow this road and after about 200m you will come to a barn with a yellow arrow painted on it. Take this route over a bridge across the Rio Relachigo, taking a left where you come upon a huge sign indicating the border between La Rioja and Castilla y León. Continue down a farm road and after approximately 3 kilometers you reach the village of Redicilla del Camino.

Redicilla del Camino is a small, one street village that has owed its existence to the Camino since the 11th century. The village has a long history of caring for pilgrims and once had 3 pilgrim hospitals and as many as 11 hermitages. Here you will find the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Calle, which contains a beautiful 12th century Romanesque baptismal font which is well worth stopping to see. The albergue, Hospital de San Lázaro, is built on the site of one of the original medieval pilgrim hospitals and is situated opposite the church. Leaving Redicilla del Camino past the church and public garden along the Calle Mayor, cross the main road (N120) and then take the gravel track until you arrive at Castildelgado. Castildelgado once had a monastery and pilgrims hospital, but nothing really remains of either of these buildings. There is a sorry looking church, Iglesia de San Pedro, but little else other than a bar/restaurant, bakery and a hostel. Leaving the village take the track that runs parallel with the main road and after about 1 kilometer take a left turn onto a smaller road which leads to Vitoria de la Rioja, the birthplace of Santo Domingo. Unfortunately, the house in which he was born has recently been

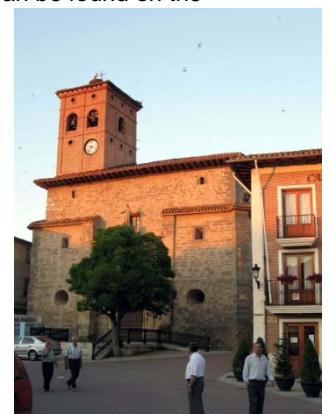


Binnenplaatsje van Hospederia San Lázaro



Dooptont uit de 12e eeuw in Redicilla del Camino

demolished but the font in which he was baptised can be seen in the Iglesia Vitoria de la Rioja. The Camino de Santiago did not originally pass this way but was redirected in the 11th Century by Sancho III to pass through Belorado. For those wishing to stay the night there is a small albergue which sleeps about 12 people. Head out of the village along a quiet country road and then down a track which runs alongside the main road. After approximately 4 kilometers you come to a small village with delusions of grandeur. Villamayor del Río, or roughly translated, large town of the river, is in fact a small village by a little stream. There is not much to Villamayor del Río, but there is an albergue for those wishing to stay. There is also a restaurant on the main road, but be warned, despite being on the Camino they discourage backpacks and walking sticks. So if you choose to go in you will be asked to leave your backpacks and sticks outside. Continue through the village on the track that runs parallel to the main road and you will soon come across a picnic area, cross the road and follow the track into Belorado. Lying in the valley of the Río Tirón in the shadow of the mountain, this town can trace its origins to Roman times. It once had a castle, which now lies in ruins but from which you get fabulous views of the valley. By the 13th century the town was home to 8 churches, none of which have survived. However, there are two churches, the 16th century Iglesia de Santa María and the 18th Century Iglesia de San Pedro. The Iglesia de San Pedro contains some impressive altars some of which depict Santiago Matamoros and the pilgrim or peregrino. The Monasterio de Santa María de la Bretonera which was re-established in the 14th century can be found on the outskirts of the town, as can the Convento Santa Clara. The Camino, once deviated from its original route, played a part in the town's development. In medieval times the town had a thriving Jewish community, like so many other towns. The area now known as Barrio Nuevo was once the Jewish ghetto. The Jews were expelled by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabela in the 14th century, which caused the ruin of the local economy. Unfortunately, the area hasn't fared so well in modern times either with the gradual demise of the leather industry. In its favour Belorado does have an unusually high concentration of bars and cafés and two albergues close by. The tourism office is currently holding an exhibition on the Camino in the Centro de Promoción Jacobeo which may be worth a visit. Check before you go as 2010 was a holy year and the exhibition may have only been running during that time.



Belorado: Iglesia de San Pedro

Camino de Santiago - Stage 11 - Belorado to San Juan de Ortega

Total distance: 24km

Leave Belorado by walking down the Calle Mayor, taking a left onto Calle Raimondo de Miguel and then onto Calle Hipoloto Lopez. As you head out of Belorado you pass by the Convento Santa Clara, built on the site of a hermitage which was destroyed by the Moors. Continue following the markers and you eventually come to the N120 where the town's exit signs are. Cross the main road and the Río Tíron using the pedestrian bridge which runs parallel to the road bridge. Carefully following the waymarkers you soon reach the hamlet of Tosantos. There is a café bar here, just off the Camino route, as well as an albergue, San Francisco de Asís. Heading out of



Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Peña

Tosantos along the dirt track and climbing a little you come across the 12th century Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Peña which has literally been dug out of the mountain. Continue on this track for approximately 2 kilometers until you reach the hamlet of Villambistia.

Villambistia is a small village with a legend surrounding its fountain. Called the Tradicion de Villambistia, the story tells of a pilgrim, exhausted from his travels under the burning sun, being spotted by an elderly villager. The villager spoke to him about the Tradicion de Villambistia which consisted of completely immersing the head in the fountain in the village. This complete immersion would result in him being completely cured of all tiredness. The pilgrim did as the villager said and true to his word all semblance of exhaustion was wiped away. The pilgrim continued on his way to Santiago and regaled his fellow pilgrims with the story of the fountain. Over the centuries the story has been passed on by word of mouth and to this day pilgrims soak their head in the waters of the fountain.



Tradicion de Villambistia

In the town you can see the 17th century Iglesia de San Esteban Protomártir and on your way out of the village you will pass by the Ermita de San Roque. There is also a private albergue with cooking and laundry facilities. Cross over a stream on the way out of the village and on into Espinosa del Camino where you will find an albergue that offers dining facilities.

Leave Espinosa del Camino taking a dirt track to the top of the hill from where you will see your next destination, Villafranca Montes de Oca. Following the markers you will pass by the Abside de San Felices and the ruins of the medieval Monasterio San Felices. Unfortunately, not much remains of the original 9th century building, in fact, only a single arch remains of this once important monastery. It is believed that Don Diego Rodriguez de Porcelos, the founder of the city of Burgos, is buried within its grounds.

From here the footpath takes you through some fields and then back towards the main road, crossing the bridge over the Rio Oca to enter into Villafranca Montes de Oca. Located in the valley at the foot of the Montes de Oca, Villafranca is a beautiful village with a population of approximately 200. The town's name comes partly from that of the early Roman settlement of Auca, as well as from the Frankish (or French) settlers who came to the region in the middle ages when the Camino was at its most popular. Worth visiting is the 18th century Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol where you will find inside a baroque statue of Saint James, along with a 65kg baptismal font in the shape of a giant scallop shell which is believed to have originated in the Phillipines.

As the next stage of the journey to San Juan de Ortega will take at least 3 hours to cover the 12 kilometer route through mountains and woods, it is recommended that you don't set out in the afternoon, but stay the night at the

14th century albergue Hospital de Peregrinos de San Antón Abad (also known as Hospital de la Reina). This building was built by Reina Juana Manuel, wife of King Enrique II. Villafranca is also the last place on the journey towards Burgos that has a good selection of places to eat and to stock up on provisions.



Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Oca

As you leave Villafranca you will pass another monument worth visiting, the 8th century Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Oca, where you can fill your water bottles from the fountain.

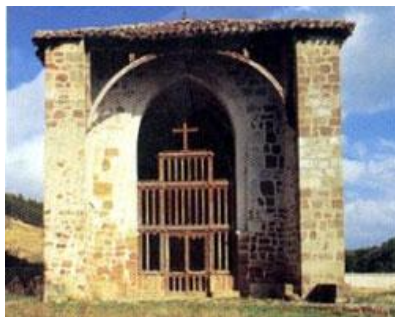
The route from here towards Burgos takes you through the Montes de Oca, part of the Sistema Iberico mountain range which stretches from La Rioja down towards Valencia. On your journey you will pass the fountain dedicated to San Indalecio. According to local legend the waters here began to flow on the site where San Indalecio, one of St James' disciples, was believed to have been martyred.

The mountain range between Villafranca and San Juan de Ortega is a nature reserve full of oak, juniper, ash and pine trees. On your journey you may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse some of the abundant wildlife such as foxes, otters and deer.

Two kilometers out of Villafranca you come across the Fuente de Mojapán, literally translated as the fountain of moist bread. Continuing along the tree lined path and at around 1163 meters above sea level you come across the Monumento de los Caidos, a memorial to the victims of the Spanish Civil war, one of many such monuments throughout Spain. The next stop on your journey, San Juan de Ortega, is approximately 7 kilometers from this point. From here the path starts to descend towards the Rio Peroja, once across the river the track begins to climb once again. From here on in the path is pretty straight passing through pine woods known as the Alto de la Pedraja, and through fields of heather. The track finally starts to descend and the countryside laid out before you is a complete change from what you have just experienced and feels as if it is straight out of a beautiful landscape painting. The path continues to descend crossing a footbridge across a stream and passing the 12th century Ermita de la Valdefuentes, the only remaining part of a gothic pilgrim hospital. After a small climb the path



Monumento de los Caidos



Kerk San Nicolás

once again descends as you enter the small hamlet of San Juan de Ortega. San Juan de Ortega was, like his mentor San Domingo, an architect and prolific builder. He was involved in building a number of bridges, hospices and churches, all dedicated to helping the Peregrino, or pilgrim, on their journey through the region. The recently restored church and monastery dedicated to San Nicolás de Bari was built by San Juan following a near fatal shipwreck. San Juan was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when his boat was shipwrecked in a storm. The saint prayed to San Nicolás de Bari for salvation. He was spared and returned to the Montes de Oca, then a wilderness and prone to bandit attacks, where he built a hospice in honour of the saint that had saved his life.

San Juan also founded a monastic order and built the 12th century Iglesia de San Juan de Ortega where you can find San Juan's Romanesque sarcophagus. The sarcophagus had originally been in the crypt but following a flood in 2005 this was moved to the church. San Juan has built a reputation of being the patron saint of fertility. The legend refers to an incident when the tomb of the saint was opened and a swarm of white bees escaped from the tomb surrounded by a wonderful smell. The bees were believed to be the souls of unborn children being kept safe by San Juan until a suitable Christian woman could be found to bear that child. Queen Isabela la Católica visited the church in 1477 after having being childless for a number of years. She went on to have 3 children, the first, a boy she named Juan and the second, a girl she named Juana. The Queen ordered the rebuilding of the chapel as it had fallen into disrepair and commissioned the canopy placed over the saint's tomb. The church also contains an architectural masterpiece called the Milagro de la Luz, or the miracle of the light. When San Juan built the church he included a capital of the annunciation. From around 5pm to 7pm on the day of the spring and autumn equinox, subject to there being sun, a ray of light enters through the window and illuminates the Virgin of the Annunciation. If you wish to stay here, there is an albergue called Albergue del Monasterio and a café where you can get something to eat.



Monasterio San Juan de Ortega

Camino de Santiago - Stage 12 - San Juan de Ortega to Burgos

Total distance: 27.6 km

From San Juan de Ortega there are two routes to Burgos but the other, passing through the villages of Santovenia de Oca, Zalduendo, Ibeas de Juarros, Castrillo del Val, San Medel, Castañares, Villayuda, is hardly used therefore, described below is the standard route towards Burgos. Upon leaving San Juan de Ortega you head past the church and walk down the Barrio de Colinas, taking a right turn towards the way marked track through the pine woods. Not long out of the town you pass over a couple of cattle grids, through some open fields coming eventually to a large wooden cross. At this point keep well left, this path will take you through a small gate and down a dirt track towards the village of Agés. There are 3 refugios/hostels in Agés. The Hostel San Rafael has a café and restaurant, and for those of you who wish it, internet access. One of the other hostels, Casa Caracol, which can be found on the Calle la Iglesia is supposedly to be one of the gems of the Camino. Also in Agés you will find a sign which lets you know that you still have 518 kilometers to go before you reach Santiago.

The most dominant monument in the village is the 16th century Iglesia de Santa Eulalia. It is here that the remains of King Garcia de Navarre were originally entombed before eventually being moved to the Pantéon Real in the Iglesia María de Real in Nájera.

King Garcia had been the ruler of the kingdom of Navarre and his brother King Ferdinand I was ruler of the kingdom of Castilla y León. The kingdoms had at one time been part of the empire of King Sancho III of Navarre, their father, upon the king's death they were divided between the two brothers. Unfortunately, as has so often happened in history, one brother, King Garcia, being jealous of his sibling decided to go to war against his brother King Ferdinand. Unfortunately this resulted in his death in 1054 at the battle of Atapuerca. To leave Agés walk down the

main street past the fountain on the right and follow the street out of the village and down the road for approximately 2.5 kilometers until you reach the next village, Atapuerca. On the road between Agés and Atapuerca you will come across a 2 meter high standing stone which marks the spot where the armies of King Garcia of Navarra and King Ferdinand of Castile met. The words inscribed on the stone are Fin de Rey – Garcia de Najera 1054. In English this translates to "end of the king – Garcia de Najera 1054.



Iglesia de Santa Eulalia

Atapuerca is not a large village, having around 230 inhabitants, but it has an impressive church, la Iglesia de San Martín which overlooks the village from a small hill. Atapuerca was once known as one of the first villages to have been wrested back from the Moors (muslims) during the Reconquista. However, in the 20th century Atapuerca became world famous for the discovery of the most important archaeological site ever to be found, situated in the Sierra de Atapuerca hills some 3 kilometers from the village. The on-going archaeological dig was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2000. The site was originally discovered in the 1960's during the construction of a railway. However, since the 1980's the remains of more than 32 individuals have been found in La Sima de los Huesos, or the pit of bones. Most of the bones found here are over 300.000 years old. In 1994, during excavations of an old railway cutting in Trinchera Dolina, close to Atapuerca, more bones were discovered. These were found to be over 800.000 years old thus making them the oldest Europeans and the discovery of the Atapuerca Man. Most of the items found during the various digs are to be found either on display in the Museo de Burgos or in the Museo de Ibeas in the village of Ibeas de Juarros near Atapuerca. Visits to the site can also be arranged. A worthwhile website to look at before you go is www.atapuerca.net that has information in English. However the main information site is www.visitasatapuerca.com, which unfortunately is only in Spanish. This does contain information on visiting times and fees. If you wish to stay in Atapuerca there are 2 Albergues and a hostel. There are also 2 bars, one with a restaurant, a café and bakery. To leave Atapuerca walk through the village and just after the second bar and bakery take a left turn past the fountain and following a line of fencing on your left hand side up towards another cross. The path continues across open heathland and as the path begins to descend you will see the City of Burgos ahead.

Keep walking straight on passing some TV antennae and a quarry. Soon after passing the quarry the path starts to descend and you come to a fork in the road. At this point take the right hand fork and then turn right onto a minor road which leads you into the small hamlet of Villaval. This route is slightly longer but it takes you through some beautiful villages. The other route takes you mainly through stony pasture.

Pass through Villaval keeping to the road until after about 2 kilometers you come across the village of Cardeñuela Riopico. There is a small municipal Albergue here, the keys of which can be found either in the town hall or at the bar La Parada. The road continues down towards Orbaneja Riopico where you meet up with the alternative route. About 1 kilometer away from the village you will come to a bridge over the A1 motorway. At this stage you are faced with 2 options for entering Burgos, both routes are clearly marked. The original or historic route takes you through Villafria an industrialised area which follows the very busy and noisy main road into Burgos. This is apparently the worst part of the whole Camino. The other, quieter route follows the river. It's slightly longer but is a much safer way to enter Burgos via Castañares, one of the suburbs.

We will detail both options below and it is then up to you which route you take. A third option is to take the Number 8 bus from Villafria into the centre of Burgos, but then that would be cheating.

Traditional route through Villafria

Cross the bridge over the motorway and follow the road for about 2 kilometers until you come to the railway line which runs parallel to the road. The road bends and you will see a rubbish tip on your left and a bridge over the railway. Cross the bridge and from here you can either follow the road until it joins the N1 or take a slight detour to visit la Iglesia de Villafria with its resident storks. There are a couple of bars near the church should you wish to have a drink. Going back to the main road follow the N1 towards Burgos and after about 4 to 5 kilometers you come to a large crossing and at this point the road becomes Calle Vitoria. A little further on you come to another junction which is signposted right towards Santander, left to go to Madrid and the centre towards Burgos city centre. At this point we would recommend that you continue down Calle Vitoria but taking the shaded road running parallel to it on your left which takes you along the river and down the Avenida General Sanjurjo. Eventually this road leads you to the pedestrianised area known as Paseo de Espolón in the city centre close to the cathedral.



Kerk in Villafria

The alternative route through Castañares

After you have crossed the bridge over the A1 motorway turn left past the former barracks, then take a right onto a track through some wheat fields and waste ground. The path is way marked but because the authorities have had no option but to paint them on the ground they may be difficult to see. As an alternative guide look out for 2 large chimneys in the distance. One is coloured red and the other white, the spire of the cathedral can be seen behind them to the left. After about 3 kilometers you pass through Casteñares and will soon meet up with the route that came from Villafria. Follow Calle Vitoria, down the Avenida General Sanjurjo and into the pedestrianised area of Paseo de Espolón towards the cathedral.

Burgos is a place that is worth spending a whole day in if not longer. If you are a lover of architecture or of history you will find something to suit your taste here. There are around 75 monuments in Burgos with the Monasterio de Santa Maria la Real de las Huelgas, the Cartuja de Santa Maria de Miraflores and the Catedral de Santa Maria, Burgos all well worth a visit. If you take into account the Atapuerca Man, who at over 800,000 years old is considered to be the oldest European, then Burgos could technically be considered the oldest city in Europe. The city's actual foundation comes some time in the late 9th century around the time of the Reconquista, becoming the capital of Castilla y León during the 11th century. Burgos flourished through the export of wool to Flanders during the 15th and 16th centuries however, by the 17th century this was in decline, primarily due to the political strife in Flanders and other towns and cities also exporting wool. As its fortunes declined Burgos settled into the role of provincial capital. Burgos has been on the pilgrim route from the very beginning and as I've said earlier it is a place well worth spending a day, if not more in before you start on your next stretch of the journey through the flat plains of the Maseta. The old part of the city with the remains of the old castle looking down onto the Gothic Cathedral de Santa Maria, declared a World Heritage Site in 1984 and the impressive gateways leading into it from the river are well worth seeing.



Burgos: de kathedraal

People who visit Burgos without doubt visit the cathedral. The building of the cathedral was commissioned in the 11th century by the then King Fernando III and his German wife Beatrice of Swabia. The building of the cathedral was overseen by the English born Bishop Don Mauricio. The towers which dominate the skyline were designed and built by Hans of Cologne, bearing more than a passing resemblance to the great cathedral in Cologne. Many of the sculptures within the cathedral can be attributed to the father and son team of Gil and Diego de Siloé, natives of Burgos. The cathedral is vast with a number of different chapels but perhaps one of the most interesting is the Capilla de Santísimo Cristo de Burgos. Here, behind a pane of glass can be found the figure of a crucified Christ dating back to the 14th century. Nothing unusual in that, however this wooden figure is entirely covered in buffalo hide. It also appears to have a full head of real hair and is wearing a skirt. The arms and legs are also moveable. Directly opposite this chapel above the Capilla de Santa Tecla you will find another strange sight, that of Papamoscas. This is an automaton above a clock which opens and closes its mouth and strikes a bell on the hour, every hour.



Burgos: Stadspoort

Also within the cathedral are buried the remains of Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, better known worldwide as El Cid, and his wife Doña Jimena. Their burial place, surprisingly, is marked simply by a paving slab.



Praalgraf El Cid in de kathedraal

When you came into the city, if you followed the route down the Avenida General Sanjurjo you will have probably already entered the old town across one of the two main bridges. The more eastern of the two, known as the Puente de San Pablo is guarded by an imposing statue of El Cid. The other bridge is the Puente de Santa Maria dominated by the magnificent Arco de Santa Maria, one of the original archways of the city's ancient walls.

If you have an interest in Christopher Columbus make your way to the Casa de los Condestables. It is said that the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella received Columbus in one of the halls here after he returned from his second journey to the new world. For those of you who may have an interest in the Spanish civil war you may be interested in visiting the neo-gothic building called la Capitania. This building, still used by the army today, was used as the headquarters for the Nationalist Junta during the civil war and the façade still bears plaques to the memory of Generals Franco and Mola.



Casa de los Condestables

Now leaving the old quarter there are a couple of religious buildings of particular merit that should be visited. The first is the Monasterio de las Huelgas which is about 20 minutes walk from the old town. The monastery, founded by Eleanor wife of King Alfonso VIII of Spain and the daughter of English monarch Henry II and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, is still home to around 40 Cistercian nuns. Las Huelgas literally translated means "the repose" and it was once a favourite place of retreat for the Castilian monarchs. The church was partitioned in the 16th century and a moving



Monasterio de las Huelgas

pulpit installed that would allow the Priest to address both the nuns and the general congregation at the same time. Also in the church you will find an unusual statue of Santiago holding a sword. You might say that there is nothing really unusual in that as there are hundreds of statues of Santiago as Santiago Matamoros depicting him with a sword in hand. The unusual thing about this statue is that the arms move. It is said that the statue was used in the coronation ceremonies of the Castilian kings. The coronation ceremony of the Castilian monarchs would involve them being knighted. Obviously, already being of the highest rank in the land there was no-one who could knight them, who better than the patron saint of Spain to perform this deed.



Cartuja de (Santa María de) Miraflores

Therefore statues of Santiago were made with moveable arms in order that they could be used to knight the monarchs. On the nun's side of the partition is the royal pantheon where you will find the ornate tombs of King Alfonso VIII and his wife Eleanor showing the heraldic arms of Castilla and England, King Enrique I and his wife Doña Berenguela, along with a number of other members of the Castilian royal family. Also in the grounds of the monastery can be found the Museo de Ricas Telas. This museum displays the remarkably well preserved clothing and jewellery found within the tombs when they were opened in 1942. The other monastery to visit is the Cartuja de Santa Maria de Miraflores. You can walk there but it takes around an hour from the centre of town and as you have

already walked several kilometers it is recommended that you take a bus.



