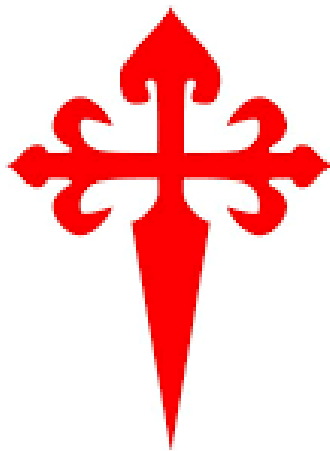


El Camino de Santiago

June – July 2018



A summary of the pilgrimage to Santiago along the Camino de Frances and the ensuing hike to Fisterra (Finisterre) made by Jason, Lawrence, and Robert Winschel including the text of a daily journal and accompanying pictures.

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El Camino

2018

Intentions

- General:
1. All benefactors spiritual, temporal
 2. Well-being of all family
 - Immediate, extended
 - Spiritual, temporal
 3. SSPX General chapter & Holy Mother Church in crisis

And in thanksgiving for all divine blessings/gifts bestowed upon our family and in reparation for all offences against our Blessed Lord, His Blessed Name, the Blessed Sacrament, etc.

4. For the proliferation of the Catholic Faith across the Earth
5. That my family and I always seek, find, and follow the Will of God
6. The revival of Christendom in these hallowed lands and beyond
7. Reparation for my sins

(What follows but is not here reproduced are three pages of individuals and families for whom the trip was offered up.)

Thursday, June 21

6:17 PM

Pittsburgh Airport

Pittsburgh

Our saga begins with familiar faces flying to alien lands. Pavle (Djokic), Zach (Ehling), Beck (Griswold), Justin () are on their senior trip heading toward Amsterdam, German cities, and Barcelona. They will be on the same flight as we, at least as far as Iceland. Meanwhile, we just found out that the cab driver picking us up in Paris is some sort of Muslim fellow named GKW (God knows what). How sadly appropriate that we will be welcomed to Europe by one of her soon-to-be-conquerors. We will walk for the resuscitation of Christendom and the renewal of the spirit of the Reconquista.

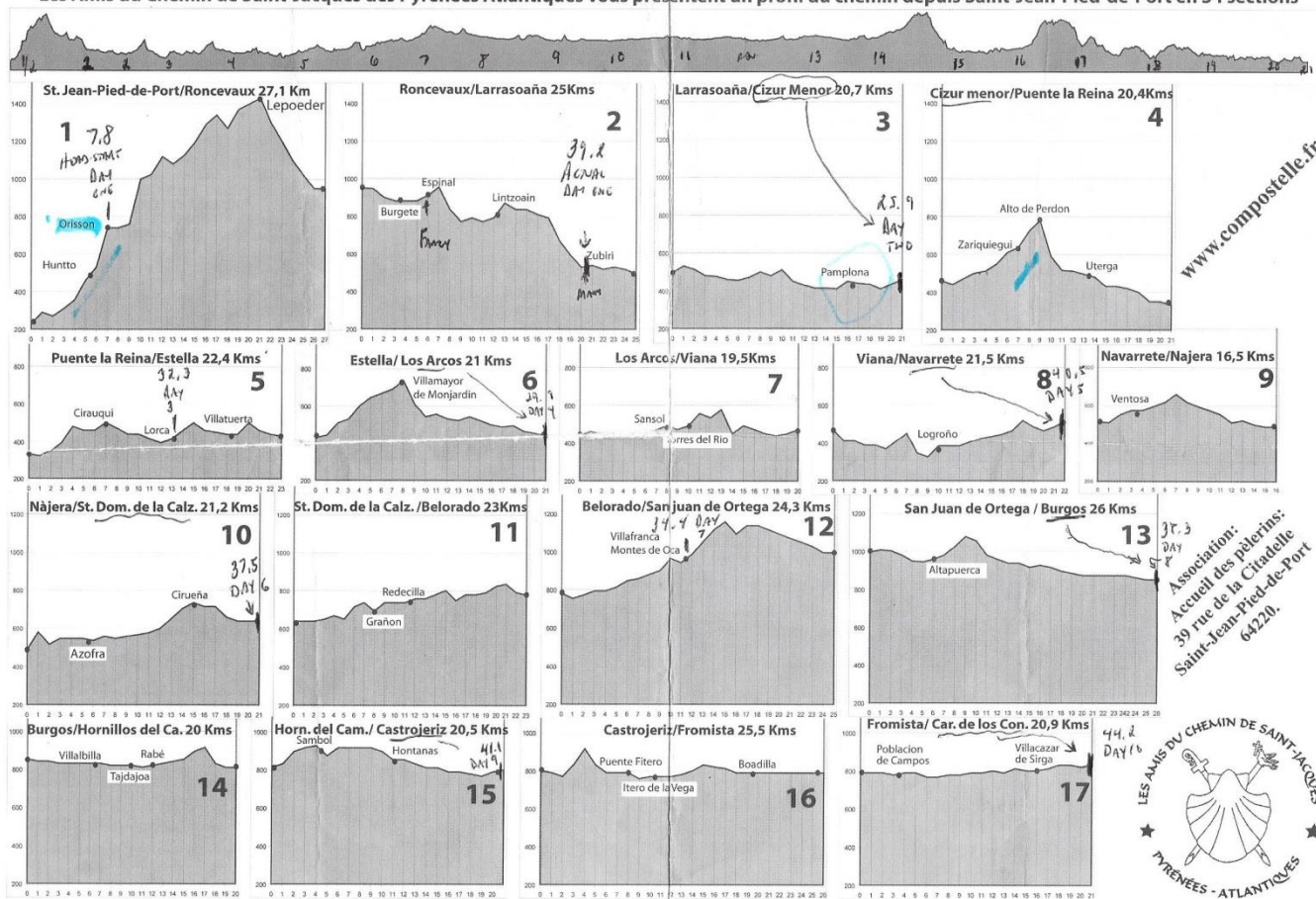
10:30 PM EST

over the Atlantic

A sleepless night on a plane. We hoped to sleep this night while in flight, but thus far we have had no such luck. With 90 minutes remaining before we land I have come to the realization that it is not going to be dark tonight. Presumably the course has gone too far north to part ways with the sun's beams. If numbers are correct, we will be landing at approx. 11:45 PM our time, putting Iceland 5 hours ahead. Thus, we will skip not only darkness but nighttime itself. Ugh! It promises to be a rough day tomorrow.



Les Amis du Chemin de Saint-Jacques des Pyrénées Atlantiques vous présentent un profil du chemin depuis Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port en 34 sections



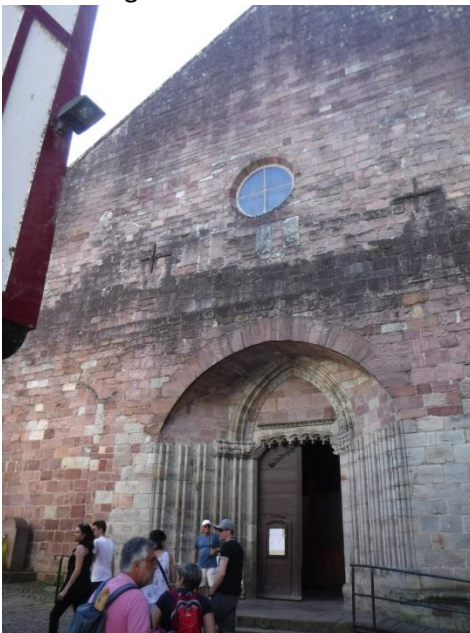
The numbers did not in fact add up – the pilot was off on flight time. We landed at 12:45 AM our time. Iceland is 4 hours ahead. After a long line for passport check we barely made our connection to Paris. Once landed, the Pakistani driver – Khalid, who was very nice – got us to our bus station. We then walked around Paris for 5-6 hours. My hip hurt so bad that I started to fear the demise of this journey before the first step. The pain remains, albeit muted. Tina said I would crack under pressure over here and forget obvious things. Indeed, the boys got a big laugh when I tried to impress the French pizza lady with my knowledge of the language. Oops. I answered “si” instead of “oui”. I gave her a tip because A) she didn’t laugh at me, B) so she would not hate all American ignoramuses, and C) because she spoke English with a fine French accent.

