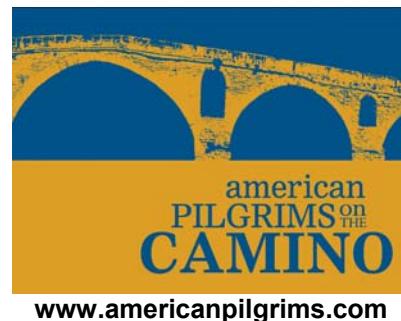


AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2009



Dear Fellow Pilgrims:

The Board met across a long weekend in the middle of October to rethink some of the structures and directions of American Pilgrims. It was a wonderfully productive meeting, and I would like to use this page to report on it.

We have simplified the committee structure. In addition to the standing committees of the Board, specified in our By-Laws (finance, nominations, and by-laws), the Board creates other committees to take on the aspects of its work that carry out the association's mission. We have reduced a rather overgrown garden to four committees.

One will be the gatherings committee. In concrete ways, our association came into being as pilgrims gathered, and shared their stories, and looked for ways to "give back" to the Camino. These annual gatherings, to which veteran and prospective pilgrims are all invited, will remain one of our principal activities.

Another committee will look after our website. The website has become our principal means of communication and, as such, requires a committee dedicated to it.

Another will look after membership. This committee will have multiple functions, from overseeing correct data, to placing volunteers, to recruitment and support efforts.

The fourth committee will oversee and enact Camino Support. This committee will have two distinct expressions. We will continue to train and place volunteer hospitaleros. We have done that for several years now with enormous success, and it is one very embodied way to "give back" to the Camino what so many of us received in such abundance. The second expression will have to do with material support of Camino entities and projects. We will have more to say about that at our Annual Gathering in Albuquerque in March.

In addition, we have reconstituted the Executive Committee with Jim Eychaner as Chair, Cherie Pagett has become Vice-Chair and Nicholas Hayes remains as Treasurer.

I am proud to be able to say as well that the Board approved a grant of \$10,000 to the refugio in Fuenterroble de Salvatierra, on the Via de la Plata, for the enlargement and enhancement of that albergue. Fuenterroble is the nerve center of the Via de la Plata associations, already very active in conducting its own pilgrimages and holding its own conferences on Camino themes. Several of the Board members have direct experience of the albergue and Don Blas, who is the local priest and runs it. At every point they have been impressed by his energy and enterprise and integrity. We are more than satisfied at being able to further his efforts.

I look forward to seeing you in March at our Annual Gathering in Albuquerque.

Ultreya!

Michael Wyatt

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12th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims Albuquerque, New Mexico March 11-17, 2009

Walk in Spirit

Dear Fellow and Future Pilgrims

We are pleased to announce our plans for the 12th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims, to be held from March 13-15, 2009 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Many thanks to all who made suggestions for our venue; after much discussion and many inquiries, our program committee chose the Rio Grande Inn in the heart of Old Town Albuquerque. Here we will find good lodging, attractive meeting rooms, and comfortable places to meet and talk together. The Rio Grande is near Albuquerque's museum and botanical gardens, with easy access to the charms of this old New Mexico city.

The theme of the 2009 Gathering is well expressed in its title: *Walk in Spirit*. Our intention is to provide a time for reflection on what it means, for each of us, to be a pilgrim. Presentations about Camino life, past and present, will challenge us to consider anew the spiritual truths that lie within pilgrimage. We hope everyone will leave with a refreshed sense of the pilgrim's purpose, new ways of thinking about spiritual growth, and deeper insights into how the Camino can transform and inform our lives. At the same time of course, the Gathering offers all the pleasures of food, drink, and festivities that so many of us have enjoyed both on the Camino and in past Gatherings.

On Friday, Daniel De Kay will present his ever popular and useful workshop on Camino first aid. We also will hold our usual Q&A panel session for new pilgrims, this year with Camino author and film-maker Sue Kenney and Camino veteran Luana Duggan. In a concurrent session, Kathy Gower will tell us about her recent pilgrimage that included visits to many lesser known sacred sites along the Camino de las Estrellas.

We are delighted to welcome Phil Cousineau, well-known author of *The Art of Pilgrimage*, to our Friday program. Phil will present an afternoon workshop on the "Great Round of Pilgrimage." With story-telling, sketching, and exercises in awareness, Phil will help you transform the adventure of your Camino journey into a deep pilgrimage. There is an extra fee for this session; but those who choose other Friday options will be glad to know that Phil will also be our guest speaker after dinner on Friday night.