Tombe Isabel de Katholieke

The monastery was built on the site of a former hunting lodge used by King Enrique III. After his death his son King Juan II de Castilla decided to donate the lodge to a Franciscan order but it was a Carthusian community which eventually established itself here. Unfortunately in 1442 the building was destroyed by fire. The King ordered that it should be rebuilt but regrettably did not live to see it completed, dying in 1454. The King's daughter Isabella, who was to become one of Spain's most revered monarchs Reina Isabel la Catolica, took over the building project. Like the cathedral in Burgos, this building was designed in part by Hans of Cologne. There is another link to the cathedral to be found in the church, the

elaborate star shaped tomb of King Juan of Castile and his wife Isabel of Portugal. The tomb was commissioned by their daughter Isabel and was carved by Gil Siloé. Also lying close by is the tomb of Alonso XII, Queen Isabel's brother, the heir to the throne, who died at the tender age of 14. His tomb was also carved by Gil Siloé.



Tombe Juan van Castille en Isabel van Portugal

As mentioned before Burgos' most famous son Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, known the world over as El Cid, a name he never used in life, is buried within the cathedral. However, his horse Babieca is entombed in the Monasterio de San Pedro de Cardeña about 10 kilometers outside the city. This monastery is also where El Cid and his wife Jimena had originally been buried. Unfortunately during the Napoleonic wars their bones were stolen and taken to France. There is an ornate tomb in the 15th century church marking the spot where they had been buried. The bones were later reclaimed from the French and were interred in 1927 in the cathedral.



Tombe van het paard van El Cid...

El Cid

Most of us will have at some time or other seen the 1961 film El Cid starring Charlton Heston as El Cid and Sophia Loren as his wife Jimena. This film immortalises him as one of the great heroes of Spain but in reality this is only partly true. Born Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar in 1043 he became friends with King Sancho II of León y Castilla, serving him until the King's assassination in 1072. He then served King Alfonso VI as a general but the relationship was not a happy one. To begin with Rodrigo believed Alfonso to have had a part in the previous king's assassination and made the king swear, before god, that he had nothing to do with the death of his brother at the church of Santa Gadea in Burgos. Their initial friendship ended when the king banished him following the battle of Cabra near Toledo. The king believed Rodrigo had taken it upon himself to attack the muslim stronghold, when actually he was defending himself.



Burgos: El Cid op zijn paard

Whilst in exile Rodrigo became somewhat of a mercenary, fighting for the man who would pay the highest price. This included fighting for the muslim army with Almutamán, king of Zaragoza. He was eventually reconciled with King Alfonso VI in 1086 when the King sent him to protect the Castilian interests on the east coast around Valencia. This was around the time that the Almoravid invasion was beginning. With a combined Moorish and Christian army Rodrigo lay siege to Valencia in 1093, first in the July and August and then again at the end of the year, with the city finally surrendering to Rodrigo in June of 1094. It is also believed that it is around this time that Rodrigo receives the Arab title of Sidi (my lord) which subsequently becomes El Cid. The Almoravid army, angry at having lost Valencia to the Christians continued to apply pressure resulting in numerous battles, most of which were won by El Cid.

It is now where the story of El Cid is mixed with fact and fiction. If you believe the story given in the film, the Almoravids again besiege the city of Valencia and it is during one of the skirmishes that El Cid receives a fatal wound by an arrow

piercing his heart. Upon hearing that their hero has been wounded the Valencian troop's morale drops so despite dying during the night, the following morning Doña Jimena orders that El Cid be strapped to his horse Babieca to lead his troops to battle. That way morale would improve as the troops believed that he still lived. Another story tells that he actually died of natural causes. I know which one I would like to believe.

Either way Valencia was taken by the Almoravids in 1102 but before the city was taken, Jimena with the help of Alfonso VII, abandoned the city along with her family and followers of El Cid. They took Rodrigo's mortal remains along with them to be buried, along with his horse, in the grounds of the Monasterio de San Pedro de Cardeña. If you really want to explore the city in some depth the tourist office can be found close to the cathedral.

Like any large city there will be plenty of hotels, hostels, pensiones and albergues to choose from dependant upon your budget. There are also a large number of restuarants, bars, cafés etc.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 13 - Burgos to Hornillos del Camino

Total distance: 20km

From Burgos all the way to León you will be walking through the area known as the Meseta, a mostly flat uninspiring landscape. It is very hot in the summer and extremely cold in the winter. On this stage there are a couple of villages where you can get something to eat and stay for the night in the albergues but there isn't much to see or do.

The best place to restart your Camino to Santiago is to start from in front of the cathedral as the marked path passes by it and down Calle Fernán González. On your way down this road you will go under an archway at which point you will need to turn right immediately and go down a flight of stairs. Crossing the road keep walking straight down Calle del Emperador and past the Iglesia San Pedro de la Fuente. If you have forgotten to fill up your water bottle, you can do so here at the fountain next to the church. At the bottom of Calle del Emperador turn left into Calle Vilalón and cross the Puente Malatos over the Rio Arlanzón. The path continues past the Hospital del Rey and the refugio in the Parque Perral. After about 3 kilometers you will come to a set of traffic lights where the road veers left. At this point take a right fork down a tree lined road and then down a farm track which runs parallel to the railway line (this should be on your left). You will walk through some fields and a tree plantation and after a further 3 kilometers you come across the village of Villalbilla de Burgos.



Iglesia San Pedro de la Fuente

Here you will find a couple of albergues, a café, shop and pharmacy if you didn't stock up in Burgos. The track continues across a minor railway line and forks right past a flour factory and across a bridge where you take a left turn once you have got to the other side.

You will pass two bridges and head down a farm road through some fields and after about one kilometer you will reach the main road where you will cross over the Río Arlanzón via the Puente del Arzobispo. Soon you will come across an underpass where the builders have placed a plaque asking the Pilgrim's forgiveness for the small diversion and wishing that all the Pilgrim's desires come true and the river Arlanzón and we wish you Ultreya! Once out of the underpass you will pass the site of a former pilgrim hospice, now marked with an 18th century stone cross and then into Tardajos where you will find a couple of bars and a shop along with the albergue. One of the bars also offers accommodation. In Tardajos you will also find the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción.



Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Monasterio

Leave Tardajos by the Calle del Mediodía, past a fountain and down a track over the Río Urbel. This takes you to Rabé de las Calzadas where you will find a couple of refugios and a fountain. Despite being very small Rabé de las Calzadas is home to the 13th century Iglesia de Santa Mariña and the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Monasterio which you will pass on your way out of the village. From here the path takes you through fields and pastures and past the Fuente de Prao Torre just before you begin to climb. When you get to

the top you will be faced with a wondrous sight, a landscape which for miles around is never endingly flat, devoid of trees but still in its own way, stunningly beautiful. Welcome to the Meseta.

After a few kilometers the path begins to descend down the steep Cuesta Matamulos and into Hornillos del Camino. In Hornillos del Camino you will find the Gothic Iglesia de San Román in the Plaza de la Iglesia which is built on the site of an ancient Iron Age Castro and it's rather odd cockerel topped fountain, el Fuente del Gallo. To the side of the church is the albergue. There is also accommodation to be found in the Casa Rural Sol a Sol.



Iglesia de San Román

Camino de Santiago - Stage 14 - Hornillos del Camino to Castrojeriz

Total distance: 20.3 km

Having left Hornillos del Camino and continuing down the valley, after about 5 kilometers you will come to Arroyo San Bol, which someone said "is like an oasis in the middle of the Castilian deserts".

There used to be a hamlet here called San Baudilio and during the 14th and 15th centuries there was a pilgrim's hospital called San Boal run by the Antonin monks. For some unknown reason the hamlet was abandoned in the early 16th century and no trace of it remains. What does remain however is the albergue Arroyo San Bol. It used to be run by hippy volunteers and gained a somewhat disturbing reputation as a party hostel. However, that is a thing of the past as it's under new ownership but it still has a hippy feel,



Albergue Arroyo San Bol

maybe it's the murals that surround it. In the grounds of the albergue is a natural spring where it is said that those pilgrims who wash their feet in it will not have any foot problems from here to Santiago. Soon after leaving Arroyo San Bol the track descends once more into another valley and then begins to climb and eventually levels out. Other than a couple of now abandoned houses, which you will have recently passed, there is nothing in sight for miles around.



Hontanas is een leuk dorpje

If you like birds of prey you may get the occasional glimpse of them flying high on the thermals but the landscape here is mainly wheat fields and little else. After about two kilometers, past a minor road, a valley appears to your right followed by another soon after, suddenly in the distance below you, down a steep descent, is the sight of the church and village of Hontanas. The pilgrim village of Hontanas, which means fountains a name given to the village because of the sheer number of them in the area, is dominated by the 14th century Iglesia de la Inmaculada Concepción. There are a couple of albergues in Hontanas, one of which is in the recently restored former pilgrim hospital of San Juan as well as a couple of hostals. If you fancy a swim and you are doing your Camino in the summer there is a municipal swimming pool here. When you leave Hontanas walk past the swimming pool and down the path. The path runs parallel to the road leading to Castrojeriz, however there is no shade

along it. You may wish to walk down the quiet tree lined road which will give you some respite from the sun. The path will take you past the ruins of the Molino del Cubo, an abandoned mill and through the deserted village of San Miguel before eventually coming across the ruins of the gothic Monasterio de San Antón and the remains of its pilgrims hospital. The Camino continues through the archway across the road. The hospital was founded by el Orden de los Antonianos (Antonis), a French religious order believed to have healing powers. They specialised in treating a disease known as Saint Anthony's fire, a disease that caused the sensation of burning inside the body if its victims. Other symptoms included gangrene, hallucinations, nausea and vomiting, amongst a raft of other symptoms. The disease originates from a fungus infecting Rye and as we have seen on our journey across the Meseta, cereal crops are the mainstay of the economy in this area. However, in the middle ages rye bread was eaten all across northern Europe but wasn't really known in Spain. Some of the monk's treatments were quite extreme, including amputation but many of the pilgrims that passed this way were "cured" through plenty of exercise, copious amounts of wine and the divine hand of San Anton himself



San Antón



Albergue in San Antón

and then sent on their way after being blessed with the 'Tau' or T shaped cross. The Tau is very closely connected to this area and can be seen in many places around the locality. It is similar to the 19th letter in the Greek alphabet and is considered to be a symbol of protection, therefore the monks wore it and gave it to pilgrims who passed this way as a way to protect them against further sickness and evil. Within the walls of the monastery is a small albergue. In medieval times those pilgrims who arrived late were left food in little niches in the walls, today many pilgrims write notes and put these into the niches held down by pebbles. Continuing on the Camino de Santiago, passing through the ruins of San Antón and along the tree lined road you will come, after

about 4 kilometers, to Castrojeriz but before you get there you will first spot the ruins of its 9th century Castillo up on the hillside. You enter the town by turning right passing the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Manzano and continue upwards into the centre of Castrojeriz. Like so many of the other towns along the route Castrojeriz is a pueblo calle, basically this means that the village was built around the main street. There has been a village in this area since celtic times and you can see that it would make an ideal place to settle in, close to a river and ably defended by the hill top fort. The Romans used this vantage point to protect the route to their gold mines in nearby Astorga. But it was in the Middle Ages and the coming of the Camino to Santiago that brought Castrojeriz its prosperity. During the 11th century it became a royal residence and was considered one of the main stopping points along the Camino with its 8 pilgrim hospitals and 9 churches. There were still 7 of these hospitals at the beginning of the 19th century.



Iglesia de Nuestra Señora del Manzano



...slightly gruesome carved skulls....

As you entered the village you will have passed by the 13th century church Colegiata de Nuestra Señora del Manzano. Legend says that Santiago is believed to have seen an image of the Virgin Mary in an apple tree. So excited was he that he leapt heavily onto his horse leaving behind hoof prints that can be seen embedded in rock just outside the church. The 16th century Iglesia de Santo Domingo is decorated with slightly gruesome carved skulls but inside you can see some exquisite 17th century tapestries based on Rubens cartoons. On the other side of the village is the 13th century Iglesia de San Juan de los Caballeros with its beautiful Mudéjar ceilings and impressive cloisters. Parts of the church were built in the 16th century by Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón the architect who was also responsible for the cathedrals in Salamanca and Segovia.

For the best views of the town and the surrounding countryside you should climb up to the ruins of the 9th century castle. Legend claims that this was founded by the Roman emperor Caesar or possibly Pompey, but archaeological investigations have dated it to a much earlier time. Some also say that it was built by the Visigoth King Sigerici circa 760 and that it was from him from whom the town got its name, Castro Sigerici or Castrojeriz. Underneath the castle the hill is honeycombed with tunnels containing bodegas built to keep the wine cool. If you are staying in Castrojeriz for the night there are 4 albergues, a couple of who have internet access, 3 hostals and a pension, most of whom provide a pilgrim menu, there is also a campsite. There is a shop, bakery and a café, who also has internet access, as well as a bank.



Castrojeriz: café met appelboom (manzano)

Camino de Santiago - Stage 15 - Castrojeriz to Frómista

Total distance: 24.7 km

To leave Castrojeriz walk down the main street past the Iglesia de San Juan, crossing the road at the fountain and following the way markers taking you towards a gravel track. The path from here, clearly seen up ahead, winds its way up to the top of a hill called the Alto de Mostelares. About 1 kilometer out of Castrojeriz the track joins a restored section of Roman road originally built to provide a solid route across the boggy Odrilla valley. Soon you will come across a wooden footbridge across the Rio Odrilla and then the steep climb up to the Alto de Mostelares. If you look to your right before you start your climb you will see the remains of some old Roman mines where they used to mine for mica, as you climb you can actually see the seams of mica. When you get to the top you will see a monument that has supposedly been built by pilgrims. Take some time to rest at the rest area at the top and to take in the view looking back towards Castrojeriz, it's spectacular. Looking ahead, you can see your Camino route stretched out before you towards Puente de Itero, Itero de la Vega and Boadilla del Camino. From the top follow the iron crosses with yellow plastic on them, these are the way markers. After about 500 meters you will have panoramic views of the valley below. The path begins to descend through some fields for about 3 kilometers at which point, after a slight uphill climb, you will come to the Fuente del Piojo a fountain and picnic area. Take a right along a road and the village of Itero de la Vega can be seen up ahead. The road doesn't actually take you through the village but there is an albergue there if you want to take the slight 700 meter detour off the main road. There are also the remains of the castle that once stood there.



Monument op heuveltop iets na Castrojeriz



Ermita San Nicolás de Bari

At the crossroads take a left down the road and soon you will come across the Ermita San Nicolás de Bari. This was once a pilgrim hospital that has been converted by the Confraternita dei San Jacopo (the Italian Confraternity of St James) into a refugio. The building doesn't have electricity so if you choose to stay dinner will be served by candlelight. A short walk along the road from the Ermita San Nicolás you will come to the beautiful 11 arched Puente de Itero over the Río Pisuerga. A stone marker at the opposite side of the bridge marks the border between Burgos and Palencia, it also marks the historic border with the kingdom of León. The original bridge was built by Alfonso VI to unify the kingdoms of Castile and León and is

mentioned in the Codex Calixtinus. After you have crossed the bridge take a right down a minor road for about 1,5 kilometers, passing the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Piedad and enter the village of Itero de la Vega. There are a couple of shops and supermarket, a bar as well as two albergues and a hostel that provide pilgrim menus.

Heading out of the village, follow the white arrows that will take you down a track flanked by water channels on either side. After about 1 kilometer you come across the hamlet of Bodegas, keep walking straight on and cross the bridge over the Canal del Pisuerga. From here the path starts to climb to the top of a hill, you will see them in the distance as 3 humps. At the top of the ridge is the village of Boadilla del Camino. Once you reach the top of the hill the views are fantastic. An unusual sight along this part of the Camino is the number of ornate palomares or dovecotes of all shapes and sizes which dot the landscape. Doves and pigeons are kept mainly for their droppings, which provide good fertilizer, and sometimes provide someone with their dinner. In Boadilla del Camino you can visit the 16th century Iglesia de Santa Maria de la Asuncion which contains an



Brug over de Pisuerga-rivier



...impressive stone font...

impressive 14th century stone font. If the church is locked you can get the key from the albergue. This is the only remaining church in the village. It did at one time have 3 churches and 2 pilgrim hospitals. Just outside the church is a 15th century stone cross called the Rollo de Justicia which is the symbol of the jurisdictional autonomy bestowed on the town by King Enrique IV. It is ornately decorated in scallop shells and other Camino related symbols. The Rollo also marks the spot where criminals were tied in chains and subjected to cruel and unusual forms of public humiliation before they were tried. There are three albergues in the town if you wish to stay here. Leave the town past the bar and turn left past the football ground and towards the Canal de Castilla. A feat of 18th century engineering the canal was built mainly to transport goods, such as wheat and barley, but with the coming of the railways, like in so many other countries, the canal went into

decline and is now used for irrigation for the many wheat fields and provides electricity for the factories. The canal itself is 207 kilometers long starting in the north of Palencia going down to Valladolid. Following the canal towpath for about 3 kilometers you will reach the Frómista Canal lock gates. This lock once had four separate gates allowing boats to descend and ascend the 14.2 meter elevation between the top and the bottom. Cross over the canal here and walk under the railway line into Frómista. The town of Frómista is perfectly situated in the middle of a rich agricultural region and during Roman times was considered to be the bread basket of the Roman Empire. The Roman's named it Frumentum which is the Latin for cereal. For a small town with a population in the region of 1.400 it is home to two national monuments, the first is the 11th century Iglesia de San Martin de Tours. The church had been built originally as part of a Benedictine monastery though no remnants of the monastery exist.



Sluizen in het Canal de Castilla



Iglesia de San Martín de Tours

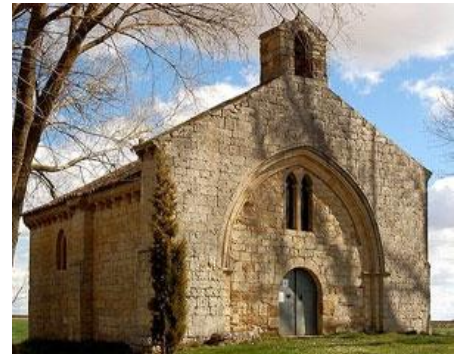
Inside the church are more than 300 human and animal faces carved in stone under its eaves. Unfortunately the church is no longer used as a religious building but only as a tourist attraction due to it having been de-consecrated. The other national monument is that of the Iglesia Santa Maria del Castillo which contains an altarpiece with 29 paintings.

Unusually for a town that is nowhere near the sea, it contains a statue to the patron saint of sea farers, St. Erasmus of Formiae, better known to most English speakers as Saint Elmo. Local legend claims that the Saint was born in Fromista some time in the 3rd century, whether this is true we don't know, but we doubt it. Another church worth visiting is the 15th century Iglesia de San Pedro and its museum of religious art. This is the main parish church of the town. For those wishing to stay the night there is an albergue and various hotels or hostels to choose from.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 16 - Frómista to Carrión de los Condes

Total distance: 19.3 km

Leave Frómista on the road heading towards Carrión de Los Condes. In recent years a specially constructed gravel walkway, or *andadero de peregrinos*, has been added running parallel to this road all the way to Carrión de Los Condes. This route will take you past the outskirts of Población de Campos, where there is a bar and refugio and to the village of Villovieco. It passes through the villages of Villarmentero de Campos and Revenga de Campos and skirts Villalcázar de Sirga. After about 3 kilometers the old route meets the new just after the tiny 13th century Ermita de San Miguel on the left. At this point you can keep following the purpose made path to Carrión de Los Condes or take the old route.



Ermita de San Miguel



Pelgrimspad met Caminopaaltjes

If you want to take the old route then turn right here down towards the Paseo del Cementerio and into Población de Campos. The village here is a good place to see some of the adobe style mud buildings endemic to this area as well as the very large Palomares which are used to breed pigeons. There is also an albergue and a casa rural if you wish to spend the night as well as a shop, restaurant and a couple of bars if you need refreshment. There isn't much to see here but you may wish to visit the small 13th century Ermita de la Virgen del Socorro and the 17th century church, Iglesia de la Magdalena. There are also the remains of a former pilgrim hospital. The route continues behind the church where you will come to a junction with a minor road ahead. Follow this

for about 3 kilometers where you will come across a fountain on your right hand side with a wayside cross next to it. After another kilometer you should reach the village of Villovieco, don't stop here, just skirt past it. At a bridge over the Rio Ucieza take a left then an immediate right to follow the river bank, this you do for about 5 kilometers until you come to the Ermita de la Virgen del Rio. Inside you will find an alabaster image of Santiago Peregrino and a statue of la Virgen del Rio who is said have swum up the Rio Ucieza during a flood and stopped here. You may need to ask permission to go inside as I believe it is now a private house.

After the Ermita de la Virgen del Rio turn left near the bridge and walk past the Ermita del Cristo de la Salud, again turn left and continue down the path for about 1 kilometer until you reach Villalcázar de Sirga, or as it is more commonly known in these parts, Villasilrga. It is at this point that the other route converges. In the 13th century the Camino was re-routed through here because King Alfonso X, el Sabio (the Learned) continuously mentioned the miracles performed by the Virgen Blanca (white virgin) in his Cantigas, a large collection of songs from the Middle Ages. The main monument in Villalcázar de Sirga is la Iglesia de la Virgen Blanca, a large church build between the 12th and 13th centuries by the Knights Templar. This already huge church is what remains of a much larger building which was damaged in 1755 by an earthquake and Napoleon's troops during the Napoleonic wars. Inside the church are the tombs of Don Felipe, a Templar knight and brother of Alfonso X, el Sabio and his wife Doña Leonor. There are a couple of miracles attributed to items within the church. The first is a statue of the Virgin Mary which is said to heal pilgrims who haven't been healed in Santiago. The second is an alabaster bust of Santiago which is reportable able to get rid of headaches, if you rub a towel across its forehead and then across your own then you will be cured.



