

# A Few Days from a Long Walk

Odd days from a 2,000 mile walk from Salzberg to Seville.

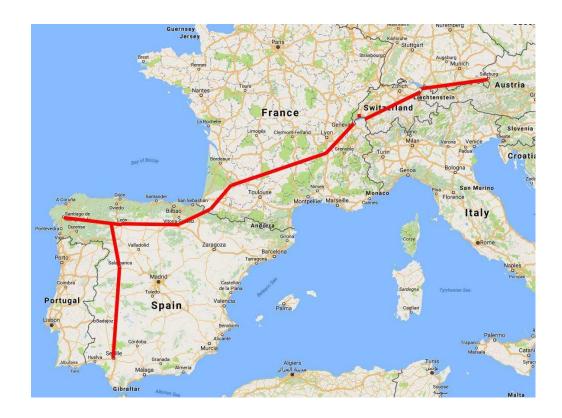
This journey was undertaken in eight separate trips between 2005 and 2013 + one day of walking in 2016. For a lot of reasons the walks were not undertaken in the order shown in the book, but they all went in the direction of Santiago de Compostela. The whole journey was a little over 2,000 miles. In addition I used a bus, train and cable car for a further 190miles. I used to be a purist, but now I am not, just older and a little wiser.

I have selected images from 33 days of walking out of a total of 158; so I hope the 20% documented here gives a good representation of the whole journey. Incidentally, for 24 of the 158 days I had the company of our son Rob, or my long term walking pal Jim. Apart from that I travelled alone, but met up with, and occasionally walked with, a lot of interesting people who were also making the journey to Santiago.

I used a variety of cameras; damaging two in accidents. Since 2005 the quality of digital cameras has improved out of all recognition, so the photographic quality in the book is at best variable.

I look back on the whole journey as one of the great experiences of my life. I met a lot of interesting people, saw some great sites, enjoyed parts of countries I had not been to before, and took life at a pace where I could observe what was going on around me. I enjoyed the minimalism of carrying all my kit on my back; simplifying life to a few questions... Where was I going to sleep tonight? Where was the food coming from? Could I find coffee and a sticky bun? Would I find a beer? .....And what could be the most challenging, how to dry my socks?

Was it fun?... not all the time. I could be wet, lonely, hungry, hot, cold, bored and at times, in Switzerland, a little worried on the safety front. .... but I would not have missed a single day.



### Bad Reichenhall to Teisendorf 22Km, Germany

Today was day two of the Austrian / German part of my walk, with the sun beaming down and Robert for company.....it could not get much better than this.

As it was a Sunday we had topped up our supplies the previous day and managed to put together a decent packed lunch. After eating a big breakfast we set off through a forest, a pathway of the usual high Germanic standard....prepared for cycling.

On leaving the forest we crossed the river Saalach and headed across the broad valley towards a village on top of a hill called Anger. It was reputed to be one of the most beautiful villages in Bavaria; we decided that opinion is divided on that one, but stopped in the square for lunch. For some reason we did not bother with coffee...

....A worrying development.











After Anger we walked down the hill into another valley and another wood, arriving in Tesendorf mid-afternoon, the place was deserted except for the town's main feature... a brewery, so after sampling some of it's finest pilsner we searched for our accommodation. To cut a long story short we were transferred to someplace out in the sticks and then taken by car for food. Not a great way end to the day when you are tired, but it all worked out eventually.

This section of the walk was not all sunny meadows, the photo on the last page page of the book is from the next day....it rained and rained. We should have taken the bus, but I was too focussed at the time.

Next Page: The view from Anger....or as Rob said 'Looking Back In Anger'











## Hohenpeibenberg to Wildsteig 24Km,

Each day in Bavaria seemed very similar, mostly on well organised paths, some tarmaced, but all up to a high standard that could be cycled on with a standard bicycle. Today was going to give me some unmarked and dodgy tracks on steep hills, interesting villages and good food at the end of the day.

After a few miles the path suddenly dropped down a slippery slope into some woods; I left the forest track behind and eventually joined a rough road that followed the river Ammer.

At a bridge I realised my way was not over it, but through a landslip on this side. The next few hours was a muddy journey through some poor tracks high up in the trees.

I eventually came out of the trees into a typical Bavarian meadow, with long views back to the hill I had climbed the day before and down into the Hohenpeibenberg valley.

Arriving at a roadside shrine, I was taken with its Bavarian simplicity and the perfectly cut field. The sun shone and I sat down for a short lunch followed by laying down for a longer snooze.















A few miles down the road is Rottenbuch, whose main claim to fame is its church. The Bavarians have a great line in 'fairy cake' church interiors (I believe the technical term is Rococo) and this was a good example. The Germans support their churches through their taxes and it is very clear to see they are used to keep such places spick and span....not to mention topping up the gold leaf.

There then followed a road walk to Wildsteig, great scenery all the way...pity it was on the road, even if it was easier going than my forest walk earlier in the day. Wildsteig is a delightful village set in the middle of nowhere with its own 'fairy cake' church. Hotel Zur Post was good, so was the food; venison, by way of a change from the vast quantities of pork and veal I was eating.

I picked up on the local farmers' protest about the price they are getting for their milk.... something in common with their UK counterparts, even if I do not approve of the way they go about caring for their dairy herds. This is the system; the cows live in barns all year, the farmer cuts the hay and brings it to the cows, he then spreads their manure over the fields. The meadows look fantastic, having not been trodden on by stock, but the quality of life for the cows?











Left: Inside the church Rottenbuch

I cannot leave this part of my journey without including another over the top Rococo church, visited five kilometers into the next day's walk after Wildestieg. It is called the Wieskirche. Or better known as Pilgrimage Church of Wies, a UNESCO heritage building,crawling with tourists even as I arrived at 9.30am.

All pictures on this page are from the Wieskirche.



#### Weiler-Simmerberg to Bregenz 21Km

I think a good walk contains variety and today that is exactly what I have. After another big breakfast I left the very clinical Bavarian town of Weiler-Simmerberg to disappear into woods. Coming out the other side I crossed over into Austria and joined a big recreational track, full of people. It was a lovely sunday and everyone was out walking. The scenery was great, not alpine panoramic, but good distant views.

















Potentially it was a 30Km day but I employed a trick I discovered in Switzerland... a cable car, saving 8km. Arriving at my hotel for some reason I felt very down, I think it was two weeks since Rob had left and I had not met up with anyone to have a conversation.

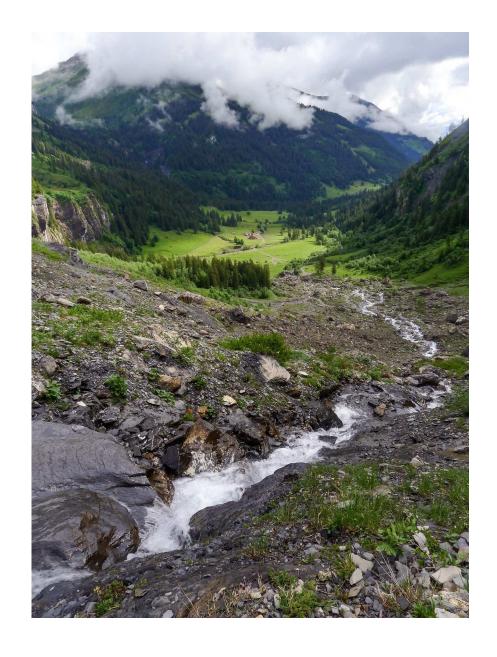
Best remedy for the blues is to get outside, so that is what I did, enjoying the Sunday evening sun with all the holiday makers on Lake Constance. It had been a good day, but I was looking forward to going home in a few days time.



## Alp Vorsiez to Elm 18Km + 1109 mtrs up and 1261 mtrs down + The Foo Pass

This was our first pass on the Swiss Alpine Pass Route. The guide book says: 'If you are in any doubt about the challenge facing you, after today you will be in no doubt.' ... and so it was, another 24 passes were to follow. The Foo pass having no useful cable car to assist the old, gnarled and knackered, like Jim....and myself.

After a leisurely breakfast at the café / dairy where we were staying, we climbed up to the Foo pass.









When you get to Foo Hut you imagine you are at the pass....but you 'ain't...you have another hour and a bit to go. We eventually crawled into Elm at 6ish, both thinking the Thames path might not have been ideal preparation for the trip.

After a shower, beer and food we crawled into bed and slept the sleep of the truly exhausted.











## Brutsi to Engelburg via the Surenenpass, Switzerland, 24Km + 600 mtrs up, 1289 mtrs down

This turned out to be one of my favourite walks of the 2,000 mile journey. If you look at the up and down calculation in the heading of this page you notice that they do not add up. That is because Jim and I took a cable car from Altdorf to Brutsi the day before removing a brutal 800mtr climb from the walk.

I set off from the hotel leaving Jim in bed ready for his pre-planned return to the UK. The weather forecast was not good, rain all day. So filling myself up with a good breakfast I put on a full set of waterproofs and headed out into the steady rain / drizzle. Just to add to the feeling of merriment it was not yet fully daylight and a heavy mist kept coming and going.

After half an hour the drizzle stopped and I was enjoying the valleys; scenes appearing and disappearing. I was also aware I was walking on a ridge with big drops on both sides; most of the time I could not see a lot except the alpine flowers which lined the path.

Eventually I came to a waterfall and whilst in my photo 'zone' I looked up, the mist had lifted and I had a fantastic view all the way up to the Suerenpass.

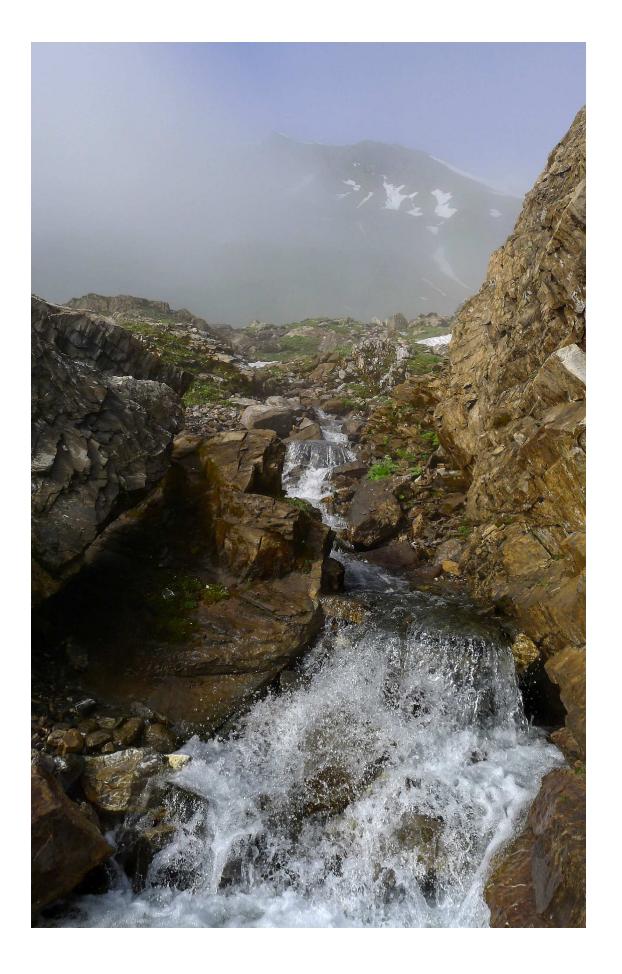












Walking upwards, I followed the path which took me over a small snow field, the first I had ever walked on. I soon realised that on the level they were no problem to cross, but even a small incline could cause a difficulty. The snow was also melting and where it passed over streams holes were appearing. This was fine if you knew where the holes were, but I feared going through the snow to a cold soaking in a stream below.