On Thursday evening we will have an informal reception for those who arrive early to be able to attend the Friday activities

Our Saturday sessions begin with Arthur Boers, teacher of theology and spiritual disciplines, and author of *The Way is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago*. Arthur will talk to us about how pilgrimage provides an antidote to hollow living by pointing us toward wonder and meaning, and by drawing us into practices that engage us deeply and connect us with others, creation, and the divine.

Three guests will guide us through various types of medieval spiritual expression, exploring both the relevance and the contrasts of these to our own experience on the Camino. Steve Raulston from the University of the South in Sewanee will focus on the spiritual meaning of Church architecture, asking how medieval pilgrims responded to those same beauties of Romanesque churches that we find so captivating today. Mike Hammer, from the University of San Francisco, will look at medieval pilgrimage stories to see what pilgrims from that time expected from the road, and what they expected from God. And Tony Cardenas from the University of New Mexico will show how the songs of Alfonso X present some challenges to the Camino's usual spiritual and political meaning.

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Saturday will also include active sessions on awareness of the body as part of spiritual growth. Dolly Sanchez de Riviera, a lifelong leader in the Albuquerque community, runs the exercise program at the Barelas Community Centre. Dolly will show us simple yoga postures to help us experience our bodies mindfully and use them respectfully on our journeys. And Doug Corpolongo, Master Instructor of Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong, and a long-time teacher in Albuquerque, will introduce us to walking practices from the Tai Chi tradition that focus the mind and connect us with the deeper rhythms of pilgrimage.

We are very fortunate this year to have Sue Kenney as our after dinner speaker at our Saturday banquet. Sue will present *My Camino*, a stage play adaptation of her book of the same name, which has already received excellent reviews across North America.

As in previous years, the 2009 Gathering will be preceded by a hospitalero training. We invite anyone wishing to volunteer to serve for two or more weeks in Spain at a Camino *refugio* to attend this excellent 2-day program, hosted by Lin Galea and Daniel De Kay. For questions regarding the Hospitalero Training contact hospitaleros@americanpilgrims.com .

The Gathering will be followed by a Retreat. Our relationship with our backpack will be the guiding metaphor. How do we decide what to take? How do we learn to unpack and repack, to discard, to add what is missing? How do we end up with the essential simple pack that is ours - which, as we come to know it intimately, becomes lighter to carry? The retreat will be held a short distance from Albuquerque at the beautiful, self-contained Spiritual Renewal Center. Space is limited. Return transportation to the Rio Grande Inn will be provided.

This year's Gathering is an opportunity to explore new ways of thinking about the significance of the Camino in our lives. But its greatest value will be, as always, what we learn about ourselves as pilgrims through dialogue with others. It is these informal conversations that support us in our journeys and give us confidence and hope. We invite you to bring not only your memories and questions, but also any photos or mementos of pilgrimage that hold meaning for you, to share with others and display in our meeting room. As well, we will be auctioning and raffling a number of articles; if you have something you would like to donate, please contact gatherings@americanpilgrims.com .

Registration forms are available to download at www.americanpilgrims.com. Please contact gatherings@americanpilgrims.com with registration questions or if you would like a registration packet mailed to you.

Our registration deadline is February 21, 2009.

In order to receive the discounted room rate at the Rio Grande Inn, you MUST book your own room before February 12, 2009. Details provided on the registration forms.

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Postcards from a Hospitalera

One of my favorite things about being a member of American Pilgrims on the Camino is the organization's training program for volunteer hospitaleros. I attended the first training session held in Santa Barbara in 2004, in preparation for my two weeks as a hospitalera at Refugio Gaucelmo in Rabanal del Camino.

Since then I have participated in training sessions in Sacramento in 2006 and Santa Barbara in 2008. Each session put me in contact with other enthusiastic volunteers and renewed my desire to return to the Camino. In 2006 I volunteered in Salamanca on the Via de la Plata and this fall I returned to the Camino Frances to work in the small town of Sahagún. Here's a postcard about my experiences in Sahagún:

Hola, Amigos!