Iglesia de la Virgen Blanca

For those wishing to stay there is a municipal albergue and some bed and breakfast style hotels and a hostel. The village also has a bakery, a couple of shops, a restaurant and a bar. From Villalcázar de Sirga we will follow the purpose made gravel track that runs parallel to the road for 5 kilometers until we reach Carrión de los Condes. Carrión de los Condes during medieval times was a town of between 10,000 and 12,000 inhabitants, nowadays there are just over 2,000. The town also used to have at least 12 churches and several pilgrim hospitals. Some books tell us that the town got its name from a story told in El Canter de Mio Cid about two Castilian nobles or Condes, who married the daughters of Don Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, El Cid. Once married, the men took the women's fortunes and tied them to trees and beat them. The truth is that the town had belonged to the Leonés royal family and was called la ciudad de los Condes, or city of the Counts.

As you enter the town you will pass la Cuesta de la Mora and its fountain. Legend says that King Alfonso X had arranged to meet with his Moorish lover Zulima for an assignation, but she was late and the King, angry at this perceived slight, cursed the fountain. Unfortunately, Zulima finally turned up and tragically drank from the fountain dying soon after. One of the monuments of particular interest is the 12th century Iglesia de Santa Maria del Camino which celebrates a victory over the Moors which happened on this site. Each year the Christian inhabitants of the town were forced to pay tribute to their Moorish rulers by providing them with 100 virgins. Understandably they weren't too happy about it and prayed for deliverance. Santa Maria heard their prayers and sent a herd of bulls to attack the Moors and drove them away.



Monasterio van Santa Clara (albergue)

Another building worth visiting is the Monasterio de Santa Clara. This is one of the oldest Claris convents in Spain having been founded in 1255 by the Queen of Portugal and niece of King Fernando III, Mencia. It is rumoured to have sheltered Saint Francis of Assisi on his pilgrimage to Santiago. The convent is now home to one of Carrión de los Condes' albergues and a museum containing some very valuable works of religious art. There is actually a rather unusual story that surrounds the Convent. During the Napoleonic war the French soldiers and the nuns came to an agreement. The nuns would provide the soldiers with chocolate and picatostes (pieces of fried bread) in exchange for the soldiers leaving them alone and respecting the monastery. It's amazing what people will do for a little bit of chocolate! There are all the necessary amenities

including a supermarket in the town. There are 3 albergues here along with 4 hostels and a nearby camping site called El Eden by the Rio Carrión.

Before you leave Carrión de los Condes make sure you have plenty of food and drink with you as for the next 40 kilometers there will be precious few chances to buy food and there is no water for at least 17 kilometers.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 17 - Carrión de los Condes to Lédigos

Total distance: 20 km

Leave Carrión de los Condes by crossing the 16th century bridge and passing the 10th century Benedictine Monasterio de San Zoilo. This has originally been built as a convent but was used by the royal family of Castilla y León as their court. The building is now an impressive Parador, one of many state owned hotels most of which are in national historical monuments, or what we in the UK would call listed buildings. The building is beautiful in itself but worth seeing is the outstanding 16th century Renaissance cloister by Juan de Badajoz. From here the Camino de Santiago is pretty straight following an old Roman road known as the Via Aquitana, alternatively known as the Calzada de los Peregrinos. This ancient road provided a link between Burgos and Astorga. From the Monasterio de San Zoilo keep straight on crossing a couple of main roads and then onto a country road through farmland. After about 4 kilometers you come to the ruins of the Franciscan Abadia de Santa Maria de Venivivere. It is just after this point that you start to walk along the old Roman Road.



Monasterio San Zoilo

The area around about is mostly flat but provides the pilgrim with endless views of the mountain range, la Cordillera Cantábrica, in the distance. After about 16 kilometers you come to the village of Calzadilla de la Cueva but you will have spotted the church tower a long time before you reach the village. The village is tiny, primarily just one street. There is a fountain as you enter and an albergue, a bar and a hostel that has a restaurant. It is worth filling up your water bottle and getting something to eat before you start up on your journey again. Head out of the village down the unusually named Calle Mayor, taking a right at the main road and following the gravel path to the left. Here there is a map giving you different routes if you were not planning to stay at Ledigos, but as Ledigos is our last stop on this stage we will ignore the map.

About 2 kilometers from Calzadilla de la Cueva you will pass the remains of the once hugely important 11th century pilgrim hospital of Santa Maria de las Tiendas. There is talk of restoring the building and turning it into a refugio, let's hope this is true as it would be a great shame to lose such an important building. The old monastery also marks the half way point of the Spanish section of the Camino. Leaving the monastery we continue down the track before a slight upward climb and then a descent into Ledigos. The Albergue El Palomar is the only place to stay the night but it does have laundry and cooking facilities. Close by is bar if you fancy a drink and a small shop for provisions. The local parish church, la Iglesia de Santiago Apostol is the only church on the whole Camino which has Santiago in all three of his manifestations, the apostle, Santiago Matamoros (the moor slayer) and Santiago Peregrino (the pilgrim). Unfortunately, it is not easy to get in the church as more often than not it is locked.



Restanten van Santa María de las Tiendas

Camino de Santiago - Stage 18 - Lédigos to Sahagún

Total distance: 16.1 km

Head out of Lédigos the same way you came in and take a left fork along a track through some fields. After approximately 300 meters take a right and after 500 meters take a left. Continue down the road for about 1.5 kilometers until you come to the village of Terradillos de los Templarios. Terradillos de los Templarios gets part of its name from the fact that it once belonged to the Order of the Knights Templar who built a pilgrim hostel in the



Iglesia San Pedro

12th century called San Juan unfortunately, only the occasional stone remains to mark its existence. The 18th century Iglesia de San Pedro is unusual in that it is made from brick. This is because when it was built there was a lack of local stone. Inside there is an interesting 13th century crucifix. There are 2 albergues in Terradillos de los Templarios. The first, Los Templarios, you will have passed on the main road as you entered the village. The other is called Albergue Jacques de Molay, named in remembrance of the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar who was burnt at the stake in front of Nôtre Dame Cathedral in Paris by King Philip IV of France.

Leaving the village take a track on your left towards a minor road then go right through some fields. The path runs parallel to the main road and crosses the stream known hereabouts as the Arroyo de Templarios. After about 3 kilometers you reach the small village of Moratinos with its underground bodegas. There is a fountain next to the Iglesia Parroquial Santo Tomás de Aquino and a rest area here but little else. Walk down the main street through Moratinos past the church until after approximately 2.5 kilometers you come to the village of San Nicolás del Real Camino.

San Nicolás del Real Camino, like Terradillos de los Templarios, is a village associated with the Knights Templar. Here you will find another brick built church, the Iglesia de San Nicolas de Bari with its ornate Baroque altar. The Albergue Laganares is the only accommodation here but it does offer a Pilgrim menu and for those wanting to catch up on emails, it has internet access.



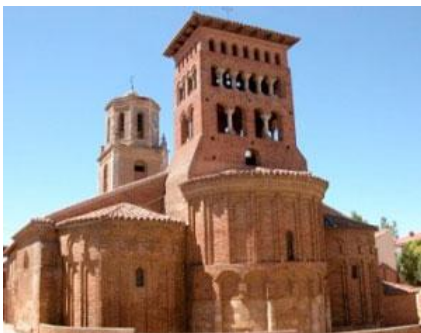
Iglesia de San Nicolas de Bari

Not long after you have left the village you come across a sign that says 'Senda de Peregrinos', a pilgrim path that runs parallel to the main road. An alternative path runs through some fields following the river. Whichever route you take after about 1.5 kilometers you will be leaving the province of Palencia and entering the province of León. Both routes also meet at the 12th century Ermita de La Virgen del Puente located next to a Roman bridge over the Rio Valderaduey. The Ermita de la Virgen del Puente had originally been a pilgrim hospice and the path we will be following into Sahagún is known as the Camino Francés de la Virgen (the French Camino of the Virgin).

About a kilometer along the path there will be an underpass under the main road, go through it and in the distance you will see a large white grain silo, aim for this. Once you have reached the grain silo take a left passing the railway station and the bull ring and take a bridge over the railway tracks into Sahagún. Sahagún derives its name from the saint San Facundo who was martyred here and the 9th century monastery, Abadia de San Benito el Real de Sahagún, built in his honour by King Alfonso III de Asturias, el Magno. The monastery grew in importance during the reign of Alfonso VI de Castilla who showered the town with prestige and money for the help he received from the monastery during the war with his brother Sancho III. During the Middle Ages the monastery became the most powerful Benedictine monastery in Spain controlling at least 100 other monasteries from Tierra de Campos to Liébana in the heart of the Picos de Europa and down to Segovia, near Madrid. The Benedictine monastery was disbanded in the 19th century and most of the buildings were destroyed during two major fires that destroyed much of the town of Sahagún. Only the 17th century Arco de San Benito, the 12th century Capilla de San Mancio and the 19th century Torre del Reloj remain of this once powerful monastery. A number of the Castilian royal family were buried in the monastery including Alfonso VI of Castilla and his 5 wives. After the fire that destroyed the monastery in 1810 their remains were moved and eventually re-interred in 1835 in the 16th century Monasterio de las Madres Benedictinas de Santa Cruz.

Two churches worth seeing are the 13th century Iglesia de San Lorenzo and the 12th century Iglesia de San Tirso (left picture). Both have been built in the Mudéjar style. They are very similar in look but the Iglesia de San

Lorenzo is built entirely out of brick, and the Iglesia de San Tirso is part built in stone with the upper parts constructed out of brick. You can find accommodation in either one of 3 albergues along with at least 4 hostals. There is also a campsite, Pedro Ponce, on the way out of town. Several restaurants in the town offer a pilgrim menu and there are all the necessary amenities you would expect with a town of this size.



Iglesia San Tirso



Iglesia San Lorenzo

Camino de Santiago - Stage 19 - Sahagún to El Burgo Ranero

Total distance: 18 km



Arco de San Benito

Leave Sahagún through the old town passing through the Arco de San Benito and cross the Rio Cea using the Puente de Canto, a bridge built by Alfonso VI in 1085. Just after you cross the bridge you will see the campsite Pedro Ponce on your right where you will see a grove of Poplars. There is a tale, called the Legend of the Flowering Lances that says these grew in a single night. The legend tells of a difficult battle between the Emperor Charlemagne and the Muslim Aigoland. The battle had been raging for 3 long days and the Muslim army seemed to be growing in number. On the third night Charlemagne's troops stuck their lances into the ground and settled down to a long and uneasy night's sleep. Upon waking the next morning the soldiers found that many of the lances had sprouted bark and leaves.

Unfortunately, the omens were not good as this was believed to be a sign of martyrdom.

The soldiers cut down the lances, leaving the roots and went off to battle. The fighting was ferocious and many thousands of men died including all of the owners of the lances that had sprouted in the night. Later in the day four Italian Marquises arrived to aid Charlemagne and Aigolando sheepishly retreated with his troops to León. After the battle was over the roots that remained sprouted once more into the grove of Poplars that you see today. Continue along the path for 4 kilometers until you reach Calzada del Coto. Here the route splits into two, one called the Real Camino Francés and the other la Calzada de los Peregrinos. Our preferred route is to follow the Real Camino Francés that will take us through to El Burgo Ranero as there are more opportunities to stop to get



Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Perales

something to eat or drink as well as places to spend the night. We will give details of the alternative route at the end of this page. The Real Camino Francés for the most part is a purpose built pilgrim track, built for the 1993 holy year, which runs parallel to the road to Bercianos. After 1,7 kilometers you will pass a laguna or lake on your right and after 2 kilometers you will come to the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Perales just before coming to Bercianos del Real Camino. In Bercianos del Real Camino you can stay at the Albergue Parroquial or the Hostal Rivero and get something to eat in the café.

The village used to have a church called la Iglesia de San Salvador, but unfortunately for many years it had been poorly maintained and was at risk of collapse. In 1998 all the relics were removed to one of the two Ermitas in the village and the church was closed for renovation. Unfortunately, soon after the 32 meter tower collapsed rendering the church unusable and leaving the parish without a church. All religious ceremonies are now conducted at the newly renovated Ermita de San Roque. Walk all the way through the village and continue along the well marked route. In the distance you can see the grain silos of el Burgo Ranero about 7 kilometers away. Keep along this track until you come to a tunnel under the motorway, go through the tunnel and into the village of El Burgo Ranero. Here there are 3 albergues and a hostel to choose from. There are also a couple of cafés that offer a pilgrim menu. If you happen to be doing your Camino in the autumn you may get to see storks that come to the lakes around El Burgo Ranero before they migrate south for the winter. This is the stop on this stage of the Camino de Santiago, however we did mention earlier that there was an alternative route. Some consider it a more pleasant route, especially for those who like solitude, space and silence but if you intend walking this route be aware that there is only one village for the next 30 kilometers and there are also not many way markers.



El Burgo Ranero, iglesia San Pedro

The Calzada de los Peregrinos follows the old Roman road called la Via Trajana. At the village of Calzada del Coto walk past the Ermita de San Roque on your right hand side and cross over the motorway. Follow the main street out of the village but ignore the track to your left as this leads you down to the Camino Real Francés, the other route, instead keep walking straight taking a right hand path. After 2 kilometers you will pass an artificial lake on your left and come to a bridge over the railway line. Cross the bridge and walk straight on and you will soon enter a wooded area where the path starts to climb. Keep going through these woods and after about 3 kilometers you will pass a large farm called the Granja Valdelocajos. A little further on, about 1 kilometer, you come to the Fuente de los Peregrinos and a picnic area. 3 kilometers further on you come to the village of Calzadilla de los Hermanillos. It is probably wise to stay the night here as it is another 18 kilometers to the village of Reliegos where the two routes converge. In Calzadilla de los Hermanillos there is one small albergue as well as a small hostel. There is a restaurant as you enter the village which offers a pilgrim menu and a tiny village shop.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 20 - El Burgo Ranero to Mansilla de las Mulas

Total distance: 19 km

As mentioned in the last stage of our journey we are taking the Camino Real Francés between Sahajun and Mansilla de las Mulas. At the bottom of this page we will give details of the alternative route along the original Camino la Calzada de los Peregrinos. To leave El Burgo Ranero follow the main road through the village past the church and then past the cemetery. Walk for approximately 4,5 kilometers and you will come across a brick fountain set back slightly from the road in amongst some trees.

Keeping straight on after another 3,5 kilometers you pass a turning that takes you to the village of Villamarco. The village is about 1 kilometer off the Camino but it does have all the usual amenities so if you feel like a detour then turn left here. If not continue on for another 2 kilometers at which point the route crosses the railway line. From here we more or less follow the railway line, keeping it to our left for most of the next few kilometers. We soon enter a small valley crossing 2, usually dried up, rivers firstly the Valdearcos and then the Santa Maria. Soon after crossing the Santa Maria the landscape becomes a little hillier with wine storage cellars or bodegas set into the hills every now and then. 2 kilometers later we enter the village of Reliegos.



De 'Weg met de bomen' iets na Reliegos, links ziet u het in 1993 aangelegde pad van de Camino Real Francés

In Roman times Reliegos was an important transport centre as it lay at the coming together of three major roads. It's most recent claim to fame though is that of the last major meteorite strike to have hit Spain, way back at 8am on the 28th December 1948. The meteorite fell on the Calle Real and weighed around 8.9 kilos and the crater it created was 35cm (13.78 inches) deep. Unfortunately you won't get to see the meteorite here in Reliegos as it was taken to the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales in Madrid.

The large municipal albergue is quite modern and has both cooking facilities and internet access. There are some cafés around the main square and a shop to stock

up on provisions.

Leave Reliegos by walking straight through the village and joining a stony track and your next stop, Mansilla de las Mulas, can be seen approximately 6 kilometers away. The path is more or less straight from here until you reach the main road. Cross over the road, then walk over the bridge spanning the canal and enter the town of Mansilla de las Mulas. Whether you have walked the Camino Real Francés or the alternative Calzada de los Peregrinos here is where both Caminos meet. You enter Mansilla de las Mulas through the medieval Puerta del Castillo and down the Calle Santa Maria into the Plaza del Pozo where you will find a number of rather good pastelerias for those of you with a sweet tooth.

The name of the town comes from the Spanish for hand (mano) and saddle (silla de montar). The town's coat of arms depicts a hand resting on a saddle. The Mulas (mules) part of the town's name refers to the ancient mule markets that took place here.

The 14 meter high walls that surround Mansillas de las Mulas are believed to have been built some time in the 12th century, though there may well have been some type of fortification here since Roman times. The walls originally had 4 gates, the gate from which you entered the town, la Puerta del Castillos was the main gate, the best preserved though is la Puerta de la Concepción. In some parts the walls are an impressive 3 meters thick.

Worth seeing is the stretch of wall that runs alongside the Rio Esla.

At the height of the Camino's prominence during the Middle Ages Mansilla de las Mulas became a significant stopping point for the Pilgrims and once had 3 pilgrim hospitals, 2 convents and 7 churches. The 13th century Iglesia de Santa Maria and the Ermita de la Virgen de Gracia are the only remnants from these earlier times. The Iglesia de Santa Maria was the oldest church in the town having been the only one in the town up until 1220 when they started to build the others. The building that stands there now is from the 18th century but was built over the original. The original Ermita de la Virgen de Gracia was built around the same time as the Iglesia de Santa Maria and like the church, the current building is from a later era, probably 14th century. The Iglesia de San Martín, which was also built in 1220 has now become the Casa de Cultura, or cultural centre, of Mansilla de las Mulas. The only part of the original church remaining is the tower. As promised I will give you the alternative route from Calzadilla de los Hermanillos, which was our last stop on the Calzada de los Peregrinos. The route from here is pretty much a straight one all the way to Mansilla de Las Mulas, crossing an immense plateau with nothing to see but cornfields in every direction, and the occasional train.



Ermita de la Virgen de Gracia uit de 18e eeuw

After about 3.5 kilometers the tarmacked track you have been following turns into an un-surfaced road which you follow for at least 13.5 kilometers and then, as if from nowhere, you come to a deserted railway station at Apeadero Villamarco. As per the other Camino the village of Villamarco is close by, approximately 2 kilometers to the south. If you are desperate to stop cross the railway line at this point. If not keep straight on walking more or less parallel to the railway line and after about 4 kilometers you begin to go through the valley with the two dried up rivers, the Valdearcos and then the Santa Maria. Six kilometers further on you enter two more valleys where the path veers to the left. After a while you emerge from the second valley where you will come to a junction from where you will see the church tower of Reliegos. The path leading to Reliegos is about 500 meters away and if you wish you can meet up with the Camino Real Francés here or alternatively if you want to keep on your original path, take a right down a track shortly after the junction and after approximately 6 kilometers you reach Mansilla de las Mulas.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 21 - Mansilla de las Mulas to León

Total distance: 20 km

Leave Mansilla de las Mulas by crossing a stone bridge over the Río Esla, then take a left onto the old road which soon becomes a track that runs more or less parallel to the main road for about 5 kilometers. As you leave Mansilla de las Mulas you can see in the distance the first signs of the Cordillera Cantabrica mountain range. Up on your right hand side atop a hill are the remains of the Castro de Lancia once populated by Celtic Asturians until the Romans took it in around 24BC. Rumour has it that when the Romans finally captured the fort Emperor Augustus closed the Temple of Juno in Rome, something that was only ever done when Rome was at peace, thus marking the beginning of a period known as Pax Augusta.

Back on the track after 4 kilometers you pass through the village of Villamoros de Mansilla and then 2 kilometers further on you cross the 200 meter long, 20 arched Puente de Villarente over the Rio Pormo and enter the village that shares its name. Be aware that this bridge is extremely busy with traffic so can be pretty dangerous at times. The authorities in this area have mentioned the building of a temporary Pilgrim footbridge, but when this will happen I don't know. The government is also building a new motorway that will pass close by which should alleviate some of the congestion when it is completed sometime around 2012. The village has the usual restaurants, cafés and shops as well as a couple of albergues and a couple of hostals. Pass through Puente Villarente and after a petrol station on your right you will find the way-marked gravel path which runs parallel to the main road passing through the small village of Arcahueja after about 4.5 kilometers. There is a small albergue here. A couple of kilometers further on you come to the village of Valdelafuente where you can get something to eat at the bar/restaurant.



Puente de Villarente

Unfortunately from here the path disappears and you have to follow the main road. You will start to walk uphill towards the Alto del Portillo from where you will get some great views over the city of León and the mountains in the distance. Eventually you come to a bypass called the Avenida de Madrid which veers to your right but you will need to fork left towards the Puente Castro over the Rio Torio. Cross the pedestrianised footbridge about 50 meters from the main bridge and keep going straight on down the Avenida del Alcalde Migue Castaño for about 1.5 kilometers till you come out on the Plaza Santa Ana. Follow the Calle Barahona then the Calle Puertamoneda passing the Iglesia de Santa Maria del Mercado on your right, down the Calle de la Rua and the Calle Ancha until you reach the cathedral in León. Lying on the banks of the Rio Bernesga, León is the last major city before you reach Santiago and before you climb through the mountains of the Cordillera Cantabrica. The city was founded as a Roman fort in AD68 to protect the roads leading to the gold mines at El Bierzo a little to the west. The town was home to the Legio Septima or Seventh Legion of Imperial Rome from whence the city is believed to get its name. León was Christianised in the 3rd century becoming the oldest Bishopric (diocese of a bishop) in western Europe. It also became the Christian capital of Spain in the 10th century during the reign of Ordoño II, king of Galicia and León until it was destroyed by the Moors some time around 987 AD. It was reconstructed by Alfonso V.



