A watercolor illustration of a small, rustic church with a bell tower, situated on a grassy hill. The church is painted in warm, earthy tones of orange and yellow, with dark outlines for the roof and windows. The surrounding landscape is depicted with broad, expressive brushstrokes in shades of green and brown, suggesting rolling hills and trees. The overall style is artistic and sketchy.

# Camino

Part 1 Geneva to Pamplona

Andrew Lievesley





# Camino

## Part 1 Geneva to The Pyrenees

Camino is the Spanish word for Road, It is used by many modern pilgrims as international slang for the journey they undertake to Santiago de Compostela in north west of Spain. It would be better titled 'My' Camino, as everyone's journey is very different and personal.

The journey I experienced, by foot, is 2500Km or 1600 miles from Geneva to Seville via Santiago de Compostela. I was joined on three occasions of four days by my long term walking pal Jimmy and for the last 100 km's into Santiago de Compostela by our son Robert. The rest of the time I travelled alone meeting a lot of interesting and delightful people. In preference I usually walked by myself and met up with fellow pilgrims in the evening. However on odd occasions I joined people who were kind enough to share their time on their journey.

The reasons for the brevity of words in these books is that if you could describe most days it would look something like this. 'I woke up, packed my bag, looked for some breakfast, walked 10 to 20 miles, found accommodation, showered, did laundry, chatted to companions over a beer / coffee / sticky bun, shopped for the next day's lunch, ate an evening meal, went to bed.'

The traditional Pilgrims' (or 'grims as I called them) publications are of the route showing the main sites , cities, monasteries, deep thoughts on the meaning of life and pilgrimage.

My record, mostly in pictures, with a few odd words of explanation is a picture story of the **essence** of my personal 'Camino' and my interpretation of those pictures. If you need a book that names all the places, there are plenty around .....but this is not one of them.

My journey, or should I say journeys, were over six separate visits, not necessarily in the logical journey order shown here. For various reasons four different small cameras were used ( I damaged two of them) ..... it is amazing how the quality of Digital camera output has improved over the time of my journeys. So the quality of the pictures is variable.

This book is dedicated to Joy, who is kind enough to stamp my passbook and allow me to go and play 'All by my own.'









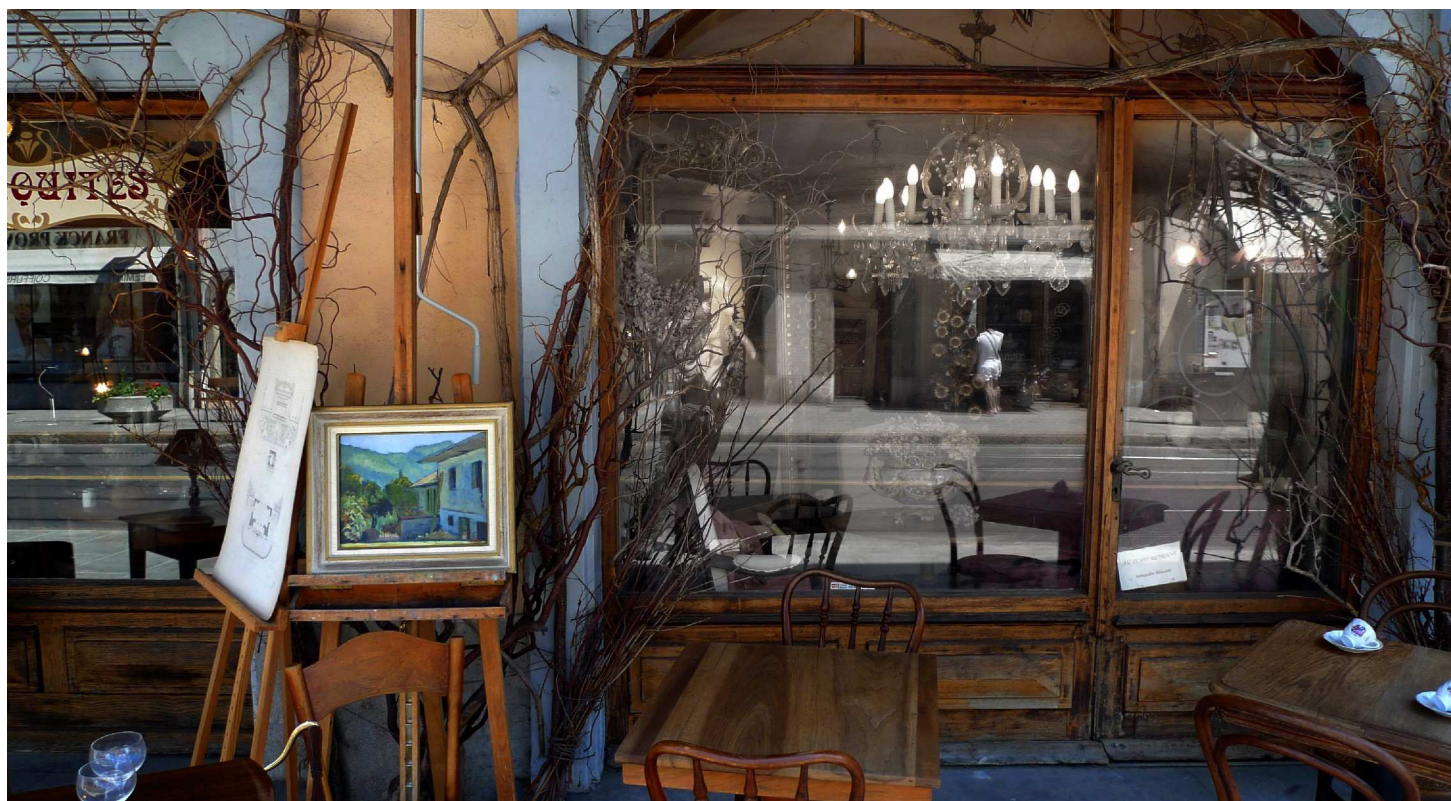
The picture on the right contains my total needs (apart from shelter) for the journey. The most vital part being 1.5 litres of water and a loaf of bread, you then had your thirst and next meal covered. The rucksack weighed 10Kg without water and bread.