When I first walked the Camino in 2002, there was only one pilgrim refuge here in Sahagún; now there are three. The oldest, with bunks for 65 pilgrims, is operated by the city and located inside a former 17th century church. This is where I slept in 2002. Since then, an even larger private refuge has opened, as well as the one in the Benedictine convent where I am currently working as the volunteer hospitalera.

And working is the operative word! I find that I am equal parts concierge, counselor and cleaning lady. After arriving on Sunday, I spent the afternoon settling in and learning about my duties from my predecessor. Around 7:00 pm, he took off, leaving me with a heavy set of

keys and a list of things to do. With only five pilgrims staying the night, I went to bed relatively unconcerned.

Monday was a different story! The day started badly when I overslept by an hour. My first duty of the day is to set out a simple breakfast for the pilgrims at 7:15 am, but I didn't awake until 7:30 - and they were too kind to knock on my door. I jumped out of bed, put on the coffee, and quickly had the bread, butter, jam and cocoa on the table. In small towns like this, a simple breakfast is much appreciated, as pilgrims generally must be out of the refuges by 8:00 am. Nothing is open then and there is often no coffee or food to be had until the next town at least an hour or so further along the Camino.



Sahagún
Convento de las Madres Benedictinas

I soon had all the pilgrims on their way, except for one German woman who was ill with stomach flu and tendonitis, so I told her to stay in bed and rest. I commenced my cleaning, but soon the doorbell rang. There in the entry was a tall, handsome German fellow asking if he could come in and rest awhile. (He told me he was a priest, but I've never seen one that handsome before!) He had been sick to his stomach all night and was feeling awful. I put him to bed in another room, and brought tea and dry toast to my two patients. Soon another young German with stomach flu arrived, so I put him in the bunk next to the priest. By now it's only 11:00 am and three of my fourteen beds are already filled!

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As I went about my duties, the doorbell rang off and on. Some pilgrims passing by asked to have their pilgrim credentials stamped, while others asked when I would be opening for business. I started admitting pilgrims at 12:30 and by 2:00 pm, I was "completo," i.e., completely full. The three patients slept most of the day and I also had another pilgrim with some pretty serious blisters on both feet. The better part of the afternoon was spent directing my patients to the local medical center, and providing information about where/when to catch the bus to the next town. We all turned in shortly after 10:00 pm. This time, I made sure my alarm was working properly before falling into a restless sleep.

I was up at 6:00 am on Tuesday, and began serving breakfast at 6:30. After many "thank yous," hugs and "Buen Caminos," my charges had all departed shortly before 8:00 am. I set to cleaning, working straight through until 11:00 am! There was so much to do. We have bunks for 14 distributed in three bedrooms, each with its own "en suite" bathroom. Since the house was full the night before, everything warranted a thorough cleaning.

My principal contact with the Benedictines nuns is Sor (sister) Consuelo. She is about 80, but very spry and up to the minute. She comes by each morning to see how I am getting on and to retrieve the donations left by the pilgrims in the donation boxes. (We are among those very special refuges that offer hospitality without charge.) Sor Consuelo was very pleased to tell me that she had found a grand total of 55 Euros in the two donation boxes. "Last night's pilgrims comported themselves very well" she said. Even though that's less than four Euros per person, I felt rather proud of myself, since Sor Consuelo seemed to think it was a good haul.

By noon on Tuesday, after working all morning, I was feeling tired and discouraged. But only two pilgrims showed up that afternoon, so it

turned out to a quiet and relaxing day. One of these was a young Japanese woman, also suffering from tendonitis. I sent her to the medical center and she returned with a note from the doctor recommending three days rest. Because of the note, Sor Consuelo determined that she could stay with us three whole nights. Naturally, I put her to work helping me with the small amount of cleaning needed Wednesday morning. She is now resting in our lovely garden and tending the doorbell until I return to open the refuge at 12:30.



Sahagún
Enclosed Garden at Pilgrim Refuge

So all is well, the weather is beautiful and I am happy again. We'll see what this afternoon brings. Next time, I will tell more about the layout of the refuge, which has some very interesting features. Stay tuned!

Martha Lopez

Want to try your hand at being a volunteer hospitalero on the Camino? Consider registering for the next Hospitalero Training session to be held March 11-12, 2009, in Albuquerque NM. For more information, visit www.americanpilgrims.com.

More postcards from Sahagún, coming soon on our website www.americanpilgrims.com.