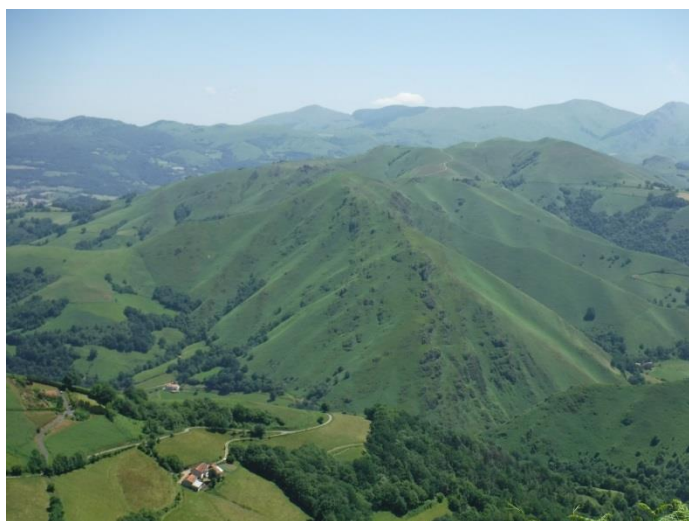
We left Paris on a bus at about 6:45. I was relieved to get out of the city as those people drive like maniacs. Motorcycles are everywhere, weaving through traffic; they treat the lines on the road as bike lanes; they routinely drive on sidewalks, etc. Everybody is always honking and cutting everybody else off. But, on the other hand, they always stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk. Paris is a beautiful city, with some ugly spots, and its monuments and street names reek of revolution – liberte, egalite, fraternite and socialism. But they have nice public bathrooms there. I will be content never to return.

Our 12 hour bus trip to the wonderful town of Bayonne was uneventful. Even the most desired event of all – sleep – failed to transpire for any of us. I was becoming convinced that the trip was doomed as the pain in my leg failed to subside. As we ate virtually nothing and had not slept for two straight nights it seemed more and more a burgeoning repeat of the Appalachian Trail fiasco.

But in the early morning hour as we arrived in Bayonne all seemed to turn. It started when the huge Gothic cathedral appeared to greet us. It continued when a magic screen showed us how to get to the train station. It got better when I found I could walk without too much pain. To top it off, we met a supremely helpful Catholic soul named Jean-Marie, who told us of the town and pointed us to the station. All of this before 8:00 AM. Bayonne is a stunning little town; with the cathedral at its heart it screams out Medieval Christendom. (Oddly enough, we did not see a single church in Paris in 6 hours.) Finally, we managed to get a train – actually a bus – 4 hours ahead of our scheduled ride. Anxious to end this trying trip we abandoned beautiful Bayonne and joined several others en route to the Camino in St. Jean Pied De Port.

Our plan was to get to St. Jean, situate ourselves for the morrow, find a meal, hotel, bath, etc. and sleep mightily so as to recoup from the trip and prepare for the journey. This did not come to pass. Upon the advice of a French-Canadian woman who now lives and works in St. Jean at a trail shop, we started off today. After a meal in St. Jean, we placed our fate in the hands of Our Lady at the church in town, and we started on the hardest part of the entire Camino. To get a head start on those starting out tomorrow we climbed five miles – treacherous miles by virtually any standard – to come to rest here at Orisson, a nugget of wonderful food and accommodations, an unbelievable view, and a wonderful sign that reads “We don’t have wifi, talk to each other.”





Sunday, June 24

8:20 PM

Zubiaren-Etxea Pension

Zubiri – 39.2 km (47.0 down, 731.5 to go)

The albergue at Orisson proved to be amazing. For 41 euros each we had a 3-4 course meal with wine, bed and shower, breakfast in the morning and sandwich packed for lunch. The meal was grand with 40 + happy, talkative pilgrims, fine food, and a moment where we all got up and introduced ourselves. One veteran pilgrim warned us not to attempt to go to Zubiri the next day – too long, too rough, so we doubled down on that intention. In the morning after a half-way decent sleep and a small meal we took off. Within a few miles we had overtaken all the other pilgrims. Unless the tortoise and the hare prove prophetic I don't think we will see any of them again. For after a grueling hike we made it to Zubiri – just under 40 km. They had Mass at Roncesvalles at noon – just as we were leaving that ancient church. It was odd to be on a religious pilgrimage and intentionally skipping Mass. It was also hideous to think of this ancient church being desecrated by this hideous Mass. Going down the mountain to Roncesvalles was almost as painful as going up the one before, so it was good to have flat conditions for a while after. We passed up a number of pilgrims from Roncesvalles as the day went by. We had thus made up almost ten miles on them. We were in strong form until the last 5 miles or so when a fountain that was advertised did not materialize, and we fought the strain and the heat in what was nearly a losing battle. When we arrived in Zubiri in a state of physical stupor we took the first available place and got two rooms with a bathroom, shower, kitchen and washing machine. No evil comment from Brazilian women speaking Portuguese because we washed our clothes in the sink today! We revived ourselves with a meal at a local restaurant and are preparing for sleep on sturdy and nice beds.

On a side note: 1. We are spending way too much money – God bless Steve Kottelich. 2. The boys are in good spirits, seeming to buy into the spirit and challenge of the pilgrimage. Graces are surely flowing. God is good.



Monday, June 25

6:10 PM

San Juantista Albergue

Cizur Menor – 25.9 km (72.9 down, 705.6 to go)

No sleep – actually approx. 5 hours – last night. I think we are just not over the time change. We zipped over 20 easy km to Pamplona today, arriving around 1:00 PM. What a fantastic city. It is much more attractive and intriguing than Paris. Sublime streets with trees covering the sidewalks, beautiful architecture, no litter. It all leads to the old town ensconced behind several sets of steep, imposing walls. We spent a good deal of time in the incredible cathedral, with awesome features so abundant that I eventually just set aside the camera. We walked the neat, narrow streets where the bulls run, and we ate at Burger King! 5 km later we wrapped up a relatively easy 26 km day at San Juantista, an albergue run by the great Knights of Malta. This order has been serving pilgrims since the Crusades, so we had to stop here.



We have met some nice people along the Camino. One of the nicest was the lady who ran the albergue where we stayed last night. She was so nice I felt compelled to leave as soon as possible this morning to save her the pain of trying to communicate with us three functionally deaf and dumb folks. Meanwhile, we met a mom (Lorraine) and two daughters (Nora, Florence) from London today. We conversed with them at two different places. It had been a couple of days since we had a real discussion with someone other than ourselves, so it was pleasant. As were they – three ladies doing the Camino one week at a time each summer, leisurely. They seemed to truly relish each other's company.

We walked approx. 32 km today. It was hot, but after the long, steep ascent of Alto de Perdon – where the metal statues are – and its steeper, more painful descent, the tough terrain was somewhat sparse. We are getting along at a comfortable 5 km/hour pace consistently. We walked today on almost no sleep and no breakfast, but we had a solid lunch and dinner. I lay in bed without falling asleep from 8:00 to almost 1:00 AM. Then the extremely noisy early birds woke everyone up at 4:15! We were the last to leave the albergue at 6:45 AM! The heat is truly oppressive here, so we might start with early departures ourselves.



Last night we all slept. Thanks be to God! Except for the heat trying to kill us all we passed a relatively uneventful day. Starting around 7:00 AM we finished 29.9 km by 3:00. Little donettes for breakfast, ice cream for a snack got us to lunch at Villamayor de Monjardin. This was the highpoint of our day's walk, so we wanted to get there before the sun got too high. While we were praying in the church a group of girls entered en masse and from nowhere broke into some song that sounded like a French version of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight". We decided to eat light by just grabbing some cold cuts and bread from the local store. Unfortunately, the sandwiches we made were huge and we felt them the rest of the day. With rain threatening we walked the final 6 km in 54 minutes. Now we are in our nice but cheap albergue trying to decide what to do with the night. If it rains then we will stay in. If not, time will tell.