Kathedraal van León

Like its sister city Burgos, León is worth spending some time in, especially if you have an interest in architecture, there are some wonderful examples in the city including a building by the famous architect Gaudi. The first building to visit is the Catedral de Santa Maria, a gothic masterpiece. The building that stands here today was begun in the 13th century and built over the original Romanesque cathedral that in turn had been built over a palace erected by Ordoño II. The palace that the king built had been built over the original roman baths which led to some major problems as we shall recount later. Over its lifetime the cathedral has undergone some major reconstruction and restoration. Because of its not too suitable building plot, the use of poor quality stone and the sheer weight of the amount of stained glass used (some 1,765 square meters in all), the building became somewhat unstable. Much of the stonework was replaced in the 19th century

requiring the removal of whole sections of the building. This in itself is a remarkable piece of engineering as it could well have caused the collapse of the whole building. I tip my hat to those engineers. Just as you enter the wooden doors of San Juan hanging up in one of the corners are the leathery remains of what most people believe is a mole or Topo Maligno who was blamed for causing all the problems with the building by tunnelling underneath it. The legend says that a giant mole, that no one had ever seen, would come out at night and destroy the foundations that the stonecutters had laid the previous day. This went on for many weeks bringing construction on the cathedral to a near standstill. Fed up with not being able to get on with their work the stone masons decided to set a giant trap to catch the culprit. Luckily they were successful the first night that the trap was put in place. When the builders went to see what had been caught they couldn't believe their eyes because the mole was so big. They promptly killed the animal and skinned it and hung



Kathedraal van León



Gezellige avond in León

its carcass above the door to remind everyone of their victory over the destructive mole. What was actually causing the problems were the myriad of tunnels that had been built as part of the roman baths and not one to put a kybosh on any legend, but recent investigations have also shown that the carcass that hangs over the door is not that of a giant mole but of a giant tortoise. There are many statues within the cathedral but one of particular interest is the Virgen de los Dados (or the Virgin of the Die or Dice). The legend tells of a captain of the Tercios de Flandes who went to eat in one of the numerous taverns in the Calle de la Bodega Vieja (now known as Calle Mariano Dominguez Berrueta). After having a large meal and plenty of wine to drink he started to talk about the numerous battles he had been in and generally telling a few tall stories and after while, fuelled by the

copious amounts of alcohol he had consumed, he started to gamble. Unfortunately, the alcohol was having a detrimental affect on him and he began to gamble irresponsibly losing quite a lot of money, but this didn't seem to stop him as he thought he could recoup the money he lost if he continued to play. This continued most of the night until he saw that he no longer had any money to bet with and anguished by the loss of his money he left in a huff. Wandering the streets of León at night he began cursing the bad luck the dice had brought him until he came upon the statue of the Virgin and child at the north wall of the cathedral. He hoped that by looking upon the figure of the Virgin that he would get some sort of peace but quite the opposite happened. In a fit of pique he threw the dice towards the Virgin hitting the head of the Christ child. At that very moment blood sprang forth from the wound and the poor Captain felt a chill go through his body and he fell to his knees begging forgiveness for what he had done staying there until dawn. A few days later the man presented himself to the local Franciscan monastery just outside the walls of León.



Stadsmuur van León

After explaining what he had done he entered the monastery never to leave, living the rest of his life as a Franciscan monk. The story of what had happened soon spread around the city and the statue has been known from that day hence as the Virgen de los Dados. The council of the Cathedral, fearing that this might happen again decided to bring the Virgin into the cathedral where it can be found today with her hand outstretched as if to say that she is willing to receive the dice of any person displeased by their game. Whilst still in the cathedral it is worth visiting the museum which is housed in the cloisters and sacristy and reached by a beautiful plateresque stairway. The museum contains many examples of religious art as well as the tombs and statues of much of León's nobility.



Real Colegieta de San Isidoro, pas gerestaureerd

Not far from the cathedral is the Real Colegieta de San Isidoro. This beautiful Romanesque building built partly into the city walls, is one of the most important buildings of its type. Built over the 10th century remains of a monastery built by Sancho el Gordo it was consecrated in the 11th century. In 1063 King Fernando I named the church after San Isidoro after having repatriated the saint's remains from Muslim held Sevilla. As you look at the building the right hand door is called La Puerta del Perdón or the door of forgiveness. It was believed that any pilgrim who was too ill to continue on their journey to Santiago could gain absolution by passing through this doorway. The other doorway, to your left, is La Puerta del Cordero or door of the lamb. Inside the church below the retablo is the casket which holds the remains of San Isidoro. The real treasure of the

basilica is its museum. The first area you enter is the royal crypt or Panteón Real with its amazing painted vaulted ceiling. The crypt holds the tombs of 11 of the Kings of León and their families, but unfortunately the bodies were taken by the French army during the Napoleonic wars. Towering above the cloisters is the Torre del Gallo or the tower of the cockerel which is topped with an 11th century weathercock. The building that fascinates me is the nearby Casa Botines. This building is by the famous architect Antoni Gaudi, who designed the Sagrada Familia and various other buildings in Barcelona. The building was commissioned by fabric merchants and construction started in 1891 and was declared a historic monument in 1969. For Gaudi this is quite a subdued but rather beautiful building which would not look out of place in a fairy tale. Part of the building houses an exhibition centre with the



Crypte met bijzondere plafondschildering

remaining floors being taken up by a bank. You may be lucky to be allowed to look around but please ask at reception first.



Casa Botines

Not too far, near the Plaza Mayor, is the former pilgrim hospital and monastery of San Marcos. The hospital was built under the orders of King Alfonso VII and was in operation from the 12th century through to the 15th century. The present building, with its 100 meter façade was begun in 1515 by the Order of St James who used it as their headquarters. It wasn't completed until some time in the 18th century. Most of the building is now taken up by a luxurious Parador but the chapterhouse contains an archaeological museum. You can wonder round the ground floor of the Parador if you ask permission first at reception, alternatively you can join one of the regular tours that are put on daily. Just across

the square there is a statue of a pilgrim looking towards the building. The area to the north of Calle Ancha is an area known as el Barrio Humedo or the wet district said to get its name from the sheer number of bars in this area. There are plenty of places where you can spend the night, from albergues right through to the luxurious parador. There are also plenty of bars, restaurants and cafés. If you want to spend the day here the tourist information office is located opposite the cathedral.



Parador San Marcos

Camino de Santiago - Stage 22 - León to Villadongas del Páramo

Total distance: 21.8 km

The best way to leave León is from the cathedral following the scallop shells that pass by the Real Colegiata de San Isidoro and towards the Parador of San Marcos. By the hotel is a bridge over the Rio Bernesga, cross this and walk through the Parque Quevado and then take a left turn at a fork in the road. There is a crossing here over the railway line via a footbridge, take this and keep going straight passing la Iglesia Capilla de Santiago. The road begins to go uphill from this point. At some traffic lights, about half way up the hill, take a right onto the Camino de la Cruz through some bodegas and an industrial estate. Keep straight on walking past the factories and rejoin the main road that heads into the large village of La Virgen del Camino. One of the stories attributed to this village comes from the 16th century. It is said that during the festival of the visitation in July 1505, the Virgin Mary appeared to a local shepherd called Alvar Simón Fernández while he was tending his flock. She asked him to go to the city and get the Bishop and bring him to this place to build a shrine in her honour. He asked the Virgin Mary how was the Bishop to know that it was she that sent him. The Virgin Mary seeing that he had a slingshot in his hand asked him to pass it to her. She picked up a small stone and put it into the slingshot. She told the shepherd that wherever this stone landed that is where she wanted her shrine to be built. The shepherd set off to speak to the Bishop in León and told him of his vision. He was unconvinced until the shepherd, using his slingshot, hurled a stone which promptly became a boulder when it struck the ground. Now convinced of this miracle the Bishop went away to speak to the other ecclesiastics and people of the village about the apparition and they eventually built an Ermita to the Virgin Mary.

The very modern church that stands in the place where the original Ermita had been is la Iglesia de la Virgen del Camino which was built in 1961 and is managed by a Dominican Order. Another story attributed to this shrine is that of a merchant being held captive, chained inside a strong box, by the Moors in North Africa in around 1522. The Virgin hearing of his plight and knowing of his desire to visit her shrine transported the merchant, chains and all, to the village of la Virgen del Camino. Inside the sacristy of the new church can be found the merchant's box and chains. Accommodation in the village can be found either at the municipal albergue across the road from the church or at a couple of hostals and a hotel. The Camino continues across the road from the church down a minor road towards the cemetery. After about 100 meters you have a choice of routes towards Hospital de Órbigo. Like before we will give you details of both options. One route, our preferred route, follows the Roman road and is considered the original Camino de Santiago. It does however follow the main road. The other route takes you through the countryside. Both routes are clearly marked. Both routes meet in Hospital de Órbigo. Our preferred route takes us to the village of Villadangos del Páramo which will be our stop on this section. Head up the hill, passing the cemetery on your left, to rejoin the main road. Unfortunately this is the main Madrid to Astorga road so be careful as you walk along the hard shoulder. After about 3 kilometers you come to the small village of Valverde de la Virgen where there is a private hostel and a café that does food.

Walk through the village and in about 1 kilometer you come to the small village of San Miguel del Camino where a local man leaves sweets, nuts and other such treats for the passing pilgrim. Just after coming through San Miguel del Camino fork left off the road onto a path that runs parallel to it and follow the track over open land running more or less parallel to the road. At some point it will look like you are about to rejoin the road, don't, keep walking straight until after about 5 kilometers you come to the Urbanización de Santiago where you will find 2 hostals. 1.5 kilometers further on you come to the end of this particular stage of the Camino de Santiago, the village of

Villadangos del Páramo. In Villadangos del Páramo it is worth visiting the at the entrance of the church depicting the legendary battle at Clavijo in 844 between Ramiro I de Asturias and Abderramán II, the Emir of Córdoba. It is at this battle that Santiago in his guise as Santiago Matamoros is reputed to have helped the vastly outnumbered Christian army. Inside the church are some impressive statues of Santiago both as Santiago Peregrino and as Santiago Matamoros. The village's other claim to fame is that it was here that the battle between the armies of Alfonso I of Aragon and Queen Urraca of León took place.



Santiago als pilgrim



Santiago Matamoros

Now this is a tale of marital strife gone a little crazy, yes the two monarchs were married to each other at the time. The marriage between the two had originally started out as a plan to unify the two powerful kingdoms, unfortunately it led to years of civil war. Eventually they had their marriage annulled and the wars ceased. Accommodation here can be found at the municipal albergue at the entrance to the village or at the hostel. The alternative route is slightly longer and only has one village between La Virgen del Camino and Hospital de Orbigo. It is however, a lot quieter and takes you along minor country roads and farm tracks. Be aware that at times there are not many way markers. At La Virgen del Camino take a left turn off the main road and walk uphill past a wall. After a short while you will join a minor road, follow this road for 2 kilometers until you reach Fresno del Camino where there is a fountain and a café. Leaving Fresno del Camino keep walking uphill and after about 2 kilometers the road descends into the village of Oncina de la Valdoncina. There are no services here other than a fountain where you can replenish your water supply.

At the end of the village veer right then left taking a track at a sign that says Chozas de Abajo 5km. Up here the area is as flat as a pancake, continue more or less forward until you reach Chozas de Abajo where you can get a meal at the bar as well as pitch your tent, if you have one, at the camping site. Walk down the Calle Real, which is signposted Villar de Mazarife 4km, taking a left turn, then a right, crossing a bridge which brings you to another track which leads you to Villar de Mazarife. Villar de Mazarife is the largest village on this section and has accommodation in the form of 3 private albergues. Two of them provide an evening meal and breakfast, the other has a vending machine and a kitchen where you can prepare your own food. Also in the village are a couple of cafés and a bakery as well as a supermarket. Walk through the village to Plaza Mediovilla and down Calle Camino to the main road, the Carretera Valcalbo. Cross the road where you see a signpost saying Villavente 9,3km and walk down a minor road continuing straight on for about 6 kilometers before crossing a bridge over the canal. A further 2 kilometers down the line you come to a bridge over a large canal cross it and follow the road into Villavente. Villavente doesn't have any accommodation but it does have a couple of bars who unfortunately don't provide food but there is a small shop. Walk out of the village passing the church, forking left before crossing the railway line where you will see a notice saying Hospital de Orbigo 3.5km. When you reach the AP71 motorway cross it using the footbridge and follow the arrows showing the Camino route for bicycles, it's pretty straightforward, soon after you will reach the bridge of Hospital de Orbigo where the two routes merge.



Lange –historische– brug in Hospital de Orbigo

Camino de Santiago - Stage 23 - Villadongas del Páramo to Astorga

Total distance: 27.1 km

At the end of the village turn left to return briefly to the main road. After a little while fork left onto a path running parallel to the road. Try to follow this track as far as you can before you have to rejoin the road and walk along the hard shoulder. There is no choice but to walk along the road here as the land hereabouts is criss-crossed with canals, dykes and irrigation channels. After about 4 kilometers you come to the village of San Martin del Camino. Accommodation at San Martin del Camino can be found in 2 private albergues and 1 municipal one. There is a café, a bakery and a shop. Walk through the village and cross the road forking right down the path running parallel to the road. After about 2 kilometers take a left turn crossing a bridge over a dyke and unfortunately, return to the main road. After about 1.5 kilometers you come upon a gravel works, take a right turn down a lane walking through fields heading towards the town of Hospital de Orbigo. Take the Calle Orbigo walking adjacent to the river and cross the fabulous medieval bridge into Hospital de Orbigo. This 13th century bridge is the longest one on the Camino at 204 meters long (approximately 670 feet) and has 20 arches. The river that it crosses doesn't seem to appear to warrant such a lengthy bridge, but prior to a dam being built at Barrios de Luna the river was a lot wider. The bridge also has the legend of El Paso Honroso (Honourable Pass) attributed to it. El Paso Honroso was the name given to a jousting tournament of sorts undertaken by the Leonés Don Suero de Quiñones. Don Suero was in love with a lady by the name of Doña Leonor de Tobar, who unfortunately did not feel the same way. This 15th century knight considering himself a prisoner of her love, decided to wear an iron collar around his neck every Thursday as a symbol of being enslaved by his love for her. As a way to impress both the lady he loved and King Juan II, as well as a way of freeing himself from his enslavement, he decided to embark on a surprising joust in the style of the knights of old.

At a meeting in January 1434, Don Suero proposed to the King that he would break 300 lances on the bridge over the río Órbigo close to a pilgrim Hospital run by the order of San Juan (Saint John) and only when he had accomplished this would he remove his iron collar. Many knights arrived from all manner of places including Germany, Italy, Portugal and especially from the kingdom of Aragón. The tournament started on the 10th of July 1434 and lasted a month during which time Don Suero and his 9 fellow knights defeated 68 men, killing only one and managed to break nearly 200 lances. The men who were judging the contest decided that this was enough and during a ceremony removed the iron collar from Don Suero's neck.

On the bridge at Hospital de Orbigo there is a plaque commemorating the tournament showing the names of the 10 knights who were involved: Don Suero de Quiñones, Don Diego de Bazán, Don Suero Gómez, Don Lope de Aller, Don Pedro de los Ríos, Don Lope de Estúñiga, Don Pedro de Nava, Don Sancho Rabanal, Don Diego de Benavides and Don Gómez de Villacorta. The plaque also contains the following:

*Por rescate de la prisión en que su señora le tenía
Y con codicia de fama durable
Concertó con nueve caballeros más
Defender el Paso Honroso junto a este puente
Rompiendo lanzas contra más de setenta caballeros
Que al camino de romería del Apóstol Santiago
Llegaron de Castilla, de Aragón, de Cataluña
De Valencia, de Portugal, de Bretaña
De Italia y de Alemania*

Roughly translated it says:

*To be rescued from the prison in which his lady held him
And desiring long lasting fame
He set out with 9 other knights
To defend the honourable pass close to this bridge
Breaking lances with more than 70 knights
That to the pilgrim road of the Apostle St James
They came from Castilla, Aragon and Cataluña
From Valencia, Portugal and Britain
From Italy and Germany*

There is a slightly different story in that Don Suero offered the tournament to Saint James saying that he and the other 9 knights would challenge those undertaking the pilgrimage to Santiago until 300 lances were broken. When the tournament was finished all the participants went to Santiago de Compostela to offer the arms with which they fought to the Apostle. It is also said that the iron collar (now gold) worn by Don Suero is hung around the neck of the image of the Apostle that is used in processions. Unfortunately like so many of these stories it doesn't have a particularly happy ending. A few years after the tournament Don Suero lost his life at the hands of one of the knights that had been defeated and who was seeking vengeance for his defeat. Every year in early June since 1997 the Fiesta de las Justas del Paso Honroso takes place in a field close to the bridge in commemoration of the legend. The story of el Paso Honroso is mentioned in Don Quijote and may have been an inspiration for the old knight himself. The Iglesia de San Juan Bautista, on the other side of the bridge is what remains of the pilgrim hospital which had been built in the 12th century by the Caballeros de San Juan de Jerusalén (Knights of the Order of Saint John).

Accommodation can be found at one of the 3 albergues or one of the 3 hostals in the town. There is also a camping site. There are a number of restaurants near the bridge that offer a pilgrim menu and there is also a small shop in the village. Walk through the town down the Calle Álvarez, past the Iglesia de San Juan Bautista and the Iglesia de Santa Mario, continuing down the main street right to the end of the village until you come to some crossroads.



Twee cafe solo en een typisch Spaanse grote croissant-met-vork in Hospital de Orbigo

Again you have two options the first is to continue on the road to Astorga. This is considered the historic route, or alternatively you can choose to follow a route through the countryside to San Justo de la Vega where both routes meet. If you want to take the first option and follow the road, keep walking straight ahead following the way markers and you come to a gravel path which runs parallel to the N120 road. Just follow the markers all the way to San Justo de la Vega. The other route as we mentioned takes you through the countryside and is a much nicer route. At the crossroads take a right turn and keep walking straight until in about 2 kilometers you come to the small village of Villares de Órbigo. Here there is accommodation available in a private albergue and a café bar and pharmacy.

Walk through the village and walk past the lavadero, this is where people used to go and wash their clothes in the days before washing machines. After a while you will come to a road at which point you will need to cross both it and the canal close by. After about 200 meters you will need to turn left and then walk about 1 kilometer before rejoining the road and entering the village of Santibañez de Valdeiglesias.

There is a reasonably sized albergue here with a kitchen. The village does have a café but they don't serve food, they do however sell food items as they are the local village shop. The village is small but each year they construct a maze out of maize which is reputed to be the biggest in the world.

Walk directly through the village and take a right up Calle Carromonte Alto. You will start walking up hill and into open countryside. From the top of the hill the path descends into a valley where the way markers can be found on the ground. Walk up the other side of the valley and then down again into the next valley and yes, you've guessed it, start walking uphill again onto an open

plateau. Soon after you come to the Crucero de Santo Toribio where the two routes meet. From the Crucero you get, on a good day, some fabulous views of Astorga in the valley below. From here walk downhill taking a right turn onto the old road which links to the new main road and into San Justo de la Vega. This is a village that is continuously expanding and has a number of bars, restaurants and a shop. Accommodation can be found at a hostel or at the local casa rural. The village also allows people to camp by the river during the summer months.

Walk through the village and cross the bridge over the Río Tuerto. Take a right turn 100 meters later walking past the merendero, a picnic area. Keep following the road until you come to a bridge with 3 arches across a canal. Cross over it and take a left down a track towards the main road. After a short while you will cross the railway tracks a couple of times using the marked level crossings and then enter the walled city of Astorga through the Puerta del Sol, making your way to the Plaza de la Catedral.

Before the Romans arrived Astorga was home to the celtic Astur tribe. The region was then conquered by the Roman legion Legio X Gemina. The Romans made it one of their most important forts due to the number of roads passing through the district and more importantly, the sites of many gold mines in the area. The Romans named the town Asturica Augusta. In recent centuries the area around Astorga became the capital of the Maragatos, an ethnic group of people known for their very distinctive dress, customs and building style. During the height of the



Astorga: Kathedraal Santa María

Camino de Santiago in the Middle Ages, Astorga boasted 22 pilgrim hospitals, the last of which, el Hospital de las Cinco Llagas, burned down early in the 20th century. It is here that the Via de la Plata (the Silver route) meets up with the Camino Francés.

There are a number of buildings worth visiting as you pass through. The first is the Catedral de Santa María. Building on the cathedral started in the 15th century under the auspices of Obispo Don Alvaro Osorio y Guzmán as part of a remodelling of the earlier Romanesque cathedral, parts of which can still be found within the current building. The building wasn't to be completed for further 300 years. Most of the building is gothic in style, but the towers and the façade, added in the early 18th century, are Baroque. Just across the road from the Cathedral is our next building, the Palacio Episcopal, which despite its name has never been the home of any bishop, even serving as the local

headquarters of General Franco's Falange party during the Spanish civil war. There has been a primitive style of Bishop's palace on this site since Doña Urraca donated the land to Bishop Don Pelayo in 1120 AD. The building was adapted in numerous ways over the intervening centuries but 2 months after the new Catalan Bishop Don Juan Bautista Grau y Vallespinós moved in it burnt to the ground.