BOOK REVIEWS

Review of *The Roads to Santiago: The medieval pilgrim routes through France and Spain to Santiago de Compostela*, by Derry Brabbs (ISBN 978 0 7112 2706 4)

Sometimes you CAN judge a book by its cover: on the front jacket, an imposing view looking up at the façade of the cathedral of Santiago in the evening sunshine; on the back, a downward look at long shadows on a deserted stretch of the Camino aragonés near Sangüesa; on the inside of the cover, a colorful reproduction of the 1648 map showing the roads from France to Santiago de Compostela. This cover art does not deceive. Inside the book is exactly what author Derry Brabbs promises, an exuberant “celebration of the glorious religious architecture and countryside that are the very essence of the pilgrimage” (8).

I REALLY like this beautiful, large-format coffee table book. It appeals to me because of its wealth of striking photographs, because of the insights that the author shares in his text, and perhaps especially because it is one of very few books in English that show not only the geographical but also the historical and artistic continuity of the French *Chemins de Compostelle* and the Spanish *Camino francés*. Indeed, without the French roads, the *Camino francés* would never have developed as it did. Even the organization of chapters points to this: after an Introduction there is an historical overview, then four chapters on the four main routes in France, a transitional chapter, then four chapters on the *Camino francés* in Spain, and finally an Epilogue. It is, the author writes, a book intended to inspire those who have not yet walked, and intended as an *aide mémoire* for those who already wear the scallop shell. And, interestingly, it is a book written as much for the motorized pilgrim as it is for those who walk.

The author uses his Introduction to create the context for everything that follows. He talks briefly about the pitfall of using contemporary worldviews to criticize medieval belief systems, about the variety of people who make the pilgrimage today, about the *Codex Calixtinus*, and about the contemporary renaissance of the pilgrimage roads to Santiago de Compostela. Then, in the first chapter, “Origins & Development,” he recounts the history of the pilgrimage succinctly and cogently, from the time of St. James’s efforts to evangelize in Roman Hispania up to the Romanesque period of the Middle Ages.

The next four chapters trace, historically and geographically, the four major Compostellan pilgrimage routes in France: the Via Podiensis from Le Puy, the Via Lemovicensis from Vézelay, the Via Turonensis from Chartres, and the Via Tolosana from Arles. Each chapter is graced with magnificent pictures from these routes, pictures of medieval architecture and current landscapes. The accompanying text in each chapter is highly readable and for the most part very informative.

This is not to say that I agree with everything that the author has written. To my way of seeing things, several minor problems make their appearance in these chapters and then crop up from time to time throughout the rest of the book. One is more than anything else a matter of narrative style: the author injects his personal opinion about the value of a particular landscape or architectural feature and expresses it as if it were more than an opinion. I would cite, for example, his assertion that “Logroño is disappointingly dull and soulless,” which I would consider quite simply wrong. An editorial problem has to do with there being descriptions of sites like San Pedro de la Rúa in Estella, or of objects like the Black Madonna of Le Puy, but with no accompanying photo. Finally, there is the occasional factual error; for example, “Built by Sancho the Strong in the thirteenth century, the walls of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port have withstood attacks from the Visigoths, Charlemagne’s men, the Moors and the Spanish army” (148). Walls built in the thirteenth century would never have seen the Visigoths (fifth to ninth centuries), Charlemagne’s men (end of the eighth century and beginning of the ninth), or the Moors (eighth and ninth centuries). These are quibbles, though, and really do not diminish the overall attractiveness of the book nor my liking of it.

In the chapter “The Pyrenees to Puente la Reina” the author gives us a wonderful transition—textually and pictorially—from France to Spain. He talks about the convergence of the three upper French

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routes at Hiburnia, about Roland and how his historical defeat was turned into wartime propaganda for the Crusades, about Roncesvalles and Pamplona and Puente la Reina. In the following chapter he makes connections between the architecture of the cloister of San Pedro de la Rúa in Estella, Spain, and the cloister at Moissac in France, as well as between the pilgrim's hospital at Irache and the one at Roncesvalles. He points out worthwhile detours to San Millán de la Cogolla and to Cañas, and relates the impact that Domingo García (Santo Domingo de la Calzada) and Juan Velázquez (San Juan de Ortega) had on the development of the medieval pilgrim road.

