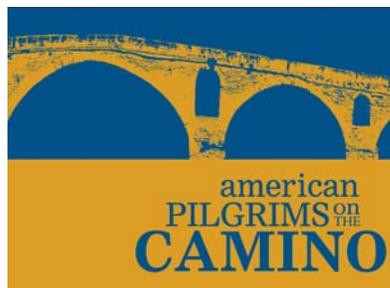


## AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, May 2009



[www.americampilgrims.com](http://www.americampilgrims.com)

Dear Fellow Pilgrims:

During the past winter we have made some changes, changes that will allow the organization to operate more efficiently and which will increase its presence on the Camino. By now, you should be well aware that American Pilgrims on the Camino has gone to an Internet-based membership management system. The system has business benefits for the Association, and personal benefits for you. You are able to manage your membership, donate to our programs supporting the Camino and pilgrims, and connect with other pilgrims in the message boards. We have taken care to ensure your information is yours to control. If you have not logged on, we encourage you to do so and let us know what you think.

American Pilgrims is proud to announce that it has created a new credential. Working in cooperation with the Pilgrim office in Santiago, American Pilgrim's credential task force has incorporated our new logo into a striking document that should withstand the rigors of its journey across Spain. It is available free of charge to anyone making a request in preparation for the Camino. You may preview it by going to our web site – [www.americampilgrims.com/camino/credential\\_req.html](http://www.americampilgrims.com/camino/credential_req.html)

We are also proud to announce that our Camino Support Committee has established a grant program. It is intended to be a systematic, accountable method for providing money to help pay for both on-the-ground projects in Spain and local or regional events for pilgrims State-side. At present, our funds are quite modest. However, it is an important step in our mission of supporting the infrastructure of the Camino, as well as the activities of those of you who support American Pilgrims.

The Board encourages American Pilgrim's members to consider an application for a grant to help pay for a local or regional event. You could invite fellow pilgrims to walk your local trails or path. You could hold a one-day Gathering for your state or region. Grant money could pay for a meeting space, event insurance, a speaker, or other expense.

From my perspective, American Pilgrims on the Camino is made up of truly remarkable people. I am a recreation planner by profession, and I know how people use "vacation" time. Believe me, for most Americans a lengthy journey on foot or bicycle is out-of-the-ordinary remarkable. You may have joined American Pilgrims because you simply need to relate to others who have taken that journey.

I have had the privilege of meeting people who have traveled to Spain and walked or bicycled (sometimes both) multiple routes, multiple times, in both directions, and in all seasons. Among you remarkable people, I often feel humbled, but it is my pleasure to serve.

Buen camino.

Jim Eychaner

*Walk in Spirit - The 2009 Gathering in Review*

American Pilgrims on the Camino held its 2009 Hospitalero Training, Gathering and Retreat this year in Albuquerque, New Mexico from March 11 to March 17. Over 100 pilgrims from the USA and Canada were present, and we were pleased once again to welcome José Suarez Otero and Xavier Valiño from the Galician Xunta.

In response to suggestions made at other Gatherings, our theme this year was the spirituality of the Camino, and all presentation topics were chosen with that theme in mind. This made for a coherent program that focused our attention on the many kinds of spiritual expression that pilgrimage and the Camino hold.



*Our Galician guests – photo by Grant Spangler*

The Hospitalero Training was a type of pilgrimage in itself. Originally planned for the South Valley Development Center in Albuquerque, the Training was moved to the Santa Fe International Hostel for better logistics in late February. But just as some refugios have their limitations for group activities, so did the Hostel. Enter Kate Lopez, longtime resident of Santa Fe and active American Pilgrim member, who performed one of those Camino miracles familiar to seasoned pilgrims. Kate opened her beautiful home to the hospitaleros-in-training, and all sessions and meals were held there, while the Hostel was used as a refugio for sleep. The Training by all accounts was a great success. Our abundant thanks go out to Daniel De Kay and Lin Galea for welcoming the trainees and guiding them through all the nuances of hospitalero life, including meal preparation, first aid and spiritual support for pilgrims, and of course to Kate for providing the perfect venue.



*Our new hospitaleros and their trainers – photo by Grant Spangler*

Pilgrims coming to the Gathering began to appear at the Rio Grande Inn in Albuquerque on Thursday March 12. An evening reception for these early arrivers was held next door at the St. Clair Winery and Bistro. Our private meeting rooms, with their dark pink walls and intimate Spanish décor, came alive as old pilgrim friends met, newcomers were welcomed, and everyone enjoyed wine and hors d'oeuvres.