One thing of note; we sang the rosary while we walked today. What power music has! The sense of being on a journey for/with God has never been so keen! I am pleased that the boys knew the melody line better than me. Fruits of summer camp.

Also, we came upon the fountain of wine today. Naturally we all partook. I can only imagine how long Hilaire Belloc would have stayed!



After writing last night we went out for a quick bite. We first stopped into the church of St. Mary at the center of town. I was moved to tears by the Spanish beauty. The whole thing was a series of breathtaking monuments to God. Every square inch was adorned in some way. It is the most awe-inspiring church I have ever seen. And it is in a town of 1200 people. A magnificent church dominates every single town we see regardless of its size. What a consolation to glimpse Christendom.

When we left the church we once again found our three English friends. We were shocked to see them. But we found out that they had a little assistance. And some serious blisters. Likely we will not see them again.

We walked this morning at 5:45 AM and knocked out Brierly's 27.8 km stage six by 11:30. After walking all over Logrono in search of cheap fast food, we settled in at the Drunken Duck Restaurant. Since we had nothing better to do all afternoon, and since we did not like the feel of the big city, we forged on another 12.7 km, bringing us to the quaint Medieval town of Navarette – 40.5 km from our point of departure.

As most of the aches and pains subside, increasingly we think of speeding through this thing. The pull of Santiago is strong, perhaps too strong to refuse. May the good God preserve us from injury.



Friday, June 29 6:35 PM Cistercian Abbey Albergue Santo Domingo de la Calzada– 37.5 km (213.1 down, 565.4 to go)

We have often wondered as we proceed through these little Spanish towns 1) Why all the stores are closed, and 2) Where all of the children are. It appears that siesta answers both questions. Last night we stayed in the center of town. By early evening absolutely everyone living there was outside congregating. Kids were everywhere all night long, well past 11:00 regardless of age. The men were carrying on past 2:00 AM. You guessed it – it made it very difficult to sleep.

Regardless, we were up and out this morning at 6:05 AM. We covered 37.5 km of land that begins to look more and more like the Dakotas.

We ate only snacks all day until our pizza dinner. In the heat, food appeals little and we have grown bored of big meals at restaurants. Meanwhile, our various pains grow deeper. It is no longer soreness at issue, but, God forbid, injury.





Saturday, June 30 3:24 PM San Anton Abad Albergue Villafranca Montes de Oca – 34.4 km (247.5 down, 531.0 to go)

I write early today as we got done early, it is raining, and I have wrapped up all daily routines except spiritual reading. I read from my *Imitation of Christ*. What an absolutely inspired book. Every single page invites a full day's meditation. And to think in my bold and ignorant youth I once had only hostility towards it!

Yesterday it rained when we were at dinner in Santo Domingo. Some unknown but saintly soul put our clothes, which were hanging out drying on a portable line, under cover. In spite of it all, they were just about fully dry by morning.

It was an easy day today. 34.5 km along generally flat and slightly uphill terrain. We entered Castile & Leon in the process. We are grateful that they mark the trail far better than La Rioja. Along the way we met James, a fellow from Manchester, England, and his walking mate, Sebastian from Denmark. James is a 20 year-old who on his own dime has traveled virtually the entire Eurasian continent. We sat down to some tapas with him and had a grand old conversation, which became yet more interesting with the arrival of Sebastian. They are two thoughtful young men with nuanced views on the world. They walk fast, but we will not likely see them gain.

We got rained on not long after leaving those two in Belorado. The rain was not heavy, and we weathered it easily. The rain gear is hot, though. Otherwise, the sun remained hidden all day behind dense clouds. It made for delightful walking conditions.

I took a couple ibuprofen last night before bed. Between that, the solid ground we had all day, and the eleven hours of sleep I got last night, all the disconcerting pains of yesterday vanished. We are all feeling strong and in good spirits as we near the 1/3 mark of our journey.



Just getting ready to shower and go to bed. A long day today. But walking at 5:45 we got to Burgos 38.3 km later just a bit after 1:00. Huge festival today as the town celebrates the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. As we arrived we came upon a parade. We then got lost looking for the cathedral. Having heard of the difficulties finding lodging, we took the first place we could. A bit pricey at 60 euros for the three of us, but they jack up prices for this festival. Otherwise, we have got expenses under control. Basically, no breakfast, Haribo for snacks, and one major meal. We did Burger King and Dominos today A) to keep price down, and B) because nothing is open at our dinner time. It is a real nuisance trying to eat in Spain. (Another nuisance is trying to figure out what roads are called.) Last night we cooked our own meal – using a microwave. More of that to follow if we can find a grocery store that is not on perpetual siesta.

Uneventful day today. Mainly cool and downhill until we got to the long, hot entry to Burgos. Robert and I toured the cathedral, which now surpasses any church I have ever seen. Spain lost in the World Cup today to Russia in a shootout. Dumbest way to end an athletic contest ever. The entire city watched and then walked away. I would have preferred to see the electricity of a victory. Oh well.

I must go so I can hopefully get some sleep. It is 9:00 PM and Spain is finally waking up. I got no sleep last night and can't afford a recurrence.





Monday, July 2 4:40 PM

Albergue Rosalina

Castrojeriz – 41.1 km (326.9 down, 451.6 to go)

I am writing from the laundry room of this albergue in order to keep our spot in line. We are using machines tonight since we have been frugal for the most part. It has been a fairly productive day after a rough night. Burgos partied hard last night with fireworks topping it off around midnight. We left at 5:45 AM to be immediately met with a bunch of drunks, one of whom got up in Robert's and then my face as if to pick a fight. Once we got out of town we knocked out 41 km across the Meseta – a land startlingly similar to South Dakota. Oddly enough we met a pilgrim from South Dakota while walking through the Meseta. The clouds held the sun at bay, thanks be to God, and we barely broke a sweat as the winds stayed high and the temperature stayed low.

Lawrence's foot is hurting, but he is muscling through. Robert is growing stronger daily. I feel pain periodically, but with solid, even ground and not too much downhill all is well. Tomorrow we climb the final hill before endless flats, so we are in a good place as we near halfway.





Tuesday, July 3 4:40 PM

Hostal Santiago

Carrion de Los Condes – 44.2 km (371.1 down, 407.4 to go)

I write today from a fine, relatively new hostel in Carrion after taking an extremely long shower. We are all feeling the strain of a 44.2 km day. We ate a decent breakfast at our albergue and left this morning at 6:45 AM. We arrived in this town at approx. 3:30. The terrain was flat and boring after the initial towering climb, so we took advantage to go the extra distance. It was a long monotonous walk through endless cropfields beside a road accompanied by a nagging sun.

Last night was not so dull. We went out to get food from a market to make dinner. We found little to our liking, but we picked up a few things at a place run by a young lady who spoke Spanish very quickly. I think she was drunk. We laughed at her; she ran across the street to get change; we laughed all the way back to our albergue. When we arrived an ensemble of nice people offered up their massive leftover pasta. We feasted and spent the next couple hours making

merry with: Justine and her daughter Georgia from California who are barely bungling through; Gerald and Thoma from France, who started their respective walks from their respective front doors; Sebastian from the Netherlands, who speaks many tongues but not Spanish and has been walking 1500 km or so; and a nameless fellow from Germany, who has been on the road for 2000 km and 63 days. Lawrence jumped at the chance to speak to the last of these in German. A good time was had by all, but alas I suspect we will not see any of them again.