The chapter "Burgos to León" includes some magnificent photos of the meseta in the summer, when the fields are dry and the landscape has turned from green to brown. In this chapter and the next one, "León to Santiago", it sometimes seems that the author's descriptions are dated; for example, pilgrims no longer need to "carry sufficient provisions" between Tardajos and Castrojeriz, and the highway route out of Villafranca del Bierzo is no longer the dangerous stretch that it used to be—the walking path is well protected from cars and trucks by concrete barriers. On the other hand, his discussions of the meaning of the term "franca," on medieval communications, and on the question of returning or not returning home after arriving in Santiago, are all intriguing.

If there were any question as to whether Santiago de Compostela deserves its own chapter, the magnificent photos and inspired text here should dispel all doubts. His description of the cathedral's Baroque western façade and its encased original Romanesque façade is a gem, as is his summary of the ceremonial rites of pilgrims when they arrive. I would consider the final paragraphs of the chapter as exceptional if not for the complaint about the lack of silver service and starched napkins for those ten pilgrims who obtain a free meal at the Parador—who cares if there are no starched napkins when you are getting a Parador quality meal for free!

The Epilogue on "The Pilgrimage Today" provides more wonderful photos and both strong ("[T]he road to Santiago de Compostela is not only a journey of self-discovery, but an opportunity to savour and appreciate the sheer beauty of nature" (246)) and weak ("It really is worth a try" (246)) concluding statements.

This book is now prominently displayed in my living room.

Reviewed by Carlos Mentley

Review of *The Way is Made by Walking*, by Arthur Paul Boers
Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

Anyone contemplating making the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela on foot, would do well to look elsewhere for information of the 'what to wear, what to carry' variety. This is not a technical manual for the uninitiated, and may be better suited to the interests of those who have returned from the journey in Spain.

It is, however, a book containing a great number of 'on the scene' descriptions, drawn from direct observation and experience of human participation along the Camino. Arthur Boers teaches Pastoral Theology at the Mennonite Biblical Seminary at Elkhart, Indiana. He is an ordained Mennonite minister, and Benedictine oblate at St. Gregory's Abbey at Three Rivers, Michigan.

Pilgrims returning from the Camino frequently speak of the manner in which their notions about many aspects of their lives, changed as they made their way along the ancient route, and then later after their return home. Arthur Boers, walking himself on the Camino, identifies with their views, selecting episodes from his journey to illustrate his growing appreciation as he makes his way, one step at a time, day by day.

In describing the Camino as the Way, Boers refers to the earthly route to Santiago, measured in kilometers, and the spiritual Way, measured in terms of growth.

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Thus personal growth may occur in response to other people, the land, the climate and weather, local customs, and one's health and welfare. Change occurs as process, over time measured in footsteps, attitude, and insights.

As Arthur Boers defines the process, it is a journey toward Spirituality, toward the realization of oneself as a spiritual person. Although Boers occasionally uses passages from the Scriptures to reinforce an observation, the message is not 'preachy'. We are left to decide for ourselves if his observations are relevant to our experience. After reading this book readers may feel they have been in a conversation with a remarkably down-to-earth human. The sub-headings of a few of the chapters give a flavor of the contents: Drawn to Pilgrimage, Simplify, simplify, simplify, Hospitality and solidarity, The disconnect of pilgrims and Church, Walking as spiritual practice.

While the book centres mainly on the Camino pilgrimage, there are extensive notes in the back relating to pilgrimages in history and in other parts of the world. As well, there is an information list of other books on related topics. This is an attractive volume, compact and easy to carry with black and white photos and softcover.

Review by John O'Henly, co-chair, London Group of Pilgrims, Canada
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PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO

Camino de las Estrellas, A Pilgrimage – By Kathy Gower
Full version and photos contact kathygpilgrim@yahoo.com

Some of you may have met Ferran Blasco at the Santa Barbara Pilgrim Gathering: he gave a very fascinating introduction to the Camino as an initiatic journey of self-discovery through star practices, temple energetics and internal alchemy, tracing the steps of the ancient spiritual Master Builders.. I use his words as they are best to describe my recent journey along the Camino with him and Juan Li, a well-known Qi Gong practitioner and seeker of ancient wisdom paths.

