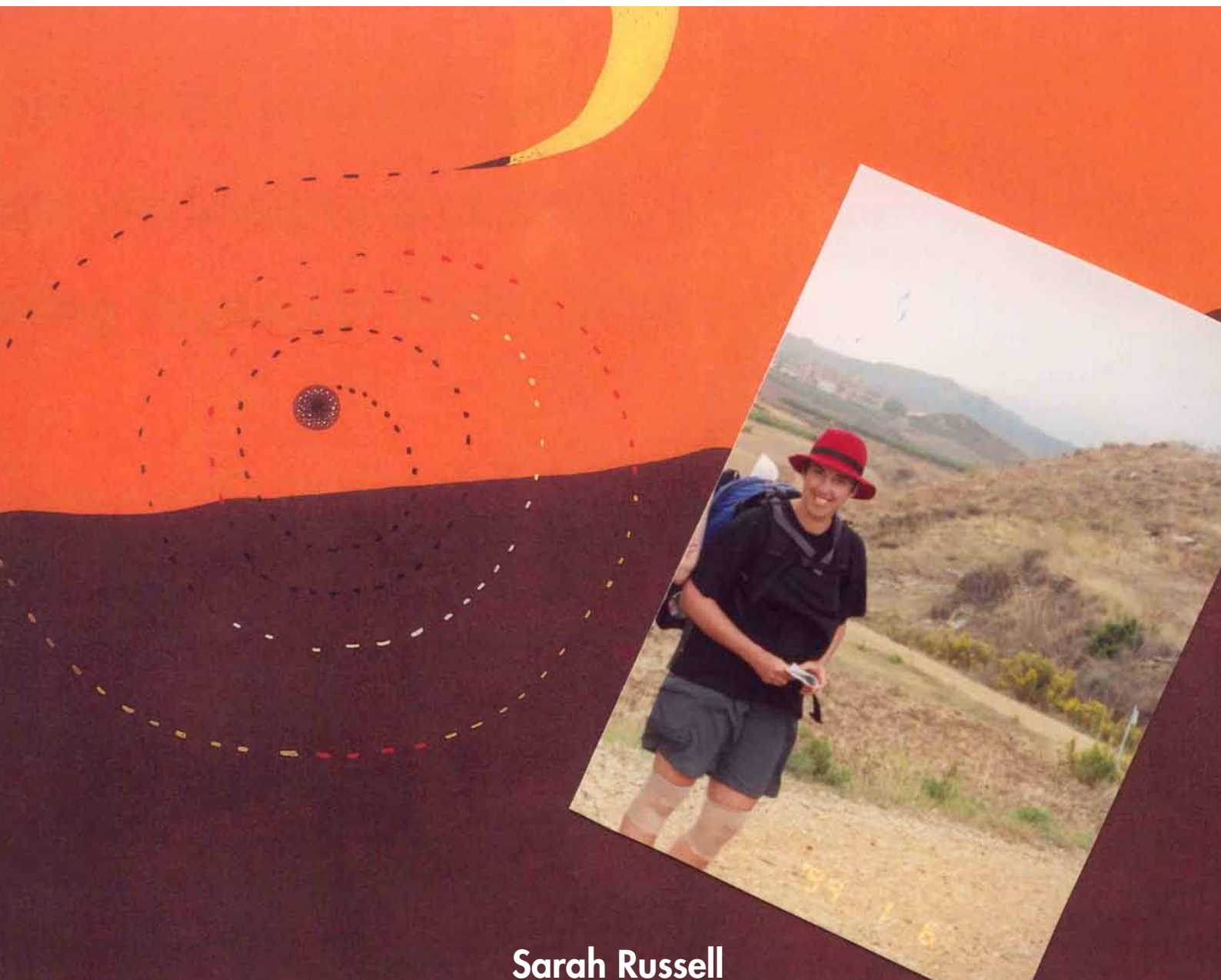


# LOST IN SPAIN

## THE ROADS TO SANTIAGO

*AND MANY  
OTHER  
DETOURS*



Sarah Russell



# LOST IN SPAIN

## THE ROADS TO SANTIAGO AND MANY OTHER DETOURS

TRAVEL REPORT

July 2002

Sarah Russell

❖ Research Matters

Sarah Russell PhD

Principal Researcher

Research Matters

Phone: +61 3 9489 0742

Email: sarahrussell@comcen.com.au

Website: www.research-matters.com.au

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*Miro and Me meander in the 'landscape' (Joan Miro, 1927)*

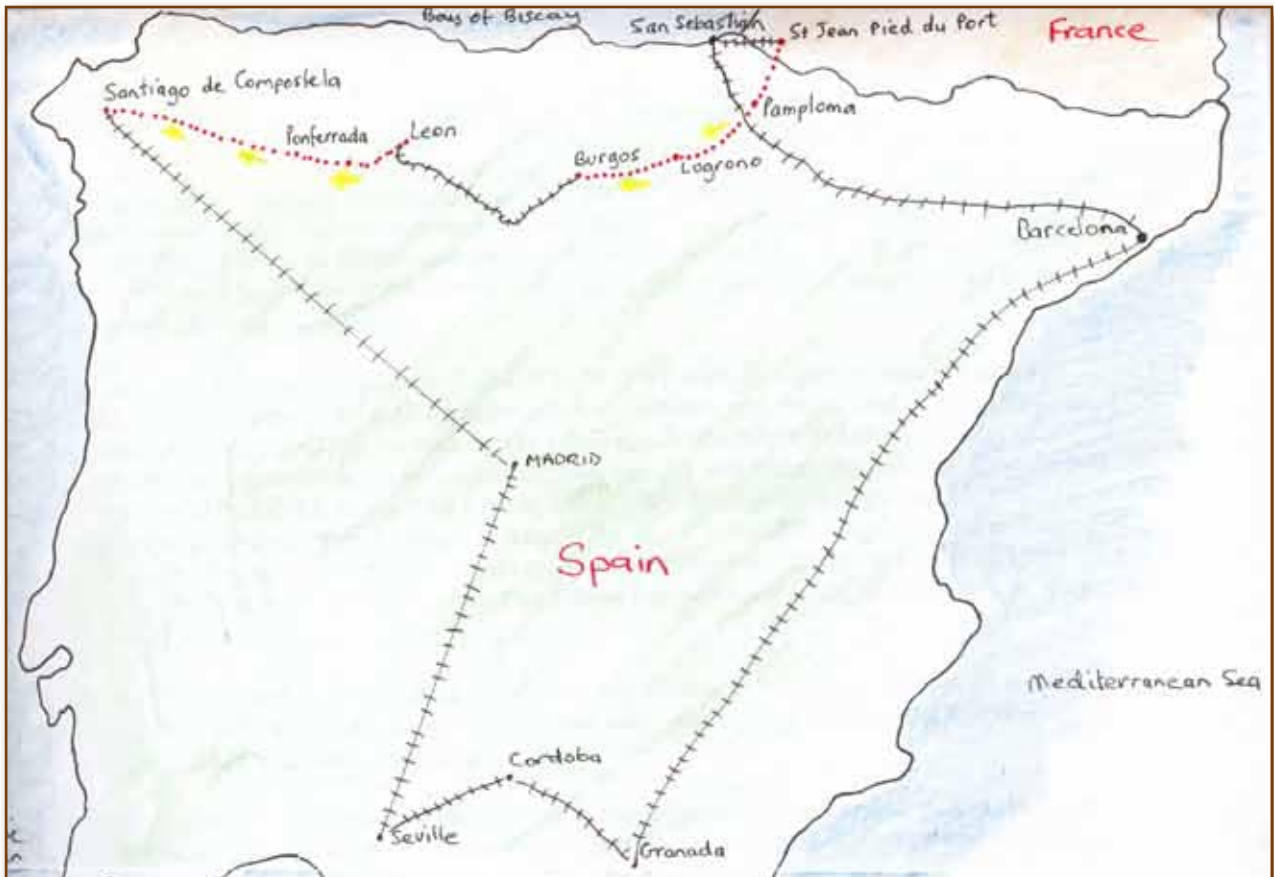
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**The Roads to Santiago**