My drug of choice is on the table in front of me, plus the odd beer. If I could get coffee with an english paper and a sunny spot to sit in, I was truly a contented little 'grim.















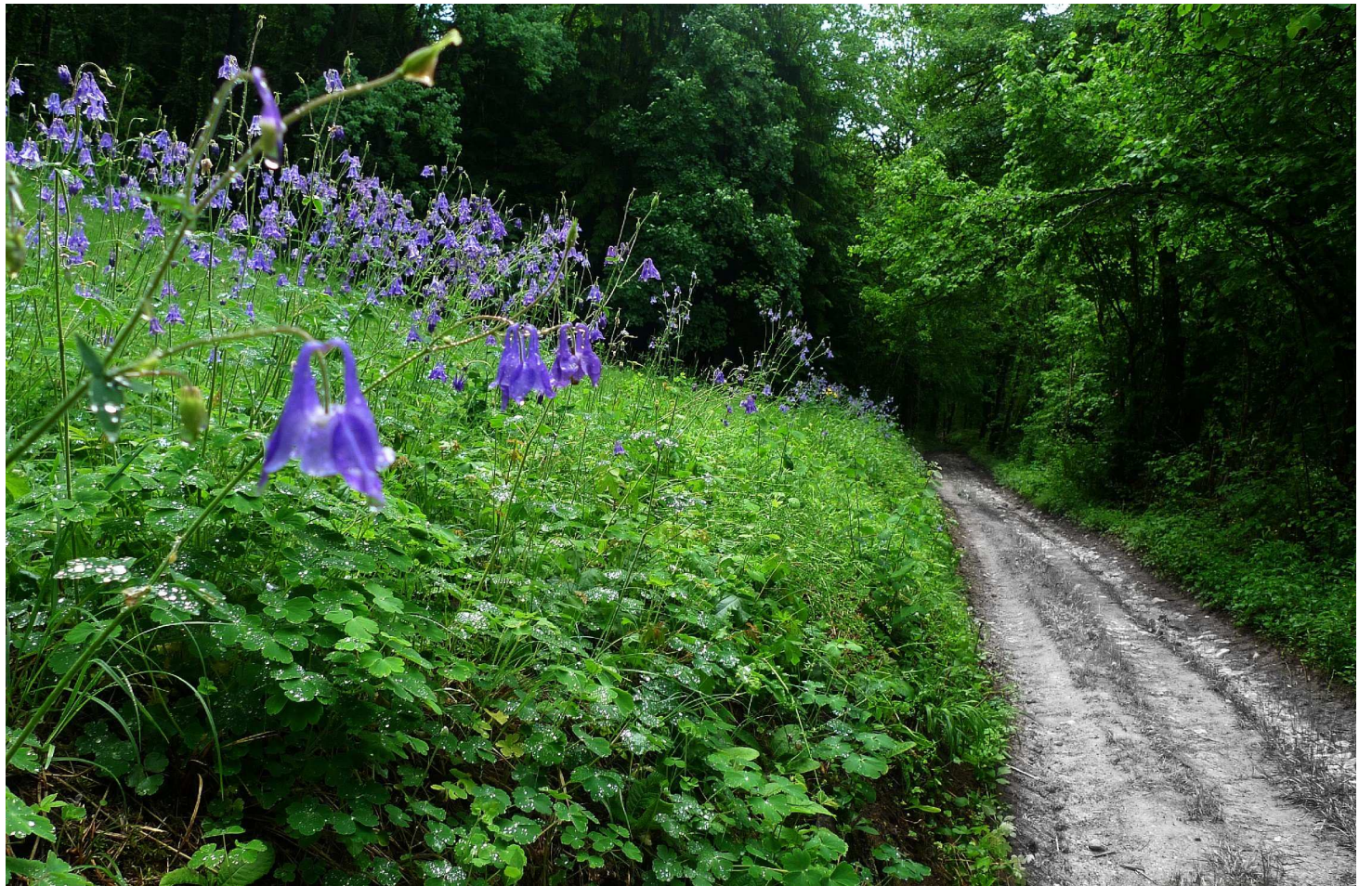














































Jimmy had been my companion for the first four days of this trip, with glorious weather. The morning we parted it rained all day. I learnt two things. One, that great pictures are still available. (See this page and the next) and two, my waterproof jacket is useless.