Our Camino actually started with the dolmens and megaliths along Spain's Catalunyan coast. Sunrise at El Cap de Creus on the Mediterranean shore commenced the journey with an introduction to earth energetic and sensibilities. The stunning Monastery of Saint Pere de Rodes with its Saint Michael Chapel and towering Templar castle guards the eastern boundary of Spain. Just below the monastery is an ancient spring to Venus, who can be seen each morning.

Many pilgrimages in Spain start at either Roncesvalles or at Jaca, after going over the Somport Pass. In our case, we journeyed to an even older pass for the pilgrimage through the parallel Valle de Hecho. The pass is rich with dolmens and stunning scenery, including waterfalls and pastoral wonders. The base of the valley is Siresa where there is another church to St. Pere, built in the 9th century for he "who holds the keys". At one point the church held the grail cup after St. Lawrence brought it to Spain in the third century. Fascinating is the floor of the church which has the oldest labyrinth in Spain.

I chose to go on this particular journey because oftentimes on the many walking pilgrimages I have taken, there isn't time nor energy to visit some of the spots where I would have truly liked to have spent time. The Monastery at Leyre with its ancient crypt offers the legend of St. Virilia who meditated on birdsong at a spring high in the mountains at Leyre and returned 400 years later.

Another spot was Sanguesa, a place I had visited earlier but was interested to learn that the braided knots on the tympanum, like those at Torres De Rio, were used for healing. Those ill were advised to follow the patterns of the knots...different knot patterns had different healing properties.

The theme of American Pilgrims is "Bridges" and we visited some of the more energetic ones along the way. Monreal, Puerto La Reina and others were built by their own Master Builders, to assist

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pilgrims and to harmonize their energies with that of the towns they connected. Walking these bridges revealed startling energetics and feelings of being uplifted, something the weary pilgrim could use.

Each morning was a qi gong practice before breakfast for energy and on into the journey one could start to feel the differences in the various sacred spaces along the way. Geometric drawings of Eunate (no two walls are the same size in its unique octagonal pattern) and Torres del Rio helped us to understand the purposes of these Templar churches, based on the Dome of the Rock of Jerusalem, one of the destinations of the other great Pilgrimage route of the Middle Ages.

Many nights were given to star gazing along the Camino, for each area comes under a certain constellation. The camino starts in Sagitarius with its archer that needs to see its goal and goes through until it gets to the Canis Major with its major star, Sirius shining brightly for us each morning to lead the way. Further, the road goes under the "Eagle", investigating great teachings of the past with its energy of helping one another, through the Lyre, or "Lyra", where we find our rhythm in walking. Cygnus the Swan is next, sometimes looked at as a ganso, or goose, gets us into the flow with Deneb, a star that is 2 times larger than the sun. After the Swan is "Cepheus", the one who would be king, located above Cassiopeia. Here is where trust and real heart-centered caring starts to develop as we journey the Way. Perseus comes next, the winged messenger who slew the Gorgon Medusa, with its bright stars generating the light of self-consciousness towards change and lucidity. Auriga contains the twin stars of Castor and Pollux, sometimes referred to the twin hemispheres of the brain or putting ideas into practice. Finally comes Orion, whose 3 stars in his belt point to the Canis Major and Sirius.

The Cathedral of Leon, with its stunning stained glass window holds many clues to its sacred geometry on the front porches. The luminous, light-magnifying windows, created with an alchemical mixture of gold, silver, copper, tin and iron, do not require any cleaning. Workmen during a recent renovation noted that pollution does not stick to them as it does to the few replacement windows created after the originals were destroyed by war.

What is most important to note here is that pilgrimage is a journey of self - discovery. Pilgrims are souls in motion, passing through territories that are not known to them, seeking completion or wholeness or perhaps faith and clarity. Their spirit's inner compass points the way through personal experience, venturing into sacred territory. What I have found was evidence of that sacred quest from the earliest megaliths to those making their own journeys in a less visible way.

It starts with "*calcination*", a kind of fire or zeal to do something, walk those 500 miles...filled with anxiety and even pain in the beginning as our muscles adjust to their work. Next is the water part or "*dissolution*"--sweat, perhaps tears as things begin to dissolve for us and we start to change our ways as things break down. The third stage is that of "*separation*" when we start to separate from our physical stuff, illusions start to disappear. The fourth stage is "*conjugation*" when something useful remains from our previous structures and coincidences and synchronicity starts to happen. We simplify and leave things behind and find ways to dance with the process. We are becoming pilgrims. "*Fermentation*" is the fifth stage and new possibilities begin to arise; new options and we start to experience "*flow*" where our abilities and talents take hold in a marvelous way. "*Distillation*" brings you down to the details of how, when and in which way. This is the time of penetrating insights, when you start to observe the essence of things. Finally, there is "*coagulation*" where we make plans for new ways of being; new structures arise and then, since nothing is impermanent, the cycles begin again!