On Friday, more pilgrims began to arrive and the sleepy front lobby of the Rio Grande Inn was transformed into a bustling meeting place as van after van pulled up from the Albuquerque airport. The Gathering registration desk never lacked for volunteers, and we thank all those, including Denise Bleakly and Board member Bill Matthews, who welcomed arriving pilgrims. One pleasant offshoot of our enthusiastic lobby crowd was the attention we got from others staying at the hotel who had never heard of the Camino or American Pilgrims on the Camino. A good many of our brochures on the Camino sent to us by the Spanish Tourist Board went to these curious onlookers.

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The Friday morning presentation was Daniel De Kay's *Blisters and Other Sore Points: Camino First Aid*. Always a success, Daniel's session drew a large crowd to the Aztec Room, where people could be seen bandaging imaginary blisters and wrapping sprained ankles.

After a lunch buffet held in the Ballroom, two concurrent sessions were offered. Sue Kenney and Luana Duggan spoke with first-time and returning pilgrims about the practicalities of Camino travel. While the take-home point was "pack as light as possible," their message was much wider: *exchange anxiety about what to take with a pilgrim's trust in the Camino*.

Meanwhile in the Aztec Room, Kathy Gower, one of the founders of American Pilgrims, presented a slide show of sacred sites along, and sometimes further off *El Camino de las Estrellas*. Kathy showed us favorite familiar sites, often from a new angle, as well as many other places that hold the mystique of a pre-Camino world. Thanks to Grant Spangler who held Kathy's laptop on high for all to see, in the face of an unforeseen technical glitch. Kathy's presentation was extremely well received, so much so that she showed her slides again on Saturday for those who didn't see enough on Friday. *Look in the announcements at the end of the newsletter for information on another presentation of Kathy's talk with slides in San Francisco*.

Phil Cousineau, documentary filmmaker, world traveler, and author of *The Art of Pilgrimage*, gave a brilliant 2-hour workshop on Friday afternoon, entitled *Transforming Travel into Pilgrimage*. Over 60 people were in Phil's audience. For once, said Phil, he was speaking to a group who didn't need to have pilgrimage defined for them. Phil outlined with stories, video excerpts and slides, his concept of pilgrimage as comprised of seven stages. Later, using crayons and paper, each of us got busy drawing an image of our Camino pilgrimage, applying Phil's stages to our own experience.



**Phil Cousineau** Photo by Grant Spangler

The other concurrent session on Friday afternoon was offered by Dolly Sanchez de Riviera in the Rio Grande Bar: *Yoga for the Pilgrim*. This was probably a first for the bar. Dolly runs the exercise program at Barelas Community Center in Albuquerque and has been a community leader in Albuquerque for many years. Dolly provided an excellent session, thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended.

There was ample time between the afternoon sessions and dinner for people to rest, mingle, or explore Old Town Albuquerque. Kate Lopez displayed a large number of her lovely Camino watercolors. Kate's paintings provided the illustrations for Elyn Aviva's new book, which was among other books for sale and other items of interest. These tables and the registration desk were constantly looked after by volunteers, of whom Debbie Sanchez stands out for her ready assistance in everything from desk sitting to printing some extra copies of handouts. Thank you to Debbie and all of you who kept the desk and tables in order! Thanks also to those who sold every *last* raffle ticket we had printed! Good job!

Our Friday dinner buffet was held in the Ballroom, which had been beautifully decorated by Rio Grande staff. We put the Gathering's only known clergyman, Arthur Boers, on the spot to say grace, not only on this night but on Saturday as well, and we thank him for graciously agreeing and offering a lovely blessing each night.

After Friday dinner, Jim Eychaner, current chair of the APOC Board, offered welcoming words and kicked off the first stage of our raffle. We pulled tickets for our first evening of prizes, including two beautiful scarves hand crafted by Denise Bleakly. Phil Cousineau, our evening speaker, spoke at length, using his dazzling slides to build on ideas from his afternoon workshop, and showing how, in so many different contexts, from baseball to the Buddhist shrine at Ankhor Wat, the conscious attempt

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to ritualize our travel turns it into a pilgrimage and allows us to connect with the essence of the places where we travel. Phil suggested a five-minute morning practice for the traveler, such as read and reflecting on the art, literature, or spiritual expression of the place, to help make this connection.