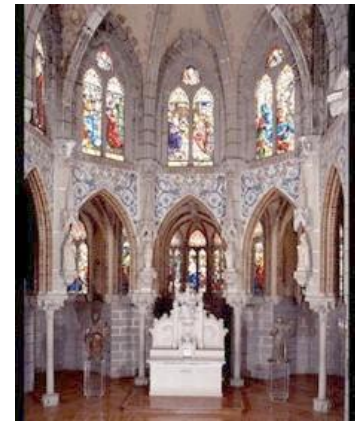
Crucero de Santo Toribio



Astorga: Bischoppelijk Paleis van Gaudí

So a new palace needed to be built and the new Bishop called upon his very good friend and fellow Catalan Antoni Gaudí to design and build the new Episcopal Palace. Building started in June of 1889 but when the bishop died in 1893 only the first two floors had been completed with the third floor and the roof still to be finished. Following the death of his friend, Gaudí had a number of disagreements with members of the council and he resigned from the project therefore stopping construction for several years. It is even reported that so disgusted was Gaudí with his treatment that he said "he wouldn't cross Astorga even in a hot air balloon". It wasn't until the arrival of the Asturian Bishop Julián de Diego y Alcolea in 1907 that work start anew on the building. In order to finish the building the bishop commissioned the architect Ricardo García de Guereña who completed the building in 1915.

The chapel was consecrated in 1913 but the next year Ricardo García de Guereña, like Gaudí, resigned the contract and it wasn't until 1956 and the appointment of Bishop Castelltort did work to finish the interior restart with work finally being completed in 1961 under Bishop González Martín who promptly converted the building into what it is now – el Museo de Los Caminos. If you are anything like me you will enjoy nothing better than having a lovely bar of chocolate as a treat after a long walk up hill and down dale (I live in Yorkshire) as a reward for all that hard work. For those of you with a sweet tooth there can't be anywhere better to visit than the Museo de Chocolate. The museum celebrates Astorga's chocolate industry which thrived during the 18th and 19th centuries.



Interieur Bischoppelijk Paleis

The museum houses a unique collection of materials and machinery used in the making of chocolate from grinding stones through to the plates used in the printing the labels for the chocolate. You will be able to see how chocolate was and is being made and at the end of the tour sample the chocolate itself. My mouth is watering just thinking about it – enjoy. For those of you with an interest in Roman history you can visit the Museo Romano which has been built over the Ergástula cave which is believed to have been the entrance to the ancient Roman forum. Inside you will find many objects found in archaeological digs in the area which show how the Romans lived and worked.

Like many large towns Astorga has all the usual amenities. For accommodation you can choose one of the 2 large albergues or decide to stay at one of the 4 hostals.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 24 - Astorga to Rabanal del Camino

Total distance: 20.7 km



Astorga: koekjes en chocolade

The next section of the Camino de Santiago goes all the way through to Ponferrada, passing through the area known as la Margateria and then enters the Bierzo region, with its mines, bordering Galicia. This area has very few villages so we would recommend that you always have enough food and water with you for emergencies. As you will be walking through some pretty high mountains make sure you take some warm clothing with you, you will need it, even in the height of summer. Follow the Camino markers through Astorga past the cathedral, taking a left onto the Calle Portería and out through the Puerta Obispo. Take a right into Calle Sancti Spiritu and down Calle San Pedro passing a church. At a crossroads cross over to the Calle de

los Mártires towards Santa Colomba de Somoza. You will know if you are going the right way as the Ermita del Ecce Homo will be on your left. This path runs parallel with the road and after about 5 kilometers out of Astorga you will reach Murias de Rechivaldo. Accommodation here can be found at one of the 2 Albergues or at a couple of casa rurales. There are 2 bars/restaurants if you want something to eat or drink.

Murias de Rechivaldo is a lovely village with most of the stone buildings constructed in the traditional Maragato style. Many of the buildings date from the late 19th century due to a flood destroying most of the village in September 1846. The new village was built on higher ground to avoid it being flooded again. The 18th century Iglesia de San Esteban has a carving of the Virgen del Pilar above the door. The Virgen is another of Spain's patron saints and el dia del Pilar (Virgin's day) is celebrated throughout Spain on the 12th October. The church also has an external staircase which leads to the bell tower which is a common feature in these parts. As is also quite common in many areas, more often than not you will find a stork's nest on the top of the bell tower.



Murias de Rechivaldo: Iglesia San Esteban

Walk past the albergue and the pilgrim fountain onto a track leading to a country road which runs parallel to the main road. After about 5 kilometers you enter Santa Catalina de Somoza where accommodation can be found either in one of the 2 private Albergues or at the municipal hostel. Walk down the Calle Real and rejoin the main road at the large cross situated near some seats. In a little while the path starts to climb again. Keep along this track for 4 kilometers until you reach El Ganso which is about 1,020 meters above sea level. El Ganso is typical of the villages in this region and some of the buildings still have the traditional thatched roofs, unfortunately many of these are being replaced with much easier to maintain roof tiles. Back in the 12th century the village had a monastery and pilgrims hospital which administered to the pilgrims passing through but there are no sign of any remains.



El Ganso

The Camino continues through El Ganso down a track running parallel to the road. Here it passes an old oak tree where many a pilgrim have rested in the shade of its canopy. It is known as el Roble del Peregrino. As you walk along the path towards Rabanal del Camino you will pass the remains of the Roman gold mines of La Fucarona, one of many such mines in this region. After about 7 kilometers you reach the small village of Rabanal del Camino. Just as you enter the village you pass the 18th century Ermita del Bendito Cristo de la Vera Cruz. This village is indelibly linked with the Camino de Santiago due in part to its location on the pass through the mountains.

In the Middle Ages this was an important stop for pilgrims

before they walked through the mountains and the village was much bigger as can be seen by the number of churches here. There is a new order of Benedictine monks living in the Monasterio de San Salvador del Monte Irago. The monastery was started in 2001 by monks who came from Santo Domingo de Silos near Burgos but now the monastery is affiliated with the abbey at St Otilien in Germany. They, like their 12th century predecessors administer to the spiritual needs of the pilgrims. Despite its size Rabanal del Camino can offer the pilgrim accommodation in 3 Albergues and 3 hostals. Take the opportunity to rest here before you tackle the mountains of Monte Irago and Montes de León.



Albergue in Rabanal del Camino

Camino de Santiago - Stage 25 - Rabanal del Camino to Molinaseca

Total distance: 25 km

Walk out of Rabanal del Camino past the churches of San Jose and Santa Maria and down a country lane until you reach the road. After about 2 kilometers you come across the Fuente del Peregrino and following a continuous climb for a further 4 kilometers you come into the village of Foncebadón. Just as you are approaching the village you will see a wooden cross known locally as el Cruz de Foncebadón. It kindly asks you in 4 different languages, including English, to not leave stones on the cross. This you may ask is a little odd but you will see what we mean a little later.



Foncebadón

Foncebadón like so many other villages has been linked directly to the fortunes of the Camino de Santiago. The village grew during the Camino's height in the 12th century even having its own pilgrim hospital, hospice and church built by the hermit Gaucelmo, the remains of which you will pass on your way out of the village. However the village very nearly disappeared altogether, at one point only having 2 inhabitants. With the resurgence of the Camino de Santiago over the last few years the village is slowly but surely coming back to life and some people who have passed through on their way to Santiago have loved it so much that they have come back and settled here. Should you wish to spend the night here you have

the choice of 3 albergues.

As you leave the village you pass what remains of the church and hospital built by Gaucelmo. After a short while, approximately 1 kilometer, you come to the road again where you turn left and about 300 meters later you come to the top of Monte Irago and the Cruz de Ferro (iron cross). I mentioned just as you entered Foncebadón that the cross there asked you not to put stones on the cross, here is why. Where the cross is now located is thought to have originally been an altar built to the Roman god Mercury, whereas some stories say that it is where the Celts worshiped, either way the origins were pagan. The cross is believed to have been placed here in the 11th century by Gaucelmo. Traditionally pilgrims have left a rock here, whether picked up along their journey or brought all the way from their homeland. Some of the rocks that have been left here contain little messages to loved ones or the name of the pilgrim's home town. In the holy year of 1982 the little Ermita de Santiago, that you see close by, was built. There is also now a huge sundial on the floor where you provide the shadow in order to tell the time.



Cruz de Ferro

Thankfully from here until you reach Ponferrada the route starts to descend for the most part and after about 2

kilometers you reach the village of Manjarín. Unlike its neighbour Foncebadón which still had a couple of inhabitants, Manjarín was completely abandoned at the beginning of the 19th century. It too relied heavily on the traffic of passing pilgrims and like so many villages we have passed through had a pilgrim hospital run by the Knight's Templar. There is only one person in the village now and that is a gentleman called Tomás Martínez who runs the small, rough and ready albergue here. He is a real character, dressing up as a Templar knight for his visitors. Just outside the albergue are a number of wooden planks showing the distances to various places, of particular interest to us is the one that lets us know there are only 222 kilometers to our final destination, Santiago de Compostela.



"Tempeliersnederzetting" in Manjarín

From Manjarín you continue to follow the road for approximately 2 kilometers passing a military base up on the hill. At around this point you have reached the highest point of the entire Camino de Santiago at 1,515 meters above sea level, that's approximately 4,970 feet. The views on a clear day are spectacular. The steep downhill section starts from this point heading towards the El Bierzo valley and its former Roman gold mines. Keep on following the track until you enter the village of Acebo. The village of Acebo has a couple of interesting pieces of history. As you have walked from Foncebadón you will have passed a number of posts. Back in the Middle Ages these numbered around 800 and it was up to the inhabitants of el Acebo to maintain them so that pilgrims would not get lost in the snow. So important was this job considered to be that the king exempted the inhabitants from paying taxes on condition that they continued to maintain those marker posts. I somehow doubt they are exempt from tax now and whether it's the villagers that maintain them. The other piece of history does not refer specifically to el Acebo but to a small village about 5 kilometers away called Compludo. We don't pass it on the Camino but there is a detour if you wish to take it. I mention it because I thought that it had an interesting legend. In the 7th century San Fructuoso founded a monastery there and included a blacksmiths forge or herreria.

What made it famous was that it was said to have been the place where the sword used by Pelayo during the Batalla de Covadonga was forged. Pelayo was the founder of the Kingdom of Asturias and was the first to have banished the Moors from his Kingdom therefore starting the Reconquista.

Back in Acebo there are 3 albergues, 1 of which has a café/restaurant and another has a kitchen. There is a small shop down the main street where you can get supplies. There are also a couple of hostals in the village if the albergues are full. As you leave El Acebo you pass the local cemetery where you will see a sculpture of a bicycle. This was placed here in memory of a German pilgrim named Heinrich Krause, who sadly died in 1987 of a heart attack at the age of 70 just outside el Acebo on his way to Santiago. Passing the sculpture keep walking down the path towards Riego de Ambrós. In Riego de Ambrós there is a single albergue, a pension and a hostel. A restaurant in the village offers a pilgrim menu and you can get some food at the café too. Walk all the way through the village descending all the time and follow the track that takes you through a chestnut wood and join the road that leads into the village of Molinaseca. Just as you enter the town, before you cross the bridge, is the 17th century Santuario de Nuestra Señora de las Angustias which has been built partly into the cliff.



Monument voor Heinrich Krause



Puente de los Peregrinos

Walk past the Santuario de Nuestra Señora de las Angustias and over the Río Maruelo via the medieval Puente de los Peregrinos. Molinaseca's location has over the centuries attracted the nobility and it is said that Doña Urraca, the 11th century Queen of Castilla y León and Galicia once lived here. Many of the houses in the village are emblazoned with the elaborate coats of arms of the various noble families that once resided here. In terms of its importance regarding the Camino de Santiago it once boasted 4 pilgrim hospitals but nothing remains of these. The Calle Real is the main street through the town and it is here where most of the noble's houses can be found. The street also has a number of channels running down it which were used to clean the streets. These channels led to a new fiesta being devised in the early 1950's, which is now celebrated on

the 16th and 17th August every year.

In 1954 a couple were celebrating their wedding and some of their guests decided that they wanted to have a bit of fun so they decided to open the sluice gates a little bit, like the villagers did when they wanted to clean the streets. The water came down the channels and the guests started to throw water over each other and great fun was had by all. They repeated this the following year and after a while it became a tradition. The day begins at 3 pm with a wander round the bars of the village followed by a chocolatada, a gathering where hot chocolate is served, at the local school at 8pm. At 9pm the sluice gates are opened and water pours down the channels and then the real fun begins.

In terms of accommodation there are a couple of albergues and 4 hostals as well as a number of places where you can stop to eat or to have a drink.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 26 - Molinaseca to Villafranca del Bierzo

Total distance - 30.7 km

Leave Molinaseca by following the main street, Calle Real, until it becomes the main road, taking a right turn after you pass the tennis courts and down a path which runs parallel to the main road. You will meet up again with the main road at the top of a hill where you have a choice of routes. One route, the right hand one, follows the busy road all the way to Ponferrada and is slightly shorter than the left hand route. The alternative path takes you through the village of Campo and is slightly longer but you are away from the traffic. Directions for both routes are below.



Molinaseca: Calle Real

The road route

At the top of the hill keep walking ahead for about 1.5 kilometers where you take a right bend past a furniture warehouse and then cross over the bridge spanning the Rio Boeza. Shortly you will take a slight left bend and walk down a path that leads you to a bridge over the railway line, passing a cemetery before you reach an albergue and the town of Ponferrada.

The off road route via Campo

At the top of the hill take the left hand route following a minor road for approximately 1.5 kilometers until you reach the village of Campo. The village is now a suburb of Ponferrada and is locally known as Campo de Ponferrada but the village itself has been here for many years, probably dating back to when the Celts lived in the area. It is believed to have originally been called El Castro. The romans settled here as can be seen by the remains of a Roman fountain. During the Middle Ages, before the Spanish inquisition, this area was known as Ponferrada's Jewish quarter. Then as now the Calle Real or main street forms part of the Camino Francés but there are no albergues or places to stay, these disappeared some time in the early 20th century. There is however a café/bar where you can get something to drink. Continue down Calle Real and take the left hand of 2 roads down a gravelled path. This path will eventually turn into a tarmacked path passing some slightly unsightly buildings including a slaughterhouse and a rather smelly rubbish tip. A little further on you take a left at a sign saying Los Barrios and shortly after cross the medieval Puente Mascarón spanning the Rio Boeza and enter Ponferrada.

Ponferrada has been around since Celtic times and grew in importance and prosperity during the Roman occupation because of the gold mines in the El Bierzo region, then it was known as Interamnium Flavium. In the Middle Ages it became known as Puebla de San Pedro named after its church and became a major stopping point along the Camino de Santiago. However, getting to the village across the river, which had been set up by Fernando III the king of León, was no mean feat so towards the end of the 11th century Obispo Osmudo, Bishop of Astorga orders a bridge to be built making the Camino easier for the pilgrims. Unlike many bridges of this time which were usually constructed out of stone, this bridge was constructed from iron or ferro as it is called in Spanish. This bridge became known as the Pons-Ferrata (iron bridge) and it was this that eventually gave the city its modern day name of Ponferrada. The Knights Templar began to settle in the region during the 12th century and the town of Ponferrada was given over to the Knights by King Alfonso IX with the mandate that they protect the pilgrims who were walking the Camino de Santiago through León.



Tempelierskasteel in Ponferrada

The Knights began to construct el Castillo de los Templarios over the remains of a Roman fortress and completed it in the late 13th century. The current castle was extended during the 15th century and further alterations were done in the 19th and 20th centuries. Worth visiting whilst you are here is the Basilica de Santa Maria de la Encina. The church was built in the late 16th century and houses the statue of la Virgen de la Encina from whom the church gets its name. Legend has it that in the middle of the 5th century Santo Toribio de Liébana visited



Basilica de Santa María de la Encina

Jerusalem and brought back with him a number of relics, amongst them a statue of the Virgin Mary. This statue stayed for a number of years in Astorga but during the wars with the Moors the relics were hidden in various places to avoid them being plundered by the Saracens. During the Reconquista many of the relics were recovered but the statue of the Virgin disappeared for many centuries.

In 1178 the Knights Templar came to Ponferrada and built their castle. One fine day the man in charge of felling trees in the nearby forest saw a bright light emanating from the forest. He made his way towards the light and as he approached its location he saw that it was coming from the opening in the trunk of a holm oak tree. On closer inspection he found that inside the oak was the statue of the Virgin that had disappeared so many years before. He brought it back to the castle and from then on the Virgin has been known as la Virgen de la Encina or the Virgin of the Holm Oak.

The Royal Prison or Real Cárcel is worth visiting too as it now houses the museum el Museo del Bierzo. The building dates from the late 16th century and has at one time been a judge's house, a prison, hence its name, and the original council offices. The building underwent a total remodel in the late 18th century and following restoration in the mid 1990's it became the town's museum. For anyone who has an interest in weaving and its traditions there is plenty to see here including some old looms. There is so much beautiful architecture and history to see in Ponferrada that it would be worth spending a whole day here before the arduous trek across the mountains into Galicia. For accommodation there is the albergue which you passed as you entered Ponferrada but there are also a number of hostals where you can stay. Because of the size of the city there are all the usual amenities such as restaurants, bars and cafés as well as banks if you need to withdraw any money. Unfortunately the route out of Ponferrada isn't particularly nice, probably the worst on the route but you will soon be walking through the mountains so keep that in mind as you head out.



Real Cárcel

Walk down the Calle Rañadero and across the bridge over the Rio Sil and turn right down Calle Rio Urdiales, through the big square and towards a junction turning right down the tree lined Avenida del Sacramento. Keep going straight on at the roundabout with the fountain and sculptures on it. At the next junction turn right down Avenida de la Libertad. At the sign for Compostilla turn left, turn right at the end and then take an immediate left underneath an apartment block and into Plaza de Compostilla and walk past the Iglesia Santa Maria de Compostilla. At the Iglesia Santa Maria de Compostilla cross the road, walk down IV Avenida and then through an unusual residential district. I say unusual because it is very American in style, the sort of town large companies would build to house their workers in the US. Once through the residential district take a left and then a right into 3a Taversia passing the tennis courts and the modern Ermita de Nuestra Señora de Compostilla with its brightly coloured mural on the end wall. From here you will join a footpath which becomes a minor road going underneath the motorway and shortly you will come to the church at the



Iglesia Sta María de Compostilla

village of Columbianos. In Columbianos you can get something to eat at the café/bar or the shop. The church is a nice spot to rest awhile and look out towards the mountains of Galicia.

Walk through the village and keep on towards the main road. This is very busy so be sensible and use the pedestrian crossing. Be aware Spanish drivers don't really slow down for pedestrians. At the Capilla de San Blas take a left. If you didn't manage to get a drink in Columbianos there is a small bar just by the small chapel. Walk down the Calle San Blas and cross the railway line and after approximately 2.5 kilometers you come to the small village of Fuentesnuevas where you will find a small café/bar and the Ermita Campo Divino Cristo.

Walk down the Calle Real, past the church and through fields for about 2 kilometers when you will then reach another small village called Camponaraya. Here you will find a hostel if you wish to stay the night, some bars, shops and a bank and the Ermita Nuestra Señora de la Soledad. As you walk through the village you get the feeling that it's never going to end as it is a long narrow village. After passing the church cross the bridge over the Rio Naraya and soon you will come across a track through some vines that belong to the Co-operativa Viñas del Bierzo. If you fancy some wine the company sells it by the glass.

Thankfully we have escaped the ugliness of the exit to Ponferrada and for a little while at least we will be walking through vineyards and orchards. When you come to the motorway take the bridge over it and turn left through some more vines for about 1.5 kilometers, when you will cross the road towards Cacabelos. Cacabelos as a village first appeared in the 10th century but it can trace its origins to way back in the Bronze Age. Prior to becoming the village of Cacabelos it had previously been known as Ventosa but this village had more or less disappeared before the 10th century when the lands were given to the Monasterio de Carracedo by Bermudo II the King of Galicia and León. The village wasn't actually rebuilt until the early 12th century when the Archbishop of Santiago, Diego Gelmírez came along and built the Iglesia de Santa Maria. Unfortunately, he caused a bit of a quarrel with the Bishop of Astorga under whose jurisdiction the village came under.



Cacabelos: kerk met albergue

The argument was finally resolved when Alfonso VII, the king of Galicia and of Castilla y León gave the town to the Archbishop of Santiago. At the height of the Camino's popularity in the Middle Ages the town boasted 4 churches and 5 pilgrim hospitals. Nothing remains of these ancient buildings but the 18th century Santuario de la Quinta Angustia, where you will find an unusual carving of the child Jesus playing cards with San Antonio de Padua, has been built on the site of one of the medieval hospitals. This is also where you will find the albergue at the side. There are a couple of museums in the village, one dedicated to the archaeological findings of the region and the other to the wine industry of El Bierzo.

In 1809, during the Peninsula war, General Sir John Moore's men were trying to retreat across the mountains to get to back their navy which was based in La Coruña when they reached Cacabelos. The French army was forcing them into retreat and as Moore's men reached the bridge in Cacabelos one of the General's marksmen, Thomas Plunkett, decided to take a pot shot at the commander of the French army. Thankfully he was an excellent shot and he hit the French commander right through the head. This single act saved the British army from being overrun by the French army and thus allowing a more civilised retreat into Galicia.

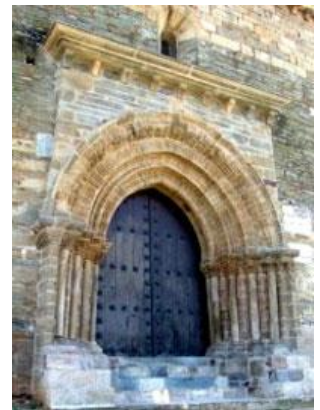
Other than the Albergue next to the Santuario de la Quinta Angustia there are also 3 hostals to stay in. As it is a reasonably large village there are a number of shops, banks, restaurants etc. Walk out of Cacabelos down the main street passing the Capilla de San Roque and down the Calle de las Angustias. Cross the bridge over the river and walk down the main road for about 2 kilometers until you get to the small hamlet of Pierros. Follow the road marked Camino Viejo down a track which will take you through the vineyards and past the Iglesia de Santiago and its cemetery on the outskirts of Villafranca del Bierzo. Villafranca del Bierzo is believed to have been founded by French monks of the Cluny order. They built a monastery here called el Monasterio de Santa Maria de Cluniaco during the years following the discovery of Santiago's body in 813 in order to service the needs of the many pilgrims who passed this way. As the monks were French the village became known as Villafranca or town of the French. In terms of pilgrim architecture Villafranca del Bierzo once had as many as 8 monasteries and 6 pilgrim hospitals. This is the last major



Iglesia de Santiago

town along the Camino de Santiago in León with the Galician village of O Cebreiro only 30 kilometers away. The town could be said to owe its existence to the Camino and both this and the many monuments to be found here make Villafranca del Bierzo a natural tourist destination. There is plenty to see but below are some that may be of particular interest.