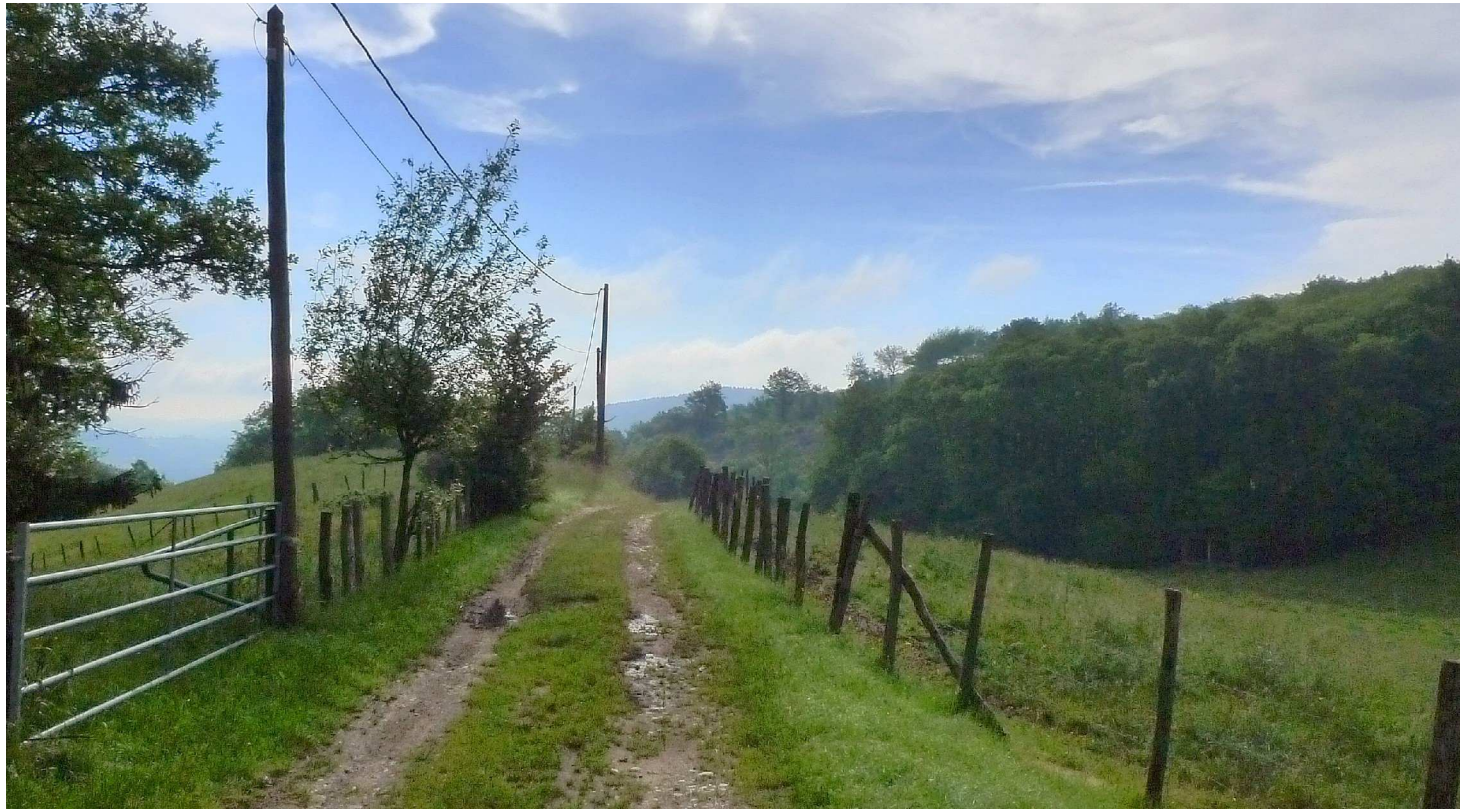
















The First World War memorial above was the only one I have seen with photographs of the dead.

Amazing that they have survived for nearly 100 years and a good reminder that the men commemorated are more than names.



























































Le Puy is one of traditional starting place for the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, being kicked off by the Bishop of Le Puy + mates over a thousand years ago. So it is very much 'grim central for the French..... Which clearly the couple above are not involved in.





















Lunch was often yesterday's bread, with a lump of cheese and some fruit. In France fantastic but very smelly Camembert; in Spain processed rubbish.

Before leaving Le Puy, I went into a deli and bought some great Quiche and salad. If only I had known at the time what a high point that lunch was.











Where did this white stuff come from? ...It was April, but it is easy to forget the Aubrach is about the same height as Ben Nevis. I walked through a snow storm all day, fortunately the very strong wind was at my back and I was warm enough in my waterproofs. Foolishly I walked 25 miles that day on tarmac, which was just covered with a layer of snow..... no traffic just me and the snow ploughs.

































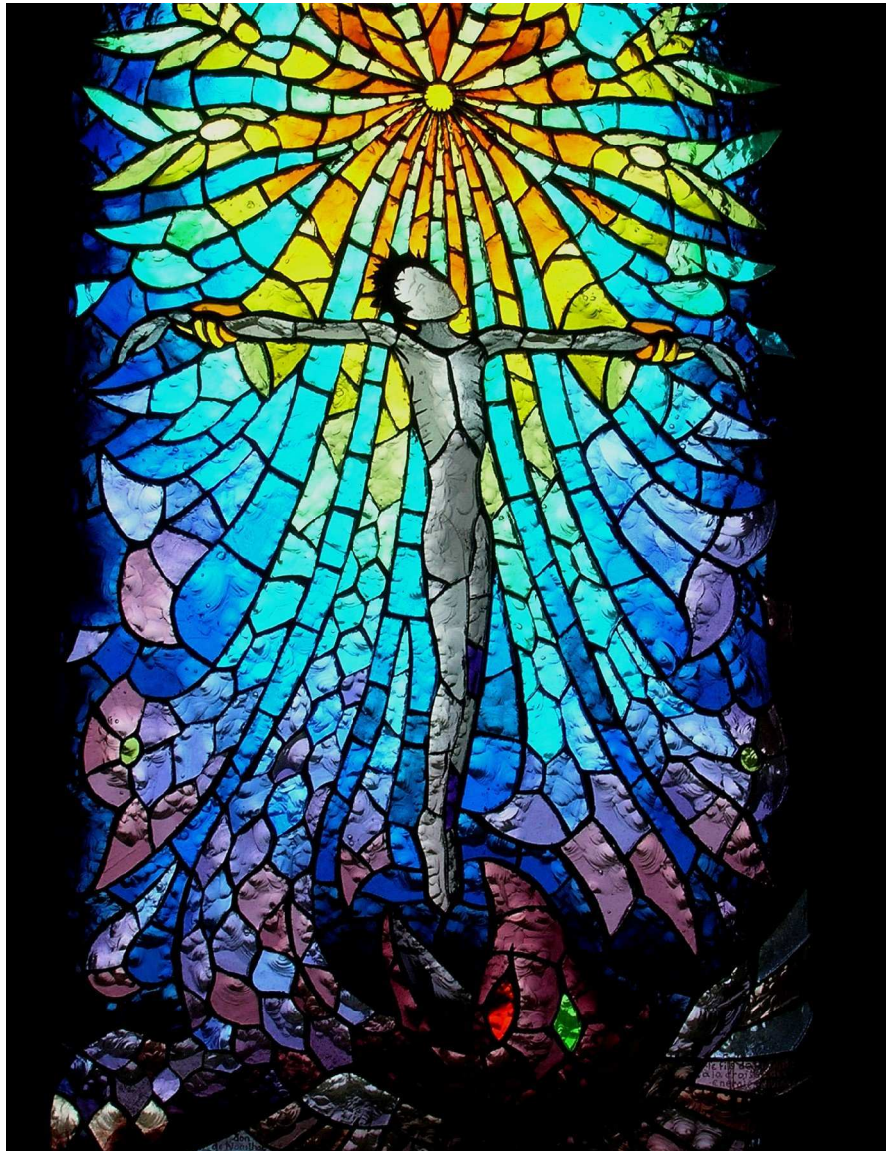












The French do a very good job with contemporary stained glass.