St Jean Pied du Port	▲	Ronchavelles	29 km
Ronchavelles	▲	Zubri	22 km
Zubri	▲	Pamploma	21 km
Pamploma	▲	Cizur Menor	5 km
Cizur Menor	▲	Puerta Le Reina	19 km
Puerta Le Reina	▲	Estella	21 km
Estella	▲	Los Arcos	19 km
Los Arcos	▲	De Soja	10 km
De Soja	▲	Los Arcos	10 km
Los Arcos	▲	Torres del Rio	8 km
Torres del Rio	▲	Logrono	20 km
Logrono	▲	Najero	26 km
Najero	▲	Santo Domingo de la Calzada	20 km
Santo Domingo de la Calzada	▲	Belorado	22 km
Belorado	▲	Villafranca de Montes	13 km
Villafranca	▲	Burgos	29 km
Burgos	▲	Train	
Leon	▲	Leon	
Villadango del Paramo	▲	Villadango del Paramo	20 km
Astorga	▲	Astorga	26 km
Rabanal	▲	Rabanal	22 km
Molinaseca	▲	Molinaseca	23 km
Cacabelos	▲	Cacabelos	22 km
Villafranca del Bierzo	▲	Villafranca del Bierzo	8 km
El Cebrerio	▲	El Cebrerio	28 km
Triacastela	▲	Triacastela	22 km
Serrias	▲	Serrias	18 km
Portomarin	▲	Portomarin	22 km
Palas de Rei	▲	Palas de Rei	24 km
Arzua	▲	Arzua	30 km
Lavacolla	▲	Lavacolla	28 km
Santiago de Compestella	▲	Santiago de Compestella	12 km
	▲	Train	
	▲	Seville	



**T**he pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella (The Way of St James or the “camino”, as it is known in Spain) is a religious, cultural and spiritual experience. People have been walking it for over a thousand years. Why an Australian atheist would embark on this religious pilgrimage, God only knows. Although my motivation to do the walk was primarily fitness and weight-loss, I confess that I hoped for some revelations.

The Way of St James (affectionately called “The Way”) passes through the same villages and crosses the same rivers as the path taken by pilgrims centuries ago. Many modern-day pilgrims have their hearts and souls set on walking the entire route (just over 800 km). I highly recommend two sections for cardiovascular fitness, scenery and interesting villages.

First, St Jean Pied du Port to Puente Le Reina, which takes about 7 days by foot. I highlight the mode of transport because some pilgrims forget that signs that state “Puente Le Reina 10 minutes” are designed for cars, not pilgrims. The second section is Astorga to Santiago de Compostela (11 days). For those of us in search of our thinner selves, these sections could be renamed The Way of St Jenny (Craig).

I arrived in Barcelona feeling excited, yet slightly apprehensive. Would I be fit enough to walk the distance? Although my pack was light without a life-time’s religious baggage, I carried enough emotional baggage to compensate.

My next stop before commencing “the walk” was San Sebastian. Here I met an Australian ‘born-again-Spaniard’. San Sebastian is famous for its pintxos - tapas-like nibbly things that often sit on public bars for hours prior to consumption. Given the amount of cigarette smoke that wafts over each pintxos, they were surprisingly delicious.

The landscape across the border into southern France via Bayonne was scattered with protest banners. These banners were the only visible signs of the ongoing conflict in the Basque region. My destination was St Jean Pied du Port, the starting point for the walk. As the train struggled up (and up) through very, steep hills, I wondered whether an overweight 40-something-year-old with a bunion and bad back could possibly cross “the Pyrennes” en pied (on foot). I think I can, I think I can, I think I can...

Months earlier, I had arranged to meet two walking companions, Gay and Jenni, in St Jean Pied du Port. They missed their train, so I spent extra time in this dolls-house town. Although I filled in time eating unforgettable basque dishes (which I would prefer to forget), I was itching to start the walk.

We walked through St Jean Pied du Port’s pilgrim gate at dawn on Friday 13th September, 2002. With a crusty white loaf firmly attached to our back packs, we felt like genuine “pilgrims”. However, without the traditional concha shell and walking stick, we did not look like the genuine article.



GENUINE  
←•• PILGRIMS



Nothing - no gym membership, practice bush walks, good boots, light back pack - could have prepared me for the first day. It was clear from the start that I had to either “just do it” or “just pike it”. I did it - 29 km up-and-over the Pyrennes to Roncesvalles. We felt rather smug as we crossed the border into the Spanish province of Navarra.

▲ “JUST DO IT” OR “JUST PIKE IT”

Without fences, we frequently came face-to-face with animals (sheep with dread locks; cows with bells; horses who sat on the side of the road not giving a rat's arse as cars passed). We owe a lot to these animals. They helped us to take our minds off our blisters, bunions, backs, and bursitis.



▲ WE FREQUENTLY CAME FACE TO FACE WITH ANIMALS



▲ BASHFUL COW

6

LOST IN SPAIN

- THE ROADS TO SAN TIAGO & MANY OTHER DETOURS



*THE FIRST DAY WAS THE MOST VISUALLY SPECTACULAR OF THE ENTIRE WALK.*



*THE VIEWS OF THE PYRENNES WERE CLOUDED IN A SOFT MIST.*



Our first night was spent in a monastery, in a room with twenty four other pilgrims. Smelly socks and loud snoring attacked our senses. These “refugios” were dormitory, “zero star” accommodation. They were cheap (generally less than A\$10 per night), but the comforts were scarce. It required patience and tolerance to queue for a hot shower, especially on the days when the long wait resulted in a cold shower.



BY THE TIME WE REACHED RONCASVALLES, I WAS IN URGENT NEED OF A LAWN TO LIE ON.



▲ THE WALK TO THE NEXT TOWN, ZUBRI, WAS SLIGHTLY GENTLER. WE PASSED THROUGH WOODS AND SOME SMALL VILLAGES, BEFORE COLLAPSING BESIDE A GENTLE STREAM FOR LUNCH.



## THE BELLS!!!! THE BELLS!!!!

In need of some comfort, we upgraded from a refugio and booked into a pension. As a punishment for our lack of pilgrim spirit, we “imitation pilgrims” were woken by loud church bells at 4am.

SPOT THE IMITATION PILGRIM ●▶



According to the guide book, our walking fitness should have kicked in by Day 3. So why did our walk to Pamploma nearly kill us? Fortunately we found a deserted village to have a lunch of sardines, tomatoes, pimientos, cheese and crusty white bread.

We also picked fruit (figs, blackberries, apples, walnuts, quinces, almonds) along the way. The vegetable gardens also looked delicious, but they were less accessible.

Without singing Elton John songs we would have “let the sun go down on us”. After nearly dying en route, we arrived in Pamploma to find the city was completely dead. All the shops were shut behind decrepit garage doors, and the streets were largely deserted. This was not because of the annual Pamploma bull race, but because it was Sunday. We found a bar and drank while waiting for “dinner time”. In Spain, it is customary to eat dinner after 10pm (not a good thing for hungry pilgrims). Fortunately, we found a chef in Pamploma who cooked us a meal at 9pm.