Just as you enter the town you come across the 12th century Iglesia de Santiago. This church was granted the privilege of providing absolution to the pilgrims who were too ill to continue along the Camino to Santiago. This absolution was received at the Puerta del Perdón,



Puerta del Perdón

the door of forgiveness which can be found at the side of the church.

Another building is the Convento de la Anunciada. The church was founded in the early 17th century by Don Pedro Alvarez de Toledo y Osorio, one of the Marqueses of Villafranca, for his daughter who had chosen to become a nun. The church is built on the remains of one of the many pilgrim hospitals that had sprung up in the town. Inside are the remains of San Lorenzo de Brindis brought back from Lisbon, where the saint died, by the Marqués. Also inside can be found the Panteon de los Marqueses the crypt for the family who still inhabit the castle. The impressive building of San Nicolás was founded by Don Gabriel de Robles in the 17th century as a religious school run by Jesuits until their expulsion in 1767. During the early 19th century the building became the centre for local government until it was sold by Roble's heirs in 1899 to the Padres Paúles who converted it back into a school which was still in use until 1983. Now it is a museum of natural sciences. The beautiful building of La Colegiata de Santa Maria was built on the site of the original monastery in Villafranca by the 2nd Marqués de Villafranca, Pedro de Toledo in the 16th century. Inside you will find a number of lovely paintings and sculptures and outside the peaceful gardens encourage you to sit and while away a minute or two.



San Nicolás



Colegiata de Santa María

The Calle del Agua has some interesting houses with many of them emblazoned with the crests of the noble families who once owned them. Of particular interest is the Palacio de los Marqueses de Villafranca and the Palacio de Torquemada. Up on a hill above the town is the Castillo de los Marqueses de Villafranca. The castle was constructed by the second Marques de Villafranca, Don Pedro Alvarez de Toledo during the 15th and 16th centuries over the remains of a previous castle which had been destroyed in 1507 by one of the illegitimate sons of the first Marques of Villafranca, Don Pedro Alvare Osorio.



Iglesia de San Francisco

Unfortunately the castle was sacked and partially dismantled by the British army as it marched towards Lugo in 1809 during the Peninsula war and again, but by French troops this time, between 1815 and 1819. Over the intervening centuries the castle has undergone some restoration and it continues to be home to the descendants of the Marqueses de Villafranca. You can visit the gardens for free, but as it is a private residence if you wish to visit the interior you will need the permission of the owners.

The Iglesia de San Francisco is also worth a visit. It is said to have been founded by Saint Francis of Assisi whilst undertaking a pilgrimage to Santiago. The building had originally been part of one of the pilgrim hospitals in town but was moved to its current location in the late 13th century. If you are staying here for the night you have the choice of 3 albergues, one of which is called Ave Fenix (as in the bird the Phoenix) due to it having burnt down in 1996 and then been rebuilt, or you can stay at one of the 3 hostals or the Parador. There are also some reasonable restaurants and café/bars if you want to eat or drink.

Before we leave Villafranca del Bierzo I would like to recount a local legend. It doesn't have any direct link to the Camino but I thought it was interesting none the less. About 11 kilometers from Villafranca del Bierzo you will find el Lago de Carucedo. Many centuries ago it was rumoured that where the lake is now there once was a village. This village was close to a monastery where a young orphan was being raised by the monks. When this child grew to be a man he fell in love with a young woman. However, our young man had a rival, Señor Cornatel, the local squire and owner of the castle had taken a fancy to this girl and was determined to make her his come what may. One day Señor Cornatel was found dead and the young man was accused of his murder so he fled the village. Many years passed and our young man returned to the village hoping to find his lady but he found that she too had disappeared. Disillusioned the young man went to the monastery where he had been raised and became a monk, eventually becoming the abbot. One day the lady who he had fallen in love with returned to the village and they began a relationship, despite the man having taken a vow of chastity. This angered God and he sent a huge flood towards the village destroying it completely and thus creating the lake that can be seen there today. It is said that during the festival of San Juan the bells of the submerged monastery can be heard to toll each night. Another legend says that the lake is believed to hold the sword that belonged to Roldán, a bit like the Spanish version of King Arthur and Excalibur.



Villafranca del Bierzo: brug over rio Burbia

Camino de Santiago - Stage 27 - Villafranca del Bierzo to O'Cebreiro

Total distance - 27.2 km

Walk down Calle del Agua and at the far end turn left by the statue of the pilgrim and walk across the Río Burbia. Once across the bridge you have 3 choices of route which are all clearly way marked. One low level route which follows the road down the valley or a choice of two high level routes, the choice you make will be determined firstly by the weather. If the weather is foggy or raining heavily don't attempt the higher level routes. The other will be determined by your fitness and how good your knees are. We will give you details of all three routes below starting with the road route. Once across the Río Burbia walk past the convent and Iglesia de la Concepcion and keep walking until you reach the exit of the road tunnel through the mountains.



De A6 hoog boven de N6, iets na Trabadelo

Cross over here and take a right turn and walk for another 3 kilometers when you will take a right down an older section of the NVI road just before you enter the village of Pereje. There is a single albergue here as well as a bar. Walk down the Calle Camino de Santiago to the end of the village where you rejoin the main road for about 2.5 kilometers and again you will take a section of the old road for about 1 kilometer and into the village of Trabadelo. There is a single albergue here and a hostel with a restaurant. Again walking down the Calle Camino de Santiago keep walking ahead until you reach the spot where the motorway crosses the N-VI and you then turn right onto the main road. Follow this road until you reach the Hostal Valcarce where you will take a left down the old road to Portela where you can fill up your water bottle at the

fountain or get something to eat at the bar/restaurant. At the end of the village turn left to rejoin the main road and at the junction take the route marked towards Ambasmestas and after about 4.5 kilometers you arrive in the village. Here are a couple of bars, one of which has a restaurant that offers a pilgrim's menu, a panaderia (bread shop) and an albergue. The route now takes you through Ambascasas with the road viaduct above you and out towards the village of Vega de Valcarce. There are a couple of albergues in the village plus a number of the restaurants offer a pilgrim's menu. There are also a few shops, a bakery, a chemist to restock on your blister remedies and some banks. It's probably a good idea to stop here to get a good night's rest before you start the steep climb up the mountains to O Cebreiro.

If you choose to stay here the night you might want to take a look at the Castillo del Sarracin up on the hill above the town. It had once belonged to the Marqueses de Villafranca but it is more or less a ruin now but you do get some great views over the valley. It is about a 1 hour round trip. In the village there is a great example of an horreo or grain store. As you enter Galicia you will see different styles, usually made of granite or wood but this is a good example for this area. There is however a rather unusual carving in front of it, a bit spooky I think. The Camino from this point onwards until you get to O Cebreiro climbs up through the mountains starting off gently but progressively getting steeper. Walk through Vega de Valcarce down the road for 2 kilometers until you reach the village of Ruitelán. There is an albergue here if you were unable to get a bed in Vega de Valcarce.

In another kilometer you come to the village of Herrerias where all three routes converge. The village derives its name from the iron forge that used to be here. There are a couple of bars that offer food with one of the bars containing a restored iron forge if you would like to take a look. At the end of the village the houses used to belong to the Hospital Inglés a pilgrim hospital.

Walk through the village and after about a kilometer you come to a track with 2 marker posts, one of the routes is for those doing the Camino by bicycle, the other is for those on foot. If the weather is bad follow the cyclist's route, if not follow the walker's route. The path climbs steeply through chestnut woods for about 3.5 kilometers before you walk down the Calle Santiago into La Faba. The village has a small shop and a café plus 2 albergues. One of them, the private Albergue Vegetariano is only open in the summer and only offers vegetarian meals. Close by here, during the winter of 1809 when General Sir John Moore's army was retreating over the mountains heading for La Coruña they were caught in a blizzard. It was so bad that several hundred of his men froze to death and the remaining men mutinied throwing a large chest of gold over the cliff in protest. The General managed to regain order but he ended up being killed by the French at the battle of La Coruña.

Walk through the village and up a tree lined lane forking right when you come into the open and keep on walking uphill until you reach Laguna de Castilla in 2 kilometers. The albergue here is only open for a couple of months in the summer – July and August. As you walk out of the village you come to the first of many marker stones which from now until you reach Santiago will appear every 500 meters. They are usually marked with a scallop shell and the name of the town or village in which you are in as well as how many kilometers you have left to go until you reach Santiago.



De N6 richting Pedrafita do Cebreiro



O'Cebreiro, rechts een palloza (rietgedekte hut)

Keep walking straight through the village and after 1 kilometer you finally leave León and enter Galicia. This point is marked with a large marker stone. After another kilometer you come to the town of O Cebreiro. Before I give you any more information on O Cebreiro I will give you details of the other 2 routes. The second slightly longer route takes you via Pradela where there is a fountain but no other amenities and is clearly marked as are the other 2 routes. Unlike the road route this doesn't start off gently, this route is steep from the start. At the bridge in Villafranca del Bierzo take a right hand fork down Calle Pradra and walk along the steeply rising path for

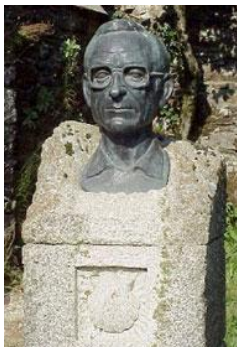
approximately 3 kilometers when the path continues to climb but not as steeply. After you have passed some television masts the road begins to descend. Turn left at the junction, Pradela is to your right if you want to stop for water. Follow the path and then across the road and down a steep gravel path into the Village of Trabadelo where you meet up with the flatter road route. From here you now follow the road route as I have described above. The third and final route takes you via Dragonete and is not a route for the faint hearted, it is considerably longer and pretty arduous. You need to be pretty fit to embark on this route and you need to make sure you have plenty of food and water with you as the villages you pass through do not have any amenities.



Iglesia Santa María la Real in O'Cebreiro

Leave Villafranca del Bierzo over the bridge as mentioned previously but this time cross another bridge over the Rio Valcarce and walk down the Calle Salvador crossing the NVI at the road tunnel. Take a right hand fork up a tarmacked track at the signpost saying Dragonete 4.3. Keep following this track to the village of Dragonete. There is a fountain here if you need to replenish your water. Walk through the village continuing along the tarmacked track and after about 2 kilometers you will come to a sign marked Camino de los Francés GR11, take this track and at the minor road take a left and continue descending into Moral de Valcarce where again there is a fountain. Once through the village take a left fork at the lavadero (where Spanish women used to do their washing in the days before washing machines) and follow the track through the chestnut woods to the bottom of the valley. You will pass by an old watermill and through more chestnut woods until you reach the Iglesia de San Fructuoso, which used to be part of a monastery administering to sick pilgrims at the entrance of the village of Vilar de Corrales. Here too is a fountain. The path continues to wind its way up the mountain passing a farm and another fountain. Keep following the markers through an old quarry and at the road take the path signposted Camino de los Francés into the village of San Fiz do Seo. The path continues to climb for about another 2 kilometers and then descends slightly down a left hand fork in the path. A right hand fork will then take you through some chestnut woods and then down into the village of Villasinde where there's a bar and fountain. As you enter the village take a right turn and fork right by the cemetery down a descending track then across the Puente Viejo into Vega de Valcarce. From here follow the road route to O'Cebreiro. O'Cebreiro or Pedradita do Cebreiro to give it its full name owes much of its existence to the Camino de Santiago as well as to the many roman roads that passed this way. It is the first town you reach on the Camino Francés as you enter Galicia.

The first pilgrim hospital to appear in the town was built in the mid 9th century and was run from the late 11th century by the monks of Saint Gérard De'Aurillac, a French order. Also in the 9th century the monastery of el Santuario de O'Cebreiro was built, not much remains other than the Iglesia Santa Maria la Real, considered to be the oldest intact church along the whole Camino. The church was founded by Benedictine monks but came under the control of the French monks in the 11th century after the monastery was given to the French order by King Alfonso VI. It was to remain in their control until the monastery was handed back to the Benedictines by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. The monastery was abandoned in the 19th century following the Mendizabal disentailment in 1853, a similar act to that of the dissolution of the monasteries which occurred in the United Kingdom in the mid 16th century. The church underwent a major renovation in the 1960's and 70's initiated by Don Elias Valiña Sampedro, the parish priest. A little bit more on this remarkable man later.



Don Elias Valiña Sampedro

Various books tell that "the" Holy Grail was believed to have been hidden in this church during the Middle Ages but what they are actually referring to is a miracle that is believed to have occurred here during the 14th century. The story tells of a single parishioner from a nearby village called Barxamaior who climbed up to the church through heavy snow and a blizzard in order to hear mass. As the priest was performing the Eucharist he had a momentary lapse of faith and whilst he was consecrating the bread and wine he thought to himself, whilst looking at the parishioner sat in front of him "what is this man doing here in this cold weather, just to see a piece of bread and a little wine?". It was at this point that the miracle occurred, the bread turned to flesh and the wine became blood. This became known locally as el Santo Grial Gallego or the Galician Holy Grail. The relics are kept in the church in a reliquary given to the church by the Catholic Monarchs whilst they were undertaking the Camino to Santiago in 1486, along with the chalice and paten used in that mass. In the church you will also find the tombs of the priest and the parishioner who were involved in this miracle along with that of Don Elias Valiña Sampedro. Just outside the church is a bust of Don Elias Valiña Sampedro who was the parish priest at Santa Maria Real from 1959 until his death in 1989 who took it upon himself to restore the church and the ancient hospital (now the Hostal San Giraldo de Aurillac). During his studies at la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca he wrote a thesis on the Camino's history. He promoted this thesis at various universities across Europe and promoting the Camino de Santiago. Even more remarkable it what he did next.

If you were wondering how the signs and markers that point your way on the Camino de Santiago came about then look no further than Don Elias Valiña Sampedro. This amazing man decided to undertake the Camino but found that many of the original paths had virtually disappeared, on his trip he decided to write a book and his Camino guide book was published in 1982. It was then in 1984, along with his nephews, that he started to mark the entire Camino with the big yellow arrows you see today with yellow paint he managed to commandeer from the Spanish department of transport. In 1985 he became a member of the Comisario del Camino de Santiago who were tasked with promoting the Camino and getting others involved and from this came the association known as Amigos del Camino de Santiago (Friends of the Camino). To give you an idea of just how important this man was you just have to look at the numbers who now undertake the Camino. In the early 70's less than 10 Compostelanas were issued, in 1989 when Pope John Paul II visits Santiago over 5,700 Compostelanas were given out and it is estimated that in the holy year of 2010 over 300,000 pilgrims will have received one of these hard earned certificates.

Whilst you are here in O'Cebreiro you may want to take a look at the Pallozas, the traditional round stone houses with thatched roofs that the people of this area used as their homes. Some have recently been turned into holiday homes and one of them is a small ethnographic museum. Accommodation can be found at the albergue and 3 hostals including the Hostal San Giraldo de Aurillac, which was lovingly restored by Don Elias. There are also a number of shops, bars and restaurants.



Centrum van het piepkleine O'Cebreiro

Camino de Santiago - Stage 28 – O'Cebreiro to Samos

Total distance: 29.5 km

From O'Cebreiro you take the main road towards your next stop, the village of Liñares which is about 3 kilometers away. Here there is a small café, a shop and the small 12th century church la Igrexa de Santo Estevo. Accommodation can be found at a casa rural. You will note as you walk through Galicia that all signage is now in Gallego (Galician), very rarely will you see any signage with the Spanish alternative on it so I will give you the Galician name from here on in. Most guide books still seem to provide the Spanish name which may confuse the traveller. Walk through the village and join the road at the end following the markers to a rough track which runs parallel with the road. The path now climbs steeply for a kilometer up to the Alto de San Roque. Up here you will get fabulous views across the mountains, on a clear day that is.



Groot pelgrimsbeeld op de Alto San Roque

There is a small chapel to San Roque but the most photographed image is that of the large bronze statue of a pilgrim facing towards Santiago, holding onto his hat against the wind. The path continues climbing and after 1.5 kilometers you reach the small village of Hospital da Condesa. As the name suggests there used to be a pilgrim hospital here, built in the 9th century by Doña Egilo, the wife of Conde Gantón. The small church Igrexa de San Xoan, like the one up in O Cebreiro was restored in the 1960's. There is a small modern albergue here along with a café, but the café is not always open. Walk through to the end of the village and down a minor road sign posted to Sabugos. This will take you along a lane and then a track through the small hamlet of Padornelo. Once through the hamlet the track begins to climb steeply towards the Alto do Poio 3 kilometers away. In Alto do Poio there is an Albergue which is situated at the back of the Café Puerto, you need to ask at the bar first. If you happen to be doing the Camino in the autumn/winter you will always find a roaring log fire going in the bar to warm you up. There is also a private hostel/restaurant in the village and a small shop.

Walk through the village and down the road forking right to walk down a track parallel to the road down to the village of Fonfría in 3.5 kilometers. The village gets its name from its fountain Fons Frigida or cold spring. During the 16th century there used to be a pilgrim hospital here that would give heat, salt and water and a bed with two blankets to healthy pilgrims and to the sick a piece of bread, eggs and butter as well. In the small church there is a 17th century silver chalice which has engraved on it "Soy hospital de Fon Fría". For modern pilgrims the local albergue offers a bed for the night as well as a good pilgrim menu and breakfast in the morning. There is also another café in the village but this is only open during the summer months and a couple of casa rurales.



Kapel San Pedro

Thankfully from here until Triacastela the Camino starts to descend.

From Fonfría walk down a track parallel to the road and then follow the markers into the small village of Biduedo. There are a couple of hostals here, one of which has a bar/restaurant. There is a tiny chapel dedicated to San Pedro on the side of the road. The track now descends down to the small hamlet of Filloval and then on through to the hamlet of As Pasantes where you will find a small hostel and an unusually shaped chestnut tree that locals claim to be around 800 years old.



Boom 800 jaar oud

You continue down the track downhill into Ramil and through the hamlet for about 6.5



Triacastela: pelgrims-monument met rood zwaard

kilometers passing a refugio at the entrance to the small town of Triacastela. This town is said to have been founded in the 9th century by Conde Gatón, the same man whose wife built the pilgrim hospital at Hospital da Condesa, but there are remains of Castros (hill forts) in the area which shows that the area was inhabited many thousands of years before. The king Alfonso IX thought of Triacastela as an important strategic town in what he called los Alpes Gallegos, or the Galician Alps. The name of Triacastela could come from three castles that may have stood here, but there are 3 castros, Triacastela, Lagares and San Adrián in the vicinity so it could also refer to them, in any case all that remains of these is their symbol on the town's coat of arms. Most of the tourist sites in Triacastela have a link to the Camino. The main one is that of the Pilgrim Monument. During the Middle Ages when the cathedral was being built in Santiago it was tradition that the pilgrims travelling through Triacastela would pick up limestone and take it along with them to the lime kilns in Castañeda, nearly 100 kilometers away. That way each pilgrim would feel that they have contributed to the construction and maintenance of the Saint's resting place. The town used to have a number of pilgrim hospitals but only one of those remain and that is now being

used as a private house I believe. There are a number of places where you can stay including 4 albergues and 4 hostals and various restaurants and café/bars. As you leave Triacastela at a T-junction you are given a choice of 2 routes towards Sarria. The left hand route takes you to the impressive monastery at Samos which is our preferred route. It is about 11 kilometers but the monastery there is one of the most impressive buildings I have seen and well worth a visit. The right hand route takes you through a more rural route towards San Xil. Both routes meet a few kilometers before Sarria and are clearly marked, though only the San Xil route has those marker stones we mentioned before.

At the T-junction take the left turn and cross the Río Oríbio and walk down the main road for 3 kilometers to the village of San Cristobdo do Real. Go through the village passing the church and again crossing the Río Oríbio by the lavadero. Pass the cemetery and take the lane and keep on walking down it until you get to a junction where 4 tracks meet. Keep walking straight on and then cross the Río Oríbio once again. Here you start walking uphill and pass a church and its adjoining cemetery into the village of Reche (café/bar). Take the minor tarmacked road and over the Río Oaga, crossing another bridge and walk along a track until you enter the village of Tredezín. Walk through the village and walk down a path running parallel to the river. As before, the path begins to climb and at a T-junction take a left, cross the bridge over the Río Oríbio once more and walk into the village of San Martino. Pass through the village and up a hill where you cross a minor road and down a path which links up with the main road to Sarria. Here take a left and then down a lane sign posted Friexo 4 and before the bridge turn right down a lane into Samos. In Samos you will find the impressive Benedictine Monasterio de San Julián de Samos. It was founded in the 6th century by San Martin Dumienne and renovated by San Fructuoso in the 7th century. Unfortunately soon after the monastery was renovated it was abandoned because of the Moorish invasion and it wasn't until the Asturian



Monasterio in Samos



Ingang Monasterio van Samos

King Fruela I reconquered the area did the monks return. Some years later King Fruela was assassinated and the monks gave refuge to the King's wife and son, who was later to become Alfonso II of Asturias. Because of this the monastery was granted royal protection. Over its history the monastery has changed hands many times. Early in the 10th century the monks were expelled by the Bishop of Lugo, Don Ero, because he wanted control of the monastery himself. Later that same century it was reoccupied by the Benedictines under the direction of King Ordoño II de León and in the 12th century the monastery was taken over by the Cluny order. Unfortunately in 1558 there was a massive fire which destroyed much of the monastery. It was rebuilt but the monks were again expelled in 1835,

however the Benedictine monks returned in 1880. In the 19th century, during the wars with Napoleon it was used as a military hospital. In 1951 the monastery yet again caught fire which destroyed its famous library and causing it to be reconstructed once more. The monastery's church was built between 1734 and 1748 and contains a library measuring 31 meters in length and contains more than 25,000 books. The monastery has 2 cloisters. The larger one called unsurprisingly Claustro Grande was built in the 17th century and at 3,000 m² it is considered to be the largest in Spain. It contains a statue to Padre Feijóo (Benito Jerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro) a Spanish friar and scholar who did much to demystify myths and superstitions. The other smaller cloister, Claustro Pequeño built in the 16th century is also known as the Claustro de las Nereidas because of the strange serpentine fountain in the middle. The figures have serpentine bodies but the head and chest of a woman.