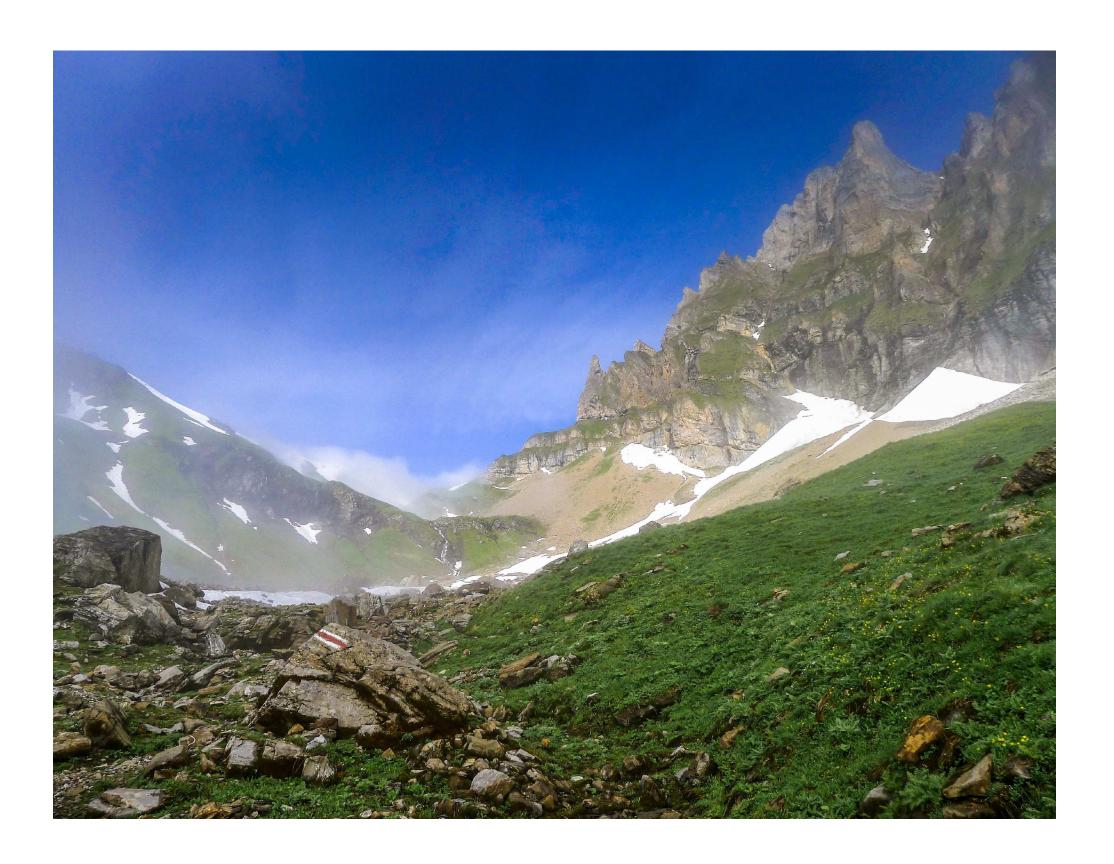


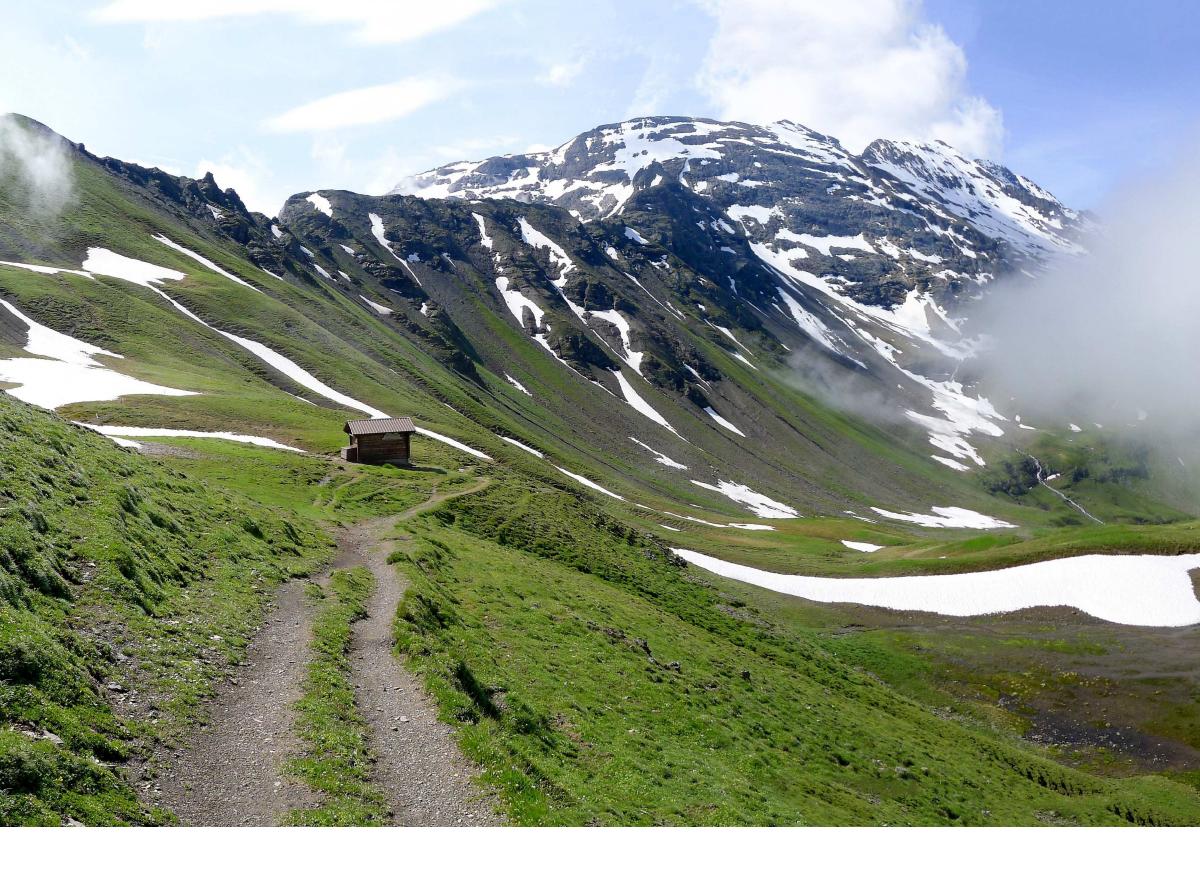




The scenery was truly magnificent. As I looked backwards the scene over the Alps appeared through the cloud. I sat down and admired the view, totally alone.

At this point the cloud came down again and I struggled up the path to the Surenenpass. Looking at the pictures there seems little snow, but it accumulated where you wanted to walk, in the path gullies.





Reaching the summit of the pass the cloud lifted again and I had a magnificent view west. It was then an easy stroll down a hanging valley.

To my delight, that day the hut at Blackenalp had opened for the season and I was able to get a cup of coffee. An unexpected treat.....I am very easy to please after I have been walking for a few miles.



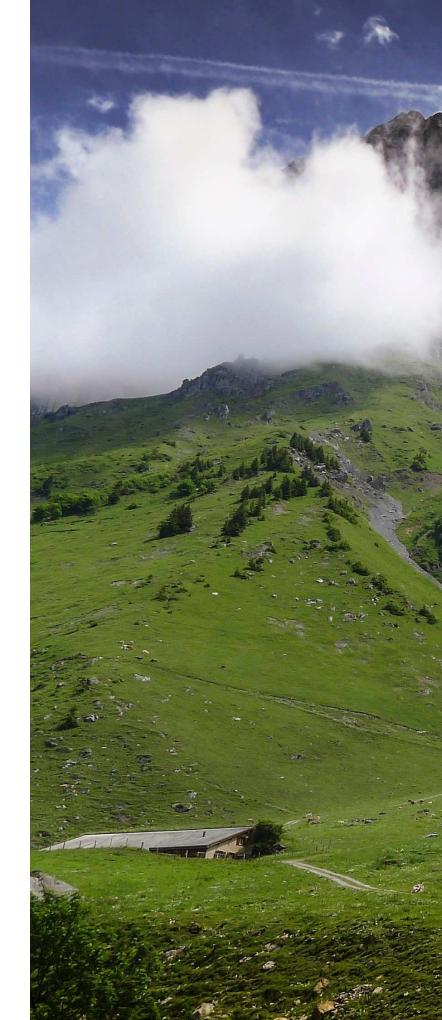
There then followed a long, relatively easy walk in the sun to Engelburg. I don't know why I felt quite down after I arrived, perhaps it the crowds of people after such a peaceful day. Why was it one of the best walks of the whole journey....variety, fantastic scenery, challenging and different walking in places, but not too difficult.











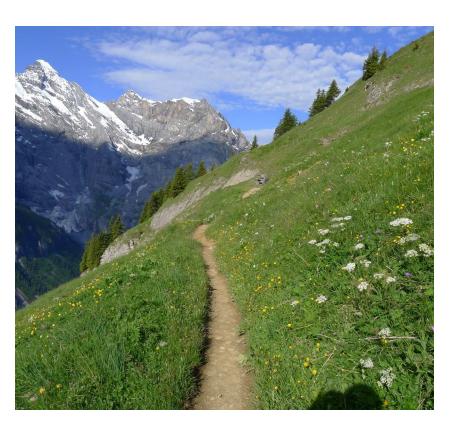




## Murren to Ober Bundalp, Switzerland 18Km,1374 mtrs up,1204 mtrs down

I have picked this walk as it was probably the most difficult walk of the whole journey, except I have no pictures of the dodgy bits as I was otherwise occupied. As I mentioned in the previous walk snow is OK as long as it is flat, or you have simple crampon's etc. On this walk I had neither.

Realising I had a big climb ahead of me I left the hotel just before dawn. I started going up straight away and after a few hours arrived at the Rotstockhutte for coffee.









5 years later I took Joy on a visit to Switzerland to try and show her the 'best bits' around Grindelwald. We also took a trip up the cable car from Murren to the top of the Schilthorn mountain.