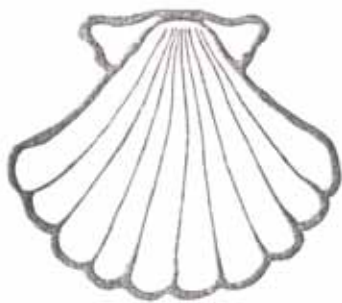
A good night's sleep (without bells, snores or even farts) was followed by a pleasant surprise: succulent shop windows replaced the garage doors in Pamploma! My traveling companions (an architect and landscape architect) explored buildings and gardens while I wandered around the cobblestone streets trying to find the best coffee in Pamploma.

Later, I tried to return to the pension, only to find that I could not find it! I enlisted the help of a group of men from the local bar. They walked up and down the main street, looking for a lock to match the pension's key. Although I was 'Lost in Spain', I was rescued by Spanish generosity and good humour.



PAMPLOMA ●▶

CARNET DE PÈLERIN  
DE SAINT-JACQUES  
*"Credencial del Peregrino"*



At the end of our sight-seeing in Pamploma, we strolled a short distance to the next town, Cizur Menor. This time it was a young French man who gave new meaning to the concept of snoring. By now, our patience and tolerance for refugio-snoring had expired. From now on, we preferred to sleep in a three (or at least two) star pension. Our intention from now on was to merely visit regugios to have our "Credencial del Peregrino" stamped. Even though we did not dress, act or sleep like pilgrims, this document proved our authenticity.



*THE WALK TO PUENTA LE REINA WAS GORGEOUS.  
THE WINDMILLS DANCED ON THE TUSCAN-LIKE LANDSCAPE.*





We walked into town armed with our guide book, determined to find a hotel with a bath. My list of carefully prepared questions (from the Spanish phrase book) were answered by a receptionist who spoke fluent English. It could have been a scene from Fawlty Towers.

The travel guide also recommended a restaurant which did not look much from the outside but tasted great on the inside. Afterwards, we visited the bridge (Puente Le Reina) that makes this town famous. More interesting than the bridge was the nearby construction work with wheelbarrows filled with concrete hanging precariously from cranes. According to the phrase book, the Spanish word for WorkCover is “huh?”



From Puente La Reina, we walked to Estella. After 5 days on The Way, the daily routine of “breakfast, walking, lunch, walking, tapas and vino tinto, dinner, bed” had become much easier. Our back problems were fixed by deciding that four pairs of underwear were more than enough. We posted excess baggage home. Our blisters were ‘comfeeled’. This but blister treatment was a foot saver.



SARAH 'COMFEELS' JENNI →



A COLD DRINK AFTER A HARD DAYS WALK



BUYING BREAD ALONG THE WAY

Estella's town square (Plaza de Los Fueros) was an unexpected delight. This happy space is simply a large paved area with seats around the outskirts. While children play (bikes, soccer, bull-games) parents and others sit, drink, walk and talk. This was all part of the Spanish "social imperative" (i.e. the imperative to be social). Later that evening we found a shoe repairer who understood charades and fixed Jenni's shoes.



BREAD DELIVERED TO THE DOOR HANDLE WHILE CHILLIES PROVIDE A HOT VIEW

The walk to Los Arcos was dreary due to the heat and dull landscape. The highlight was again using charades, this time to buy bread from a delivery van-man. The lowlight was wandering into a Dutch Evangelist bar where a cup of nescafe was accompanied by a copy of the bible. If the coffee had tasted better, I may have been converted (to nescafe, not religion).





The annual wine harvest celebrations made it impossible to find any accommodation in Los Arcos. We were forced to break our vow of '3-star accommodation all the way' and book into a refugio, albeit reluctantly. That night, not even the newly purchased ear plugs allowed me to sleep. Escaping at dawn, we mistakenly followed red and white signs instead of the yellow arrows. A German couple behind us had the good sense to stop and turn around, but not the manners to call out to us.

The few people we met in De Soja were rather surprised to see three women walk into town wearing dresses and back packs. When we asked about "Camino de Santiago" and met blank stares, we knew we were Lost in Spain (again).

◀•• UNHINGED BY FOLLOWING THE WRONG SIGN



WRONG WAY: GO BACK ••▶



◀•• DISPIRITED IN DE SOJA



We looked to the heavens for our “travel guardian eagles” to rescue us, but saw only a blue sky. My silly charades could not even convince a farmer to abandon his work and drive us back to Los Arcos. There was nothing else for us to do but walk back to Los Arcos, dispirited. However, we were determined not to spend another night in a refugio. We took advantage of the few remaining hours of daylight and walked a further 8km to Torres del Rio.



Just outside Torres del Rio, we noticed the sign “De Soja: 5km”. To make matters even worse, the only accommodation in town was a refugio. There was only one thing to do: drink vino tinto, sing silly songs and flirt with the barman. In a depressed, drunken state, we began to compose a song (to the tune of “How do you solve a problem like Maria”).

*HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE THE CAMINO?  
HOW DO YOU CATCH A BUS AND STILL GET A STAMP?  
WHERE IS THAT FUCKING TOWN?  
WE CAN'T BE LOST AGAIN  
WE FOLLOWED THE YELLOW ARROWS ALL THE WAY.*

I had reached my lowest ebb (or so I thought). I began to entertain fantasies about going home. The next morning, I followed my routine. I put on my boots and started walking, but my heart was not in it. The scenery was bland. Our singing stopped. Then, a miracle appeared (after all, this is a pilgrimage). We found fantastic coffee in Via Viana, served without bibles.

We bounced into Logrono, a beautiful town that was just beginning its annual week-long drinking fiesta. People in varying stages of inebriation wore colourful scarves. The reason for wearing these scarves is “tradition”. Shops (including most pharmacies) were shut for the entire week. We had to walk miles to find a pharmacy that was not only opened but in which the pharmacist understood charades for Gay’s “mother of all blisters”. Without using our guidebook, we found Los Gabriele, a fabulous restaurant named after my blistered travel companion. However, we were forced to ‘eat and run’ because the refugio imposed an 11pm curfew. It gave us food for thought to inspire the next verse to our song.

*WHY WOULD YOU SPEND A NIGHT IN A REFUGIO?  
WHY WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO SLEEP WITH PILGRIMS IN PAIN?  
THE SNORING IS ANNOYING  
AND ROWS OF BUNKS ARE BORING  
WE SUGGEST 3 STARS ALL THE WAY*

After rejuvenating soak in a bath, I decided not to pull the plug on the pilgrimage. I bubbled along The Way to Santo Domingo de la Calzada, inventing new verses for our song and designing slogans for my travel companions. For the architect who carried the guide book: "I ran the walk"



## **I RAN THE WALK**

Her verse in our song is:

*HOW DO YOU STAY STYLISH ON THE CAMINO?  
HOW DO YOU PROVE YOUR GROOVY ON THE TRAIL?  
YOU DON'T CLICK A STICK  
YOU DON'T WEAR A SHELL  
YOU WEAR A BIG BLACK FROCK AND A SCARF*



## **I BREEZED THE WALK**

For the vegetarian who behaved like most vegetarians, her slogan was "I breezed the walk" (and her theme song was "the long and windy road").