I found these two gems in a little road side chapel in the middle of nowhere.



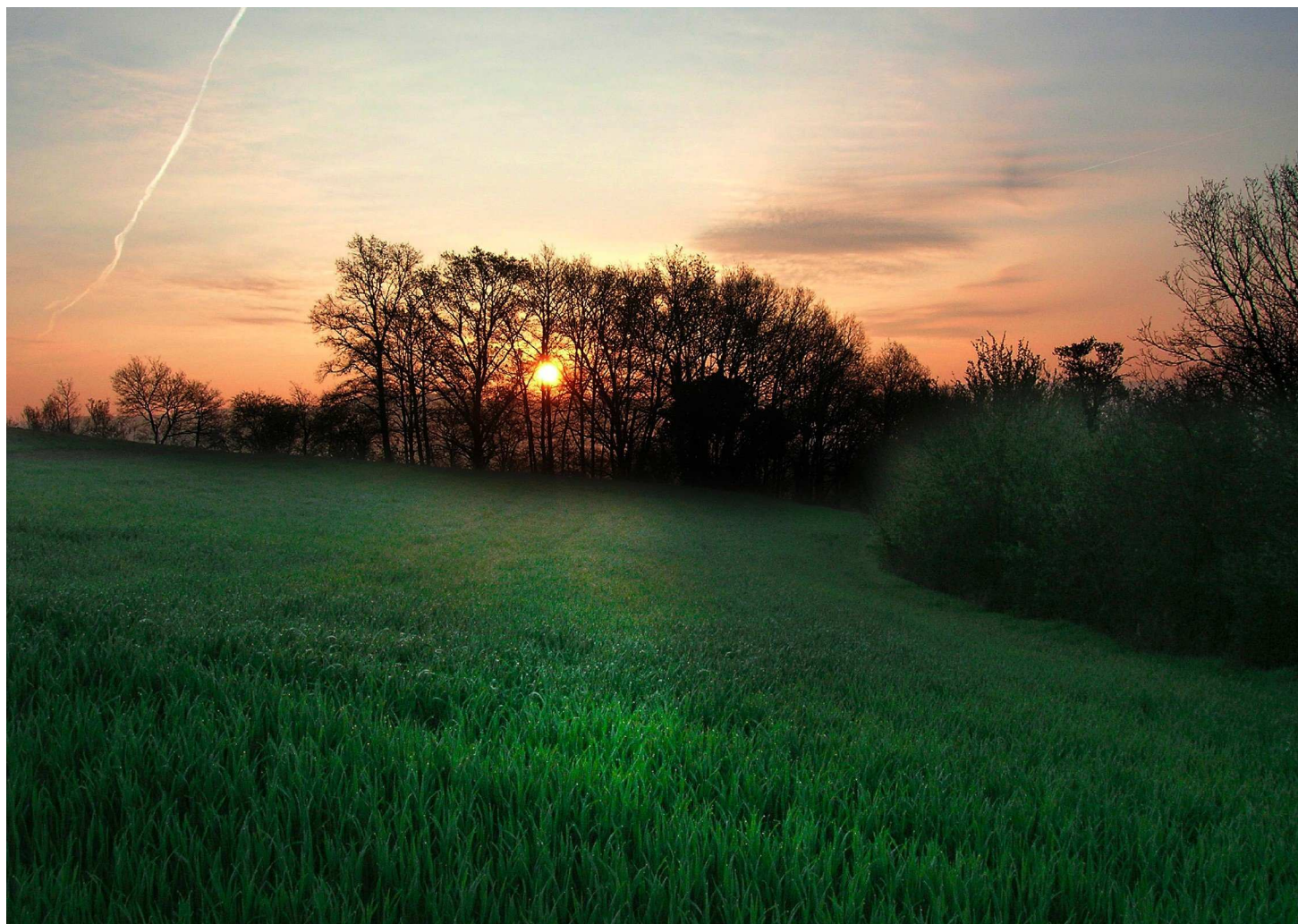


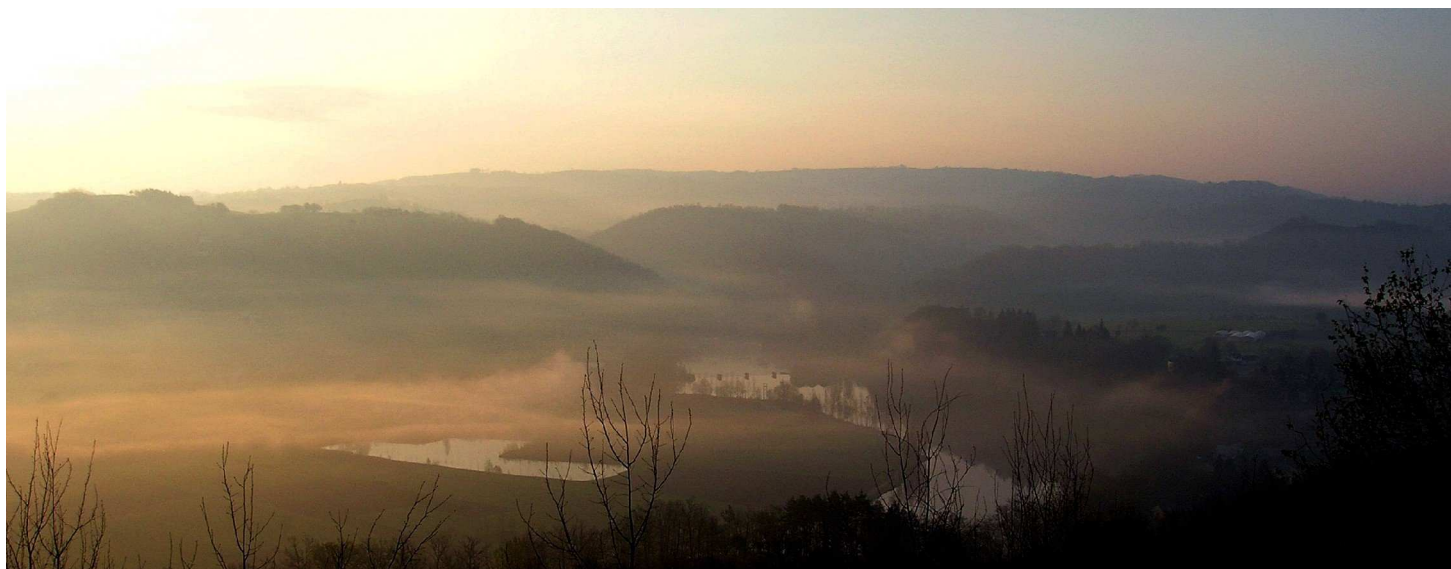


















In the Cele Valley I enjoyed two days of solid rain, when the sun comes out it looks fantastic....but I was just cold, but dryish in my waterproofs