I took the picture on the right from the cable car station. As an added bonus I was able to explain to Joy my walk from Rotstockhutte (above) to the Sefinafurgga pass (shown a quarter in from the right edge on the big picture)...in more detail than she probably wanted. Joy managed to feign enthusiastic interest long enough to placate me before returning to look at the Eiger, Munch etc.







After coffee it was back to climbing again... to within 50mtrs of the Sefinafurgga pass. At 2612meters this was the highest pass I crossed. The last section of the pass was filled with snow and nearly vertical. Somehow I made it within 5 metres of the top when I lost my footing and slid backwards. Fortunately the second people I was to see that day popped their heads over the pass. They had crampon's on and kindly gave me a hand.





Immediately over the other side the descent was very steep, but there was a ladder. My map said go left at the base of the ladder...but I could see a steep but obvious path going straight on through the scree.

I later learnt this was the way you took if the marked path had snow in it. The main path looked OK to start off with, but as I went downhill the snow filled the path and the surrounding area. It is fair to say I did not get down to the end of this part of the path standing vertically all the time.

Snow over, the path to the valley was steep, slow and time consuming. Rather than go on to the village by the river I decided to turn left at the river and climb 400 meters to Bundalp to get a good start the next day.

The hotel was the cheapest I had stayed in in Switzerland and so was the food. No showers...but boy did I sleep well. It had been a very hard day.









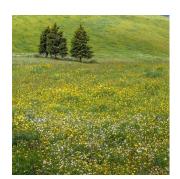












# Boden to Lenk 14 km 300 mtrs up and 888mtrs down

This was advertised in the book as an easy day.... and so it was, I had the option of three cable cars, but I only used one. The first I walked underneath for 4 miles. The next I took up to the start of a grand balcony walk. The last I resisted and walked down the side of the mountain.

The sun and profusion of wild flowers made the balcony walk a great experience; one I will remember for a long time.













When I arrived at the top of the pass, (also a cable car station) there seemed to be a lot of men of a certain age with big model gliders and aircraft.

I discovered their hut, a big boy's toy club..... magnificent. They had taken being a DB to another level....... toys, companionship, coffee shop and wonderful scenery, I was very envious.

A grand day's walking...with little uphill effort involved.







# Pully to St Saphorin 11Km

If you look at the map at the front of this book you will see a gap over Lake Geneva. This came about because after finishing my walk across Switzerland at Montreux, at one end of the lake, I decided to cheat and miss out Lake Geneva, recommencing my journey at the other end.

The years passed over this small 'lapse', until 2016 and the opportunity to at least fix 11Km of my sin of omission. Rob and I were planning our annual walking, drinking and general hanging out trip, when... to cut another very long story short, we found ourselves on a beautiful day in early October beside the Lake Geneva vineyards and as it happens on The Camino route.









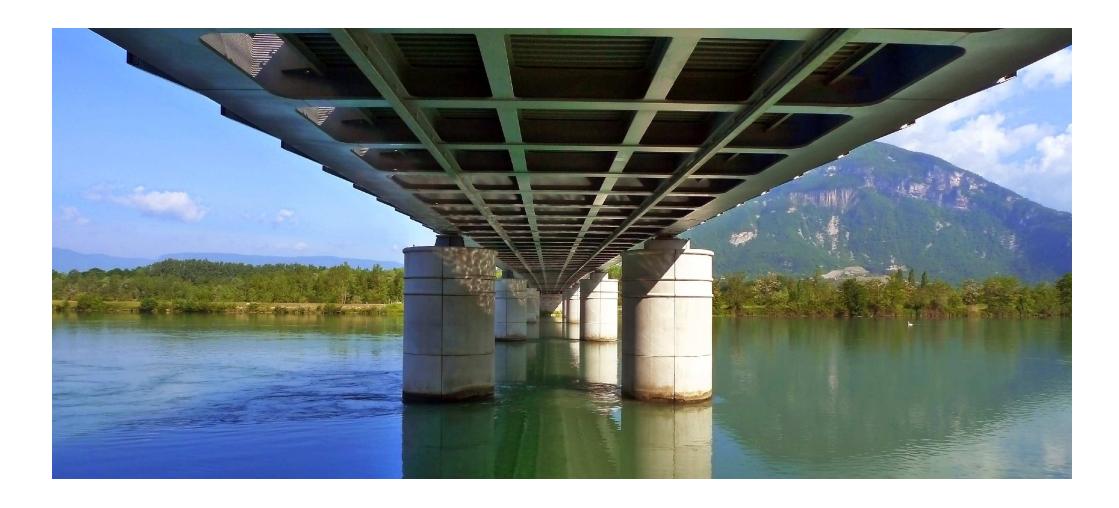
We started the day with a coffee above the station by the lake at St Saphorin, before catching the train to Pully, then walked back to our hire car. What followed can only be described as one of the best walks ever because of the weather, scenery, ease of walking, wine tasting and if I must admit it, walking companion.

I will let the photographs, mostly taken on my phone, do the job of describing a fantastic day on the 'grimage' ... I have also fixed the map at this front of the book with a small red blob above Lake Geneva.



As a final footnote to this story I took Joy to enjoy the walk a year later. It was very hot but we managed a few kilometers in the vineyard as well as a fun late evening stroll covering the last mile.





# Culoz to Yenne, France - 22Km

This walk was four days out from Geneva; also the last day Jim was going to be with me on that trip. I don't know why I always look on the Geneva to Le Puy leg as my least favourite journey. However, this day was as good a day's walking as you could find anywhere. It started with a great breakfast of Sticky Buns in a café.

We set off along the Rhone, then headed up a tributary passing a tourist type town on the water's edge. The high spot of the day was lunch in the middle of a vineyard with mountains in the distance.













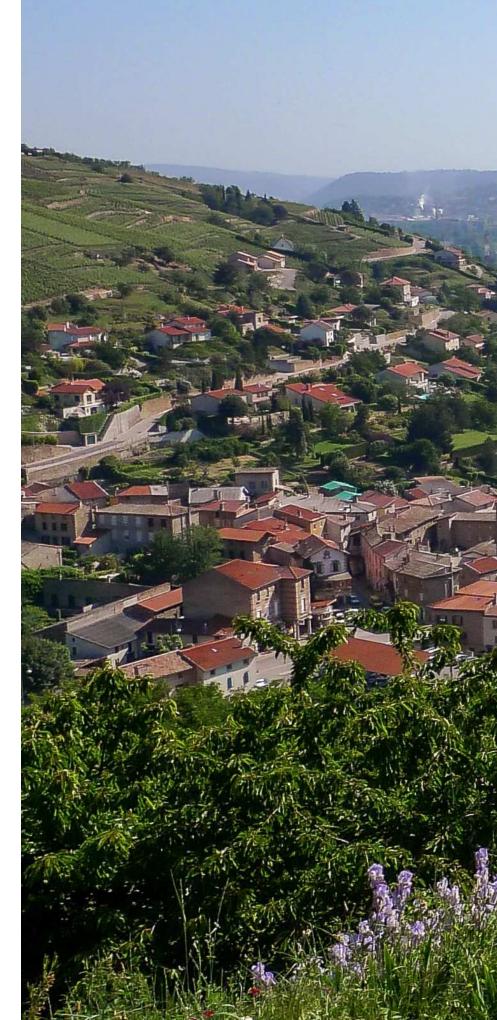


# Le Peage de Roussillon to St Julien Molin Molette - 26Km

I had enjoyed a day off in Vienne and caught a train back to the Camino to re-join the route by the river Rhone. The gentle climb from the Rhone to the hills beyond took me through a varied landscape and many orchards.











At St Julien Molin Molette I was taken to the Gite by an English lady (who did not have any accommodation free at the time) A pleasant evening was spent chatting. It was good to have a conversation after so many days by myself. The Gite had been fitted into an old school, where the kids looked as if they had just left. However the accommodation was just fine. As with most nights of my trip I was the only person staying in the room and in this case the only person in the building.











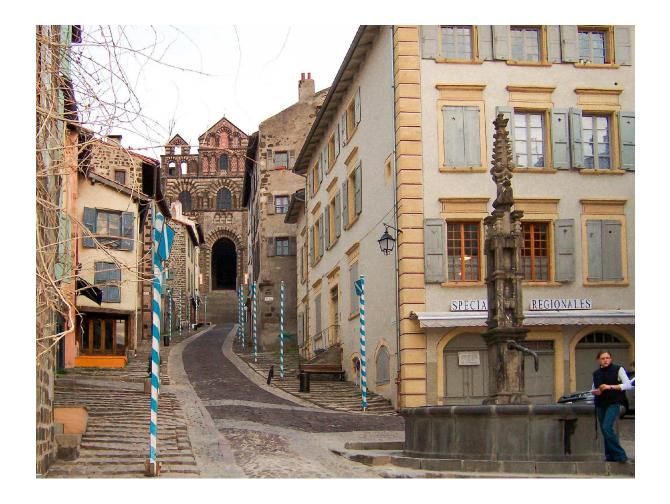
## Le Puy to St. Privat d'Allier - 22Kmk

This was not the best day's walking on the Camino, but it was the first of my many journeys. I had chosen Le Puy because it was the departure point for the first pilgrim group to Santiago led by Godescalc, Bishop of Le Puy in 951AD.

On my way to Le Puy I had damaged my camera so I bought a cheap Nikon....Sadly it delivered poor photo quality for that part of the trip.

After my visit to the camera store I eventually set off at 10am and quickly climbed out of the valley, it was a lovely day and all was well in the world. In no time we were off the road and on a dirt track walking along the top of a plain.







After lunch, the journey led me to the village of Ramourousle, which was the most depressing farming community I have ever visited. It was a collection of about six run down farms, being managed by very senior people. You could see in five years the place would be a ghost village.

On the way to the next village you pass the 12c chapel of St Roch. In the past this place started off by being a chapel to St James for pilgrims, then it was dedicated St Bonnet (local boy made good) and finally St Roch who looked after plague victims and is very big in this area. I do not know why the French feel so strongly about him as at the end of his life they put him in prison as a spy....remorse perhaps, or scared the plague might pass through again?

In the Miam Miam Dodo (The universal book for food, booze and accommodation on the route) the next village advertised a bar... which was shut. I sat on its steps drinking water and going 'cold turkey' from a day of no coffee.



The walk to St Privat was a delight; the 'edge of Dartmoor' scenes were giving way to rolling hills. At the Gite I am in a room with two of the men I met the night before, still injured and once again staring at the ceiling from their bunks.

After a 'holistic' washing session....You stand in the shower with the clothes you want to wash from the day. As you wash and remove each layer, the clothes then receive further attention being trodden on in the well of the shower.... Eventually you wash your body; a simple but effective system.

That evening I sat in a café and had some awful chips and quiche for a meal. Sitting contentedly I completed my first diary for the day, not a bad start.