Her verse in our song is:

*HOW DO YOU STAY WELL FED ON THE CAMINO?  
HOW DO YOU STOP FARTING ALONG THE WAY?  
PLEASE NO MORE SARDINES  
AND FORGET THE BLOODY BEANS  
JUST GIVE US VINO TINTO 3 TIMES A DAY*



## **I TALKED THE WALK**

And for me:

*HOW DO YOU TALK THE WALK ALONG THE CAMINO?  
HOW DO YOU MEET THE LOCALS ON THE WAY?  
JUST THROW AWAY THE PHRASE BOOK  
AND SAY IT WITH YOUR HANDS  
SOON YOU'LL MAKE THE SPANISH UNDERSTAND*

In the morning, the streets were still packed with revelers. While locals stayed drinking and dancing in Logrono, we walked slowly to Najero. As we walked, I began to reflect on my interactions with the other pilgrims. I was initially excited by the prospect of many different cultures embarking on the pilgrimage together. Given its location, I had expected the majority of pilgrims to be Spanish. However, they were mostly German, French, Dutch and Canadian. Although I met some lovely people along the way, I was surprised by a lack of communal spirit from many pilgrims. On some occasions, it was difficult to even obtain eye contact or a cordial greeting. These grumpy pilgrims inspired the next verse of our song.

*HOW DO YOU SPOT A PILGRIM ON  
THE CAMINO?  
HOW DO YOU MAKE VINEGAR LIPS  
CRACK A SMILE?  
THEY CAN'T ALL HAVE SORE FEET  
OR JUST BE KIND TO GOD  
THEY MUST BE PAYING PENANCE FOR  
THEIR SINS.*



*THE PATH TO OUR SHORT TERM SALVATION  
AT ST TERESA'S HOSPITABLE HOSPITALE*



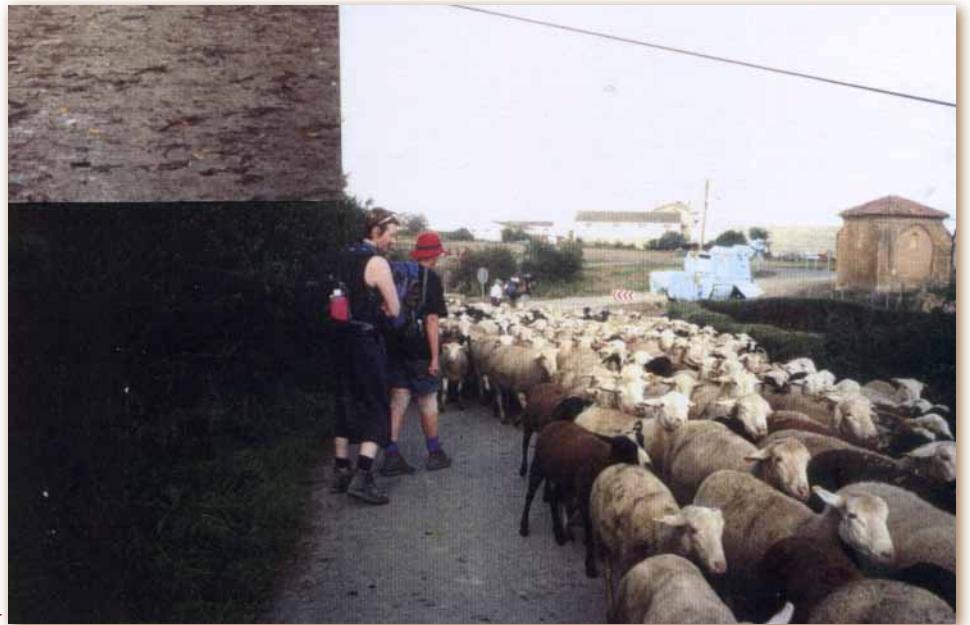
*A PILGRIM WITH BOTH SHELL AND STICK STRIDES ALONG THE  
CAMINO... ALONE (OR MAYBE WITH GOD ALONE)*

Despite an abundance of churches along The Way, it was unusual for me to look inside one. I broke my atheist vow and looked inside the cathedral in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. It's claim to fame is a live rooster and hen locked in a small enclosure in the nave. It would appear that animal liberation is about as well known in Spain as WorkCover! Here, cruelty to animals is celebrated as a tourist attraction. Stuffed poultry toys on sale everywhere. As for us old hens, we spent the night with some old chooks in a convent "Sisters Hospitale St Teresa", praying that convent style accommodation would not become a habit.





As an Australian, I am accustomed to farmers moving sheep with lots of noise from dogs, utes and motor bikes. In Spain, we often saw shepherds quietly following sheep down small roads. Although it seemed culturally confusing to have sheep as leaders, we too began to follow them. They certainly appeared to have more of an idea about where they were going than we did.



HERDED BY THE HERD ●▶

When the sheep were not leading us down the garden path, we followed the yellow arrows, religiously. We were determined not to get lost again.



SHOWING OUR FAITH IN THE SIGNS



WRONG SHELL - GO BACK ●▶



Hay bales were miraculously positioned at “rest stops” along The Way. Local farmers had kindly placed these for weary pilgrims to sit on. We also noticed the pile of rubbish left beside these hay bales. As we walked got closer to Santiago de Compostela, there was a noticeable increase in the amount of litter. On one occasion, I filled an entire garbage bag in less than a kilometer.



THE WAY ATTRACTED ALL KINDS OF TOSSERS

This was indeed something to sing about.

*HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE  
FOLLOWING A PACK OF PILGRIMS?  
HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE ON THE  
RIGHT TRAIL?  
YOU STUMBLE OVER LITTER  
SOMETIMES FAECES AND TOILET PAPER  
WHO THE HELL DO WE PILGRIMS THINK  
WE ARE?*

Conversations with many pilgrims were sometimes a load of garbage. Each time I was asked where I started the walk and how far I had walked, I felt like I was listening to a stuck record. Those who spoke repeatedly about visitations, revelations and finding themselves in the wilderness became known as “The Shirley McLaine Tossers”

By day 12 of the walk our feet and backs had become accustomed to the daily abuse associated with walking 6 to 8 hours a day. But we had not yet got the coffee right. Café con lechte was too milky, café cataldo was too little, café con lechte mixed with café con solo was too confusing to order. In the end, we settled on café con lechte pecino.

The walk from Belorado to Villafranca was a short stroll. As a truck-stop-town, Villafranca did not have many pretty sights (apart from big trucks, of course). The only suitable place (in terms of sunlight) for hanging out our clean washing was on a soccer goal post, in front of the church (nickers in the nave). Positioning ourselves for an afternoon of reading in the sun, we dropped a chair (labeled “Catholico”) on my foot. It hurt like hell. We asked two local men about the label on the chair. I understood their reply to mean that only “Catholic bishops” sat in these chairs. The others understood that the “Catholic Bank” donated these chairs. Bishops and Banks: merely semantics.



▲ THE PATH LEAD THROUGH WOODS AND NATIVE VEGETATION





▲ THE EARLY PART OF THE DAY INVOLVED A LOVELY WALK THOROUGH WOODS AND NATIVE VEGETATION

The other highlight of this town was the evening meal of Pisto. The meal was not only delicious, but the waiter reminded us of Fawlty Tower's Manuel. Manuel enjoyed making fun of our attempts to speak Spanish. He sang our heavily accented "grathias" and "La Quenta Por Favor" with a smile.

Our intention was to walk from Villafranca to Atapeurca, but we ended up walking to Burgos. The early part of the day involved a lovely walk through woods and native vegetation.

I became accustomed to large wooden crucifixes popping up in the wilderness and no longer cried "oh jesus" when they crossed my path. We stopped in Atapeurca at Spanish lunch-time. A three course meal (menu del dia) provided the energy to carry on to Burgos. It also made us complacent - we forgot to follow the yellow arrows.

As soon as we saw Burgos in the distance, we just walked towards it. It was a magnetic attraction. Next thing we knew, we were scrambling across fields, climbing up road embankments through

blackberry bushes to avoid a major train line. We walked along a very busy road before stumbling into a service station, though not a shell one. This was the second time that the words "Camino de Santiago" were met with blank faces.