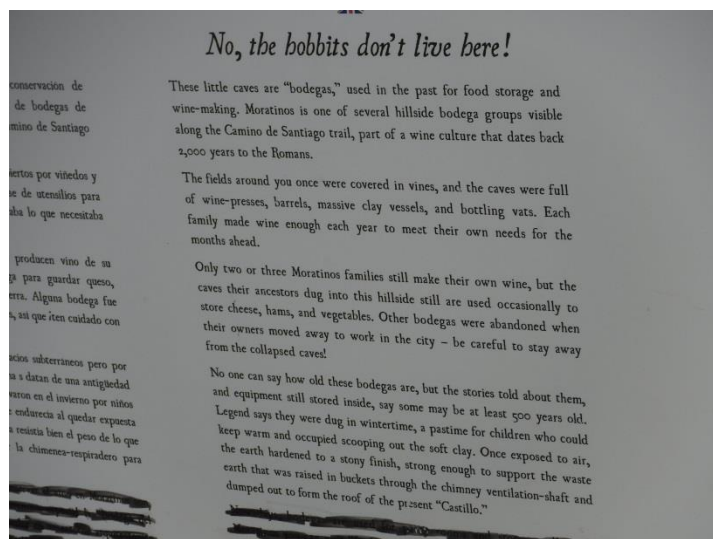


Wednesday, July 4 6:28 PM Benedictine Monastery Sahagun – 40.6 (411.7 down, 366.8 to go)

We are skipping Mass today as we stay in this convent/monastery in Sahagun. One consolation of this adventure has been the devout *novus ordo* folks we have met. The deacons and deacons-to-be Paul, Ernie, and Bill, whom we met a couple of days ago and are doing Lourdes, the Camino, and Fatima, showed great fervor and faith. Now we have just emerged from tea and conversation led by a Marist priest with the pilgrims staying here. They shared some moving stories: Fr. Daniel, 81-year-old Barbara, June and Kokumi, mom and dad with the 10-month old, and Paul. Best of all was the prodigal daughter from Japan, Kokumi. We will have a shared dinner at 8:00. I am looking forward to it.

Otherwise, we left the wonderful town of Carrion at 5:45 and walked nearly 41 km today. It was very easy – flat, not too hot, windy. We were very pleased to pass the half-way mark at 9:00 AM. If our bodies hold up, we should hopefully continue this pace to the end.





Thursday, July 5 3:45 PM

Municipal albergue

Mansilla de las Mulas – 36.4 km (448.1 down, 330.4 to go)

We took an easy day today, wrapping things up after 36.4 km. We left at 6:20 AM and arrived after another flat, boring walk at about 1:30 PM. We met a couple of Danes along the way – Christopher and Morton – and a South Korean living in Manhattan – Park – and finally a couple of young ladies from Australia – Grace and Georgie. I also met another Californian – 18-year-old Isabel – when washing clothes. All seem like nice folk out for a long walk. [Also this day we had the experience in the little restaurant with the Trina drink when we went to take a picture of it thinking it said “Tina”. As the owner did not speak English we had a difficult time explaining what we were trying to do. At first, she seemed put off, even offended, until Lawrence said “*mi madre*”. She finally figured it out and insisted on taking multiple pictures of the boys posing with a variety of Trina paraphernalia. By that time we realized our mistake, but we continued down the path that we had initiated, with the mistake being just one added comical feature to the whole episode.]

Last night we enjoyed a shared meal at the monastery/convent. The refugio supplied the main meal, and everyone else brought something to add to it. We brought potato chips, ice cream sandwiches, pudding, and some sort of pastry. It was a fine meal. Lentils, some sort of ham thing, potatoes, etc. We all ate well. Having completed a discussion about the crisis in the church with Fr. Daniel, I initiated a spirited conversation about Franco and his place in Spanish history. It was great fun. [I found that even among the devout Catholics here Franco has few allies. They denounced what they viewed as his brutality during and shortly after the war and his authoritarian regime and claimed that he gave Catholic politics a bad name by his actions, thus bringing disregard upon what they consider better or more ethical/upright Catholic regimes. They generally (though not all) denied the malediction of the forces against which he contended in the civil war and sublimated the successes of his regime to the aforementioned evils which they

considered of greater significance. By and large, my protestations to the contrary in regard to the satanic nature of his adversaries and the contrast of Catholic Spain under Franco with the increasingly secular/atheistic Spain of today fell upon deaf ears.] We then retired to bed. All three of us agreed that this was our best stay along the Camino. It was certainly the most religiously centered. Oddly enough – and sadly – the Danes we met this morning said we were the only people they have met the entire time who were here for purely religious reasons.

We continue strong, but my ankle nags still. I worry about how it will go when we get back to the hills. The mountains are closing in from the north. We have one more day of easy flats. Tomorrow we will whip through Leon (little intention of tarrying in another big city), and on Saturday the climb begins. By Sunday we should reach the cross atop the highest point on the Camino. There we shall add our rock from St. Jean to the pile.



Friday, July 6 6:30 PM Municipal Albergue Viladangos del Paramo – 39.4 km (487.5 down, 291.0 to go)

There is a great deal of generosity on display on the Camino. I will explain momentarily.

We went grocery shopping yesterday after I wrote, and we got donuts, bread, Pringles, and Haribo – enough to take us through breakfast and lunch today. We then ate dinner and went to bed. We hoped to sleep early and wake early so as to beat the sun. Of course, sleep was slow in coming and absolutely no one awoke early this morning. Most likely they all chose to sleep in as it is only 18 km to Leon, a big destination city on the Camino. Regardless, it was so quiet I was afraid that we were not allowed to leave until a particular time. Consequently, we did not start off until we slinked out of the albergue at 6:00.

We put in 39.4 km + today and finished just before 3:00. I say “+” because there was a long detour outside of Leon. We tried to disregard it and were forced to backtrack after 1/3 of a mile or so. It was upsetting. We then had to pass all the people that we had passed before.

Leon had some spectacular portions – in the old part of the city mainly. We toured the great Gothic cathedral with its towering magnificence, beautiful stained glass, and Gothic purity. And then we left the city and walked through 20 km of hot, boring highway that brought us to this spot.

Update and kindness: We ran in to the Dane, Morton, again last night. He said that Christopher’s tooth hurt so bad he went to a dentist. The dentist gave him penicillin and told him it would hold him over to Santiago – see a dentist back home asap.

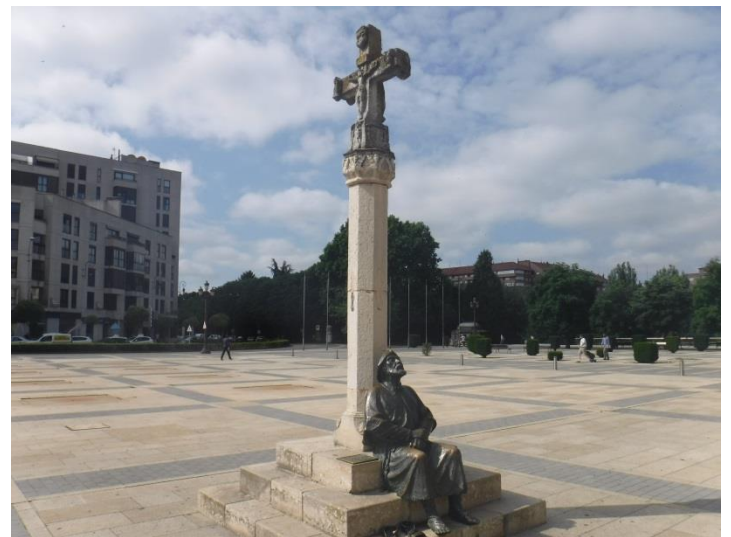
As for the kindness. We were in the doldrums of highway walking with 10km or so left. We were running out of water, had not eaten much – only the stuff from the store last night, and we were dreading the ugly way to our destination. At that moment we saw a water fountain and a woman selling fruit right in front of it. Happy days! We filled our water bottles and grabbed a piece of fruit each. When the woman realized we were just going to eat it, she refused our money and then called us back and gave us a bag of cherries while wishing us *Buen Camino*. Her gifts sustained us bodily and in spirit the rest of the way.