#### Aumont Aubrac to Aubrac - 32k

I was now in the Aubrac, a place not unlike Dartmoor, but higher than Ben Nevis. I stepped out of the Gite to a scene of snow with very high winds. I was determined to try and keep to the route and schedule. However the wind was making it impossible. After a mile I turned westwards and realised the wind would be behind me for the rest of the day, so I carried on with my wind assisted walk. The night before the gite manager had told me to stick to the roads. I took his advice but because of the long distance on tarmac I began to feel the problem that was going to result in a return home earlier than I had planned... shin splints.

At a small village, a third of the way into the journey, I stopped in a bar, scoffing my way through some great croissants and was thinking I had to get some weight out of my rucksack. Remember this was my first trip and I was carrying about 16Kg without water. (I now have this down to 7Kg) Realising there was a post office across the road, there followed a comedy routine where I mimed about buying some boxes and getting them sent home. I managed to get rid of a third of my stuff, but at the expense of feeling a bit cold in the evenings.

I took Joy through the Aubrack some years later; the snow had been replaced by driving rain. In the bar they had croissants, but they were badly burnt and the post office was an empty shell, closed for good.









If ever there was a day where my 'edges' were I tested, this was it. Unfortunately I had forgotten this journey was not a test, but supposed to be fun. This first trip on the Camino made me think about changing from task orientated work to relaxed retirement. When I crawled into the hostel that night I was very tired, 20 miles is a long way on roads.

The lesson learnt was you can walk for a long time...it is just a matter of standing up and putting one leg in front of another, but after 12 miles there is little enjoyment. A day that goes into the 'experience' if not the 'fun' box of life.







## Golinhac to Conques - 22k

I slept fitfully and I think everyone in the room got up in the middle of the night. I am fed up of being surrounded by the smell of sweaty socks, and cheese ...the bad news is the socks and cheese are all mine! Even when the socks are washed they are disgusting. The Camembert is now three days old and I have to say that the socks are firmly in the lead on the stink stakes.

I had the time of breakfast wrong by half an hour, it was still dark but there was a colourful sunrise. I was joined by two jovial Frenchmen and on my suggestion we stopped the bakers van to buy croissants to 'keep us going'. This was followed with a photo shoot, with croissants and sunrise.

At breakfast I was joined by two women who had noticed me talking English the night before. Veronique is French, but her English was excellent having spent 6 years in UK at university and then with a French bank. Elisabeth is German, retired from a senior position in the German Employment system, her English came from spending 2 years in England a number of years ago. Both had a good sense of humour and I was pleased to join them for the day's walking.









We stopped for coffee at Espeyrac, sitting on a sunny terrace overlooking a valley of fields. Spring had suddenly arrived; with some trees in blossom and others greening up. This day was more relaxed for me as it was 30% shorter in distance than I was used to; it was pleasant to lose the 'onwards' bit from my life.



Eventually we came to Conques. Everyone I meet who has gone this way talks about what a special place it is ....and they are right. First of all it is very small, but has clung to the hill side ever since a hermit founded the place in the 8thC. The current Abbey dates from the 11thC and is a beautiful simple design. The history of the Abbey is like the history of Europe.... varied. For a time even the Calvinists managed to get their paws on it. The church came to prominence when one of the monks stole the remains of St Foy from another abbey; after that the popularity of the place took off.

I fortunately had my own room as the socks and Camembert were now working together to form a lethal gas. After a quick shower, I sat in the evening sun light and sketched the chapel of St Foy that sat on a hill in the distance..... a peaceful moment on a pleasant day. I met the team again for dinner, which was a fish terrine, followed by a shepherd's pie and then an apple flan desert; all washed down with lots of wine. After this I went to bed.... I thought it had been a very enjoyable day, great company, pleasant weather and arriving at a special place.

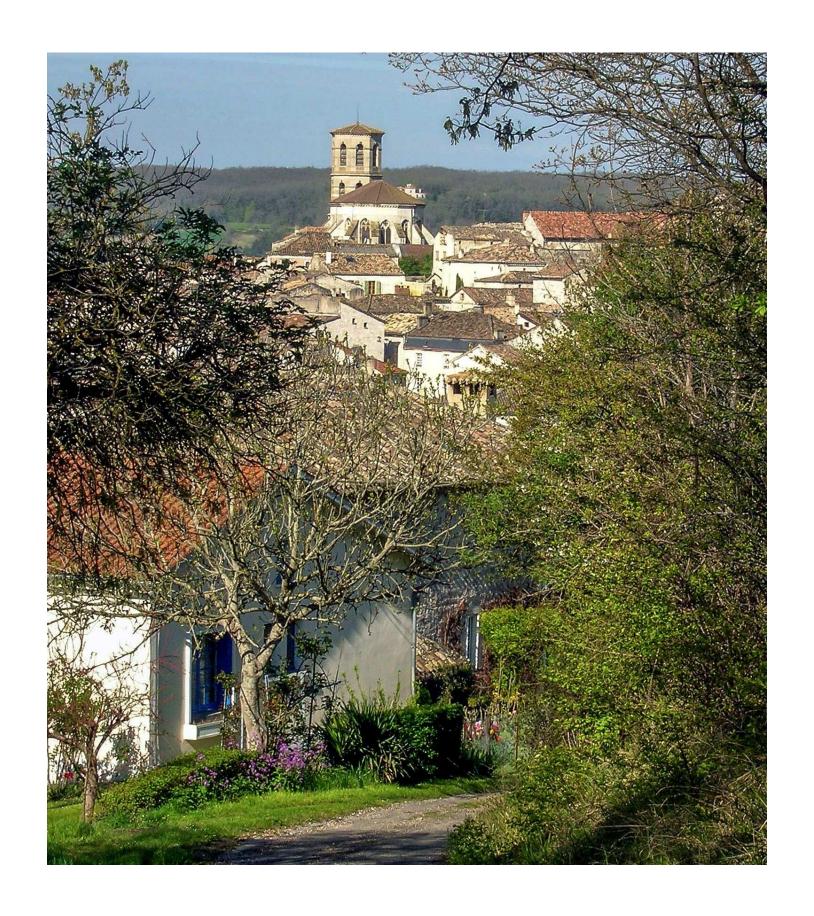




### Lascabes to Le Charlton - 26k

After a few days by myself I joined up again with Elizabeth, who I had first met with Veronique in Conques. The day starts off bright and cold but turned into a lovely spring day. The mixture of warmth and rolling countryside made the trip to the village of Montcuq very enjoyable.

The village itself has a lot of Brit expats, complete with a shelf at the front of the grocery store selling rich tea biscuits, baked beans and HP sauce... British Cuisine at it's best? Heaven knows what the locals think of the English in general and the ex pats in particular. I bought The Times...hypocrisy or what! We then settled down to coffee and croissants in the local bar. After lingering as long as we dare, we bought some food for the evening meal as we knew there would not be any supplies at the Gîte.









At Lauzerte Elisabeth left me for the shorter route while I relived old memories. This Bastide town was built in the 12c and stands out like a beacon over the surrounding area (I believe the name translation of Lauzerte is lantern) This was the place, three years ago, that I first met someone walking the Camino. I drew this sketch then of a Scotsman who had completed the Spanish section a few years earlier and was now walking 30k to the Spanish border from Le Puy. This was the man who gave me the idea that 30k was the distance you walked in a day. Above is a picture of myself standing in the same place, having taken his advice and now enjoying shin splints because I had walked too far, too fast.

At the Gite Elisabeth had arrived and kindly cooked our supper (my side of the deal was to carry it from the Montcuq) Joy of joys we could use a washing machine and a dryer for 3.5 Euro's. Elisabeth and I split up again the next morning as I left very early to join friends Andy and Monica for lunch in Moissac.



#### Moissac to Auvillar - 20k

Today, the big decision was whether to follow the canal, saving 2k and walking on a nice level sandy track or follow the Camino route and climb up and down hills on a muddy path .... In no time I was on my way to the canal.

At about 09:30 I turned off the track to Pommevic for a two stage stop, first to the bakery and then the bar, to drink coffee and finish off an old Times newspaper. After my break it was back to the canal.

Before leaving the canal I noticed an otter, diving out of sight as soon as it saw me. Leaving the river I climbed up to the lovely little town of Auvillar. It was only 2pm so I had an afternoon off. I enjoyed the rest of the day looking around the town, admiring the views from its ancient walls, writing cards, reading the newspaper, and having a medicinal beer. A pleasant afternoon in a pleasant place.















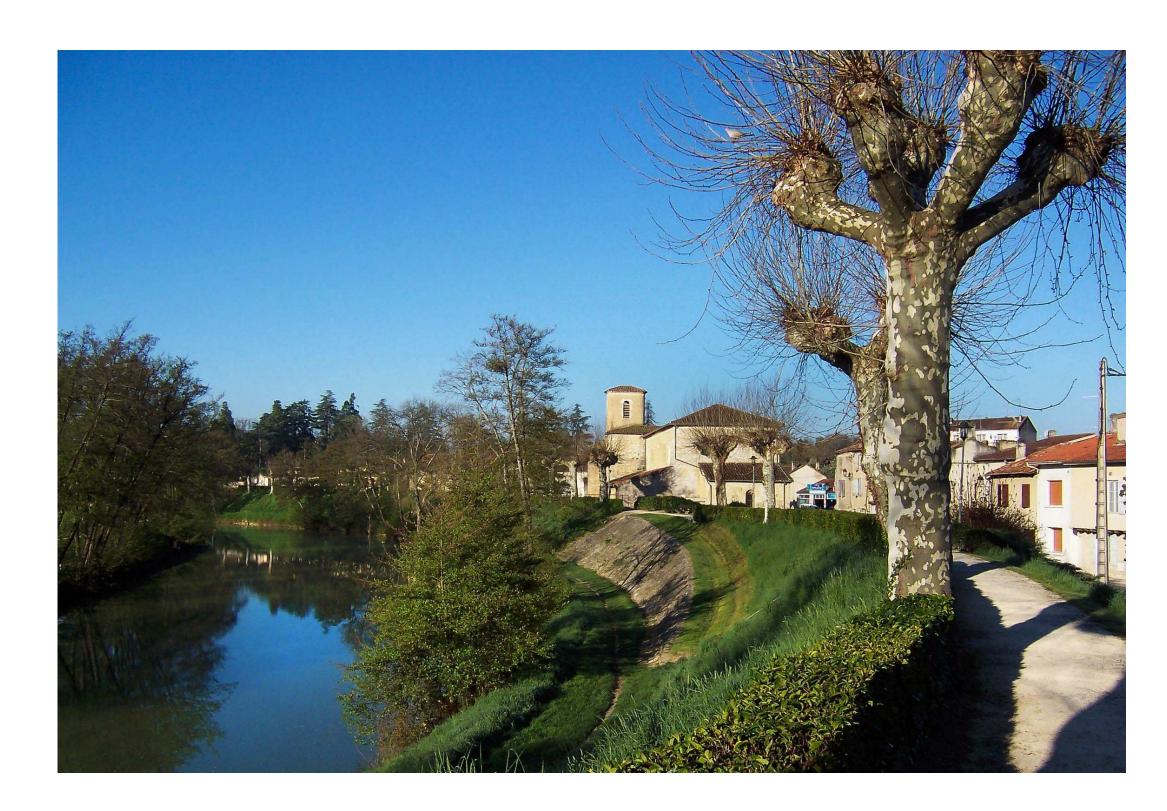


## Condom to Montreal de Gar - 20Km

The original plan for my first journey was to walk from Le Puy to the Pyrenees. Through my own lack of knowledge / stupidity I had to stop at Condom and return home because of injury. The following year I returned to the same spot to commence my next journey, taking me to Pamplona.