Our Saturday morning program began with Arthur Boers' excellent talk entitled *Centering and Illuminating Life: Pilgrimage as Focal Practice for Meaning and Wonder*. Arthur teaches pastoral theology and spiritual disciplines at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. One theme of his talk was how modern technological conveniences distract us from the world of nature and the people around us. Arthur shifted our attention to the pilgrim's practice of cultivating focal awareness to connect with the numinous quality that in the everyday world. As Arthur spoke, a slide show ran of his own Camino walk, with wonderful shots of smiling pilgrim faces. One of these pilgrims happened to be the father of someone in the audience, which gave rise to an unexpected and lovely discussion.

After Arthur's talk came Steve Raulston's presentation, *Spiritual Meaning in Church Architecture*. Here we began to focus more specifically on the tangible expressions of the spiritual life on the Camino. Steve showed with great clarity how medieval church design, including iconography such as we see at Fromista, told the story of Christian redemption to instruct and encourage pilgrims journeying to Santiago. Steve teaches medieval Spanish literature at Sewanee: The University of the South and has traveled the Camino eight times since 1981.

The morning concluded with an active session; Dug Corpolongo, founder and leader of the Albuquerque Buddhist Fellowship, provided beginner's instruction in the meditative practice of Tai Chi. This was a very enjoyable session, attended by approximately 80 people, only a few of whom were familiar with Tai Chi. Dug gave us excellent and entertaining instruction as we floated our arms mindfully and walked as gracefully as we could (as if we could feel a speck of dust on the floor) counterclockwise around the Aztec Room. The process reminded us that pilgrimage begins in the body and in the connection of the body with the air and earth.



**Basque fellow in the Pyrenees**  
Photo by Thomas Meredith, Austin, TX

Throughout these sessions in the Aztec Room we were surrounded by the beautifully rich Camino images captured by Thomas Meredith, photojournalist and fellow pilgrim.

After lunch, and another round of raffling, the American Pilgrims' Members Meeting was held. Each of the Board members spoke about their particular area, highlighting special areas of progress in the last year. Three items of note were introduced: the beautiful new American Pilgrims credential; a new initiative, the Camino Grant Program; and recent American Pilgrims donations to Camino support activities in Spain, particularly to the albergue in Fuenterroble de Salvatierra on the Via de la Plata.

Later, we were back in the Aztec Room for a presentation by Tony Cardenas, Professor of Spanish at University of New Mexico. Tony spoke about Alfonso and the Cantigas of Santa Maria, and favored us with several amusing Alfonso, his court and his attitude to the Camino frances.

Tony's talk was complemented by that of Mike Hammer, Professor of Spanish and Coordinator of the Spanish Program at San Francisco State University. Taking as his starting point the medieval pilgrims' positive views of themselves and their pilgrimage, Mike then described some of the negative ways in which medieval pilgrims were seen. These darker images, of pilgrims as sinners and criminals, are found in a number of medieval texts, and provide an intriguing counterpoint to our usual idea of the 'good' or 'virtuous' pilgrim.

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Our annual Gathering group photo took place, outside in the late afternoon sun, with flowering trees in the background. Tom Meredith was our photographer, who expertly corralled one hundred rather unruly pilgrims into some semblance of order for shots from eye level and from the balcony above.



For our Saturday banquet, we shared a lovely buffet in the Ballroom. The room was humming with the lively sound of conversation. After dinner, our final raffle event was held, amid much hilarity. The grand prize was free registration to next year's Gathering. The raffle this year raised \$1400, all of which goes to Camino support.

Sue Kenney was our guest speaker on this night. The story of her Camino, lovingly and sensitively told without props or slides, captivated us. Sue's story had a universal quality; she was Everyone, reminding us that the daily experience of any pilgrim on the Camino can be a source of meaning and lasting transformation. Her tale spoke to the trust, openness and willingness to be changed that we can all take to the Camino.



Sunday morning Mass was attended by a few pilgrims next morning, at San Felipe de Neri Church; then two groups set out for a walk with Wanda Roach along the Rio Grande. It was a lovely morning and the walk recalled us to the core act of pilgrimage itself, walking, alone or with companions, on this earth.