The instant I finished that last sentence, a Spanish-speaking woman dumped a couple of handfuls of cherries on the table for us. It never ends.

Meanwhile, the fellow running the albergue gave us a free “*Postre*” – dessert – with our dinner. I tipped him two euros, for which he was quite grateful. Next thing you know he insisted on running our clothes through the dryer

for free. This guy is doing everything in this place, running non-stop, and yet he does this one more thing – and saves us the trouble of hanging things on the line. He will get a mention in our rosary tomorrow as the fruit lady did today.





Saturday, July 7, 2019 3:30 PM Albergue Santa Catalina de Samoja – 37.9 km (525.4 down, 253.1 to go)

A rather uninteresting day to report today. We ate our donuts and left the albergue at 5:50 AM. We walked mainly along highway for about 25 km before our first break and meal – ham & cheese sandwiches, apple, and Pringles. We then proceeded through the supremely historic town of Astorga where I got the courage up to go into a pharmacy

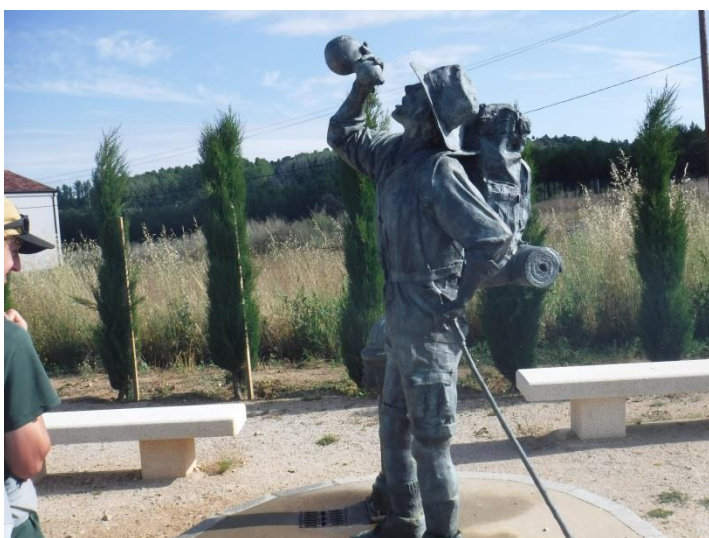
and buy ibuprofen – dirt cheap, 2 euros, I had a failed interaction at an ATM, and finally I almost walked in on a funeral. Thank God Lawrence stopped me on the last one. We finished up a short 37.9 km at 1:45. It would have been nice to go on to the next town, but it is 4.3 km away and has only one albergue. If it would have been full we would be in big trouble. As it now stands, we have just begun the ascent to the cross at the trail's high point. A storm hit last night while we were sleeping. The thunder and dark clouds coming in from the mountains suggest another is imminent. Tomorrow should prove interesting. To compound things, my left ankle is now going the way of my right, where I think I might have a slight stress fracture. What I need is ice and rest; what I have got is ibuprofen – cheap!

Meanwhile, we are running low on cash due to the ATM debacle, but at least we have figured out how to live frugally out here. Unfortunately, there are no grocery stores up here in the mountains, so we will have to buy dinner and maybe breakfast tomorrow. Time will tell.

There were some nice things in Astorga, especially the architecture and some nice churches and cathedral, as well as the old city wall. But now we look forward to seeing what nature has to offer in these beautiful mountains

Before I close, I should mention one other curiosity. At the cross atop the hill above Astorga we came across a man playing a guitar and singing for donations. His tune was simple, and he changed the words based on the nationality of those passing by, and he flipped his guitar as he played, and he smiled joyfully. Naturally I gave him all the change I had and Lawrence gave him a dollar. The incident carried our spirits for a couple of km.





Sunday, July 8 8:30 PM

Hotel Alda

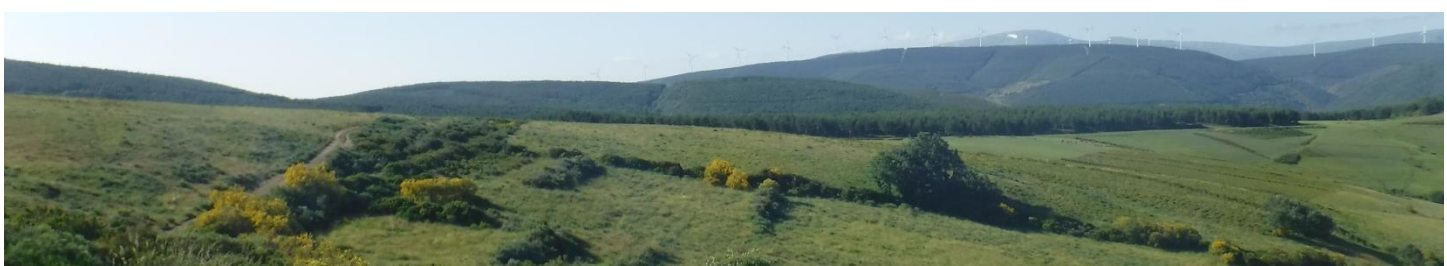
Ponferrada 43.9 km (569.3 down, 209.2 to go)

I am writing from a 2-star hotel tonight. It is a \$60 luxury to which we have treated ourselves after a pretty grueling week of walking. Starting at 6:00 AM, we went approx. 44 km today. We went without breakfast and knocked out 27 km lickety split in the morning with only a candy bar and some sports drink we picked up around the 15 km mark.

We ascended the hill to the cross at warp speed as Lawrence and Robert sped up every time we passed someone or came upon a steep incline. I kept pace while hobbled by intense shin/ankle pain. We dropped off the rocks we had carried from St. Jean, but it felt very much anticlimactic. We then continued down the other side of an absolute masterpiece of mountain beauty upon a hideously rock-strewn surface until we reached the joyous hamlet of Molinaseca. An hour more of heat and ugly landscape brought us to this town. The centerpiece of Ponferrada is a Knights-Templar castle in which they take great pride. We found a bank, hotel, laundromat, and Dominoes Pizza, and that concluded a fine day.

Last night we dined with Pablo, a Spaniard living now in Miami, who is literally walking the Camino to home. We spent the night in a remote village that's isolation made one think of Appalachia. Pablo instructed us in the ways of Spain – including “thou shalt not tip”.

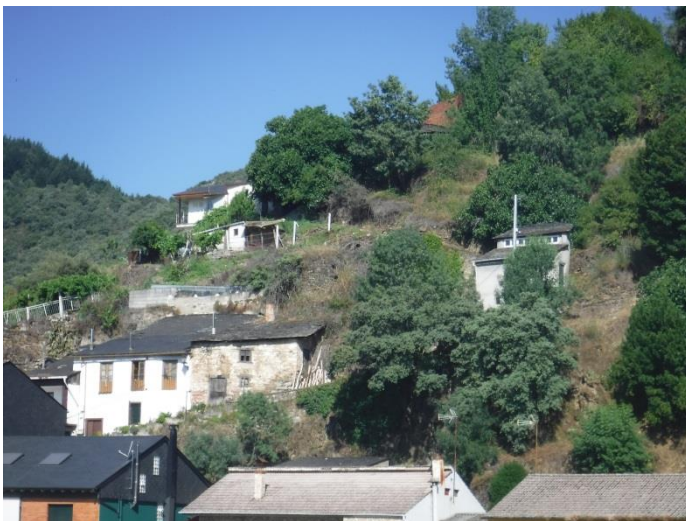
Today, we did our laundry in a laundromat owned by a Connecticut man now splitting time between Spain and Portugal. Nelson is his name. It is a crazy world. Ponferrada is a beautiful town (outside of siesta time) where tons of cosmopolitan folks were making merry on a placid Sunday evening. It is a world away from Acebo & Sta. Catalina and the rest of the villages on the mountain 15-25 miles distant.