COMMUNE DE CORN  
MORTS POUR LA PATRIE  
1914 - 1918

FRÉJAVILLE PHILIBERT  
SOULIGNAC JUSTIN  
VALETTE ELIE  
LAJOIE FRÉDÉRIC  
PUECH JUSTIN  
ROSSIGNOL JEAN  
FRÉJAVILLE JULES  
SÉNAC JEAN  
LABOUYGUES JEAN

PANCOU AUGUSTE  
GRANIÉ SYLVAIN  
BESOMBES PAUL  
POUGET JOSEPH  
CASTEL HENRI  
GALY JUSTIN  
DELBOS ANDRÉ  
CAVAILLAC ALBERT  
MERLE ACHILLE

A la Mémoire  
de  
André BOUZOU  
Déporté le 12 Mai 1944 par les Allemands  
Mort au Camp BERGEN - BELSEN  
à l'âge de 19 ans



This war memorial, shown on the left, in a very small village in the Cele Valley, had the 20c history of France written in it names.

The huge loss in the first war, deaths in concentration camps from the second and the unnamed deaths from the Vietnamese and Algeria wars thereafter.









Staying for a rest day with Andy & Monica, friends who live in the Cele Vale they took me to cafe du Tourist at Marcihac for Sunday lunch.

A truly fantastic French feast of country cooking at it's best. Sadly I think Madam only operates on odd Sundays during the summer now.