The question always arises for me how we take our pilgrimage experiences into everyday life. We usually carry on as before, but with new consciousness of the possibilities of what can be...for ourselves, our families, the community and for all. Welcome back and take care!

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My Way by Marlene Lambert, M.S.,

Marlene is an adjunct faculty member in the School of Nursing and Health Sciences at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. She teaches yoga and other moving meditations,
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Three years ago, when the divorce was final, I had a ceremony with several of my divorced friends, inviting them to witness my renewed commitment to my Self. This trip to Europe was to be the honeymoon, consummating my budding relationship to my Self first and foremost, for better or worse, in sickness and in health.

Notre Dame du Puy-en-Velay stands high on the Massif Central of France, gracefully resisting the late February ice, snow, wind and rain. I began my walking journey of a thousand miles inside this giant statue of the Virgin Mary. I emerged from her red iron robes, descending eastward under cloudy skies that threatened snow. As I looked back she resembled Lady Liberty, holding a child instead of a book and torch, and dressed in warm red, not cold blue. I then passed through the town's cathedral and its traditional starting point for pilgrims, the statue of Saint James the Apostle. I had begun to walk the pilgrimage of Le Chemin de Saint Jacques, or El Camino de Santiago, "The Way of Saint James."

The Way of Saint James follows a series of historic Christian pilgrimage routes that converge at Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, alleged site of the great apostle's burial. For my way, I chose an established route that took me more than 740 kilometers (450 miles) across central France, and 900 more kilometers (550 miles) in northern Spain, beyond Santiago all the way to the sea. I walked alone for 36 of the first 40 days, averaging about 20 km (12 miles) a day, and other than the pain that gradually developed in my feet (which, I am told, is normal), my whole body felt healthier than ever before. I was a well-oiled eating and walking machine. In the latter days of the walk, I began to feel something of the bliss that Dorothy Gale must have felt when she realized she was over the rainbow – a tremendous sense of peace, a sense that everything was right with the world, including with me.

I expected to arrive at the traditional end of the pilgrimage in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain, on May 8th. I expected my period to start on the same day. It had been running like clockwork since I left the States four months earlier. It seemed appropriate to begin bleeding as I arrived—an ending and a beginning. But I got to Santiago, and it didn't start. Neither did I feel my journey had ended. I had the urge to keep walking and hit the trail again later that day.

I sobbed when I first glimpsed the North Atlantic Ocean from the hills of western Galicia three days later. For the past 80 days and about 1,000 miles, I had wondered what this moment would be like. In France, the catch phrase of pilgrims was 'on ne sait jamais,' in Spain, "quien sabes" – one never knows. The next morning, I reached Finisterre, "the end of the earth." This small coastal town considers itself the true end point of The Way.

As I approached the lighthouse on the cape I met up with a fellow pilgrim named Martin, a young German who I had first met weeks earlier. He arrived the day before me and had climbed down the steep wall of rocks into the water to get a sense of completion at the end of his pilgrimage. He asked what I planned to do when I got to the farthest point. I said I didn't know, that I would see what came up in the moment. Many pilgrims burn their hiking boots or create other symbolic gestures of the journey's end.

AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2009



Marlene Lambert at Finisterre

Within a few minutes I was climbing down the rocks behind the lighthouse as far as I felt safe. (Not as far as Martin did, I assure you.) The boulders wobbled beneath me as I sat on a small ledge and reverently opened the bundle of mementos I had carried with me from home: medallions from and for friends and family, mostly. I had already released some of my burden, as many pilgrims do, at the foot of the Curz de Ferro in the Margarateria region, including a small blue marble and a tiny black fetish of a raven. Now I allowed the small silk bag that had contained them to blow away. Within a moment of releasing it, lo and behold, I started to bleed! Ah, the wisdom of the body. The moon was full that night. No other celebration was needed.