An up and down day today, although not so much in terms of terrain. We started out this morning at 5:50 and covered a unique 23 km before 11:00. We saw some neat, upper class, Shadyside-esque suburbs coming out of Ponferrada. That was followed by a quick succession of tidy and historic little towns until we took a shortcut to get to Villafranca Del Bierzo. We ate some pastries in the town square and drank some Trina – among our new favorites. Upon departing we began the lead-up to the final big mountain 20 km away. I was exulted upon crossing the bridge into an area that looked just like a town in the hills of West Virginia. I could not wait to walk up the valley deep within the mountains, following the river to its source. And that is where the downs came in. The sun emerged on this cloudless day and beat us mercilessly over the final 16 km. Thus it was that we dragged ourselves into this place after an even 40 km.

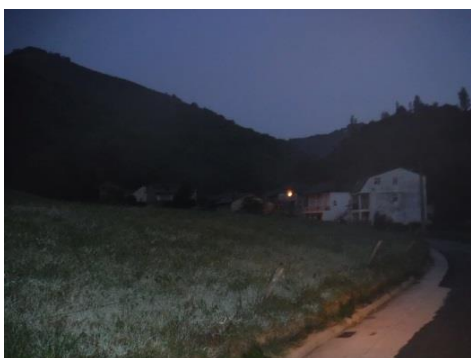
So after a day filled with natural beauty we rest in anticipation of the 2000-foot climb that awaits us 4 km into our walk tomorrow. We have less than 170 km (just over 100 miles) remaining, and we are in generally good physical condition, and morale is good. I have prayed much to Our Lord and invoked the aid of Sts. Mary, Joseph, James and others as well as my guardian angel, and thus I had no pain in my shins/ankles today. Thanks be to God.

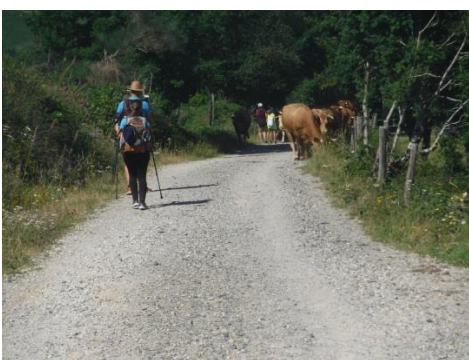


Last night, after writing, the boys and I went shopping and had dinner. For tomorrow we bought breakfast – donuts – and lunch – meat, cheese, bread, and plastic wrap, with which we made two sandwiches apiece. Since they don't eat dinner here until nearly midnight (I exaggerate) we got some snacks to tide us over – ice cream, chips, and pop. Since they had nothing at the store worthy of the microwave, we decided to eat at the bar. The meals were very filling and good at 6 euros each. The guy who ran the place offered the boys a job, for he was the bartender, waiter, cook, and dishwasher. He was a nice guy, so I gave him a big tip – take that, Pablo. I have taken to drinking wine at night – the boys had wine with their meal last night, too – because it puts me to sleep. It is the only way I can get to sleep it seems, and it works marvelously.

Last night I slept well from about 9:00 to 11:30 when a bolt of pain shot up my leg. I immediately experienced the worst foreboding about today's walk. I imagined my leg breaking as I went up or down the big hill. It was nightmarish. Even so, I slept well afterward, even being awakened by my alarm for the first time since we started.

Thus, we started out at 5:50 AM, hit the huge hill as the sun arose, worked the ascent with constant, controlled vigor, rested a short spell at the hamlet 2/3 of the way up, and arrived at the peak by 8:00. From that point on, the number of pilgrims multiplied. They are now everywhere. In the meantime, it was a gorgeous trek up high and coming down. We were above the clouds looking down at the peaks jutting through. We climbed down through a variety of mountain-type views and surroundings. We got mixed in with cows – Spanish short horns coming up the road as we went down. All in all, it was a vibrantly wonderful day of walking. Unfortunately, we got done after only 33.1 km. Incredibly, there are basically no places to stay for the next approx. 18 km. So we had to stop short. Rather than focus on this matter, it is worth remembering the old lady who gave us flat, cold pancakes with sugar as we passed – and then requested a “*donativ*” (I gave her 2 euros), and the fine raspberries we bought off of a farmer's table as we waited for the trail to re-open – temporarily closed due to another cow crossing, or the sense of victory when we eclipsed the final major ascent on the mountain and saw the masses of new people. Their presence at the start of their journey indicated that the end of ours was in sight.





What a beautiful day it has today been! Galicia has been nothing but a Godsend. We passed into this place at the peak near O'Cebreiro yesterday, and it has been one eye-catcher after another. Today we began at about 5:40 AM after our new Korean friend David banged his way around in the room for 30 minutes. We climbed a huge hill in the dark and walked in the morning mist for 90 minutes. We flew through idyllic farm and forest landscape and emerged in Sarria by 8:40, having seen virtually no one the entire way.

Sarria is just over 100 km from Santiago and thus a popular starting point for pilgrims since that is the minimum distance to earn a compostela. From there one must acquire at least two stamps a day. We found the government building to get a "Sarria" stamp. From it was hanging a queer rainbow flag – God help us. We got our stamp and were confronted by an English-sounding German, who clandestinely took our photo, thinking that we were the legendary grandfather and grandsons whose story was all the rage among the Germans. He apologized profusely when he found out that I was Dad, not granddad. We ended up eating croissants at a table next to him and talked American, German, and European politics. His name was Tilo, and he was a very lucid and entertaining conversationalist. In the meantime, they gave us butter and some sort of jelly-like substance for our croissants. It was the first time ever for such an accoutrement, and it was heavenly.

We then knocked out the last 22 km 1) with all the symptoms of a storm except rain, 2) surrounded by God's glorious creation, and 3) amidst the throngs of newbies just learning the ropes. The miles passed effortlessly, and the day was short. One alarming issue – the albergue we are in now was our third attempt. The crowds make beds hard to find.





Thursday, July 12 3:50 PM Albergue O Cruciero Melide – 39.7 km (723.5 down, 55.0 to go)

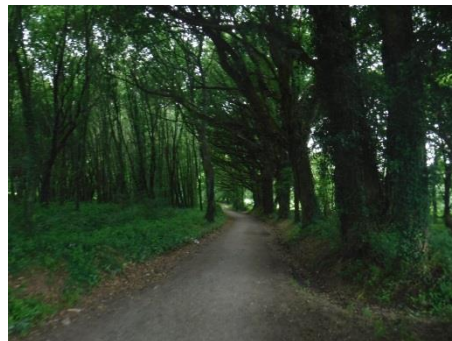
God has been good to give us Galicia. Another beautiful day today with hankerings of rain but none forthcoming. We left a very active albergue this morning at 5:45, took a break 22 km later at 9:45, and got to our present albergue by about 1:30. From morning mist to tree-lined dirt paths to quaint hamlets, it was a truly pleasant 40

km day. We are now set for two short days to finish. We anxiously anticipate placing ourselves before dear St. James so very soon.

God has blessed our journey in so many ways: from external conditions to internal dispositions. He has granted us consolations in times of despair and has brought about amicability and co-operation amongst the three of us. And the entire experience has been spiritually fruitful.

We have by now worked out a fairly consistent routine. Each morning we awake at the 5:15 alarm – at least I do. I say my morning prayers and awake the others. We get our stuff together quietly and then eat our breakfast (Bimbo's Donuts) in the kitchen or just outside. We then walk for somewhere around 20 km. We break for a croissant and a drink. We try to finish up the day's journey as close to 1:00 PM as possible, usually taking 1-2 more breaks. During one of these breaks we eat lunch – either tapas at some place or something we made the night before. Once we check in to the albergue we shower and do our laundry. At this point the boys relax with their gadgets, and I write this thing, read my Imitation of Christ, and plan the forthcoming day or two. We then go shopping if there is a market, and we return to eat what we have bought and fix stuff for the morrow. We then bide our time until approx. 7:00 when we eat dinner out or something we have made/bought. We go to bed right after dinner. Each morning we pray the Angelus, including anyone we met the day before in our intentions. We pray the rosary toward the end of each day's walk, and we try to stop in at least two churches along the way for more prayers.

