

Amigo on the Camino  
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The arid plateaus of the *meseta* dominate the central portion of the Camino Frances between Burgos and León. Some pilgrims pray for an escape from the *meseta*, but for those who are drawn to the quiet expanse of wheat fields bordering the Roman Road, pleasant surprises await. And so it was that I encountered my favorite Spaniard in Calzadilla de los Hermanillos.

Leaving Sahagún, the pilgrim can follow the Camino Real Francés along a roadway, or head out into the open fields along the Vía Romana. After the farms of Calzada de Coto, there are 8.7 kilometers of wheat interrupted only by train tracks and a *fuenta* in a tempting tree-filled meadow.

After settling in at the albergue in Calzadilla, I savored the shower and snack. Knowing that provisions were needed for a long stretch the next day to Mansilla de las Mulas, I asked the *señora* about a *tienda* to prepare for lunch on the trail. She gave me directions to the *tienda*, advising me that there was precious little time until the (1500) afternoon closing. Overconfident that I could find my way, I set out through the farming village, noting the *pelota* court and rows of well-maintained but closed-up residences. Touring side streets brought me to the tiny chapel of St Bartholomew back on the main street, but no *tienda*. Fortunately the only bar was open and I acquired new directions: “Turn right by the tractor” then continued deeper in the side lanes. There was the hand-lettered sign for the Tienda-Supermarket!

I snuck in a narrow passage and turned in to a 15x15 ft *tienda*, greeted by a friendly face on a short frame behind the counter. Every shelf was crammed with the daily necessities. Spying some essentials for the rucksack, I did not see any bread. When I asked, the diminutive shopkeeper looked in the baguette bag, to find it empty. I assured him I could come back later when *siesta* ended at 1700, but he picked up his phone and told me to wait a minute. After less than a minute’s wait a young man came in with a magic box of baguettes.

Pressure off, I wandered back to the albergue, reflecting on this tidy village of mostly shuttered houses with only a few pilgrims in the streets. Only later would inquiries inform me that in many agricultural villages young people have moved to Burgos or León, while maintaining the family house in the village for a weekend getaway. So the shopkeeper was delighted to greet pilgrims visiting on the quieter days.

Back at the albergue, I spread the word that I had indeed “discovered” the *tienda*, and intended to lead an expedition back at 1700. With the curious and hungry in tow, we wandered the quiet lanes back to my friend. His face lit up when the entourage squeezed in the entry. When the first customer ordered olives, he passed samples spooned from the massive jar for all to enjoy. Likewise, when slicing cheese or *jamón* for a customer, any who wished were welcome to sample. Anyone lacking language to request an item was invited behind the counter to search for themselves. Delighted by our provisions and the warm welcome from the proud proprietor, we headed back to the albergue and the dinner and conversation to follow, prepared to head out on the Camino the following dawn.