As a bit of a victory lap, I chose to walk another 35 km (21 miles) to the small fishing village of Muxia. I still faced the usual daily challenges of The Way, including feeling lost a couple of times (and being lost at least once), thinking about important things like lodging, food, the weather, and the condition of my feet almost always. Like Santiago and Finisterre, Muxia also claims to be the true end point for pilgrims, since its coastline has sprouted the chapel of Nuestra Dama de la Barca, or “Our Lady of the Ship.” Saint James’s followers are said to have landed there in a stone boat with the relics of their beloved teacher, having safely sailed away from their persecutors in Jerusalem. My safe arrival there was accompanied by the strongest sense of completion I have ever felt.

I did it. I did it... “My Way.” Sing it, Frankie. “Le Chemin” or “El Camino” means “The Way.” Shirley MacLaine and Paolo Coelho wrote nice stories about it, but it wasn’t that way for me. I did, in fact, get bitten by a dog while on the pilgrimage. Another day I became violently ill. I also had countless – almost daily – positive serendipitous encounters, but I did not experience the kinds of phantasms they described. “The Way” is different for everyone, which is to say, there is only one way – the way I choose.

I did something just for me, for no other person and for no other reason than for my own delight. I finished something in a way I felt good about, 100%. Maybe I even felt proud of myself for a moment. I don’t think I had ever really felt that before. All my prior achievements were done to please others or with compromise to others or were interrupted by others’ needs. In all my years of academic and professional success, no one ever truly praised my achievements. Now that I had done something just for me, for no good reason, friends and family all over the world were suddenly interested and vicariously thrilled.

Whatever it was I had done, here at Muxia I felt finished. Complete. Done. I did not have the urge, let alone the capacity, to walk another step. I finally felt very, very tired.

I spent the next several days lying around doing nothing. Literally. Every time I tried to do anything, I found myself lying back for another nap.

At some point along The Way I was startled to realize that finding a full-time partner is no longer a priority for me. A preference, maybe. Maybe not. But something along The Way radically shifted, though it was subtle. When I left the U.S., I still felt I needed to fill the void created when my husband left. Now I felt for the first time that it not only would be fine to live alone, it would also be OK to die alone. That was a real shocker. I would, of course, prefer not to die alone, but along with the blue marble and the obsidian raven beneath that wayside cross, I seem to have laid down the burden of needing someone else to be in my life full-time.

AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, January 2009

I now knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am the only one without whom I absolutely could not go on living. I am the only one who will ever be 24/7 in my life. "Till death do us part..."

Because I was incommunicado for several months, my friend Roz was certain I had fallen in love and would not return to Salt Lake City. It was in a way true; I fell in love daily, with the trees and flowers and sheep and cows and other pilgrims that I met along The Way. My sense of compassion, of truly "suffering with," grew exponentially every step of The Way. But mostly, each day I fell more in love with me, and the person who left on this journey is surely not the person who returned.

The lessons of the The Way are still integrating and unfolding in my daily life back here in Utah. I keep finding more ways to simplify my lifestyle, to walk more and to drive less. I keep finding more things around the house to donate to local charity collections, and I keep finding more reasons to be grateful for all that I have. And I keep finding new ways to offer compassion to my Self and others. Although my long walk has come to an end, my journey continues.

DO YOU HAVE LOCAL EVENTS, RECIPES OR STORIES TO SHARE?

We would love to report on Camino related activities in your part of the country. Are you planning a hike, a book reading, a movie? Let us hear from you so we can connect you with others who share your Camino interests and live or are visiting where you are.

And, in addition to announcements and news, we would love to hear of moments on the Camino - a memory, an experience, an exchange, a discovery, a word, a food – a piece of the Camino to share with your fellow pilgrims. Perhaps a photo or a poem to share or perhaps a new found understanding of an idea, a pilgrim's perspective. Please send all ideas to newsletter@americanpilgrims.com.

American Pilgrims on the Camino is saddened to announce that Michael Wyatt has resigned from the Board due to health challenges. Michael is treasured as a founding member of American Pilgrims, a dedicated and compassionate leader, and good friend. Please join us in wishing him full recovery.

As an interim measure, the Board has elected Jim Eychaner to the Chair for 2009. A member of American Pilgrims since 2004, Jim has nonprofit experience from both staff and board perspectives.

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

Safe travels to everyone along their caminos.

American Pilgrims on the Camino

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