Yesterday we roomed with many Americans and spoke at length with Coleen and Brianna from Boston. Coleen in particular seems to need prayers that she fully return to the faith. Today we met Mike from California, a very likeable guy, who took the train from Pamplona to Leon so he could finish in time. I do hope God will help all these good people to find Him and His Church, whether they are seeking or no.



Friday, July 13 4:15 PM

Albergue O Cruciero

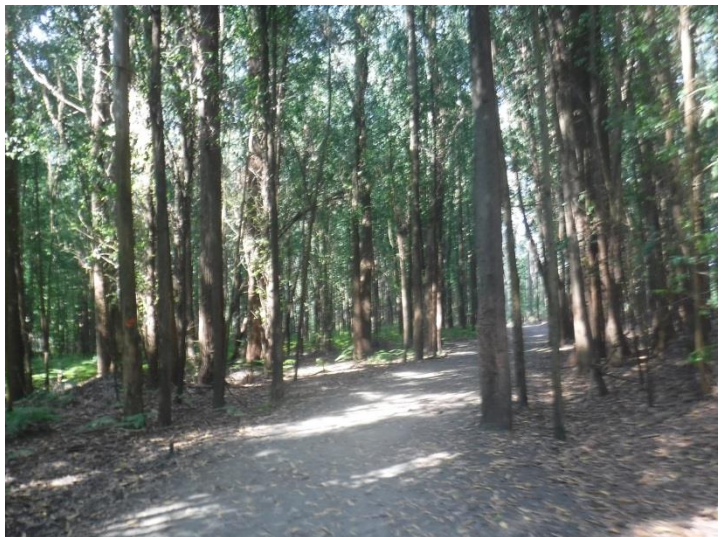
Pedrouzo (Arco do Pino) – 34.9 km (758.4 down, 20.1 to go)

It was a short but intense penultimate day today. We rolled out of Melide at 5:45 AM, and in the darkness we could already anticipate the forthcoming heat. We walked the sawblade terrain with gusto, covering 25+ km before breaking at 10:15. The crowds were enormous, their origins utterly mysterious. The newcomers bring with them a different spirit; Lawrence compared them to tourists. They are loud and jovial, and virtually none of them are solo. They cause us to walk quickly as we are distracted from the walk and focused on passing everyone. In that regard, just as we started our rosary a group of three threatened to pass us. As we have not been passed while walking since we started, we turned up the heat. This resilient crew dogged us for nearly 40 minutes of the most intense walking of the whole journey before they finally relented. After this struggle, we crossed in to our albergue, 35 km from the start, 20 km from Santiago, at noon.

Unfortunately, our albergue of choice was full – by reservation. We lucked out at our second choice. If we had not passed the 100s of people that we did en route, we might have had to continue all the way to Santiago.

Of late, we met a retired schoolteacher named Joyce (from California – of course – though now living in Oregon), who started in Astorga. She is a nice lady we met at the albergue last night. And we met a 31-year-old Sicilian who just quit his job. Alessandro, the future orange and olive king was anticipating making Santiago today. I suspect his girlfriend may prevent that from coming to pass. They have been walking since June 14. He told some funny stories about the drubbing they took at the hands of a hailstorm in the Meseta.

Otherwise, we had our main meal – no squid for this crew – and we are awaiting our dinner of cherries, some sleep, and a quick run to Santiago tomorrow morn.



Saturday, July 14

3:00 PM

Oxford Suites Hotel

Santiago de Compostela – 20.1 km (778.5 down, 0 to go)

God in His goodness has brought this ship to shore. We arrived this morning before the Cathedral of Santiago at 9:28 AM. Until our arrival in the old town it was a nearly flawless day. We left the albergue at 5:38 in the hopes of beating both the sun and the crowds. We passed all who left Pedrouzo before us (maybe six or ten), but then we ran into some people including a gaggle of kids who had started from a few places between Pedrouzo and Santiago. We

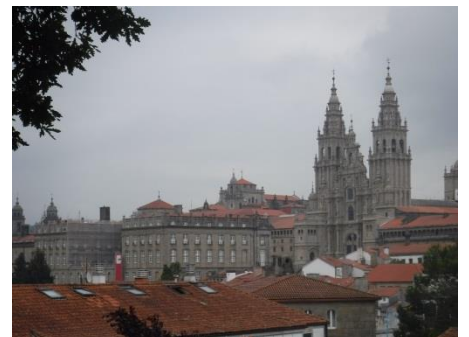
passed all of these as well and got to Santiago virtually alone, well before the sun made any impact. I was moved by the moment – the boys not discernibly as much. We took some pictures and then went to the pilgrim's office and got our compostela. We then dropped our bags at this fine hotel, about 150 yards from the cathedral. To the cathedral we proceeded. Construction bars the normal entrance, so we did not enter on knees. We did, however, pray at the relics of St. James and "hug" his statue above the high altar. We spent 20 minutes or so before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, and we left the cathedral in the initial stages of the pilgrims' Mass. After some ice cream and lunch we are now settled in to our fancy hotel room – our reward for a good, hard pilgrimage.

Just 20.1 km today. The highlight beside finishing was probably catching up to big Mike from California and his wife.

Some reflections. It has been an intense 21 days. We have become quite efficient and even comfortable with this walking thing. We met many good people – none bad. Although the architectural religiosity of Spain waned a bit in the west, we maintained our spiritual focus throughout. There were some low and difficult times but never despair. In terms of natural beauty, the Camino starts with a bang, hits bottom through the middle, and ends marvelously over the last 200 km, particularly in Galicia. Of the major cathedrals we saw, Burgos was easily the most ornate, Leon the most awesome with its Gothic simplicity, Santiago seems a bit confused. It has wonderful elements, but the Baroque seems to be intruding on alien turf. Pamplona was beautiful and coherent. Spain has many kind, and generous and patient people. They are a proud and regional people. It is sad, given their cultural heritage, that they have lost the Faith. The Church leaders of the Vatican II era have much to answer for. Spanish food is interesting, but with our inability to communicate, we were unable to fully discover it. Our journey to see St. James is at a happy end. I long perhaps more than ever to see my dear wife and kids; to be home.









PESCADOS

Rape negro de la ría y garbanzos guisados con compango

29,50€



...But, since we finished eight days ahead of schedule, after a day of rest on Sunday we head off to the end of the earth, Finisterre, on Monday.



After we completed the Camino on Saturday I was uncertain whether I would continue this journal. However, since time is ample and little of interest awaits, write I shall. In short, I am bored.

We spent the latter half of Saturday in our fancy hotel room watching the World Cup. Thereafter, we found a McDonald's a mile away and went there to eat. However this might sound – it is what it is – the McDonald's meal was easily the most satisfying of the entire trip. We feasted on Big Macs, McChicken sandwiches, milkshakes and fries, and it was good. On top of it all, we had fountain drinks, an absolute anomaly in this part of the world. [It was at this time that the young lady employee came up to us and asked us something in Spanish. So caught off guard were we, and unable to respond, that we after a surprised pause exploded in laughter for a long time. We felt terribly as we tried to apologize. Turns out she was offering to dispose of our trays and their contents.] We then returned and went to bed.

On Sunday we were surrounded by Catholic churches that we did not attend. What a sad state the Church is in in Spain. Given the number of Catholics in this country there is almost no presence here for the true Mass. We instead went to the astounding church of St. Francis of Assisi and prayed a rosary for Grandpa Tomac, whose passing we found out about the night before. We have dedicated the rest of our journey to the repose of his soul. May he rest in peace and may he intercede for us in the meantime.