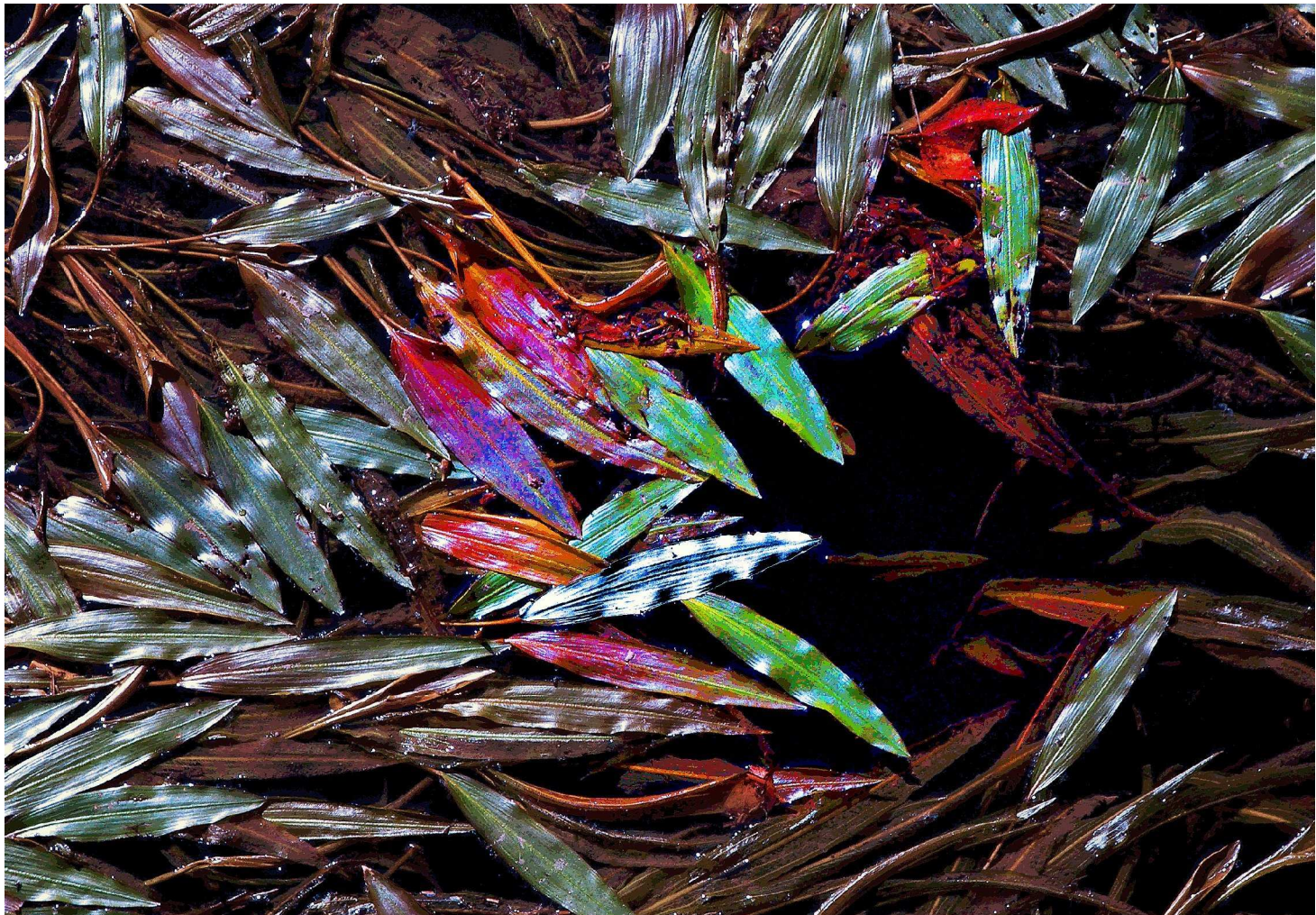




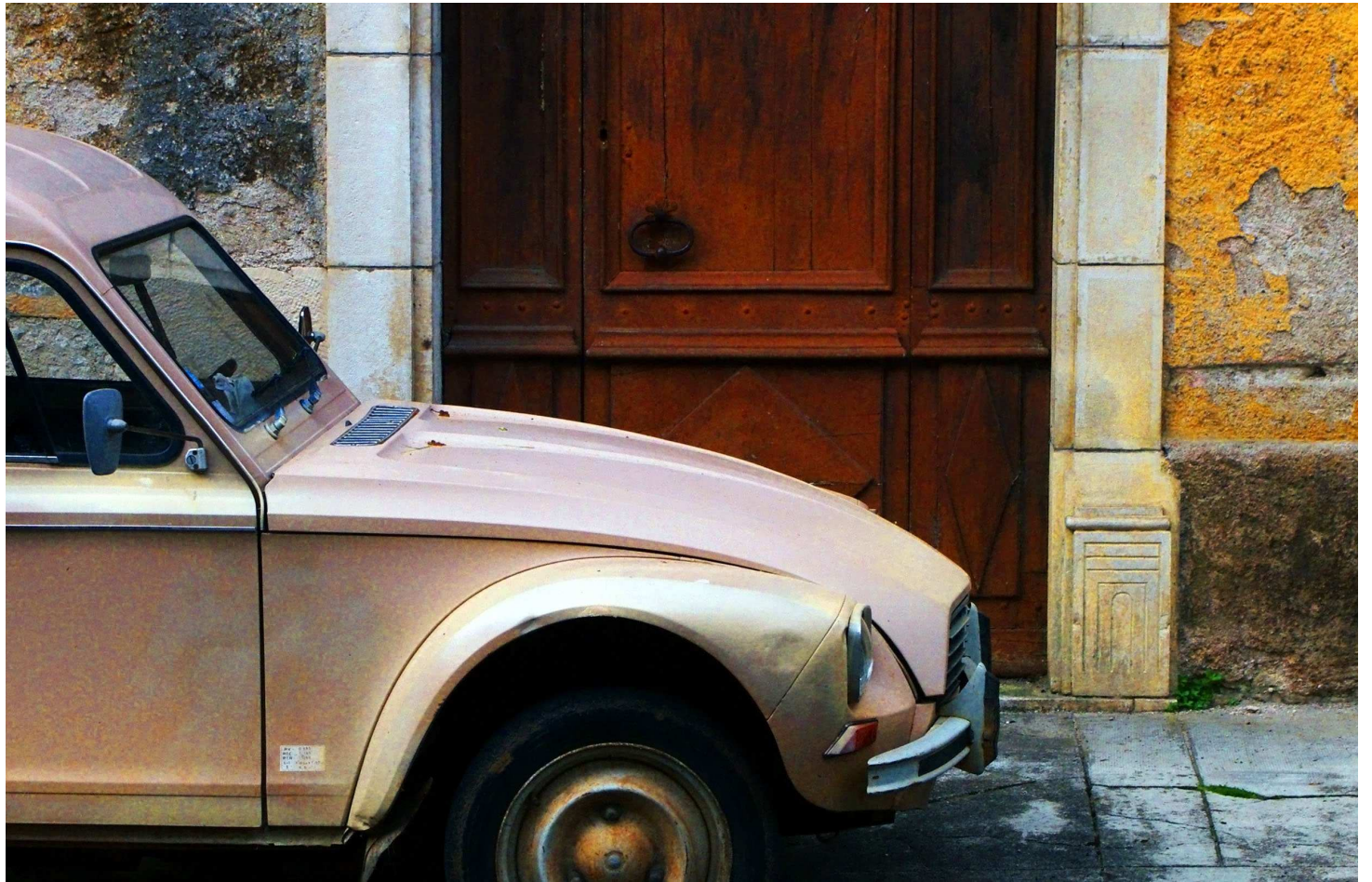
The old monastery ruins in Marcilhac turned into a 'one off' successful and profitable painting for me.

.....I wish I knew how I created the picture.