On Sunday afternoon, pilgrims began to leave the Rio Grande Inn and gradually our numbers dwindled until the lobby held only those who were going to the Retreat at the Spiritual Renewal Center just outside Albuquerque. This tranquil place, run by Dominican nuns, is located right beside the Rio Grande with the bosque extending away on

the far side. The staff welcomed us so kindly and served us throughout the Retreat with simple and delicious meals. We settled in right away in our single rooms then met for the first of five sessions in the large, comfortable room with tall windows. The Retreat title this year was *Backpack to Escarcela: Reflections on What We Carry*. The *escarcela* was the little purse carried by devout medieval pilgrims to Santiago, often flimsy and short on contents. It was normally left unfastened as an expression of both generosity and vulnerability. In our five group sessions, we explored how we pack, thinking back to Sue Kenney's comments during the Gathering about trusting the Camino. We talked over our relationship to the material things we carry, what kind of goals we carry with us, the burdens of our personal history that we take along, some willingly, some not. Using the two-fold symbolism of the *escarcela*, we explored how to express generosity in our pilgrimage, and our willingness to let ourselves be vulnerable to the lessons of the Camino. All the while, we recalled many ideas we had heard at the Gathering: Arthur's focal practices, Phil's emphasis on ritual, Steve's thoughts on symbolism in the churches. We did a number of exercises such as drawing or bead work, to help us integrate the insights we gleaned from our discussions. On our last night together, we gathered around a bonfire, and we had a wonderful time under the stars, sipping wine (that just happened to be there), and chatting. In the morning, we gave one another hand drawn farewell wishes, and parted reluctantly under the bright New Mexico spring sun.

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My heartfelt thanks goes to all who helped plan the Training, Gathering and Retreat, and to all who attended. – Mary Wallis

### CAMINO SUPPORT – FUENTERROBLE DE LA SALVATIERRA

#### CASA DE AMERICA and VIA LUCIS

Via de la Plata, Fuenterroble de la Salvatierra (Salamanca) Spain  
APOC's Mission and Grant Program in Action

Last fall, through our grant program, and in furtherance of the mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino to support the infrastructure of the Camino, your Board of Directors approved a \$10,000 grant to the albergue in Fuenterroble and Blas Rodriguez Boyero, priest, driving force of the albergue in Fuenterroble, and President of ACASAN, *Asociacion Amigos del Camino de Santiago Via de la Plata*. The funds were provided specifically for the construction of Casa de America, a private two-room apartment with bath, approximately 20 square meters, an outside addition to the albergue/rectory in Fuenterroble.

Fuenterroble de la Salvatierra is 60 kilometers south of Salamanca on the Via de la Plata. Due to the activities of Don Blas and ACASAN, Fuenterroble is referred to as the “epicenter” of the Via de la Plata. Until 2007 the rectory and the pilgrims’ albergue were one and the same. The brand-spanking new albergue building behind the rectory sleeps 18, has sparkling (and private) bathroom and hand-laundry facilities, solar hot water, a small chapel, and two private rooms that share a bath. There are many rooms with myriad beds throughout the rectory which are still available for pilgrim overflow. It is a favorite stopping place along this 1000 kilometer route which starts in Sevilla and on which there are longer distances and fewer albergues with generally far fewer beds. Note: Fuenterroble is only six kilometers from Guijuelo, which, while not on the Via de la Plata, is renowned throughout Spain as the pueblo of *jamonés de bellota* (ham from acorn-fed pigs) in particular and *embutidos* in general.

Father Blas, or Don Blas as he is often called, has been referred to as a living myth on the Camino, the “priest who never sleeps”. (*Camino de Santiago, Revista Peregrina*, noviembre-diciembre 2008). At 51, he is a handsome man of muscular build, with hands that obviously perform as much physical labor as he elicits from others. He appears a bit disheveled, threads hanging from his wrinkled sports jacket, his pockets stuffed with the day’s acquisitions. He exudes energy and charisma, as he effortlessly juggles the several balls he has in the air. It’s quickly apparent that he’s an extremely savvy businessman, as well as confidant and an inspiration to pilgrims and parishioners alike. In his little red Renault, he careens high speed among “his” five pueblos to which he ministers, rarely arriving on time. He contends that “We are all pilgrims to whom the doors are open. Regardless of age or social status, everyone is important and necessary.”