I flew to Toulouse, then caught the evening bus to Condom. I stayed at an old school which had been converted into a Gite. It was before Easter and the Gite was very empty, except for an English family who were returning to the UK. The next day was a lovely spring morning; I scoffed my breakfast croissant on a bench by the river and then started my new journey.







It was a great day's walking with perfect weather. I enjoyed a varied scenery, a coffee stop with a quick sketch at the walled city of Lassaringle, lunch on the steps of a church in the middle of nowhere and a visit to an ancient Roman site.













At the end of the day I sat resting by the town hall and found myself watching the group on the left. I thought how fortunate they were to have such a pleasant pass time to enjoy with friends they had probably known for a long time.

This part of the Camino seemed to have few Gites. On the right is my hotel at Montreal; the accommodation was OK, complete with a visiting returning 'grim' who had spent the last 4 years walking....a tad self-indulgent perhaps?









#### Aroue to Ostabat - 24KM

I arrived at the farm above; it only had one room turned into a dormitory. Fortunately I was the only one staying. It had been a wet day and I was glad of the space to dry out. The farmer's wife kindly dried some of my kit by the huge fire in the living room. For dinner I was joined by a French couple I had met on and off during my trip. They had made the mistake of staying at the municipal Gite...with no food. However they had been shown the way to the farm for grub....and a magnificent meal it was too.... probably the best of the whole 2,000 mile journey, all for about £8.

An Aperitif of Ker and white wine, as well as red wine with the meal

A vegetable soup, that was incredibly tasty.

A beautifully moist, but set, omelette containing cooked green peppers.

A bowl of lettuce (for those that know me will not be surprised I missed out on this one)

Pork served with caramelised apples ...the apples tasted so good.

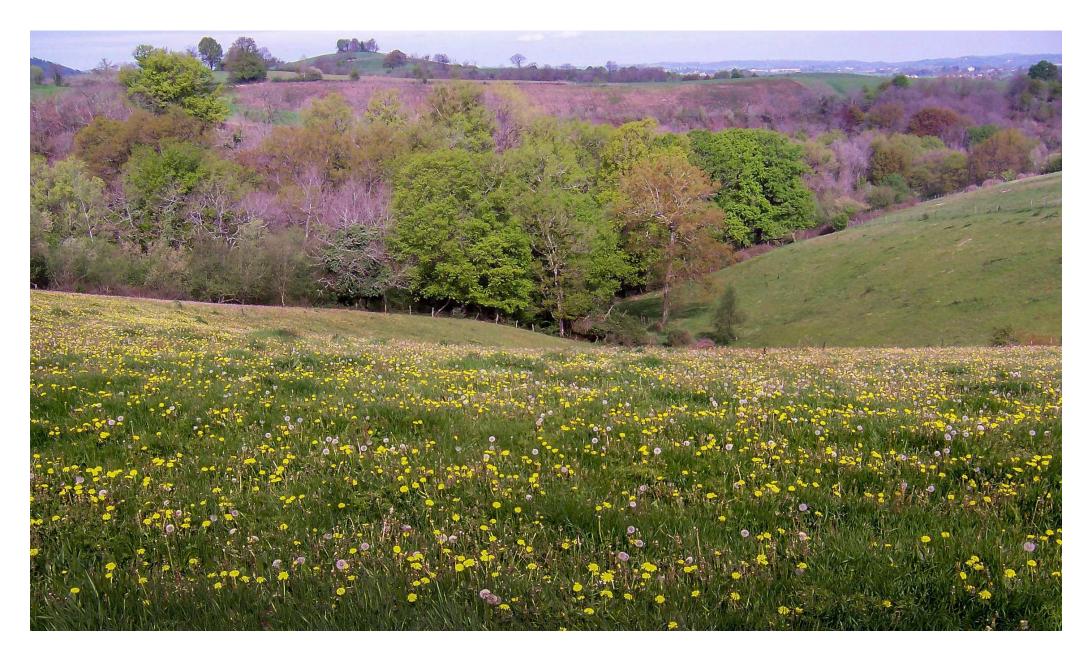
Cheese with Kiwi fruit confit (serving cheese with confit is normal in this area of France)

Strawberries served in sugar and wine (I think)









The next morning the farmer's son showed me a sneaky short cut to the Camino, cutting out a lot of hills. Soon after re-joining the 'road' I came across an old chapel of a design that is common in the Basque area. I presume the room attached was for the priest. It was locked, but I climbed up the stairs to another room, which was a little treasure trove of ancient delights.

Today was going to be without villages or shops, but I saw a 'variant' with a map on a post that was designed to take you past two Gites. It also made a lot of sense in that it took you past a bar, no food but coffee and beer. As I sat having my lunch of stale baguette and banana I was joined by two groups of 'grims.

After coffee, we split up and I walked on. My only company was to be a dog aproaching from the opposite direction. We acknowledged each other and we both walked on; I to the village of Osterbat, which looked great from a distance, but rather dreary on arrival.







However the Gîte about a kilometer further on was fine and I had a room to myself.... for the last time on my journey to Santiago. In the evening the dinner table was full with 15 people of varying nationalities, a fun evening. This marked a change in the journey; meeting only a few people to many as the route became busier.





We are very much in Basque country and the locals are proud of it, everywhere there were Basque flags, and different calligraphy / language. After the meal the host sang Basque songs.... I suppose it added to the occasion.







### St.Jean -Pied-de-Port to Orrison -10Km (if that!)

A lot of time and energy is spent in discussing the way over the Pyrenees as though it was an attack on K2. In bad weather there are alternatives that must be taken from the legendary Route Napoleon. This is because at the top of the pass all the way marks are on stones which are easily covered by snow.

I feel I should let the secret out of the bag, most of the route is covered by Mr Macadam's finest finish. However, to do the whole trip from St Jean to Roncesvalles in Spain is 21Km, but if you allow for the fact it is all 'up' for 80% of the way that is the equivalent of 30Km in one go. ... but fret ye not, I was told of a way to make the whole experience easier and more pleasant.

St Jean P de P is the Kings Cross Station of the Pilgrim world in Europe, with the exception of the Spanish most people believe this is 'The must start' place for Santiago... it is not, but who cares (The Spanish usually have the good sense to start the other side of the Pyrenees)

So watching the 'grims leave under the clock tower arch in St Jean from 06:30 (the enthusiastic and keen) to 09:30 (the not so enthusiastic) is akin to looking over a bridge on the M25 during a working week.

In days of yore people would start their pilgrimage from outside their front door. The cathedral cities such as Le Puy were just convenient collection points to travel together for safety.











My sneaky plan is to walk as far as the new Gite at Orrison half way up the French side of the Pyrenees and then go over to the Spanish side the next day. The weather is great and by taking it very slowly the 10k is all over by 11:00 am.... another tough day at the office.

On the way I meet a dutch lady called Mien, who takes a photo of me trying to look 'Windswept & Interesting' Also we have vultures the size of Eagles overhead. At one point there are eight of them circling over me and I wonder what could be interesting them down here. Clearly they are after smaller and younger meat than me as they shove off after a few minutes. Refuge Orrison sounds like a bothy in the middle of no where, but as you turn the corner to see the gite's panoramic outside bar you realise this is a great place.

The rest of the day is spent drinking coffee, the occasional beer, chatting, reading and even making a quick sketch. As Rob would say 'just hanging out and looking good' ....Do I feel guilty about not going the whole way to Roncesvalles? No not for a second. A very enjoyable day, great weather and good company.









# Pamplona to Puente La Reina, Spain - 24Km .... and Jim's Birthday

Staying at the newly refurbished Albergue in Pamplona, the day started at 6.30 with a bell we think was stolen from a cross channel ferry. My walking pal of many years, Jim, who had joined me for the first four days, didn't think it was an auspicious start to his birthday. By 7.30 we were on our way... in the dark.

Things were not looking good in the Calle Mayor, where 18 months before I had sat at a very nice bar with Sticky Bun (SB). It was not only closed, but also it was not there. The good news was on the outskirts of the city we found a bar with big croissants and Cafe con leche (CCL).

The main activity of the day was climbing the Sierra del Perdon, going down the other side and avoiding the promised thunderstorms.















We stayed at the private Albergue of Santiago Apostol, the other side of Puente La Reina. Looking back this Albergue, whilst retaining all the architectural splendour of an aircraft hanger, was probably one of the best Albergues I slept in.

Before our evening meal we celebrated Jim's birthday, sharing his miniature cake he had been given by his grandson.













#### Azofra to Grañon - 20Km

Azofra supplied a great municipal Albergue. Unfortunately I dropped my camera whilst unpacking, which led to out of focus pictures for the rest of the journey to Santiago.

The weather during the first part of the morning was very strange; there were black skies in the distance but I remained in the sun.....very dramatic. For the first hour I was totally absorbed in the effect, terrific fun with my wonky camera. The vineyards disappeared at Azofra and we are now into wheatfields. Just to add to the drama a lot of odd bits of field banks are being burnt to eradicate the vole epidemic they are suffering in this area.

....I have trouble dealing with out of focus pictures...if you do, just regard them as 'different'.











In the town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada I sat, drew and ate my lunch at the same time, producing a questionable drawing while chomping on even more questionable cheese.

In the afternoon I walked on to Grañon, where the Albergue was an extension to the church and run by volunteers from the Spanish St James Society. The bad news was that the sleeping arrangements were grab a very thin mattress and find a place. Somehow it all seemed to work, but to be on the safe side I grab two mattresses.

On the return from the trip I was looking through my pictures and decided to make a painting of the wheat fields. I think if I had put the clouds in as they were, no one would have accepted the picture. I am glad to say it sold a year later.





# Hornillos del Camino to Itero De Lavera - 30Km

I arrived in Hornillos early the previous afternoon, it was raining. On a wet day an Albergue is a grim wet cold place to stay, fortunately the sun came out and the room looked a lot better.

In the morning we were greeted with drizzle and saw the world through a fine mist. Little did I realise as the rain disappeared 5Km down the road that this was the last rain I would see for the rest of the way to Santiago.















The scenery today was gently undulating, but a hill called Alto de Mostelares made it interesting for eyes and lungs. This was the start of the 'Messeta.'



Above: The Castrojeriz Castle and Colegiata de Santa María del Manzano Over: The top of the hill Alto de Mostelares....the start of The Messeta.