Once again, we were lost in Spain. This time our travel guardian eagles swerved us well. A mechanic used a Spanish version of charades to tell us where to catch a bus to Burgos. We continued along the hideous highway, then waited patiently at a bus stop.



PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE AT A SPANISH BUS STOP ALONG 'THE WAY'

On the bus, I sat next to another kind English-speaking-Spaniard who gave directions to a hotel. Our arrival in Burgos coincided with Collingwood's appearance in the AFL grand final. While Melbourne was in a football frenzy, Burgos was celebrating the release of an autobiography by Gabrielle Garcia Marquez. A book shop owner told me that it was "deliciosus". I also describe the plane tree canopies as "deliciousus", whether in season or not.

The next stage of The Way, the "meseta", has a bad reputation - 200 km of flat, desolate landscape. We also heard the highway was a constant stream



"DELICIOUSUS"





BEAUTIFUL BURGOS

of cattle trucks, transporters, ready-mix concrete lorries, huge vehicles laden with timber, buses and cars. We decided to skip it, knowing there were many flat, desolate, walking opportunities back home. Instead, we chose a stressful train trip in which we could not find our designated seats. Lost on a Train in Spain whilst crossing the Plain!



LOST ON A TRAIN...

Many pilgrims describe catching a train as “cheating”. However we played by different rules. Our only rule was to have fun (and maybe lose some weight). So, we spent another lovely sightseeing day, this time in Leon. I admired the Spanish stalks nesting on church steeples. I considered it a gesture of irreverence. I was also irreverent when I passed wind at a percussion concert in the cathedral.

Walking out of Leon, we returned to the fold of pilgrims, seemingly forgiven. It was an industrious 20 km walk to Villadango del Paramo, with many parts resembling western suburbs of Melbourne. We spent hours walking along windy roads through industrial wastelands.

The walk to Astorga was a step in the right direction. The scenery was much more interesting, including curious underground houses. At Hospital de Orbigo, we walked over the camino’s longest bridge. Size was not everything - the bridge was also beautiful. Afterwards, we walked past four Spanish women who were talking and laughing while doing their communal washing (by hand, of course).



ONE OF MANY INDUSTRIAL WASTELANDS WE TRAVERSED

GAUDI’S BUILDING IS ESPECIALLY WORTH A GAWK





For those with time to sightsee, Astorga is certainly worth a gawk - especially Gaudi's building. Apart from gorgeous stained glass windows, this building also contains a Pilgrims museum. This museum displays small statues of pilgrims, all male and all with vinegar lips.

Our sight seeing morning in Astorga left us with only six hours of daylight to walk the 22 km to Rabanal. We walked quickly through the heath-like vegetation wondering whether we had taken another detour, this time to the Scottish highlands.

In contrast to the vegetation, the largely deserted villages were distinctly Spanish. In one village (El Ganso), people in town appeared to have shared a can of bright blue paint because nearly every window shutter was bright blue.



*WHO'LL TAKE THE HIGHROAD...*



*...AND WHO'LL TAKE THE LOWROAD?*



*BLUE, BLUE OR BLUE DOORS IN EL GANSO*





◀ CAIRN POLE



◀ CAIRN POLE CLOSE UP

LIPSTICK GRAFFITI



We arrived in Rabanal and found a room to sleep, this time in an attic. Stooping under a very low ceiling reminded us of the film *Being John Malkovich*'s, particularly the 71/2 floor.

The walk to Molinaseca was a combination of gorgeous views, exotic incense plants and a delicious lunch (paella and tart de Santiago). After lunch, we walked through a completely deserted town (Foncebaden), relieved to find no wild dogs had been left behind. With all our limbs intact, we participated in the ritual of throwing a small rock onto the cairn at Cruz de Ferro.

Although it is traditional to bring a “meaningful rock” from home, we picked up bits and pieces at Foncebaden. Jenni threw a piece of slate, after first wiping the slate clean. Gay threw a black and white rock to commiserate Collingwood's defeat. I threw a mosaic tile. More importantly, we marked the occasion with graffiti on a rock (S.J.G 2-10-02), using Jenni's best lipstick. We arrived in Molinaseca feeling much lighter, now that we had got our rocks off.

We said goodbye to lovely Molinaseca and walked with gusto to Ponferrada. Rather than visit the fortress and learn something about the Knights Templar, we preferred to taste their vino tinto, and move on. En route to Cacabelos we stumbled by succulent veggie patches, singing earthy songs inspired by the vino tinto and the artichokes. We also admired the colourful grape pickers. It was picking season.

Cacabelos was overflowing with seasonal workers. To find a room, we had to scrape the bottom of the barrel. We had become accustomed to arranging accommodation by speaking Spanish. In Cacabelos, a Spanish-looking Mexican surprised us when our requests for a room were met with an English cockney accent. The accommodation was shocking. For no extra charge, I received a small electric shock when I switched on the lights.





*WE UNSUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT ABSOLUTION FOR OUR SINS...*

We were now at the business end of the walk. Walking to Villafranca del Bierzo, we came to a church where pilgrims who are too sick or exhausted to complete the walk to Santiago de Compostela can get absolution for their sins. These pilgrims just pop into the Puerta del Pardon (Door of Forgiveness) and all is forgiven. We popped in, though got absolutely nothing (except a stamp in our "Credencial del Peregrino"). We then went off to search for the internet, which we later found in a bar.

Although churches still outnumber internet cafes along The Way, internet cafes appear to be the 'new shrines'. We prayed for email messages from home (especially after the bombs in Bali). Likewise, people at home were relieved to receive emails from us (especially after the bombs in Bali). In small Spanish towns, pilgrims and locals queued in bars and cafes to use the internet. In Villafranca del Bierzo, the bar owner was embarrassed as he deleted the pornography that locals had downloaded.

Many pilgrims tell stories about the "difficulties" of walking from Villafranca del Bierzo to El Cebrero. For some, it is the climb of the camino. To lessen our loads, we gave our backpacks to the local refugio to ferry up the mountain. Walking without baggage was a blessing.



*...THEN HEADED OFF IN SEARCH OF AN INTERNET CAFÉ*

As we crossed the border into Galicia, the landscape became a tapestry of green, orange and red. We passed a man pushing a very antiquated plough attached to a donkey - each step appeared hard work. This contrasted with the state-of-the-art video cam located in El Cebrero that brought images of pilgrims to computers around the world.



*THE LANDSCAPE BECAME A TAPESTRY OF GREEN, ORANGE & RED*





I noticed pilgrims standing on a particular spot smiling and waving. For a moment, I thought this spot must have special powers. Then I realised these pilgrims were performing for the camera. Fortunately, people at the other end of the computer did not smell El Cebrerio's cow shit.

El Cebrerio is a beautiful, though somewhat smelly and very touristy town. It has quaint round thatched dwellings. Most memorable was the meal we ate there. Every ingredient was picked fresh from the vegetable garden. El Cebrerio to Triacastela was another gentle walk. It was followed by another stroll to Serrias. Either we were getting fitter, or the pilgrimage was getting easier. Unlike the thousand steps in the Dandenongs (another Spain Train Spot), we skipped up the steep steps in Serrias.

During the walk to Portomarin, the heavens opened. The downpour also included an influx of French people arriving by bus to walk the last 100 km of the camino. That night, we booked into a "refugiette" - a hotel filled with many French 'holiday pilgrims'. These holiday pilgrims seemed happy pilgrims. We received a lot of "bon jours" during the walk to Palas de Rei. These happy pilgrims did not have sore feet.