Friday, 17 April 2009 dawned sunny and warm on the Costa del Sol, but as we negotiated rush hour in Sevilla to have coffee with a friend, then headed due north through Merida and Plasencia to Bejar, the temperature fell and the skies greyed. By the time I dropped my husband in Calzada de Bejar to begin walking on the Via de la Plata, it was chilly and misty, reminiscent of Galicia. My destination was the albergue in Fuenterroble de la Salvatierra, where we had been invited to participate in a *romeria* on Saturday and, taking advantage of my being there, to represent American Pilgrims on the Camino at the dedication of the Casa de America on Sunday.

Having spent some time in Fuenterroble last September, I savored my arrival at the now familiar albergue, went straight to the cozy dining room where I knew I would find a fire burning, and followed

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my nose to the small kitchen where I met Amparo ministering to a huge pot of soup. She required no help, but conversation would do, and I soon learned that she had spent several years as a missionary in California and as this small world would have it, also living close to my home in Virginia. I would grow fond of Amparo over the next two days and, strolling arm in arm to the dedication on Sunday, would join her in singing "Follow me where I go, what I do and who I know, make it part of you to be a part of me...". Thank you, John Denver!

### **Via Lucis**



Lesser known than *Via Crucis* (the Way of the Cross), *Via Lucis* (the Way of Light) celebrates Christ's resurrection through a series of 14 stations. Several years ago, in his continuing efforts to involve and provide inspirational activities for the people of his pueblos and in the spirit of *convivencia*, Don Blas initiated his own version of *Via Lucis*, a 30 kilometer long day's *romeria* from his home pueblo of Belena to Fuenterroble. Life-sized, beautifully carved wooden folkart images of Christ, Mary, and the favorite witnesses of the resurrection (including an especially moving Santiago as pilgrim) are transported on tractor-pulled flat beds and/or old wooden carts pulled by burros. The event has grown to over 1,000 participants from all parts of Spain, most of whom walk, although several are on horseback, some on and off the tractor beds and, as the day wears on, some in cars.

The event begins, rain or shine, with mass in Belena, preceded by hot chocolate and churros. Following the Via de la Plata backwards through some of its most breathtaking countryside, off-road paths

(more up than down) through private farmland dotted with oak and olive trees, one marvels at the snow-covered Sierras of Gredos and Bejar in the distance. At each of the frequent stops -- a meal of grilled meats, bread and wine; pastries and soft drinks; coffee in a small village bar; or hot chocolate and sweets at the highest point, the Pico de Duena with the Santiago Cross -- Don Blas reminds us of various stations and their relation to us as peregrinos. This year we start under sunny skies, but throughout the day we experience cold and pouring rain, high winds, even small hail. In the late afternoon we traverse roads built by the Romans as we marvel at perfect blue skies, the sun slanting across the countryside. The group straggles into Fuenterroble around 8:00 PM, and we observe the blessing of the statues as they re-enter their home church of Santa Maria la Blanca in Fuenterroble.



### **Dedication/Blessing of the Casa de America**

On Sunday, following a hearty lunch served in front of the fireplace to those of us remaining for the dedication, Don Blas quickly assembles a few props (an eight-foot cross, wine pitcher, loaf of bread, small wood-burning stove, a dried-flower arrangement, a gourd, and a bible) and we head out into the bright sunlight to consecrate the Casa de America. I feel proud and privileged to represent the American Pilgrims on the Camino as I admire the attractive lines and stone façade of the Casa de America; and I am grateful for the opportunity to truly feel a part of the Via de la Plata. Don Blas, in his rich, booming voice, describes for those present his vision for the structure, that American Pilgrims' members will always have a special home here, that it will be a welcoming place of warmth and sustenance, a symbol of our collaboration and dedication to the Camino. He introduces me as your representative and I express to him and those gathered our appreciation for their hospitality and the opportunity to join them in such a project. I present an American flag, with the certification that it was flown over the US Capitol on 10 February 2009.



Don Blas then proceeds to bless, at length, the building and those who collaborated in the construction thereof, the ideals of international friendship it represents, the dedication to pilgrimage and to the Camino, and the future occupants of the Casa de America. Given the diagonal front wall of the structure and cozy area created by the placement of other buildings, he foresees a patio and fountain, a place for relaxation and meditation, and a series of additional apartments representing other countries or Spanish provinces. Those present from Sevilla joke that next year we will return for the inauguration of the Casa de Sevilla, which

will, of course, be more elaborate and more attractive with a larger flag!