Above: I had to walk all the way past the trees in the distance to get to the Albergue.

Right: The Trees in the distance!



## Sahagún to El Burgo Ranero - 18Km

This is an honest description of what can best be described as not my finest hour as a 'grim'. There I was at 8am in the cafe near the municipal Albergue of Sahagún, sitting in the half light having a breakfast of CCL + SB and quietly contemplating what I was going to do to amuse myself for the first few cold hours of the journey. Suddenly two men of my age walked past me at full speed, one wearing a red anorak and matching rucksack, the other all in blue, clearly mates. They were heads down, not looking right or left, powering themselves along with their walking sticks.

I thought...' we are going to have a race!'. The two gentlemen didn't know it but they had just been entered into the 'First to the next village bar for a CCL+SB + Z (veterans division) 10Km' race. I had a black top with black and grey rucksack, to match my beard and hair, so I was as well colour-coordinated as the opposition.

Being a sporting lad I gave them a few minutes start while I paid the bill, then we were off. I was in for the long haul as they had disappeared from view but I powered along the track beside the road. I came within sight of them, way out in front on the tarmac.... clearly this was serious stuff. A little disconcertingly I passed a memorial to a pilgrim who had passed away on the journey. Had he been caught racing too and been struck down as punishment???

At the 7Km mark I caught up with the blue man at the rear. He was not pleased to see my shadow and started to accelerate (somehow the details of the race had got out.) After playing mind games with our shadows for a few moments he eventually fell behind. I then caught up with with the man in red, he looked over his shoulder as I neared him, put on a bit of speed, but pulled over for a pee as I passed him, clearly devastated in defeat.

Outside the village bar I celebrated with the full CCL+SB+ Z.

Retelling the story on the phone home that evening Joy queried if it was in the spirit of the Camino? Absolutely not....but it was great fun.















While recovering from my race sitting outside the bar, a rural activity which has been happening for many years unfolded from the farm yard opposite.

Two Donkeys appeared (I suspect Mum + foal) stopped and waited just outside the farmyard. Mum was carrying what looked to be haversacks of supplies.

Then a flock of sheep came to the edge of the yard stopped and waited until the shepherd arrived with his guard dogs.

They then all moved forward with the dignity of a Church of England Easter procession, out to the day's pasture. A delightful 10 minutes in my life.

Then the church bells rang the hour, but there was no church to be seen. The tower had fallen down in the 90's; in its place two huge steel girders had been erected from which the bells were rehung with the addition of an electronic chimer.

Like most church bells in Spain they were not tuned....but on the hour they clonked out.... perhaps not very elegant, but very practical.









The rest of the walk was as the picture on the left....so were the following days. The local government had kindly planted the row of trees to give the 'grims some shade, even in mid October I was very glad they were there.

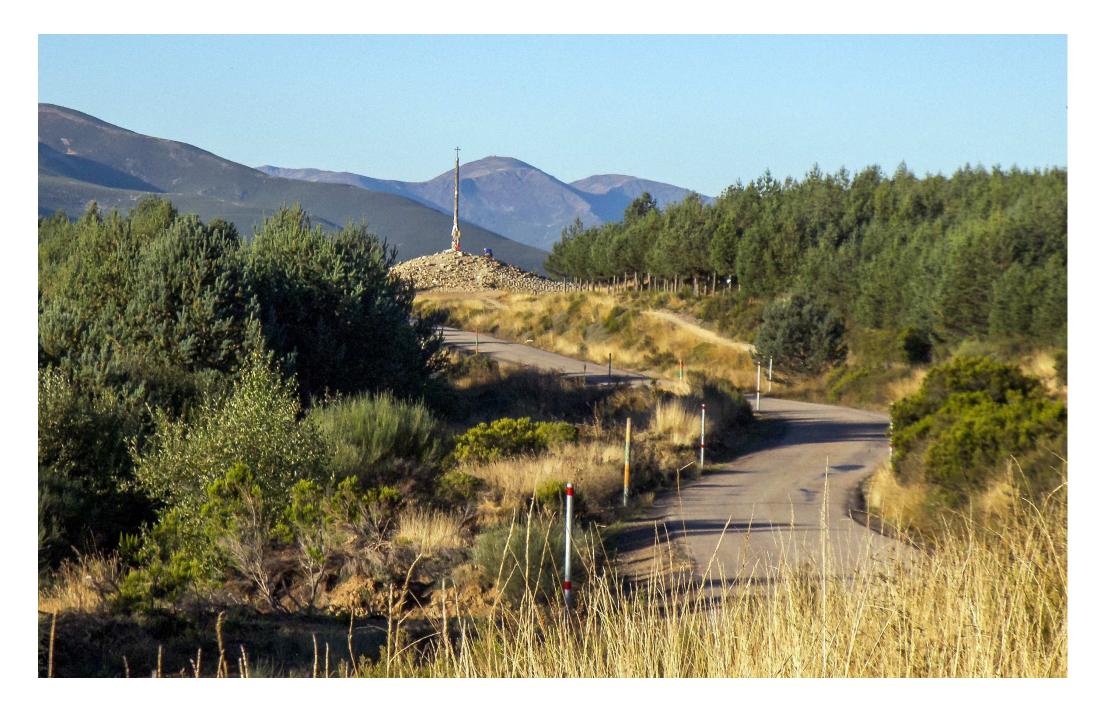
I arrived at El Burgo Ranero at lunch time and enjoyed an afternoon of hanging out, chatting, reading. It was Sunday and I attempted to go to mass....usually short, in a language you do not understand and you get left alone, my sort of service.

But after a bit I realised the words were different and suddenly the statue of Mary was picked up and a procession through the village started. Being from a Presbyterian background I peeled off the edge and watched them pass by as I was having a beer at the bar; for this I will probably end up in Purgatory for longer, but remember I receive a partial 'get out of jail' card if I get to Santiago.





The painting above I completed on my return. It is of The Messeta ...which literally means plateau or table. The Messeta covers much of Spain, cold and windy in winter, hot and airless in the summer. I was walking over it in early October where it was 35c at mid-day. The walk in this area takes about 10 days and is very similar on each day.



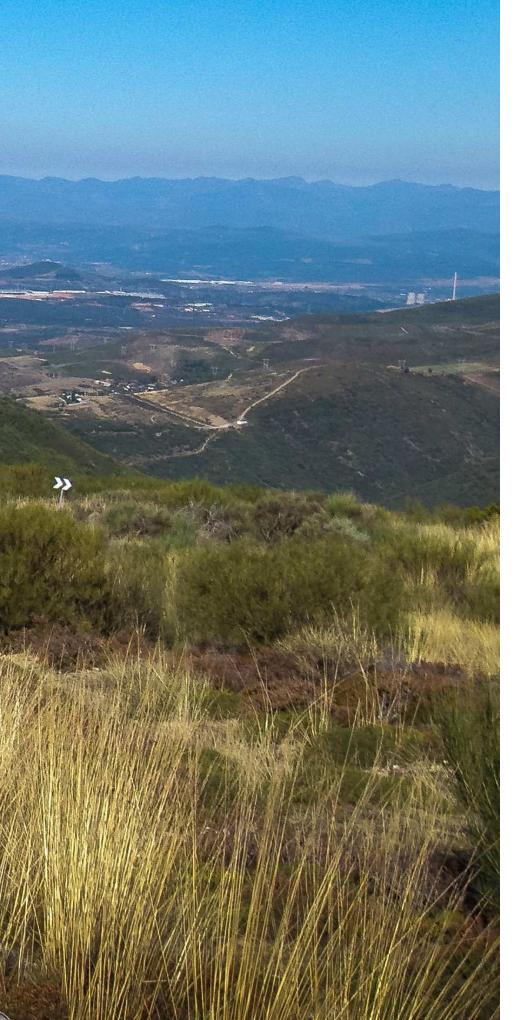
# Rabanal del Camino to Molinaseca - 24Km

Today is going to take us to the highest point on this trip at 1500mtrs. After I leave Rabanal in the dark using my head torch and witness yet another great sun rise (which are mildly addictive, pity about the cold) I get into conversation with Dalan, an Irishman, retired teacher and flute player..... we walk together until lunch time and meet up again in the evening.

At Cruz de Ferro, the high point of the pass, 'grims' have traditionally carried a stone representing all their sins to throw onto the mound. I did not carry a stone, on the principle it would be a very big boulder to represent all my misdemeanours.









As we cross the pass the house architecture changes, we see buildings designed to keep the livestock underneath with the living quarters on top. I actually saw this used as it was originally intended in Galicia; the smell must be awful. Also of note were the huge sweet chestnut trees, looking magnificent in the autumn sunlight.

In the afternoon, walking by myself I came across a flock of sheep. You get used to giving them a wide berth, as they always have a big dog that is there to guard them. Fortunately I spotted 'Rover' just in time before I ran into him under a tree.









In the late afternoon Dalan and I go for a drink. We are joined at our table by a German lady blessed with a great sense of humour; we did not recognise her at first, obviously not a 'grim as she has a string of pearls, skirt and heels.

Eventually we discover we had coffee with her and another 'grim called Jason in the morning. Maria had been given the trip as a 25th wedding anniversary present from her husband.....she had decided to put a few 'must haves' in her rucksack. The give-away was the 'tide mark' of her sunburn where her boots finished....what style.

If I was going to identify the best day's walking on the northern Spanish Camino, it would be today, it had everything great scenery, sunrise, good weather and fun company.



#### Sarria to Portomarin - 22Km

The day before I followed the alternative route along a valley near Samos and somewhere missed the 'arrows'. To cut a long and somewhat embarrassing story short, I managed to go in a complete circle. (Like most men I am never lost, just suffering a N.C.E.... Navigational Calibration Error)

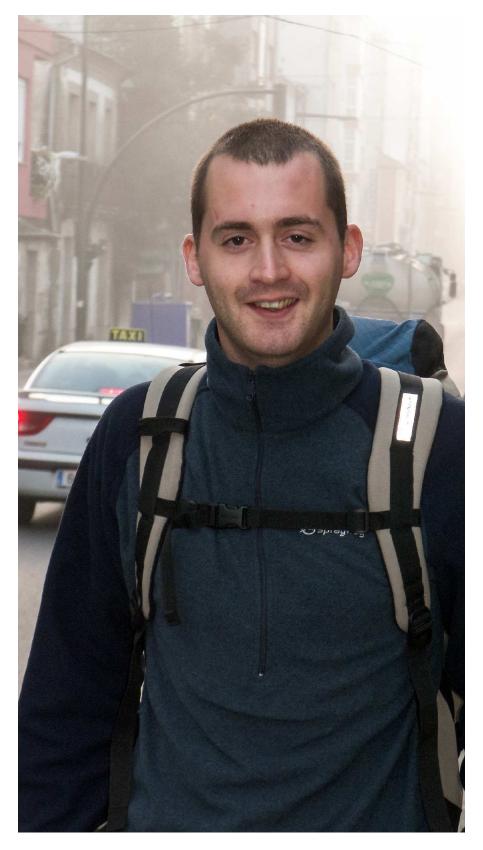
At the end was I was walking with the sun in my eyes and I knew it should have been behind me. In frustration I then followed the boring road to Sarria..... not a happy bunny.