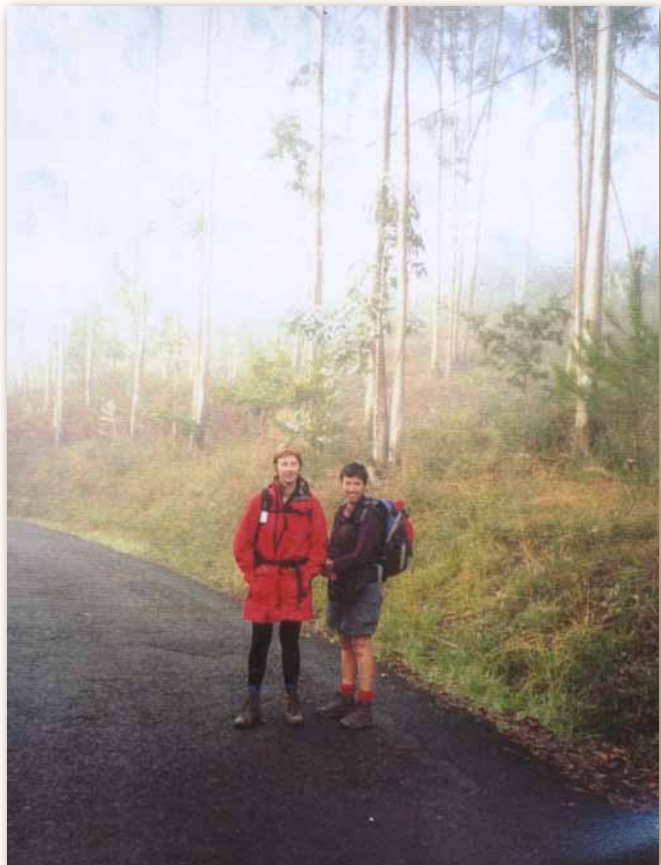


LUNCH IN THE RAIN IN SPAIN 



During the final week of The Walk, the number of pilgrims increased and the atmosphere began to resemble a school camp. I noticed a mass of pilgrims traipse into a church in a small village and was reminded of a school excursion to Sovereign Hill. Although the villagers were not “dressed up” in period costumes, the pilgrim gaze and their daily poverty seemed to feed each other.

Part of the walk to Arzuá involved walking through eucalyptus plantations. It smelt like our training weekends down at Lorne. Yet each time we walked into a village, we knew we were in Spain, not Lorne.



SMELLS LIKE HOME 

On the way to Lavacolla, we became slightly disorientated. In the first instance, we stumbled upon a coke machine in the middle of nowhere. Unlike the crucifixes in the wilderness, this was the real thing. Perhaps our disorientation was caused by something we ate at lunch, or maybe the homemade wine, herez or liquor café given to us by some Spanish pilgrims. We also stumbled upon little cairns scattered along The Way. We eventually found Lavacolla where we consumed more liquor café on the house.



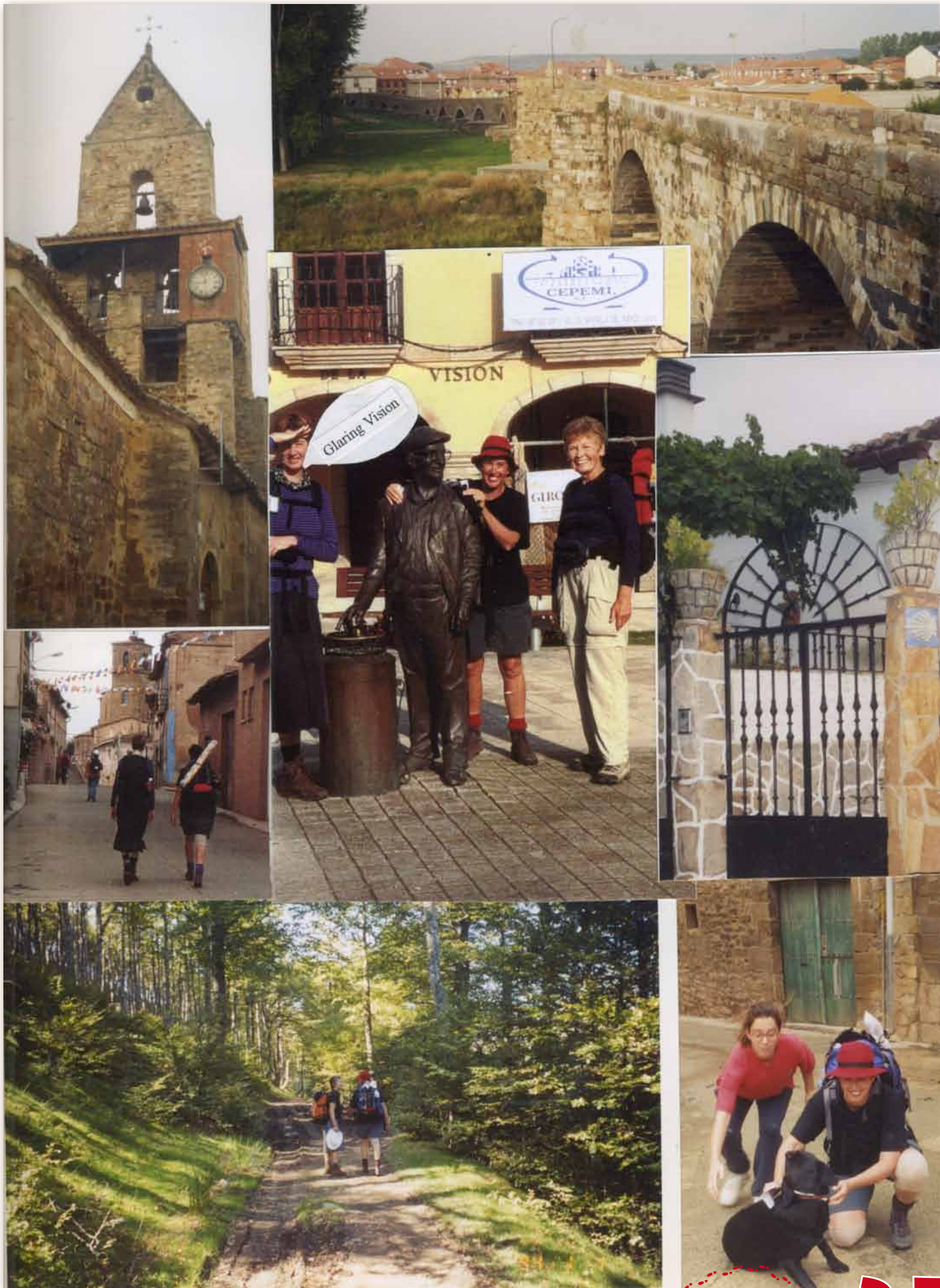
←  THE 'REAL THING'

Although it rained almost the entire time we were in Santiago de Compostella, the sky was blue as we walked into this sacred city. After the obligatory congratulatory hugs, we received our final stamp and compostella in latin.