Claustro de las Nereidas

There's a strange tale that surrounds this 18th century fountain. It is said that the ecclesiastical authority at the monastery didn't think it was an appropriate location for this type of fountain and they ordered it to be dismantled and transported to a more discreet location. The day came for the fountain to be moved and everything was ready but as the men tried to lift the fountain it appeared to increase in weight dramatically, so much so that no matter what they tried they just could not move it. There was no option but to leave the fountain where it was and rebuilt it in its original location.

Miraculously they were able to move the stones once more because they had gone back to their normal weight. Clearly the fountain had no intention of moving from that spot. If you wish to look around the monastery they do offer guided tours but you will need to check the times when these occur at the Porteria. The monastery also has an albergue for the weary pilgrim. In Samos village itself there are 2 other albergues and a number of restaurants offer a pilgrim menu. There are other shops including bakeries and banks.



Albergue in het Monasterio van Samos

Camino de Santiago - Stage 29 - Samos to Portomarín

Total distance: 34.4 km

To leave Samos continue along the main road towards Sarria for about 2 kilometers and through the small hamlet of Tequín. If you want a quieter route take the minor road marked Pascais, this leads you to the hamlet of Hospital where the other road through San Xil meets this one. Alternatively you can just stay on the main road until you reach Sarria. Follow the marked route down country lanes passing the 12th century church of Santa Eulalia de Pascais and another small chapel before crossing over a couple of bridges and a bit of an up and down track until you enter the village of Hospital, where centuries ago there used to be a pilgrim hospital. From here follow the track through the villages of San Mamede del Camino where there is an albergue, San Pedro, Carballal and Vigo de Sarria before reaching the town of Sarria after approximately 4.5 kilometers. As mentioned at the T-junction in Triacastela there was an alternative route to Sarria that went through San Xil. If you choose this route take a right at the T-junction in Triacastela taking the minor road sign posted to San Xil. After about 1.5 kilometers take a green lane towards the hamlet of A Balsa and then cross the river, pass the ermita and walk through the woods. You will pass by an unusual scallop shaped fountain and picnic area before you reach another T-junction where you take a left into San Xil.



Bron met Santiago-schelp

Once back on the Camino after about 2 kilometers you come to Alto de Riocabo. The path then goes down the side of the valley and through the hamlets of O Real, Montan, Fontearcuda and the slightly odd sounding Zoo Mondarega. Just after Zoo Mondarega take a left down a track towards Furela where there is a small chapel la Capilla San Roque, and then follow the lane through to the hamlet of Pintín where there is a hostel. 8 kilometers out from Triacastela you eventually arrive at the village of Calvor. There is a small albergue here plus just before reaching the village you will have passed a bar that does good food such as Caldo Galego, a hearty meal of various meats, vegetables, potatoes and cabbage, lovely on a cold day.



Koning Alfonso IX

Just through the village you go down a road sign posted Aguiada where there is a private hostel and a café that does food and then through to the Hamlet of Hospital. From here follow the route as described earlier through to Sarria. Sarria has been inhabited for many thousands of years both by the Celts and the Romans but the town was founded at the end of the 12th century by Alfonso IX, the last king of León and he named the village Vilanova de Sarria. He unfortunately died here in 1230 from a serious illness that he contracted as he was undertaking the pilgrimage to Santiago. A statue of the king can be seen near the police station. On first inspection Sarria doesn't appear to have much to offer for the tourist, unless you like antiques that is. It looks pretty much like many other Spanish towns, heavily built up along a very busy main street but you just need to look beyond that and head towards the river. Most of the buildings linked to the Camino can be found behind the main street on the hill where the old town used to be.

Located on the Camino itself the Monasterio de la Magdalena is said to have been founded by a couple of Italian friars who passed this way on their pilgrimage to Santiago. They asked the Bishop of Lugo if he would grant them permission to look after the pilgrims and this he did and they administered this help from the Ermita de San Blas de Vilanova. The Italian friars belonged to an order called Frailes de la Penitencia de los Venerables Mártires de Cristo or roughly translated Friars of the Penance of the Venerable Martyrs of Christ who maintained control over the monastery until 1568 when they disappeared. An Augustinian order took over the maintenance of the Hospital de San Roque, but the monastery was eventually abandoned altogether in the late 18th century when the Desamortización occurred, the Spanish version of the dissolution of the



Monasterio de la Magdalena



Prisión Preventativa

monasteries. Over the next century it was used as a prison, a firewood warehouse, a headquarters and eventually left to rack and ruin. However in 1896 Bishop Murúa gives the building to the Orden de la Merced or Order of Mercy who begin to restore and extend the monastery. The monastery is now dedicated to the education of the monks that reside there. They still provide spiritual guidance to the pilgrims that pass through their doors. Just before reaching the Monasterio de la Magdalena you will have passed a green and white building that between 1930 and 1950 was the prison or Prisión Preventativa where criminals will have been held whilst awaiting trial. It is now used as a museum by the local building college. Like so many of the town and villages along the Camino Sarria

too had its fair share of pilgrim hospitals boasting at least 7 at one point. The Juzgado or courthouse now occupies the building that once housed the pilgrim Hospital of San Antón Abade. It was built in 1592 under the orders of Don Dionís de Castro y Portugal who was cleric to the noble family of Condal de Lemos, who provided money for its upkeep. The hospital would welcome the pilgrims who were returning from Santiago complete with their Compestelana and would offer them a bed, heat and for some peculiar reason, the services of a surgeon. The hospital was still in operation up until 1821. Next to the courthouse and underneath the Torre de la Fortaleza is the mainly 13th century Iglesia San Salvador, the belfry is a later 19th century addition. Due to its proximity to the former Hospital of Santo Antón it may well have been the church for the hospital.



Sarria: iglesia San Salvador

Keeping guard over the town is the Torre de la Fortaleza the only remains of a once impressive castle. It is believed to have been built in the 13th century but was destroyed during the Irmandiño uprising in the 15th century. The castle was rebuilt and was lived in by the Merinos and then the senior judges of the Marquis until 1730. In 1860 the town council along with Don Manuel Pérez Batallón purchased the castle and many of the stones and the other towers were sold off to the townspeople. Originally the castle had four towers, dungeons, pits and buttresses but the only part that remains now is the south east tower with its open stairway and two shields with the coats of arms of Castro, Enríquez and Osorio.



Iglesia de Santa María

Unfortunately you can't visit the tower but the council are in the process of renovating it as a museum so you may be able to some time in the future. The 19th century Iglesia de Santa Mariña is located on the Rúa Maior next to the ancient Praza do Mercado where markets were held every Sunday up until the 1950's, now known as the Praza de D. Juan M^a López. The current church was built over the ruins of a 13th century church and inside is a drawing of the original church's door and capital. The church has a distinctive pyramid style tower that contains a clock. Depending on which way you approach the church you will see a mural on a side wall depicting pilgrims making their way to the church.

On your way out of Sarria you will pass the 18th century Capilla de San Lazaro the only remaining part of Sarria's principal pilgrim hospital, el Hospital de San Lazaro. This hospital was known for taking in lepers who were making their way to Santiago with the hope of a cure, along with those pilgrims with other contagious diseases. The Rúa Maior, the main street through the town also has some grand houses intermingled with the modern apartment blocks. It is also along this street that you will find a number of the albergues and most of the cafés, restaurants and shops. There are 7 albergues in total plus 4 hostals. These can get very busy as Sarria is considered the starting point for those pilgrims who are doing the short 100 kilometer Camino to Santiago.



Capilla de San Lazaro

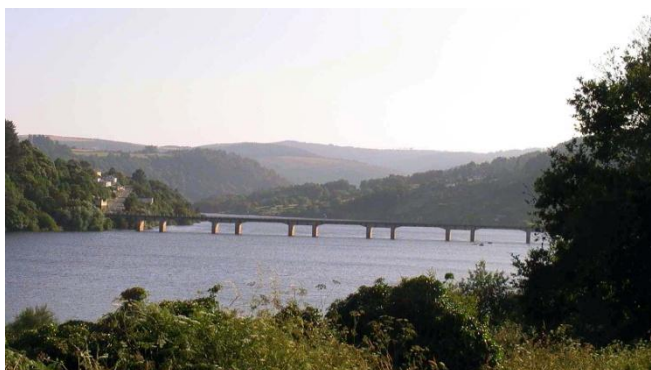


Kerk in Barbedelo

To leave Sarria walk down the Rúa Maior towards the Monasterio de la Magdalena and take a left past the cemetery and cross over the medieval bridge Ponte Aspera. The track follows the railway line for a short while when you will then have to cross over it at Sancti Michaelis. The path continues parallel to the railway line and goes across a footbridge and up through some woods and passing through the small village of Vilei and eventually after about 4.5 kilometers into the village of Barbedelo. The village of Barbedelo has been here since the 10th century and has a 12th century church which has been given national monument status because of its frescoes. It is believed to have originally been part of a monastery that had at one point come under the control of the monastery at Samos. There is a small albergue here run by the Xunta which says it has cooking facilities but there are no utensils. A little further down the hill is the Casa del Carmen that offers accommodation and has dining facilities also. Walk through the village and through woods towards the village of Rente which has a private hostel and a couple of bars. From Rente follow a tree lined track passing a modern fountain with the water coming from a pilgrim's mouth and through the village of

Marzán O Real. Walk through some more woods and through the village of Leimán and on to the village of Peruscallo where you will find a bar with a restaurant.

The path now goes down a lane through the hamlets of Cortiñas, Lavandeira Casal and Brea. At Brea you will spot a marker telling you that there are only 100 kilometers left on your journey. Continue along the path and into the village of Morgade where you will find a café that offers delicious cakes and accommodation in a private albergue next to the bar. Walk through the village past the abandoned chapel and walk down the track up to the villages of Ferreiros and Mirallos. They are very close together and here you can get accommodation at a couple of albergues and a couple of cafés one of which offers a pilgrim menu and is also open for breakfast. The bar restaurant is only open during the summer. The path now takes you through the hamlets of Pena and Couto-Rozas, both of which have fountains, then through Pena dos Corvos, Moimentos and Cotarelo Mercadoiro where there is a new albergue with its own café and restaurant. Back on the path you will pass through the village of Moutras when the track starts to descend and it is pretty much all downhill until you reach Portomarín. Before we



Portomarín: Nieuwe brug over de rio Miño; het water staat hoog

get to Portomarín we will go through the villages of Parrocha and Vilachá soon after which you will spot the Río Miño and the reservoir called Embalse de Belezar.

Cross the very high bridge over the Río Miño and into the town of Portomarín. The area around Portomarín has been inhabited for many thousands of years as the number of castros in the vicinity testifies. The Romans occupied it and named the area Portumarini but it is said to have been Don Guitierre and the Condesa Dona Ilduana who founded the town of Portomarín in the 10th century. The town was divided into two boroughs on the left bank of the river was San Pedro and on the right bank was San Juan. With

the discovery of the tomb of Saint James the town's importance grew and at one time had 3 orders of knights including the Knights Templar, Knights of Santiago and the Knights of St John of Jerusalem. This will go some way to explaining the castle type architecture of the church of San Nicolás.



**Boven de nieuwe brug, onder de oude brug.
Het water staat nu laag**

In the 2nd century the Romans built a bridge across the Río Miño which was later to be destroyed by Doña Urraca the Queen of Castilla to prevent her husband's (Alfonso el Batallor) troops from advancing. As we mentioned in an earlier stage they didn't particularly like each other and were at war. 8 years after she destroyed the bridge Doña Urraca ordered a new one to be built and the same builder would later build one of the pilgrim hospitals. If you come on the Camino when the river is low you will be able to see the old bridge next to the new one. The town you see before you today dates mostly from the middle of the 20th century with much of the old town now below the waters of the Miño. In the 1950's Franco decided he wanted to build a hydro electric dam 40 kilometers down river and in doing so would flood the town of Portomarín. The townspeople wanted to save some of their most important

monuments and transported these stone by stone up to their new home high above the river. The monuments brought here were the churches of San Nicolás and San Pedro and some of the important 16th and 17th century manor houses or Pazos.

As you first come across the new bridge you come to some steps up to an arch where you will find the Iglesia de Santa Maria de las Nieves, built on the site of a former pilgrim hospital. The staircase is actually the sole remaining part of the original 2nd century Roman bridge which was destroyed by Doña Urraca. Locals believed that the Virgen de las Nieves protected them from drowning and therefore built a shrine to her part way across the old bridge. When the dam was built the shrine was moved along with the span of the old bridge and placed here as the entrance to the new historical centre of Portomarín. As you climb the steps you can choose to continue on your way along the Camino by going left or alternatively take a right once through the arch into a park and into the remains of the old town. The large square in the centre of town contains most of the historic monuments including the Pazo del Conde da Maza. In front of the Pazo is a statue of Santiago indicating the way to the Camino.



Trap leidt naar Iglesia Santa María de las Nieves



Verplaatste Igrexa de San Nicolás

The 12th century Igrexa de San Nicolás is like many other churches found in towns controlled by Knights, a fortified church. When it was in the original town it was known as the Igrexa de San Xoan (San Juan) and was controlled by the knights of St John of Jerusalem who also controlled the bridge across the Miño and one of the pilgrim hospitals. The church was built by a student of Mateo who created the Pórtico de la Gloria in Santiago Cathedral. If you look closely you may still make out the numbers which were carved into the stone prior to them being brought here from the old town. Another of the churches brought from the old town was the Igrexa de San Pedro. This church was built in the 10th century and consecrated in 1182 by the Bishop of Lugo, Rodrigo II. As you will begin to see on your Camino through Galicia this church is built from granite which is

abundant in this part of Spain. The town has at least 7 albergues to choose from and about 3 hostals. In terms of food there are a number of restaurants, many of which offer a pilgrim menu, and cafés to choose from. If you are running a little low on cash there are also a few cashpoints (ATM's).



Centrum van Portomarín

Camino de Santiago - Stage 30 - Portomarín to Palas de Rei

Total distance: 24.5 km

To leave Portomarín walk back towards the Escalinata de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, the little chapel at the top of the stairs. Following the yellow arrows you will cross an old footbridge over the Río Torres which will take you down a minor road then down country track gradually walking uphill to the old main road. When you reach the main road cross over and walk down the track on the other side. Over the next few kilometers you will be walking more or less parallel to the main road passing through the hamlet of Toxibó, eventually reaching the village of Gonzar 7.5 kilometers out from Portomarín. In Gonzar there are a couple of albergues, one private, which has a café which does reasonable food, and the other municipal. There is a small café/bar on the road but this tends to be open mainly in the summer. Heading out of Gonzar take a track just past one of the albergues and after 1 kilometer you enter the village of Castromaior. The village was named after a large hill fort or castro in the vicinity, the remains of which can still be seen up on the hillside. There is a local story that tells of a girl who took pig snouts as an offering to the gods at the annual festival. She returned to the area the next day to see that these snouts had turned into coal which she promptly threw away. However, something caused her to keep one of them and she returned home. On waking the next day she found that the lump of coal had turned into gold and she ran back to the village to find the rest of the coal she had thrown away only to find that it had all disappeared. No doubt picked up by the other villagers.

The path continues through the village and after 2.5 kilometers you arrive at Hospital de la Cruz. As the name suggests there was once a pilgrim hospital here but other than giving the village its name nothing remains of the hospital. Accommodation can be found at the albergue and a small bar/restaurant is close by if you want to grab a bite to eat. Walk past the albergue and across a footbridge down an old country road for about 1.5 kilometers until you reach Ventas de Narón.

Like the previous village of Hospital de la Cruz the village of Ventas de Narón also had a pilgrim hospital built in the 13th century by the Knights Templar. Unfortunately the only remaining intact part of the hospital is the small Ermita de Santa María Magdalena, some of the ruins can still be seen close by. This area is also believed to be the site of a battle between the Christians and the moors in the 9th century with the Christians coming out victorious over the Emir of Córdoba. There are 3 albergues in Ventas de Narón, 2 are privately run and both have cafés which provide meals and the other is run by the Xunta de Galicia. Walk out of the village passing the small chapel and a wooden wayside cross and up to the Sierra de Ligonde. This is the highest point on this section at around 756 meters above sea level and provides some great views over the valleys below. The path now begins to descend and takes you through the hamlets of Previsa and Lameiros. Between Lameiros and the next village



Café aan de route in Ligonde

of Ligonde you will find a 17th century cruceiro which is said to be the most famous cruceiro on the Camino. A little further on and just before you enter Ligonde you will find another stone cross which marks the location of an ancient pilgrim cemetery, all that remains of a former pilgrim hospital. Ligonde has a couple of albergues but only the municipal albergue is open all the year round, the other which is privately run opens only during the summer months. About 1 kilometer further down the road you come to Eirexe (also known as Airexe) which has an albergue and a couple of pensiones if you were unable to get a place in Ligonde. There is a small café across the road from the albergue which does food. The path continues now past a lavadero and towards the hamlet of As Cruces. At the crossroads here cross over and head down the road which has a sign

saying Palas de Rey 10 kilometers. This will take you through the hamlets of Portos and A Calzada both of which have an albergue. If you want to take a slight detour at A Calzada you can go to the Monasterio de San Salvador at Vilar de Donas. This 13th century monastery was donated to the Knights of Santiago (Caballeros de Santiago) in 1224 by the noble family Arias de Monterroso. The church that remains was built in the 14th century over the previous church. This national monument is the official burial place of the Knights of Santiago and contains some impressive frescoes. Well worth a detour.



Monasterio Vilar de Donas

Back at A Calzada the path takes you through the hamlets of Lestedo where there is a hostel that provides meals, Valos (also known as Balos), Mampurria and Brea. The track now climbs through the hamlet of O Rosario and up to the Alto de Rosario from where, on a clear day, you can see Monte Pico Sacro the mountain that overlooks Santiago de Compostela. The path now descends passing by an albergue and a hostel and down into the small town of Palas do Rei. Palas de Rei or pallatium regis was given this name when the Visigoth King Witiza who reigned here during the early 8th century, built a palace here. Again like many other towns and villages we have passed through Palas de Rei prospered during the height of the Camino de Santiago during the Middle Ages and there are a number of Pazos and noble houses dotted around to show the affluence of the area. One of these, the Pazo de Ulloa is said to have once been the residence of the Galician Queen Doña Urraca. The town is nice enough with most of town life revolving around the Plaza del Concello. There is a small church la Iglesia de San Tirso which had originally been built in the late 12th, early 13th century but it has undergone numerous changes over the centuries and the only original part of the church is the Romanesque doorway.

Accommodation can be found at a number of albergues and hostals a couple of which offer meals. There are a number of restaurants in the town that offer pilgrim menus as well as a couple of supermarkets, bars and cafés.



Castello de Pambre

About 4 kilometers from Palas de Rei there is a well preserved castle called Castelo de Pambre which was built by Don Gonzalo Ozores de Ulloa during the 14th century. The castle was lucky to survive the Irmandiño uprising and was sold by the Duke of Alba to a local called Don Jose Soto in 1895 for the grand sum of 27,000 pesetas. It then passed through the hands of the Moreiras Blanco family and was latterly owned by Don Manuel Taboada Fernandez the count of Borraxeiros. When Don Manuel passed away it was taken over by a religious order and is believed to have been sold to the Xunta who will open it as a tourist attraction.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 31 - Palas de Rei to Arzúa

Total distance: 31.7 km

Depart Palas de Rei passing the modern Santiago Peregrino statue and down onto a path running alongside the main road passing through the village of Carballal and the hamlet of A Laguna before arriving at San Xulián do Camino where there is a small albergue which offers an evening meal. There is a sad story which surrounds San Julián. On the day he was born the poor man was cursed by witches to commit the horrific murder of his parents. It was to be many years later and was whilst out hunting that Julián was warned by a deer that this would happen and in order to avoid the curse he moved away without telling his parents where he was going and ended up in Galicia. As any good parents they eventually tracked him down and after their long journey they wished to rest and Julián's wife offered them the marital bed for them to sleep in. Julián was again out hunting at the time his parents had arrived so he did not know what his wife had done and the devil came to him telling him that the people in his bed were his wife and a lover.

Taking his sword he murdered the people in his bed only to realise soon after that he had murdered his parents as had been foretold. So distressed was he that he and his wife undertook a pilgrimage to Rome to ask for forgiveness and to offer to set up a hospital for pilgrims. Julián eventually built more than 7 hospitals and several houses offering respite to the poor and weary.

The legend says that an angel came to him a few years later and forgave him but another version says that it was Jesus Christ himself that forgave him. The devil is said to have disguised himself as a pilgrim who wrecked one of Julián's houses which led Julián to declare he would never take anyone else in and ordered everyone to leave. Jesus then, also disguised as a pilgrim, approached San Julián for shelter and was turned away. Jesus asked Julián to hold his walking stick which stuck to his hands and only then did he realise who was in front of him and asked for his forgiveness which Jesus gave. To this day San Julián is known as the patron saint of travellers, innkeepers and hunters amongst a number of other things including circus workers.