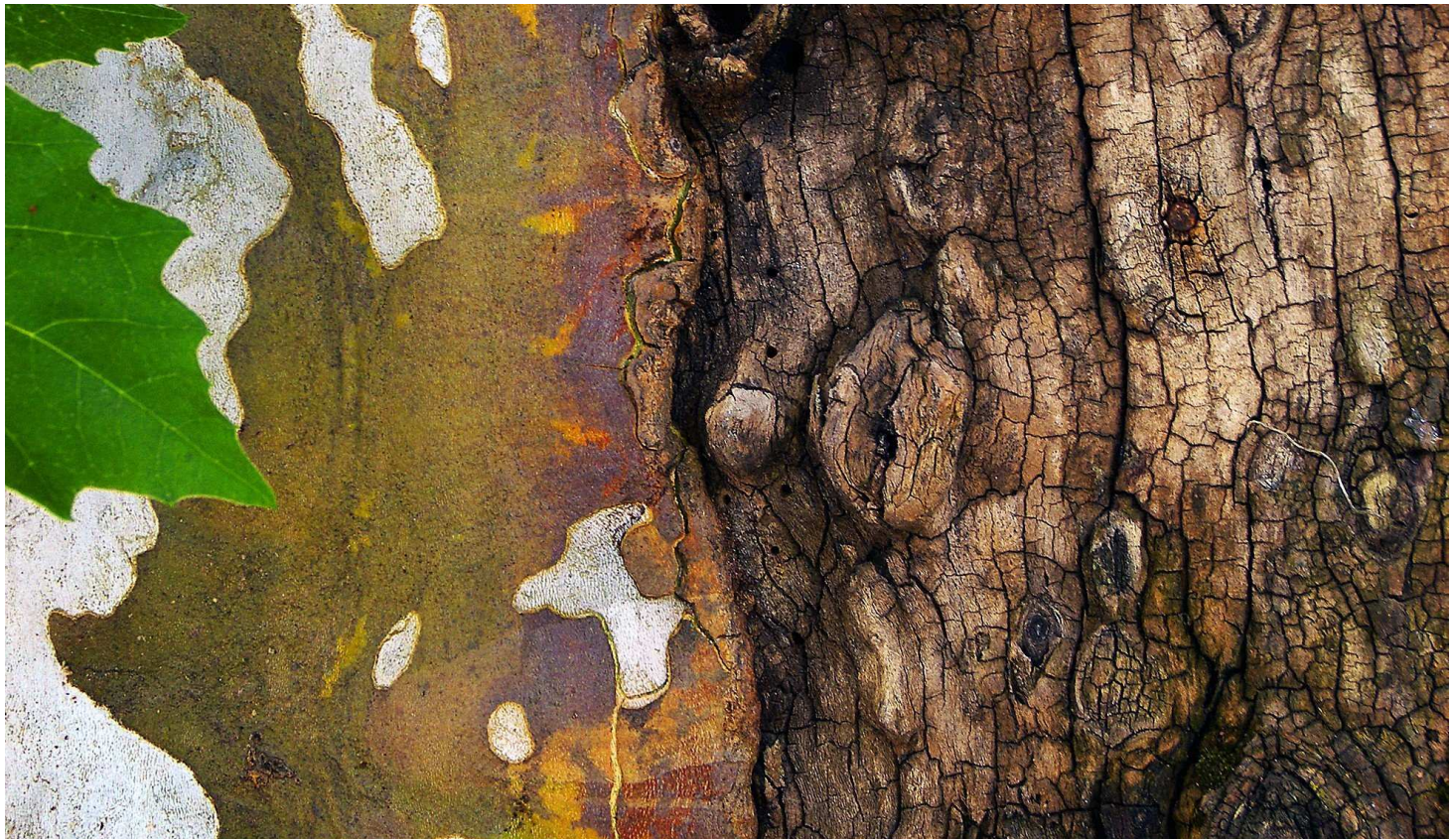
















Some days I manage to feel a grade one rat, without too much effort; this was such a day. Looking at my original plan I had decided upon a quick 17k to a place called Bouzies where the river Cele joins the Lot. For a few days I stayed with family friends Andy and Monica.

Andy offered to join me for this relatively short stroll. I was so concerned that I was committed to 32k the next day to get me to Cahors that I suggested we add a bit to the short walk planned.

Unfortunately that made it 30k, Andy felt obliged to accompany me and we set out at 9am. On a nice day this would have been a lovely, if somewhat challenging walk. But it was raining hard, cold and generally horrible. Andy, the perfect gentleman that he is, just commented that "A good general never reveals his plan until the last moment".









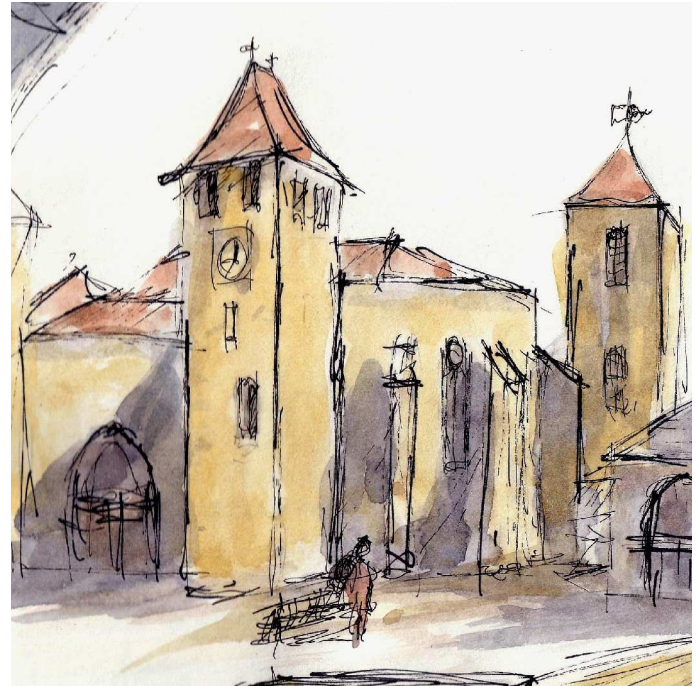












A few years before retirement I was mulling over the need for a bit of an adventure and had discovered the Pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. My idea of a bit of an adventure is..... not too taxing, no camping, the right quantity and quality of food, coffee, sticky buns and booze. The Camino seemed to fit the bill.

So on a French touring holiday with Joy I was quietly investigating possibilities. Visiting Lauzerte, a Bastide fort town, I was sitting drinking coffee knocking off a wooden sketch of the town square, the centre point was a 'grim .... I discovered he spoke English (He was a Scot) and after talking to him for a few minutes I was smitten by the idea of the Camino









Walking through a landscape gives you the chance to enjoy 'little' views .

The above picture was taken in the early morning light of a field of Orchids covered with the morning dew.....A really great sight.







At about this point in my first trip the shin splints I had developed a week earlier were becoming very uncomfortable. As I took the picture of my traveling companion above, I had the thought that our walking speeds were not dissimilar. Three days later, common sense won the day and I flew home to return the next year.

My shin problems had begun in the Aubrac...walking 25 miles on tarmac roads was not a great idea. The lesson to be learnt; not too fast or too far on hard surfaces.



















I stayed in many Gites and Auberges of sizes from 100 in a room to this little place on the right, that had 4 beds. The toilet and shower were the other side of the farm but the food was good and I slept like a log.

My companions also came from the two ends of the 'grim community. Two were cheerful retired doctors from Denmark who were tackling the whole route in two week stages, walking no more than 10 miles a day, which usually contained a long and leisurely lunch in the middle.

The other room mate was a lady traveling all the way from her home in Germany to Santiago, in one go on a very limited budget and limited time frame.... I think she was allowing 16 weeks for the whole trip. She never smiled or joined in the banter. There is a lesson there somewhere.

I was following a middle path between the two. Three to four weeks away was my usual plan. However the two times I tried long leisurely lunches I ended up with indigestion later on the walk, which is a pity as France and Spain are geared around great lunches.











Travelling through France in early spring can produce a variety of weather; snow, sun and now torrential rain. The irony of the water pouring on the pipes stored to deliver water to the parched fields in summer was not lost on me.

