MORE OF EVERYTHING: MORE BRIDGES, SHELL SIGNS, LABRA-ADORES, WALKING, CHURCHES AND VISITATIONS







*CAPITULUM hujus Almae Apostolicae et Metropolitanae  
Ecclesiae Compostellanae sigilli Altaris Beati Jacobi Apostoli  
custos, ut omnibus Fidelibus et Peregrinis ex toto terrarum  
Orbe, devotionis affectu vel voti causa, ad limina Apostoli  
Nostri Hispaniarum Patroni ac Tutelaris **SANCTI JACOBI**  
convenientibus, authenticas visitationis litteras expediat, omni-  
bus et singulis praesentes inspecturis, notum facit: ~~etiam~~  
*Saram Russell*  
hoc sacratissimum Templum pietatis causa devote visitasse.  
In quorum fidem praesentes litteras, sigillo ejusdem Sanctae  
Ecclesiae munitas, ei confero.*

*Datum Compostellae die 12 mensis *Octobris*  
anno Dni *1902**



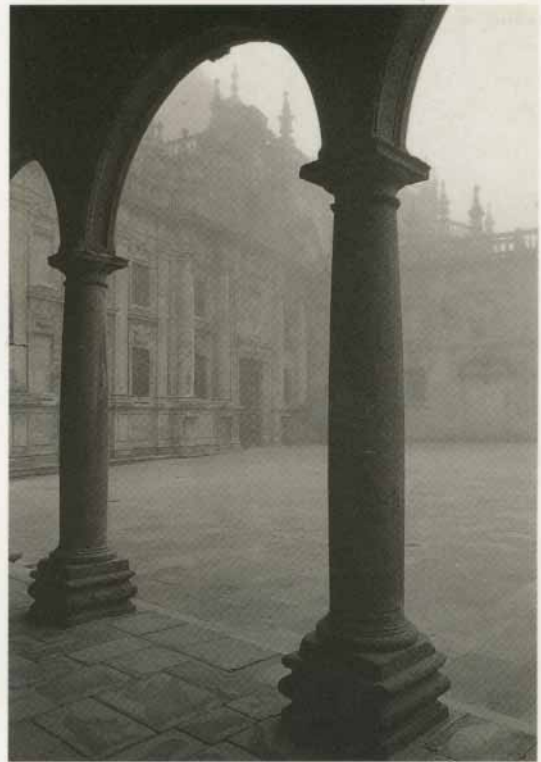
*Jaimetovill*  
Secretarius Capitularis







COMPOSTELA



COMPOSTELA

The spectacle of Santiago was the flying handbag (a silver-plated botafumeiro). This huge smoke thrower swings through the air as men in dresses pull on a rope. Fortunately God was on our side, and the botafumeiro did not bop anyone on the head.

At last we had reached our destination. We also found a way to end our song.

*HOW WILL WE FIND THE STRENGTH TO FINISH THE CAMINO?*

*HOW WILL WE KNOW OUR JOURNEY'S AT AN END?*

*IS THE END OUR INCLINATION?*

*OR THE JOURNEY OR INSPIRATION?*

*THE CAMINO IS THE START OF SOMETHING NEW.*

*SO WE WILL KNOW WHEN THE CAMINO IS AT AN END!*



◀...●  
*HOW MUCH  
FURTHER?  
**ONLY 100 KM***

Our long walk had provided time to think, reflect, gaze, sing, listen and learn. Rather than catch fleeting glimpses of pretty countryside through car or train windows, we became part of the view. Whilst catching our breath, we stopped to admire, smell and taste Spain. This was certainly the case for those of us who took time to savour and sightsee along the Camino de Santiago. For those who rushed along the way at god only knows what speed, I thank god it was you, not me.

“The RoadS to Santiago de Compostela” concludes with a poem about a calf. This poem honours the winding paths that pilgrims have walked upon for centuries. More importantly, this poem honours our predilection for detours. We did not blindly follow the calf’s path. Instead, we thought outside the path.



**A CALFPATH** BY SAM WALTER FOSS  
ONE DAY, THROUGH THE PRIMEVAL WOODS,  
A CALF WALKED HOME, AS GOOD CALVES SHOULD;  
BUT MADE A TRAIL ALL BENT ASKEW,  
A CROOKED PATH, AS ALL CALVES DO.

THE TRAIL WAS TAKEN UP THE VERY NEXT DAY  
BY A LONE DOG THAT PASSED THAT WAY.  
AND THEN A WISE BELLWETHER SHEEP  
PERSUED THAT TRAIL O'ER VALE AND STEEP  
AND DREW THE FLOCK BEHIND HIM, TOO,  
AS GOOD BELLWETHERS ALWAYS DO.  
AND FROM THAT DAY, O'ER HILL AND GLADE,  
THROUGH THOSE OLD WOODS A PATH WAS MADE.

AND MANY MEN WOUND IN AND OUT  
AND DODGED AND TURNED AND BENT ABOUT,  
AND UTTERED WORDS OF RIGHTEOUS WRATH  
BECAUSE 'T WAS SUCH A CROOKED PATH.

THE FOREST PATH BECAME A LANE  
THAT BENT AND TURNED AND TURNED AGAIN.  
THIS CROOKED LANE BECAME A ROAD  
WHERE MANY A POOR HORSE WITH HIS LOAD  
TOILED ON BENEATH THE BURNING SUN...  
AND TRAVELED SOME THREE MILES IN ONE!

THE YEARS PASSED ON IN SWIFTESS FLEET.  
THE ROAD BECAME A VILLAGE STREET.  
AND THIS, BEFORE MEN WERE AWARE,  
BECAME A CITY'S CROWDED THOROUGHFARE.

EACH DAY A HUNDRED THOUSAND ROUT  
FOLLOWED THAT ZIZ-ZAG CALF ABOUT.  
AND O'ER HIS CROOKED JOURNEY WENT  
THE TRAFFIC OF A CONTINENT.

A HUNDRED THOUSAND MEN WERE LED  
BY ONE CALF NEAR THREE CENTURIES DEAD.  
THEY FOLLOWED STILL HIS CROOKED WAY  
AND LOST SOME ONE HUNDREDS YEARS A DAY!

FOR THUS SUCH REVERENCE IS LENT  
TO WELL ESTABLISHED PRECEDENT.

FOR MEN ARE PRONE TO GO IT BLIND  
ALONG THE CALF-PATH OF THE MIND,  
AND WORK AWAY FROM SUN TO SUN  
TO DO WHAT OTHER MEN HAVE DONE.  
THEY FOLLOW IN THE BEATEN TRACK,  
AND OUT, AND IN, AND FORTH, AND BACK,  
AND STILL THEIR DEVIOUS COURSE PURSUE  
TO KEEP THE PATH THAT OTHERS DO.

THEY KEEP THE PATH A SACRED GROOVE  
ALONG WHICH ALL THEIR LIVES THEY MOVE.  
BUT, OH HOW THE WISE OLD WOOD-GODS LAUGH  
WHO SAW THAT FIRST PRIMEVAL CALF.

With all these calves on the path, wandering by sidewalk cafes, you would expect fresh milk in your café leche.



▲ STAYING STYLISH ON THE CAMINO

▼ CLOSING THE DOOR ON THE CAMINO ▼



## MOOR BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS

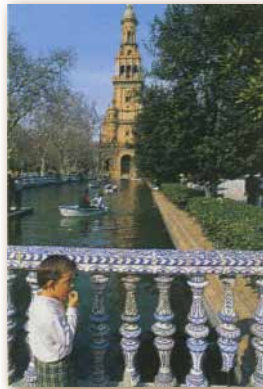
**A**fter a month traveling with Christian pilgrims, I felt excited about the prospect of learning more about the Moors in Seville, Cordoba and Granada. On the night train to Madrid, I enjoyed some boisterous discussions with a Dutch-Brazilian man (born in Dutch Guyana) and an Estonian woman, both living in Spain. Amongst other things we discussed possible explanations for why Spanish people seemingly prefer long-life, irradiated milk, even in places where cows are in abundance.

Arriving in Seville, I found a cheap-ish hostel (A\$30) without too much ado. As is my traveling habit, I wandered out past the edges of town away from the touristy bits...and quickly became lost. Unaccustomed to maps and guide books, I relied on local people to help me find my way back. My journey to the centro was accompanied by some delightful footpath eating and drinking.