Palas de Rei: pilgrimsmonument

We now continue along the path crossing the Río Pambre up into the hamlet of Pontecampaña where you can stay at the small albergue and then back on the road through some woods towards the village of Casanova where there is a Xunta albergue and a local restaurant that does evening meals and breakfast. From Casanova the route takes you through the hamlets of Porto de Bois, Campanilla and O Coto where there is a bar/restaurant. Shortly after leaving O Coto you leave the province of Lugo and enter the province of La Coruña. From here you will find that the stone markers now indicate changes of direction as well as giving you the name of where you are and how many kilometers to Santiago.

Continuing to follow the markers you will soon come to the village of Leboreiro. This village owed much of its existence to the Camino and declined somewhat in the years following the Camino's peak. Opposite the 13th century Igrexa de Santa Maria is the building that used to be the pilgrim hospital known as the Casa de la Enfermería which was founded by the noble Ulloa family, whose coat of arms can be seen on the façade. In front of the church is an interesting wooden/thatched structure which is known in this region as a Cabazo. This like the horreos you will have passed on your journey, were and still are used to store corn. The cobs get placed in here to keep them dry and out of reach of rats and other animals that enjoy eating them.



Igrexa de Santa María met ervoor een cabazo

The church itself has an interesting legend surrounding it. The legend tells that one day water began to flow from a fountain close by, not unusual you would say, but this fountain would emit a beautiful smell during the day and provide light during the night. The locals believed it to be a miracle and taking turns they dug around the fountain and found a statue of the Virgin Mary. They immediately moved it to the church, but each night the Virgin would go back to the fountain and the villagers would then return it back to the church in the morning. This went on and on until a local artist had the idea of sculpting the image of the Virgin Mary on the tympanum of the church. Once this had been completed the villagers once again moved the statue of the Virgin Mary into the church and this time, with her ego satisfied, the Virgin decided to stay put, though it was rumoured that she still left each night to go to the fountain to brush her hair. In terms of accommodation, there is a small albergue in the village which is open all year. Back on the route walk through the village and over the Puente María Magdalena crossing the Río Seco and through the hamlet of Disecabo passing by a picnic/rest area marked by a large cross placed here by the Knights of Santiago. The path now detours from its original route down the main road through an industrial estate. It was done to make the route a bit safer. Soon after passing through the industrial estate you will come to the mediaeval Puente Velha which spans the Río Furelos and into the village of Furelos.



Igrexa San Xoán

There is a small church Igrexa de San Xoán (Iglesia de San Juan) in the village which does offer guided tours. The village, like so many other, used to have a pilgrim hospital but nothing remains of it. As you pass through the village you may spot that some of the houses still have their medieval doors. There is a small bar if you want to get some refreshments. From Furelos the route into Melide is a short one, approximately 1.5 kilometers. The origins of Melide go way back, over 4,000 years, evidenced by the dolmens or burial chambers that can be found dotted around the locality. The actual town of Melide dates back to the 10th century but it appears to have gained more prominence when King Alfonso IX gave the land surrounding Melide to the Archbishop of Santiago in 1212 AD. In 1320 Archbishop Berenguel de Landoira built a castle and walls in the town to fortify it but these were destroyed during the Irmandiños uprising and after that the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella prohibited its reconstruction. Melide is found pretty much centrally in Galicia and is where two of the Caminos meet, the Camino

Francés that we have been following and the Camino Primitivo which begins in Oviedo in Asturias. If you want to find out some more history about the town and the area visit the Museo da Terra de Melide. The museum is housed in the former Hospital de Peregrinos which had been part of a Franciscan monastery founded in the 14th century by Fernán López and his wife Aldara González who donated a number of houses to be used by the monks. Also in the town is the 18th century Capilla de San Roque.

This church was built using the stone from two former churches that of Sano Pedro and the original Capilla de San Roque which used to be where the Caja de Ahorros now stands. Inside the church is a plaque with an inscription commemorating the former churches.

To the left hand side of the chapel next to a large palm tree is the 14th century stone Cruceiro do Melide, said to be the oldest such cruceiro in Galicia according to the renowned Galician writer Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao. Only the top half is original, the bottom stone pole is a modern addition. It is believed that it may have originally been part of the former Iglesia de Sano Pedro. In the centre of the town in the Plaza del Convento you will find the 14th century Iglesia de Sancti Spiritus, all that is left of a former Franciscan monastery. As with many churches of this age it has undergone a number of refurbishments and additions and contains a variety of building styles such as baroque, neoclassical and gothic. It is also said to have been built from stone from the castle that had been built by the Archbishop of Santiago Berenguel de Landoira. Also in the Plaza del Convento you will find the 17th century Casa del Ayuntamiento which used to be a Pazo or noble house belonging to the Segade family. Because of its location it is believed to be one of the most beautiful council offices to be found in the whole of Spain. Right next to the Casa del Ayuntamiento is the Obra Pía de Santo Antón a small chapel constructed in 1671 and believed to have been built by the architect who designed and built the cathedral in Santiago, Domingo de Andrade. The construction was paid for by Archbishop Antonio Segade who had made his fortune in Mexico. Now if you are hungry and you like octopus, then Melide is the place to find it. There are a number of pulperias, restaurants that specialise in Pulpo a la feria, where the octopus is cooked in large copper cauldrons and served on wooden platters sprinkled with paprika and olive oil, best enjoyed with a cold glass of Albariño or Ribeiro, the wines made in Galicia. If octopus is not your thing then there are plenty of other places to eat especially the cake shops, as Melide also has a reputation for marvellous sweet cakes.

Accommodation can be found at an albergue and 4 hostals.

As you leave town you will pass by the 12th century Igrexa de Santa María de Melide with its impressive stone altar and beautiful frescoes on the ceiling, well worth a visit. Soon after you will pass through the hamlet of Santa María where there is a shop and a bar. From here pretty much all the way to Santiago you will wind your way in and out of pine and eucalyptus forest. If you are undertaking your Camino in summer these forests will offer you well needed shade, but as you walk through take the time to take in the lovely scent given off by the trees, it's one of things I look forward to when I plan my visits to Galicia. The gravel path here runs parallel to the main road and passes through the hamlets of Carballal, Raído, Parabispo and A Peroxa before reaching Boente. In Boente you will find the Iglesia de Santiago with its two statues of Santiago, one in his guise as a pilgrim and the other as Santiago Matamoros as well as a welcome fountain. In terms of accommodation there is a small albergue in the village that also provides food. The path now continues towards the Rio Boente and under the main road crossing the river and then climbing up towards the village of Castañeda. You may remember back when we were in Triacastela we mentioned that pilgrims would pick up limestone from the quarries and take it along with them to the lime kilns of Castañeda as a way in which to help build and maintain the cathedral at Santiago. Well we have finally reached their destination but unfortunately nothing remains of the kilns.



Igrexa de Santa María de Melide

Accommodation here can be found at either the very small albergue who also provide meals or at a casa rural. From Castañeda the route passes through the hamlets of Pedrido and Rio across a bridge and into the eucalyptus woods, again crossing the Río Iso before entering the village of Ribadiso do Baixo. The albergue in Ribadiso do Baixo has recently been restored and is situated in a lovely spot next to the river. In medieval times it had been the Hospital de St Antón and is said to be the oldest pilgrim hospital on the Camino still being used. For refreshments there is a bar and restaurant close to the albergue. From Ribadiso do Baixo follow the road uphill through the suburbs of Arzúa. Be mindful that there are other markers dotted around here, usually dabs of yellow and white paint. These are not Camino markers but those for senderismo or walking markers for a particular country walk. The Camino is still marked with either the yellow arrows or the stone way markers. After about 3 kilometers from Ribadiso do Baixo you will enter the large town of Arzúa. Arzúa will be the last major town you pass through before you reach Santiago de Compostela.

Accommodation here can be found at either the very small albergue who also provide meals or at a casa rural. From Castañeda the route passes through the hamlets of Pedrido and Rio across a bridge and into the eucalyptus woods, again crossing the Río Iso before entering the village of Ribadiso do Baixo. The albergue in Ribadiso do Baixo has recently been restored and is situated in a lovely spot next to the river. In medieval times it had been the Hospital de St Antón and is said to be the oldest pilgrim hospital on the Camino still being used. For refreshments there is a bar and restaurant close to the albergue. From Ribadiso do Baixo follow the road uphill through the suburbs of Arzúa. Be mindful that there are other markers dotted around here, usually dabs of yellow and white paint. These are not Camino markers but those for senderismo or walking markers for a particular country walk. The Camino is still marked with either the yellow arrows or the stone way markers. After about 3 kilometers from Ribadiso do Baixo you will enter the large town of Arzúa. Arzúa will be the last major town you pass through before you reach Santiago de Compostela.



Druk terras in Arzúa

Arzúa's origins are intimately linked with the Camino de Santiago and the village grew rapidly during the 11th century at the height of the Camino's prominence during the Middle Ages. There is however archaeological evidence that this area was inhabited much earlier. Like Melide before it Arzúa is the point where two Caminos join. Here it is the Camino Francés and the Camino del Norte. There are a number of churches to be found in the locality which link directly to the town's association with the Camino one of them, the 14th century Capilla de la Magdalena is all that is left of a former Augustinian monastery. Arzúa also has a number of Pazos or former noble houses and one of them, the Pazo de Brandeso built in 1554, was used by the

famous Galician writer Ramón María del Valle Inclán as the setting for the romance between Concha and Brandomín in his novel Sonata de Otoño (Autumn Sonata). Arzúa's other claim to fame is its cheese the Queixo Arzúa-Ulloa, a smooth creamy cheese made from cows milk similar to that of the Queso Tetilla. Every year since 1975 the town has played host to a cheese festival (Fiera do Queixo) during the first weekend of March, unless it clashes with other celebrations when it is then held on the second weekend of March. Accommodation can be found at one of six albergues some of which provide either food or cooking facilities along with internet access if so required. There are also four hostals to choose from if the albergues are full.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 32 - Arzúa to Monte do Gozo

Total distance: 34.6 km

This stage of the camino has a number of pilgrim services offering sandwiches (bocadillos), drinks both hot and cold, conveniences etc, so you should have no problem in getting some form of refreshment along the way. From Arzúa the path goes down the Rua do Carmen, past a factory and down a paved lane. After about half a kilometer you pass through the hamlet of As Barrosas passing the Ermita de San Lázaro. The path now takes an unsurfaced track and descends to the bottom of the valley. After crossing a stream the path begins to climb again. As mentioned before there are some yellow and white painted markers here, these again are markers for a walk in this locality, ignore these.

The route is still clearly marked even though the markers don't show the distances anymore, mainly because the route has been diverted away from the main road. No doubt they will get round to putting distances on them at some time in the future. The route passes through the hamlet of Tabernavella before going into some woods, shortly after that you pass through Calzada and then Calle where the path takes you under a large horreo (grain store) that straddles it. In Calle you will find a couple of cafés. Soon after leaving Calle you will need to cross over another stream but the footbridge is a little unstable, so beware. Also a little further along the path does have a tendency to flood in bad weather, but if this happens just keep going ahead rather than forking down it.

The Camino now passes through the hamlets of Boavista and Alto before reaching the small hamlet of Salceda where you will find a bar and a shop. Soon after leaving Salceda you will come across a monument to a British pilgrim who unfortunately died, I believe from a heart attack, so close to his final destination. The monument is of a bronze pair of his shoes and people are known to leave little gifts beside the monument. The plaque at the side says "Guillermo Watt Peregrino, Abrazo a dios a los 69 años a una jornada de Santiago el 25 de Agosto 1993, año santo, vivas en Christo. Roughly translated this says William Watt, Pilgrim, Who embraced god at 69 years of age, one day from Santiago, the 25th of August 1993, holy year, live in Christ". It's so sad to think he was so close to having completed his pilgrimage.



Monument voor Guillermo Watt

Continuing on you now pass through the hamlets of Xen, Ras and Brea where there is a stone memorial to another unfortunate pilgrim, Mariano Sanchez-Coursa Carro who died here on 24th September, again in the holy year of 1993. If you want to spend the night in Brea there is a small albergue that offers dining facilities. The path now takes you through the hamlets of Rabiña and Empalme where there is a café/bar, a shop and a restaurant. Continuing along the Camino takes you along part of the main road and passing through some woods until you reach the picnic area known as Alto de Santa Irene. If you want to visit the 18th century Iglesia de Santa Irene or stay at one of the two albergues, one of which provides the pilgrim with an evening meal and breakfast, in the village of Santa Irene, go through the tunnel under the main road, otherwise keep straight on along the path. Walking through some more woods the Camino goes down a gravel track towards the hamlet of Rúa where there are a couple of casa rurales and a hostel to stay in if you wish and a café/bar. About 1.5 kilometers further on you will come to the village of Arca (sometimes known as Pedrouzo). Here you will find a couple of albergues and a hostel which has its own restaurant. There are also a number of shops, a bank and a pharmacy to get those final supplies to take care of your blisters. You are now only approximately 17 kilometers from your final destination. Some people choose to stay here and make their final journey to Santiago from here, but if you want to take part in the pilgrim mass that is held every day at 12 noon at Santiago cathedral you will need to make a very early start. Most people however, choose to make the journey through to Monte de Gozo, which is approximately 4 kilometers from Santiago.

Back on the Camino you pass through some more woods and down a track towards the hamlet of San Antón. The track now follows a path through some fields which run parallel to the main road and at the bottom of a hill you will enter the village of Amenal. After passing through Amenal the track crosses a river and climbs up to the hamlet of Cimadevila and then again through some more woods before, after about 2 kilometers, you come to a large roundabout with a stone marker close by indicating that you have reached the outskirts of Santiago.

The Camino now passes by the runway of Santiago Airport where you might be lucky enough to see a plane landing or taking off, mind you that is if you are interested in that sort of thing. The path now takes you through the hamlet of San Paio where there is a restaurant and a small hotel, and then through to the village of Lavacolla. In ancient times when pilgrims were close to the end of their pilgrimage it was customary to stop at a stream which flowed through the village now known as Lavacolla, to wash themselves before making their final journey down to the cathedral. The name is said to derive from the pilgrims taking particular attention in washing their backsides because literally translated Lavacolla means washing the tail. Around the village there are a number of café/bars, hostels and hotels but most seem to be catering for those making their way to the airport rather than the pilgrims so they may not be a cheap so it's probably better to continue on to Monte de Gozo for accommodation.

The Camino passes the Iglesia de Benaival which is dedicated to a local man called Juan Pourón who during some local unrest was sentenced to death by the local magistrates. Just as he was about to be hung he shouted out to the Virgen de Belen (Virgin of Bethlehem) "ven e valme" which roughly translated means come and save me. The Virgin heard his plea and sent him straight to heaven thus preventing a painful death through hanging. The Camino continues down some quiet roads and down through the village of Vilamaior where there is a casa rural and an old pazo converted into a hotel. Continuing on you will pass a couple of television stations belonging to Television Galicia as well as for the main Spanish channel Television de España. Just a little further on you arrive at San Marcos where there are a couple of café/bars. About 1 kilometer from the village of San Marcos is



Beeldengroep op Monte do Gozo

your resting place before the final short trek into Santiago de Compostela, the extremely large pilgrim complex of Monte do Gozo. It is tradition that if you are walking in a group the first of your group to arrive at Monte do Gozo will be designated a pilgrim King (or Queen if it happens to be a woman). The name Monte do Gozo means mount of joy. After the pilgrims had finished their wash at Lavacolla they would ascend to the top of the hill which looked out over the beautiful town of Santiago de Compostela and the spires of the cathedral in the distance. The joy came from what the pilgrim felt at seeing his journey's end. In the complex you will find a statue of two pilgrims looking out toward the cathedral. There is also a modern sculpture that was put up to commemorate the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1993. He performed a mass here to thousands of people. The albergue here as I've said is huge, it accommodates around 500 pilgrims and if you have your credencial you can stay here for free for one night only. If you choose to stay longer they will charge a small fee. The albergue has all the amenities including shops, restaurants and café/bars all geared to the pilgrim. If you can't find accommodation in the Albergue San Marcos there are a couple more nearby over the other side of the motorway.

Camino de Santiago - Stage 33 - Monte do Gozo to Santiago de Compostela

Total distance: 4.5 km

As you wake up on the last morning of your journey you will hopefully rise with a great sense of achievement and that your long Camino is soon to come to an end in what I consider to be one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Mind you I am biased as I was born a stone's throw from the Cathedral. In ancient times the tradition was that pilgrims would walk the last 4.5 kilometer stretch barefoot, however I wouldn't recommend it especially if your feet are really sore. From the albergue the path takes you past the Capilla de San Marcos where there is a little picnic area. The path continues downhill passing a house with various creatures made from concrete in its garden. From here the path continues down some steps and over a bridge across the motorway. You are now entering the area known as San Lázaro, one of Santiago's suburbs where there are a number of café/bars and other shops as well as a tourist information office which provides free maps of Santiago, well worth picking one up before you continue on. After crossing the motorway walk down Rúa do Valiño and past the Iglesia de San Lázaro. Continuing down Rúa do Valiño the road soon becomes Barrio das Fontiñas and then at the main junction take the Barrio de los Concheiros.

The path goes through a small square or plaza where there is a cross to Homo Sancto and then down Rúa San Pedro and then to Porta do Camiño. This is the traditional entry point for pilgrims into the old town of Santiago de Compostela.



Midden-boven zijn in de verte de torens van de kathedraal te zien

The path now takes you down the Rúa das Casas Reales, across the Plaza de Parga and the Plaza de Animas where you will need to take a left down to the Plaza Cervantes and then take a right down Calle Azabachería to the Praza da Immaculada, taking some steps down past the side of the cathedral and down a walkway under the Arco del Obispo which will take you into the Plaza del Obradoiro and the front of the cathedral.

If you arrive before noon you will be able to attend the pilgrim mass, but if you have time pop down to the pilgrim's office in the Casa do Deán to collect your Compostela. From the Plaza del Obradoiro and whilst facing the front

of the cathedral walk to your right down the Rúa de Gilmirez and then take another right down Rúa Vilar where you will find the Casa do Deán on your left and the pilgrim office is found on the second floor. At the next day's pilgrim mass your name, country of origin and the starting point of your pilgrimage will be announced at the mass. You are entitled to a Compostela as long as you've completed at least 100 kilometers of the Camino and you have had your pilgrim passport or credencial stamped along the way. This credencial is proof of where you have been. If you have undertaken the Camino for spiritual or religious reasons you will be given the traditional Compostela. If you undertook the Camino for any other reason you will be given a slightly different, more colourful alternative. Going back to the Plaza del Obradoiro you will have passed the 15th century Hostal de los Reyes Católicos.

This now very grand parador hotel was once a pilgrim hostel founded by the catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella and is regarded as one of the oldest hotels not only in Spain but the whole world. If you are lucky you may be able to get one of the free meals that they offer to pilgrims with breakfast at 9am, lunch at noon or dinner at 7pm. You will need to have your Compostela with you as proof that you have completed the Camino and wait at the garage entrance to the hotel, which is to the left of the main entrance. In busy periods the free meals are limited to the first 10 pilgrims. It might seem a little unfair, but at the end of the day they are a business. In summer or peak times arrive early as the free meals are only limited to the first 10 pilgrims. You are entitled to take these meals within 3 days of your arrival in Santiago.

There is so much to see in Santiago de Compostela, it really does have one of the most stunning old town's of any city I've ever been to. Not only has it got a truly impressive cathedral but there are a large number of other historic buildings worth visiting. In the Praza do Obradoiro there is the 18th century Pazo de Raxoi built for Archbishop Raxoi by the French engineer Charles Lemaur. It is now used as the main council offices and some of the local government departments of the Xunta de Galicia.



Zicht op de kathedraal vanuit het hooggelegen stadspark

The Cathedral itself is vast covering around 10.000 square meters. It was originally consecrated in the very early 13th century, having been commissioned by Alfonso VI the king of León and Santiago's first Archbishop Diego Gelmirez. The cathedral has been added to over the years, but the Portico de la Gloria designed by the sculptor Master Mateo was an original feature. The twin Baroque towers, the iconic symbol of the cathedral were added in the late 18th century. One monument with an interesting legend is that of the Convento de San Francisco de Valdediós. It is rumoured to have been founded by St Francis of Assisi. St Francis is said to have made a pilgrimage to Santiago in 1214 where he received a vision of the Apostle St James asking him to build a monastery. St Francis decided to move into a small hermitage close to Monte Pedroso where he met a

coal merchant by the name of Cotalay and to whom St Francis entrusted the building of his monastery.

Poor Cotalay had no idea how he was going to complete this mammoth task, he wasn't a builder and he was extremely poor and didn't have the resources to undertake a venture such as this. One day St Francis asked Cotalay to accompany him on a walk to look for the right spot to build the monastery. They came across a piece of land in an area known as Val de Dios which belonged to an existing monastery. St Francis spoke to the Abbot who agreed to hand over the land to St Francis on the condition that they would receive from him a basket of fish on an annual basis. St Francis and Cotalay continued on their walk until they came upon a fountain where St Francis asked Cotalay to dig a hole. This he did and soon struck something solid which turned out to be a chest containing gold coins and other riches. Cotalay now had the financial means to build the monastery and he put the money to good use. He was even able to live comparatively comfortable for the rest of his life. Little remains of the original 13th century church but you will still find Cotalay's tomb and 5 gothic arches in the cloister. There are so many sights to see that it will take some time to collate them all for you. Information on some of the historic buildings can be accessed by clicking on:

<http://www.galiciaguide.com/Santiago-index.html>



Kathedraal aan het Praza do Obradoiro

Bovenstaande tekst is in oktober 2015 integraal overgenomen van de site <http://galiciaguide.com>. Galiciaguide.com was helaas niet via mail te bereiken om toestemming voor overname te verkrijgen. Oorspronkelijke foto's zijn op verschillende plaatsen vervangen door actuelere foto's uit eigen archief.

*Mat Knaapen
28 oktober 2015*

e-mail: sanxacobeo@hotmail.nl