### **Opportunities for American Pilgrims in Fuenterroble**

Fuenterroble might seem like any other very small pueblo through which the Caminos pass. Here, as a result of our grant and our collaboration with Don Blas and his albergue, we have the opportunity to actually belong, to be welcomed, to participate with and be a part of not only the Camino experience, but the Spanish pueblo experience. We can give back to the Camino in a specific and personal way while broadening our horizons and enriching our personal lives. Work on your Spanish – the greater the effort you make to communicate, the more profound your experience.

**Hospitalero** – There is no organized program for obtaining or scheduling hospitaleros in Fuenterroble; yet there is a great need. When I arrived last September, there was no hospitalero in residence, only a couple of guys who live there for lack of other options. An Italian then arrived to serve for a month. Again, when we arrived for Via Lucis and the dedication, there were local volunteers, but no hospitalero. Blas was concerned that he was leaving for Rome in three days and there would be no one to “mind the store”. It can certainly be a two-person job. You need only to contact Ana (info provided below) and advise her of the dates you’d like to serve.

**Group Activities** – There are several planned throughout the year, such as *Via Lucis*, described herein. See the website, [www.viadelaplata-fuenterroble.com](http://www.viadelaplata-fuenterroble.com) for a list with dates and degree of difficulty. Their most ambitious undertaking (which includes food and lodging in public places such as gymnasiums), many years in the planning, will take place 10-21 August. A walking pilgrimage, complete with wood statues, carts and burros, from **Assisi to Rome**. The cost is 300 euros, plus airfare. Our members are welcome to participate. Within the next few weeks, Ana will provide me a detailed schedule in pdf format which I will be happy to forward upon request. If you are interested, you should make a deposit and reserve space promptly. Participants are coming from all over Spain.

**Projects, Ongoing, and Specific** – Don Blas has indicated that he will always welcome and can easily accommodate those who wish to share their talents within the rectory/albergue, on Camino clean-up or improvement, or restoration projects within his five pueblos. Whether a group of two, five or ten, again, via email to Ana, if you advise dates and areas in which you are able to contribute, there will be work awaiting you when you arrive. Artistic pilgrims have often returned to decorate the walls with murals, stonemasons have endless work there, the many rooms and common areas are always in need of a good cleaning, there are several areas to be cleared for patios or gardens, lots of burro harnesses and leather equipment to be soaped, carts to be repaired – opportunities for everyone to give back to the Camino.

A scant 48 hours, yet so full and meaningful – the sort of jewel one is fortunate to encounter along the Camino. Thank you for the opportunity to represent you there.

Cherie Pagett, Director, [cpagett@pagetts.com](mailto:cpagett@pagetts.com)

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Contact information for ACASAN, Asociacion de Amigos del Camino de Santiago – Via de la Plata:

[www.viadelaplata-fuenterroble.com](http://www.viadelaplata-fuenterroble.com).

Email: [aviaplata@terra.es](mailto:aviaplata@terra.es), attn: Ana (in Spanish only)

Snail mail:

Don Blas Rodriguez Boyero

C/Larga, 37

37768 Fuenterroble de la Salvatierra (Salamanca) Spain.

### New American Pilgrims on the Camino Credencial

During the recent Gathering in Albuquerque, the American Pilgrims' Board was pleased to announce the creation of a new "American Pilgrims on the Camino" credencial.

The idea for this took root several months ago when a "Credencial" task force was set up. The mission was to create something that would please our members, reflect the spirit of APOC's support of the Camino and be distinctive without being too ostentatious.

The task force prepared a set of very high level guide-lines for the credencial – maximum space for stamps, a prayer, a map - to be incorporated in a document that would be both memorable and aesthetically pleasing. This was passed to our volunteer graphic designer who created the art work and layout that is the new credencial.

You may not know him. His name is Jon Cofsky, and he has his own design company. We were drawn to Jon because we had already worked with him when he helped us create our logo. With the new credencial, he has created something that we hope will please you. The reaction of American Pilgrims members at the Gathering was very favorable and your Board is proud to have this as our official credencial.

Jon produced, at his first draft, very close to what was the final result. The task force took more time, a lot more time. From discussions about which uplifting message should be included, to the placement of commas and colons, nothing escaped our attention. The process lasted over several months and we had to remind ourselves periodically that we were not striving for the Magna Carta. Members of the task force are still good friends we are happy to report.

Curiously, there were small things that slowed us down. Finding a high resolution image of the map cost us time. It was thanks to our friends at the Confraternity of St. James that we obtained a copy of a new Spanish credencial and we were able to use their map, with the blessing of the Pilgrim Office in Santiago. We learned more about paper qualities than we had ever expected. We had to have something that would resist folding, rubbing, sweat, rain, red wine spills, yet be practical and within our budget.