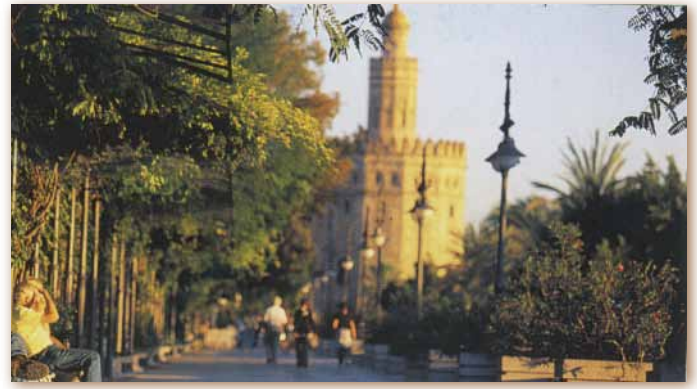


HANGING HAMS DECORATE A BAR

Once back in town, I stumbled upon what I thought was the Cathedral. It turned out to be the main public square (Plaza de San Francisco), a very peaceful and beautiful public space made up of stone, tiles, wood and water. Later, I was told that this was the site of inquisition burnings. It was certainly one hell of a place to burn.



PLAZA DE ESPAÑA



BULL RING IN SEVILLE

During the next three days in Seville, I frequently became lost. On every occasion, I stumbled upon something to admire...buildings, people. I even admired the way cars would speed down Seville's narrow streets, though I disliked the cacophony of tooting. These streets had not been designed for modern forms of transport. God help us if the American SVOs make a pre-emptive strike in Seville.

Apart from the traffic, my strongest impression was the way the old and new co-existed. Unlike all the tourists who travel for miles to see the extraordinary buildings and mosaic vestibules, the locals just accept "the old" as a normal part of their built environment. They even drive over century old mosaic drive-ways. This unselfconsciousness about the historical significance of the environment was impressive, as was all the romance on the streets.

Cordoba is like Seville, but without the hyperbole. There are many enchanting little courtyards along seemingly unimportant streets. In Cordoba, I visited a 14th century fortress with schools of fat trout as the modern-day prisoners. More importantly, I went inside the walls of the Mezquita, though not the cathedral itself. With all the orange trees, I had images of modern-day Moslems and Christians sitting together eating oranges. I then wandered over to an old bull-ring which was a modern-day market. This gave me hope that anything, including World Peace (or at least whirled peas) is possible.



Both Seville and Cordoba are a must see for those who enjoy clubbing and shopping. The porter at my hotel told me that these cities rocked whilst I slept. Perhaps this explains why the women in the brothel next door appeared to be so tired during the day.



TASTY TAPAS

A trip to the south is incomplete without a visit to Granada. Some come here especially to visit the Alumbra. I came and quickly established a routine: 10am internet cafe; 2pm menu del dia; 6pm tapas and vino tinto; 10pm salada mixta. I read, wrote, walked, ate, drank, and was merry.



ALUMBRA

On my final day in Granada, I walked up the hill to see the Alumbra (to see what all the fuss was about). At first I thought Carlos' ugly stone palace was "the fuss". This renaissance palace was a nightmare. I then stumbled upon Palacio Nazaries. It was a dream and I became completely spellbound by its mystery. In photographs, the Alumbra is represented as a strong monument, a fortress. Within Palacio Nazaries, I sensed its complexity and frailty.

My exit from Granada, via the local train station, was filled with loving farewells, excited welcomes and a platform of very handsome men. Alas, it was time to fly home.

## BLOWN AWAY IN BARCELONA

During my last day in Spain, I stumbled across thousands of Spaniards on the street with placards demanding changes in educational policies. There was such vibrancy, with people singing and smiling as they marched down the street. Mid-protest, I adjourned to a nearby café serving Catalanian food and ordered my first glass of cava (Spanish champagne). Soon after, I heard a loud explosion, much louder than a champagne cork. I looked out the window and saw hordes of people screaming as they ran past the café. Although tradition dictates that it should have been a bull chasing these people, the modern-day bull is the riot police.

Amidst all the chaos, a young man tripped over just outside the café's window. A riot policeman quickly attended to business, beating this young man's head with a thick black stick. The riot policeman's facial expressions during the beating suggested he was both out-of-control and enjoying himself. After a few minutes of relentless beating, the young man was immobilized, seemingly unconscious. Rioters rushing by stopped to carry him away, hopefully to a hospital not a morgue.

After the riot policeman and the young man were out of sight, I caught the eye of the waitress behind the bar. This connection caused us both to start crying. I suspect neither of us had ever witnessed such brutality.

The situation appeared to calm down, and I felt it was safe to walk back to my hotel. I had only walked a short distance when another group of screaming people rushed by. I heard gun-shots, but prayed that they were fire-crackers. As it turns out, they were guns shooting rubber bullets. I was immobilized, not by a riot policeman's beating but by fear. Everyone was running down the road; I stood completely still on the footpath. I thought about Bali. I thought about not making it home. I was terrified.

Somehow, I made it back to the hotel. After experiencing explosive diarrhoea, my entire body became numb. Fear shut down my senses. It took them weeks to wake up.

## HOME VIA VIENNA AND CNN

In a state of “non comprehendo”, I was told that my flight home via Vienna had been cancelled. Rather than a 2 hour flight to Vienna, it took me the entire day to fly Barcelona-Munich-Vienna. I spent hours glued to CNN. I nearly became unstuck by the fast and furious way the “news” was presented. Snippets of superficial information were repeated over and over again. To make matters worse, visual images from the “news stories” were constantly competing with unrelated text floating across the scene. I simply could not keep up. This sensory input was made even worse by the news-reader constantly informing viewers about what is coming up in 10, 20, 30 minutes. I longed for my boarding call.

I arrived in Vienna around midnight (not a safe time for a woman traveling alone). I was assured that Vienna was “safe”. And it was. Unlike Barcelona, there was not a single person on the street. My 5-minute walk from the bus station to a hotel was icy cold.

My day in Vienna was cold, but uneventful. I hooked up with another traveler who led me around town and showed me some sights (i.e. lots of big buildings). It was very clean and rather elegant, but it all felt cold and distinctly Germanic. It was one of the few places in which I hesitated before speaking with strangers. People wrapped up in winter coats with heads down did not appear open to interruption. My only connection with the Viennese was via their dogs. Even in cafes I was able to talk with dogs, if not their owners. By mid afternoon I was freezing and tired of pretty buildings. I wandered into a café (in search of Austrian’s delicious Segofredo coffee which was surprisingly scarce in Vienna). Soon after, I found myself in the wine cellar admiring the owner’s collection. I later learnt that the cafe was a gay and lesbian bar and felt relieved that it was only her wine that I was asked to admire.

## FINDING MYSELF IN MELBOURNE

The first part of this adventure (The Way of St James) was a journey back to childhood. On the pilgrimage, we played all day with no responsibilities, no commitments. With this regression to childhood, many lost souls took an inward journey to find themselves. I spent a few days on an inward journey, but got lost. So I chose to look outward in search for yellow arrows, tasty tapas, vino tinto, interesting vegetable gardens and handsome Spaniards. These were much easier to find than myself, especially with my tendency to get lost. I felt at home in Spain, even when I was lost. The Way of St James may not have been a holiday of a life-time, but I returned home with a thinner self. After two months wearing the same clothes (not all at the same time), I was glad to find myself in Melbourne. I was not glad, however, to find a small round, dark bruise (about the size of a rubber bullet) on my left shoulder. The bruise on my shoulder may, or may not, have been caused by a rubber bullet. It really doesn’t matter. Although “Shot in Spain” makes a better story (and why spoil a good story with the truth?) getting “Lost in Spain” was a real adventure.

HOT SHOT IN SPAIN? 



 OR JUST ANOTHER BRUISED PILGRIM?