If Roman ruins interest you, the Camino has lots of possibilities. I walked an extra 4 miles to see the ones below and came to the conclusion they don't do a lot for me..... Well certainly not an extra 4 miles worth.



















This small gentleman, was a 'returning' pilgrim, who not only had walked from his home in Belgium in one go, but was walking back again.

I met four such people undertaking return journeys (As all 'grims had to in days of yore) they all looked thoroughly miserable.



















The picture on the left shows the reality of food production. Staying on a duck farm, before dinner dinner we are given a tour of the ducks being fed for Foie Gras.

The process is means the ducks have 16 weeks to wander about and have fun, then they get 12 days in cages where they are forced fed. You can decide for yourselves if you approve or not, but believe me it 'aint a great end to a short life.



















On the Camino there is a direction to a chapel of some ancient significance. Having taken the detour I was thrilled to find it was locked. However the room above the doorway was not.... an interesting little find.









Now in the foot hills of the Pyrenees. What a difference 8 hours make.... go to bed on a pleasant warm day and wake up to a full storm, with a 10 degree drop in temperature.





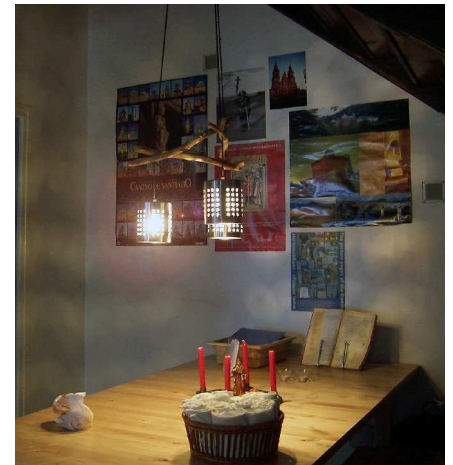


The Basque region (If you know what is good for you, you do not say the Basque region of France. To the Basques it matters nought whether you are in Spain or France.....It is one region)

Anyway, attached to a lot of churches I found stones like the above. I never did discover the history behind them.







Arriving at St Jean Pied de Port, I was advised to stay at this private Gite run by a Dutch couple who spend their winters working in the Netherlands and their summers running this Gite. It really was one of the best places I have stayed.

The majority of pilgrims start their journey at St Jean, travel over the Pyrenees and on to Santiago de Compostela. Little do they know this will be the last great 'economy' accommodation they will have until they get home.





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 to the legendary Route Napoleon. This is because the markers are on the ground...if you get snow, you do not see the route. Sadly people have died through exposure after getting lost.

However I feel I should let the secret out of the bag, most of the route is covered by Mr Macadam's finest finish...It is just the inter connecting pathways, the bit at the top and descent that is not.

The whole journey from St Jean to Roncesvalles in Spain is 21Km but if you allow for the fact it is all uphill 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.











And this is the sneaky trick, 11km from St Jean.....Refuge Orrison sounds like a bothy in the middle of nowhere, but as you turn the corner to its panoramic ledge, you realise this is a place for a DB like myself. The rest of the day is spent drinking coffee, the occasional beer, chatting, reading and even a quick sketch....or as our son would say 'just hanging out and looking good'

Do I feel guilty about not going the whole way to Roncesvalles?...Yes for all of a minute, but I get over it. A very enjoyable day, great weather and good company.





....and this was the view from the balcony. Another tough day at the office.































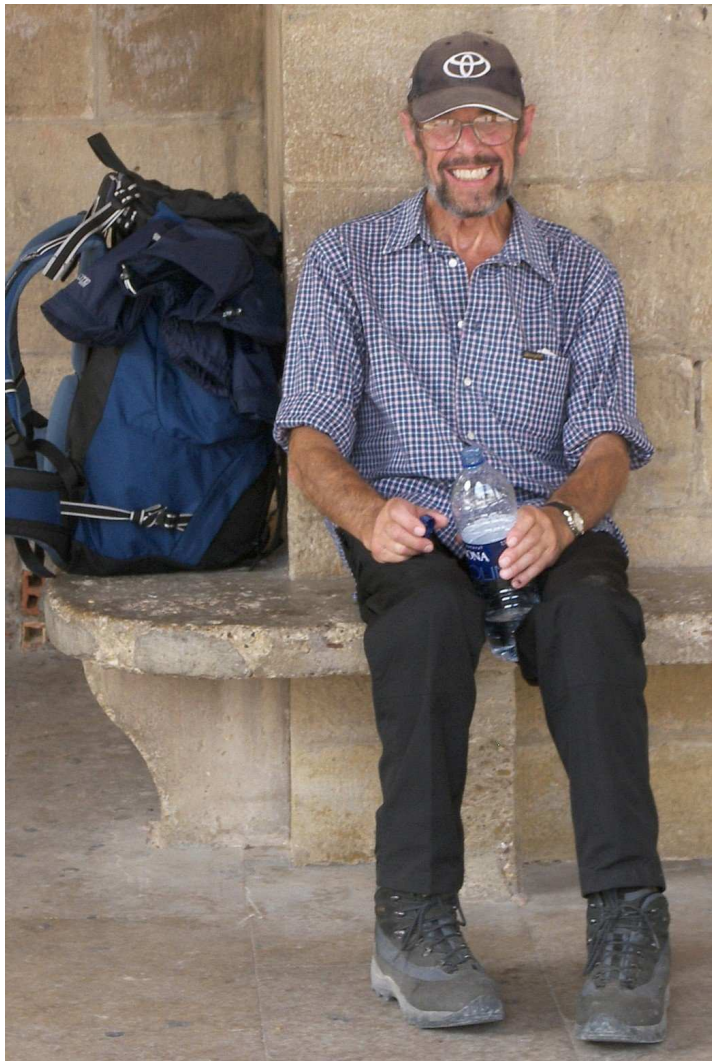








Arriving in Pamplona, whilst not exactly skiping like my friend above, at least I was as fit as a man of my years and milage could expect.



The people I have met on my Camino were very much part of the story....a good part! At the top I put in my two walking companions that joined me for short periods of time. Jimmy and our son Rob.

Enclosing the photos of some of them between the two books seems appropriate.