So, with the enormous help of Jon Cofsky, the Confraternity of S James and, in particular, the permission, granted by D. Jenaro Cebrián, Delegado de Peregrinaciones, Oficina del Peregrino, to include in our credencial the phrase "Credencial autorizada por la S.A.M.I. Catedral de Santiago de Compostela", ( Credencial authorized by the Pilgrims Office of the Cathedral of Santiago) we are pleased to present your new credencial.

Credencial Task Force

*Nick Hayes, Daniel De Kay, Carlos Mentley and Cherie Pagett*



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### WEBSITE UPDATE

By now members of American Pilgrims who have an e-mail address will have received notice of a huge change in the way the organization will be doing some of its business. Around the end of March a new, automated membership system was put on line. For members there are now available a number of facilities that will make your membership more valuable and useful than before.

You can login to the system either from the entry page (the page with the large American Pilgrims logo) down in the lower left corner or on the Membership/Join page.

It is now possible for members to search for other members by name or by state. We regularly get requests from members looking for other *peregrinos* in their vicinity and you can now do that yourself. (We are restricting location to the state level so you won't be able to see city or street information. That is where we settled on the privacy vs. public information issue.)

We also have put a forums area online. As a member you will have access to two forums not visible to the general public: "Pilgrim Introductions" and "Looking for Pilgrims". To see these "premium" topics, be sure to login before entering the forums area. Please make use of the forums! We'd like to make this a lively and informative resource for our members and for the public.

When you enter the system, we strongly recommend that you look at your profile first thing. You can edit this to your heart's content and you can control what information, if any, you want visible to other members. *Remember that non-members cannot enter the system at all* and in any event even other members can see only your name, your state and country of residence and your e-mail address.

If you have trouble accessing the system, you can always contact the membership coordinator at [membership@americanpilgrims.com](mailto:membership@americanpilgrims.com). If you have technical issues or have suggestions about the membership system or about the site in general, the webmaster would love to hear from you. He can be reached at [webmaster@americanpilgrims.com](mailto:webmaster@americanpilgrims.com).

*Gene McCullough, Webmaster*

### PILGRIM NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### **San Francisco Bay Area Pilgrims and any who are visiting - Save the Dates**

##### **SF Bay Area Pilgrim Walk**

Celebrate St. James Birthday with fellow pilgrims

Saturday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009, 9:30 – 6:00 ish

Meet: Vaillancourt Fountain at Embarcadero Center

<http://www.kiwipulse.com/embarcadero-center-the-vaillancourt-fountain/>

Note: There is a very crowded farmers' market on Saturdays at the Ferry Building.

Allow extra time to shop for lunch, get through the crowds, etc.

Bart, SF Bay Ferries, Cal Train and SF Muni are the best options for travel.

Dress in layers. You can be coolly surprised by our natural air conditioning in San Francisco.

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##### **SF Bay Area Mini Gathering**

Saturday, November 7, 2009, 9:30 – 6:00

Location to be confirmed at later date

Phil Cousineau workshop: The Art of Pilgrimage

Kathy Gower presentation: El Camino de las Estrellas

To receive more information about these events, contact [lin@linGalea.com](mailto:lin@linGalea.com)

## AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, May 2009

### **Seattle, Washington Pilgrims**

Seattle Area Camino Gathering

Experienced and aspiring pilgrims in the Seattle area who are interested in future local gatherings can contact Martha Crites at [mcrites@earthlink.net](mailto:mcrites@earthlink.net) or (206)722-7394. I am testing the waters for interest in forming a local group for sharing activities and experiences, and perhaps providing practical information for new pilgrims. An afternoon potluck is being planned for late May.