But the ray of sunshine at the end of the day was that our son Rob was going to join me for the last 100Km to Santiago.... 100Km is the minimum distance you need to walk to get your Compostela.

I realised the next 6 days were going to be very different from the last 30, no regrets, this was a great day for me and I hope Rob.

After a 4 stage journey and some nifty footwork Rob arrived from Kerry in Ireland at 7pm.... The next morning we set off on a lovely day to Portomarin, the only disappointment for me was that I felt the scenery was just like Rob had left in Ireland, but with sun and different beer.









It was Sunday and I could not find any bread so we lunched on cheese and bananas sitting on some logs.

We walked on into Portomarin. I knew the town had been rebuilt on higher ground to make way for a reservoir, what I was not ready for was the empty reservoir with the old bridge and some of the town showing through.

I convinced Rob that the Municipal Albergue was the place to stay; it was empty when we arrived. We spent the afternoon, chatting, meeting the odd 'grim and generally catching up.









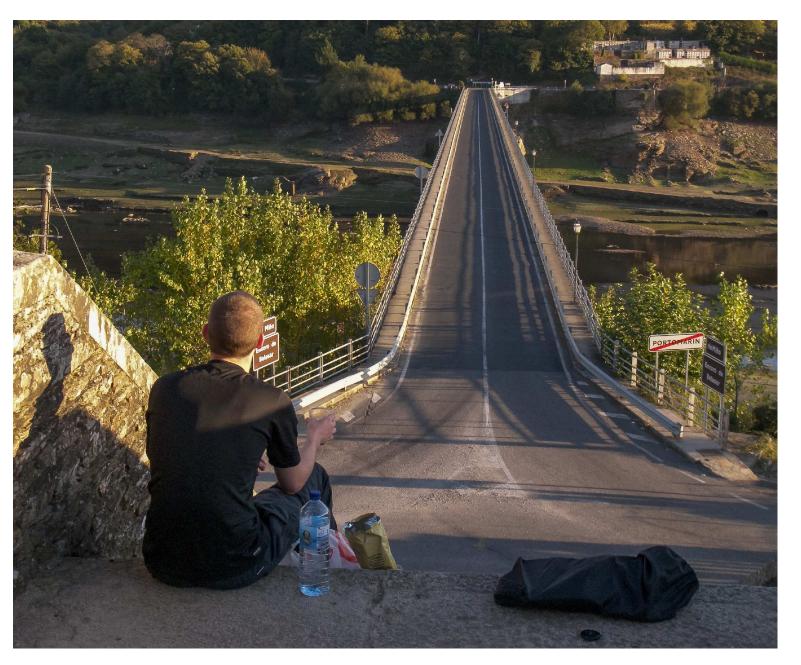




In the evening we bought a bottle of Rioja and sat at the top of the steps over the river and watched the sun go down....great day.

Unfortunately that night all the Spanish poured into the hostel very late; they were doing the last 100k over a long weekend. Noisy, the room was full and there was no air.... No sleep for either of us. Rob insisted we stayed in hotels the rest of the trip.

The other little statistic worth mentioning here is I drank more wine / booze in the 5 days with Rob than the rest of the 5 weeks. Led astray by my son?... again.



As we sat on the steps I was telling Rob of the belief in the past that when you received your 'compostela' for your pilgrimage you could half your time in purgatory.

With devastating logic, Rob offered an alternative plan. Sin twice as much and have the same time in purgatory.

There are times I feel as a father I have failed my son, but at the same time admire his thinking ...with that we had another glass of wine.

### Arca to Santiago de Compostela - 18Km

So there it was, the alleged tomb of St James, one of the 12 disciples of Christ..... so many pilgrims for over a thousand years had walked from every corner of Europe to be here. In the middle ages nearly 10% of the population of Europe made the journey....powerful stuff. From Le Puy I had managed 1,500 Km or 950 miles. Compared to the people in past centuries I had it easy. Ryan Air and Easyjet got me to my start point and I did not have to walk home.

Our first hour was taken up with finding a hotel, after that we presented our stamped credentials at the camino office and were given our Compostela.

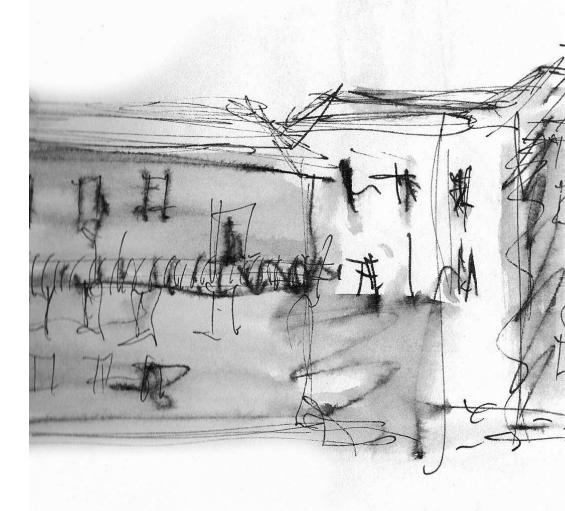
After a tour round the city and a few bottles of Cava we arrived outside the Cathedral at 6.30 where the 'grims' congregate. I was delighted to see again a lot of the people I had met on the road; Olivia, Olaf, Lisa, Ana, Jasper, Samantha, Maria, Sabina, Marie Louise, Marian, Julia, Jason and many others.









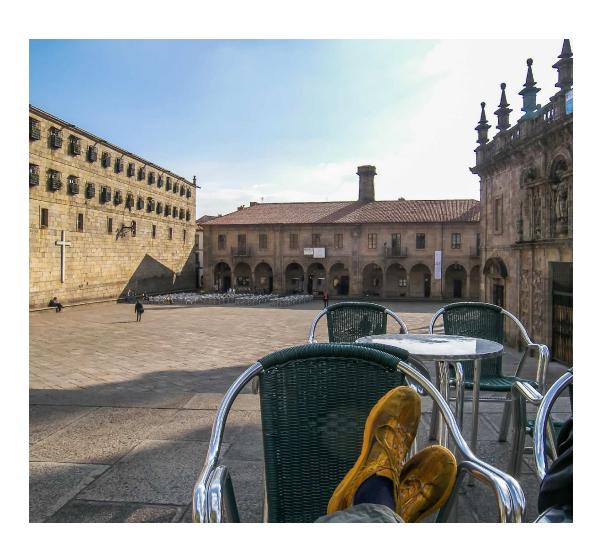




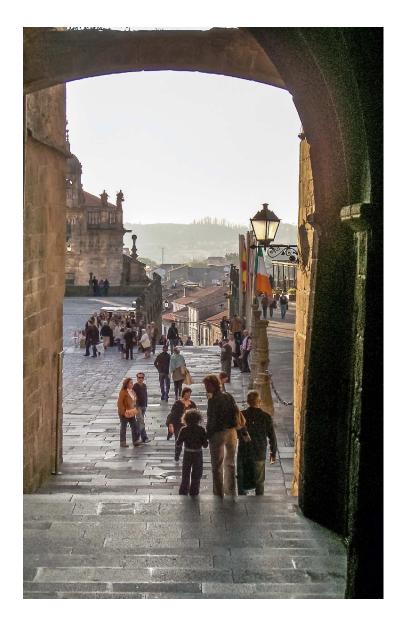
What started off six years before as a desire for a bit of an adventure turned into something much more. The memory I will take away with me is of the liberating feeling of carrying all the possessions you need on your back.

It was great to have Jim and Rob join me for part of the time. Most of all I will remember the inherent kindliness of the people I met along the way and the daily changing scenery of life going on around me as I passed by.....

Oh yes.... and the need to get rid of this B awful beard.









I walked The Via de la Plata from Seville travelling north, but for this part of the book I wanted to carry on with the experience of traveling from Salzburg to Seville. To do this I have reversed the walks so they go from north to south.

## Villanueva de Campean to Zamora 19 km

It is October and I am now in the west of Spain where the sun does rise until after 8am. The bad news is it is very cold until 10.... and very hot by 10.30am. On the upside the sunrise is fantastic.

I walked for days feeling very frustrated that I did not have a tripod and able to use a slow shutter speed...but it ain't going to happen, so I did the best I could. The variety and colour of the light was wonderful. I have always thought a good sunrise beats a sunset any day.

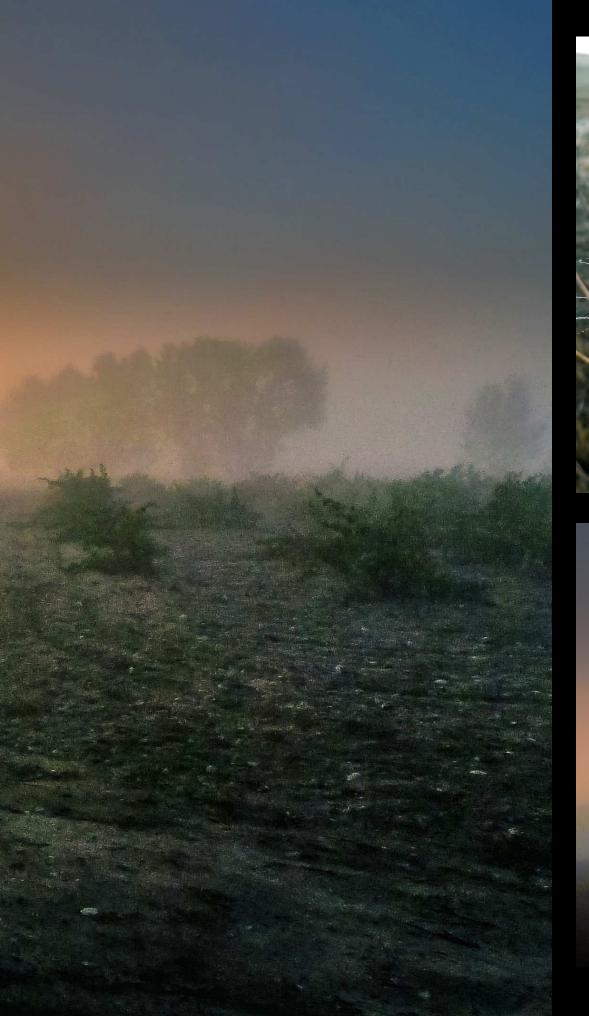
So I walked for an hour like a puppy with two bowls of food in separate rooms, wanting to capture the moment but trying to capture every opportunity.































I don't remember a lot about the rest of the day except it was hot. By lunch time I arrived at Zamora. I booked into a hostel and as I was early enough for a traditional Spanish lunch in the Plaza Mayor. The lentil and pork soup does not look much, but was great. I was also provided with wine for two, which I turned into wine for one, then slept through the rest of the afternoon... ready to join the Spanish as they woke up at 5pm with a quick tour of Zamora.