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### **The Sacred Steps Camino art exhibit,**

Seen at both the 2007 Gathering in Williamsburg and the 2008 Gathering in Santa Barbara is a traveling exhibit. <http://www.sacredstepsinspain.com/?id=1&lang=en>

Now through May 29th it is on exhibit at the University of St. Thomas, St Paul Campus, St. Paul, MN. [www.stthomas.edu/arthistory/exhibitions](http://www.stthomas.edu/arthistory/exhibitions)

August – September 2009 it is on exhibit at the University of Birmingham, UAB Visual Arts Gallery, South Birmingham, AL. [jkmoore@uab.edu](mailto:jkmoore@uab.edu)

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### **2010 Gathering Set for Lakefront Retreat Near Orlando, Florida in March**

A lush private/non-profit lake front retreat and conference center in Florida is the site of our 2010 Gathering of Pilgrims March 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>. Next year's theme is *The Camino Today* and some presentations will include the Camino in the holy year, emerging environmental issues, alternative routes, and much more. And despite the beautiful setting and up-to-date facilities, accommodations in the motel-style rooms are quite reasonable. As you mark your calendars for next year's Gathering and related events consider making the trip to Florida part of a longer family vacation.

All three of our annual events will be housed at the San Pedro Center in Winter Park, a suburb of Orlando, about 12-13 miles from the Orlando International Airport. We begin with our traditional Hospitalero Training on Tuesday night March 16<sup>th</sup>. The Gathering officially begins on Friday the 19th but early arrivals will gather for an informal reception on Thursday night. The Gathering continues until Sunday morning. Our spiritual retreat starts Sunday afternoon and continues until Tuesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Hospitalero trainees will be housed in the new bunk house on the retreat's campgrounds. Gathering attendees can select from modern motel style rooms on the property or hotels in Winter Park.

Take a few moments to check out ([www.sanpedrocenter.org](http://www.sanpedrocenter.org)) the exceptional facilities at this 480-acre retreat. A long boardwalk through serene subtropical vegetation to quiet Lake Howell, the labyrinth, the upgraded conference facilities, and the beautiful chapel all lend a special air to our coming together as pilgrims and pilgrims-to-be next year.

We will regularly update you and plans develop. Watch for details on our website ([www.americanpilgrims.com](http://www.americanpilgrims.com)) on speakers, session topics, practical details and other information that will help you decide that the Gathering of the American Pilgrims on the Camino at the San Pedro Center will be your destination for mid-March 2010.

### BOOK REVIEW

#### **Walking Through Cancer: A Pilgrimage of Gratitude on the Way of St. James**

by Elyn Aviva, Pilgrims Process 2009, illustrated by Kate Lopez

We walk, we go on pilgrimage for oh so many reasons...to get rid of our stuck places, in gratitude or in petition, to find ourselves and our connections to something greater than ourselves or for the sheer joy and sport of it.

## AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO-NEWSLETTER, May 2009

I suspect there are not nearly as many that are walking through cancer or other illness, but as Elyn Aviva reflects time and time again, we are all human and we all go through the same trials and tribulations and joys on so many levels and gratitude is but one way of connection.

St. Augustine wrote, "It is solved by walking", but often it is not the walking that solves what ails us, but in how we take the lessons those walks present to us. Letting go of expectations and false images of ourselves and each other, our old wounds, projections and deep joys as well, allows for something new to come into our being.

We might visit sacred sites to get nearer to the source of their healing energy, or we might revel in the joys of what we observe in the swooping of birds or stability of the oaks or chestnuts along the way, or the simple rhythms of our own breath and cadence as we move through space unencumbered by the day to day. Miracles can occur at any moment. The miracles of simply being alive, of friendship and connection. These interconnected miracles of daily life could be angelic intervention or simply human kindness and attention. Serendipities abound because we are open to them.

Consciously or not, the Camino, or the Chemin, as Elyn's pilgrimage through cancer takes place along the Via Podiensis, from LePuy to St. Jean, is a walking meditation. In following the Way of St. James, for whatever complex and mysterious motives, we share that path with whomever has walked before and with those who have still to make the journey and how consciously we choose to make and reflect on the journey is up to us. There is time to devote to being inward, silent and reflective...or not. It's our choice.

Elyn has shared many of her pilgrimage journeys, from her first in 1982 while a cultural anthropology student, to her current journey as a resident in Sahagun, Spain. *Walking Through Cancer* is as wonderfully detailed culturally and physically as her other memoirs, but this particular work observes the inner spirit of a pilgrim as profoundly as she captures the outer dance of pilgrimage.

*-Kathy Gower*

### 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](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.com).

Safe travels to everyone along your caminos.

American Pilgrims on the Camino

**Jim Eychaner, Chair**  
**Cherie Pagett, Membership**  
**Carlos Mentley, Secretary**  
**Herbert Medina, Camino Support**  
**Bill Matthews, Gathering 2010**  
**Nicholas Hayes, Treasurer**  
**Daniel DeKay, Hospitalero Training**

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