## San Pedros Rados to Salamanca 25 km and Day off in Salamanca

As a change from spectacular sunrises I had a cold and misty morning that gradually cleared. The countryside moved from a bleak ploughed flat land to the dire outskirts of the City. However Salamanca itself is very much worth a visit. The sketch on the next page of The Cale Major demonstrates you should not draw when drinking, but I am sure one line must be right? ... Whatever... I believe it transmits the essence of my day off; relaxed, pleasant and interesting.





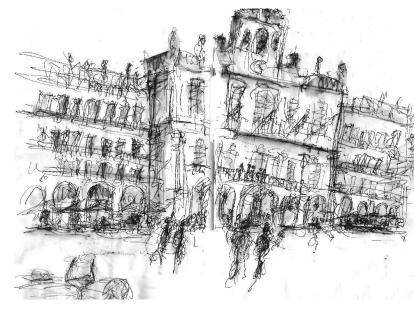




















# 25. Aldeanueva del Camino to Calzar Bejar 23 km

The night before we had a big storm and it was still raining as we walked to breakfast. I am glad to say it cleared after the first 5 miles, but you always thought the storm would return.



As the sun came out I start to climb the biggest hills on The Via de la Plata. Passing through a pleasant town I could not find an open bar for coffee...disaster.







I move into almost 'English' countryside and then on to typical Spanish scrub land. I am blown away with the frequent reminders of history when I find a Roman road marker with its year of installation.

In the village where I stayed many of the houses were festooned with flowers, sadly though a lot of the properties were empty.....you get the feeling of a place slowly decaying.











## Carcaboso to Cáparra 20 km

The previous day had been long (31km), hot and mind bogglingly boring. I had not managed to find an Alburge so I had a hotel room to myself.

The next morning I left just as light was breaking. Before the sun rose I had the moon for company....then another great sunrise.

In Extremadura they mark the Via de La Plata with coloured lines on boxes. Yellow means the modern way, green the original Roman road. It always gave me a moment of excitement to be on the original road......the Roman armies, the Moorish troops all passed this way.

















The walk was typical of the area, hot, not particularly exciting but pleasant enough.... better than a rainy day in Barnsley.



The day ended at a place called Caparra which is a ruined Roman town. Unfortunately there is not any accommodation for miles. However the book gives you a number of a hostel, who came and picked me up and I was taken back to a sort of motorway service place.

The food was great + a bottle of wine. I didn't drink it all...just nearly.



# Caser Caceres to Alcamara - 20 Km

Another day, another pre-dawn departure and another brilliant sunrise. I like the blue hour before the sun rises the best.... I still feel frustrated at the lack of tripod, but as it is very cold before 9am it is just as well I keep walking.

I ended up in a modern Alburge that looks like a nuclear bunker on the outside, but OK on the inside.... Except the food, this was almost non-existent and produced in a microwave. Unfortunately we were a long, long way from any village. A French party who were also staying in the Alburge seemed to suffer the most. Alcohol seemed to be the food substitute for us all as we watched the magnificent sun set.











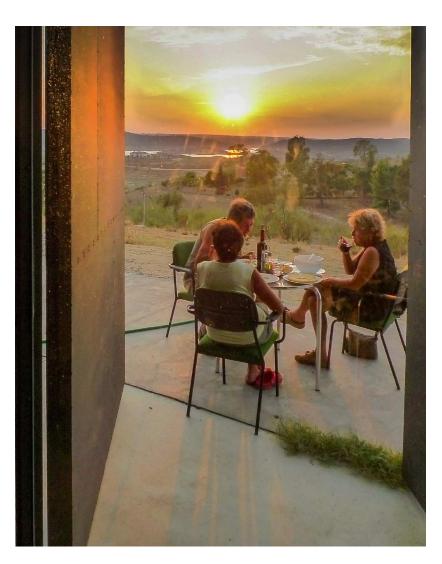


















# Alcescar to Aldea del Cano 17Km

The stretch between Mérida and Cáseres was high on the list of 'boring bits'; unfortunately for Jim who had joined me for this section. I had developed shin splints so I was going home with Jim at Caseres rather than completing my journey.



In Alcescar we stayed in a monastery, which for a change, provided good rooms. I had also been told I had sold an abstract painting the day before, so we were suffering from a small, but significant hang over.











The accommodation in Aldea de Cano, our destination, was a bit limited. We planned to walk there, then get a Taxi to Caceres, the next night's stopping place, then catch a bus back on the morrow to begin the walk where we left off.

The other good bit of news is we found a bar half way through the morning for coffee.... and the weather improved to be sunny and warm. After coffee we found ourselves on the Roman Via de la Plata which had been excavated, along with Roman marker posts. On reaching Aldea de Cano we found an outside bar in the square. A local regular was very helpful in finding a Taxi. To pass the time waiting for its arrival we watched the storks on the church opposite the bar.

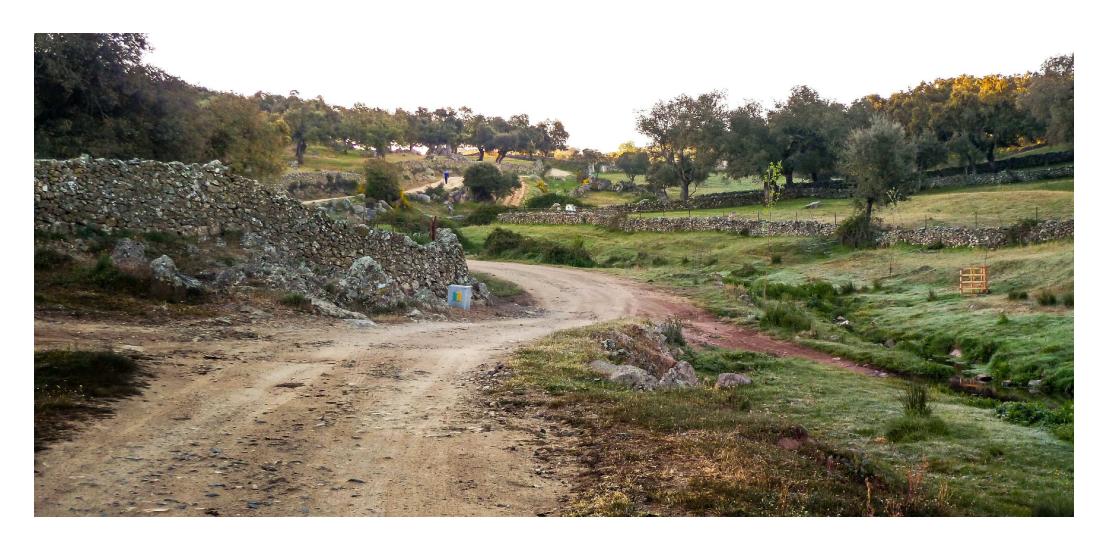


### Monesterio to Fuente de Cantos - 22Km

Today was the day when the great plan went awry.... I started out bright and early at my usual brisk speed, passing initially through wooded farm land, then on to an 'edge of Dartmoor' sort of scene and then onto sweeping hilly arable land. It was sunny but as soon as I left the woods there was a bitter northerly wind. Near the beginning of the walk I could see Fuente de Cantos in the distance...it never seemed to get closer, but the wind increased.

Half way through the afternoon I thought my right boot was rather tight, half an hour later I stopped to adjust it. The boot was not too tight, but my ankle had swollen up. Immediately I knew I had shin splints. .....B\*\*\*\*r!!!

The 'shin splints' problem 'did' for my first journey four years before, through taking short cuts, walking too far / fast on metalled roads and not drinking enough water. However I had not suffered any problems since then. This time, with the exception of one day, I had kept to sensible distances but all the surfaces were very hard. Talking to a few experts in the medical field along the journey it seems my delight in fast walking on a hard surface was probably my downfall along with lack of fluid intake (the medical advice was from a nurse who worked in a orthopedic ward and a surgeon, Lucia, who I had supper with that evening) ...in the end I returned home with Jim after we had reached Caseras and I returned to finish my journey in late September.









The accommodation for the evening was in a converted convent turned into a tourist albergue, beautifully fitted out....but in need of more beds. On my tour of the village I bumped into my last Easter procession (It was Easter Sunday) It was fun watching a happy crowd of young village people position the float into it's resting place inside the church.

The evening was spent in the company of Daniela from Germany who was suffering terribly from blisters, a very cheerful and colourful lad from the Canaries, who's name I never learnt and a fun couple from Madrid. Michael was Canadian while his partner, Lucia was Spanish; regrettably they had to return home the next day.















# Seville to Guillena - 23Km

I arrived late on Palm Sunday, during holy week. I struggled to get from the Station to the hotel through the crowds, because of the many processions. The next day I 'acquired' a credential....entry book for refugios, topped up my Spanish sim card, visited some sites, hung out, ate sticky buns and watched the processions. Including a singer giving her 'all' over a float. To the delight of the crowd the floats, carried on 'victims' heads, are steered round corners with the enthusiasm of a newly qualified HGV driver with a sizable hang over.









The next morning after a CCL + C + ZN at a bar by the hotel. I left before sun rise.....the sun does not come up until 7.45. The hinterland to the city is OK. I was to enjoy a coffee in a village mid morning, later on I realised this was an unusual and a mid morning CCL was not going to happen again for a long time.





The warm afternoon was spent walking down a long track.... with the exception of a ford, you could say it was a tad boring, but being the first day it did not matter. The night was spent in a grim bar/hotel. The municipal alburge was full....only 8 beds and the 'new' building did not look as though it had been touched for a few years.



# Postscript......

This is a picture in Bavaria of Rob walking one way and an old lady walking the other. It was the wettest day of the whole journey from Salzberg to Seville. We were in the middle of nowhere...a long way from any building, village or town. Who knows where she was going, but she was determined to get there.

The journey was not all about sunshine and interesting places, but memorable moments like this one.





M Andrew Lieves las Adresse 3 Kinsfigher Close. 9452 65P

ENGLISH. Nº Carte d'Identité / Passeport 038484871 Membre de l'Association CONFRATEMEN OF SAINT GATIES. - ZOOKESA.

Entreprend la pérégrination vers Compostelle au départ de SAINT-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT,

à pied

☐ à bicyclette



DATE ET CACHET DE LA HALTE FIRMAS Y SELLOS



Hostal CASCO ANTIGUO Emilia-Josefa Ataz Costa C.I.F. 22639231 D C/ Cardenal Landázuri, 11 Telf 987 074 000 • 24003 LEÓN



Pour obtenir à Saint-Jacques de Compostelle "LA COMPOSTELLA", faites tamponner à chaque étape.

DATE ET CACHET DE LA HALTE





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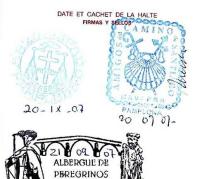
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DATE ET CACHET DE LA HALTE



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