On Sunday morning the boys and I split up. They roamed the streets of Santiago for two hours while I took a "free" tour, at the start of which we were informed that "free" means that when it is over patrons are expected to give a donation of whatever they think it was worth. It was a pleasant tour and intimate – only an Australian couple and me in company with the guide. She uncovered some of this fascinating city's secrets, just enough to make one cognizant that there must be an infinity more! We did not do much else the rest of the day except walk around, eat a large lunch, and partake of a variety of local foods – cheese, tartes, ice cream. We watched the World Cup final – Croatia lost to France; I don't like soccer – and then we went to bed. We are pretty lousy tourists. It would be a much different story if we could speak the language and read the signs.

So this morning we slept in until 6:30-7:00 and we started walking again. The role of pilgrim feels far more purposeful than that of tourist. As ridiculous as it sounds, I was energized by strapping on the backpack!

The trek to Finisterre covers about 90 km. It can be done in two days easily, but since we are mainly just killing time, we are following Brierly's book and taking it in three. The number of albergues along the way is far less than before, and one has to be careful not to end the day at a place that has no available lodging. Brierly's plan generally assures that such a case shall not prevail. Thus it is that we only walked 21.2 km today. After the late start, a listless pace, and no sense of urgency, we finished the day's walk at noon. We met a couple of Oklahomans – Willa and Eric – along the way and swapped stories with them for 30-45 minutes. Meanwhile, the Galician landscape continues to inspire. Now we are in a dumpy town with little character. We are across from a supermarket, but there is no kitchen here. Looks like we will have to settle for another heavy, boring meal tonight. I cannot wait to get home to a home-cooked meal in the bosom of my dear family.



Tuesday, July 17

5:00 PM

Albergue Herreo

Oliveiroa – 33.8 km (55.0 down, 35.0 to go)

So the meal last night was actually good. Most of them are. The problem is that every place offers the same basic fare – at least if you are on a budget. There are pilgrim meals with two plates, bread, dessert, and water or wine. These usually cost 9-12 euros. There are *combinados* – one plate with the same or similar items in smaller portions, and drinks are purchased separately. These are cheaper, especially since wine is cheaper than water. Finally, one can buy things a la carte – *raciones*. We rarely get the pilgrim meal unless it has a spaghetti option as the first plate. Then it is like two meals in one. Far more often we do *combinados* – we never do a la carte.

After dinner yesterday, we went to bed but could not sleep, in part because of the puny pillows. This was among the worst albergues we have been in, with but one toilet for men, one for women, and room for 53 people. Regardless, we rose early and left at 6:15 AM. We walked almost 34 km with just one short stop for lunch around 22 km. We finished at this really nice place in the middle of nowhere at 1:00 PM. After a pleasant, wooded start, we spent much time today on roads. Otherwise, not much to say. The weather has remained nice – in the 70s, although the sun still bears down intensely. Tomorrow we will reach Finisterre, but before we do we will have a stretch of walking on the beach. Time will tell if that proves fortuitous, but presently I am looking forward to it. As of now, there is rain forecast for Thursday, so we must take advantage of good weather on the morrow and reach the end of the earth while there is some visibility.



Wednesday, July 18

4:40 PM

Hotel Ancora

Finisterre (Fisterra) – 35.0 km (90.0 down, 0 to go)

There is a t-shirt for sale around these parts that reads “Fisterra 0,00 km Game Over”. And indeed, as of this afternoon the game is over. We started our journey today at 6:00 AM and went virtually non-stop until we arrived here – well, almost here. Seems we took a walk along the beach along the way. It went like this...

We were among the first out of the albergue. When we left we were looking at 31.5 km to town and 35 km to the cape. We motored through the darkness anticipating the first view of the ocean. Unfortunately, the fog remained thick, severely restricting visibility. The glimpse would wait. Finally, about 12.5 km in, at a height of about 1000 feet, we caught sight of a sliver of coastline. 5 km or so later we began the descent with the sea in full view. After bouncing

along the coast and visiting the most unbelievable pastry shop – incredible, beautiful, and cheap – we had ever seen, we got to a spot 3 km from the center of Finisterre (Fisterra). There we had an option of taking the walkway or the beach. Without hesitation, we stripped off our shoes and socks – and me my pants for the first and only time – and we took to the water. We stepped into the water of the eastern shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, we completed our 550+ mile walk across Spain. All that remained was Finisterre and the cape.

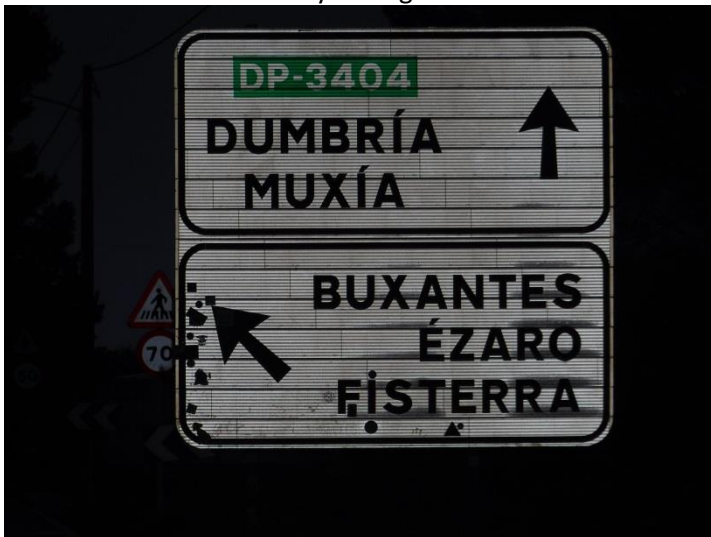
The water was absolutely frigid! Yet we quickly got accustomed, or numb, and there we were – three hairy, scary, backpack toting pilgrims amidst a smattering of sun-bathers and ocean-goers. It was the most luscious and time-consuming 2.5 km of the entire journey. God is good.

We got into Finisterre and checked in to a nice hotel that we found at a price similar to an albergue. We then decided to spend an extra day since the area is so alluring, and Santiago is not. And we have time to kill.

We dumped our bags in our room and hiked up the hill – 3.5 km in length – to the cape as though weightlessly. It was a truly liberating feeling. The cape was beautiful, windy, and crowded. We got our picture at the 0.000 km marker and proceeded to the rocky slope. We soaked that in for about 30-45 minutes and then returned, perfectly satisfied, to here. We will take dinner here and relax for the evening. Although the sun never seems to set in Spain, we are looking forward to a nice sunset tonight, God willing.

We are tired, but we are content. It has been a strenuous 25 days or so, but we all made it, no worse for the wear.

One thing to note, however, since I just took a shower and am somewhat refreshed. There are few things in life more like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates than showers on the Camino. Every last one of them hides a mystery that only unfolds when you turn it on. Even turning it on or adjusting (or not) the temperature can be mysterious. Sometimes it uses a handle, sometimes a button (which sometimes only summons water for 4-5 seconds at whatever temperature it desires); sometimes there is a curtain, a glass panel, half of a glass panel, nothing at all, to keep the water in. Sometimes there are hooks, sometimes not; sometimes the nozzle is attached to the wall, sometimes not; sometimes you pay and press a button, sometimes you pray and just hope for the best. Today we have a nozzle that lets out a trickle that reaches no further than 5-6 inches from the wall. I guess tomorrow will be the same since we are in the same room for two days straight for the first time since June 20-21 when we stayed in the happy place called home.







Saturday, July 21

4:15 PM

Albergue km 0.0

Santiago de Compostela

I write once again from the environs of the city of St. James. We returned here yesterday. Our two days in Fisterra (Galician) = Finisterre (Castilian Spanish) were pleasant and tranquil. We attempted to see a sunset – oops! Bad call considering that the coast actually faces east. I went for a run – barefoot on the beach – on Thursday morning, hoping it would loosen me up. Bad call as it exacerbated most of the pangs. We spent some time on the beach on

Thursday. Bad call as it was approx. 63 degrees, windy, and cloudy. Robert and I tried to get to a cove along the coast by climbing along the rocks. Bad call as it proved impossible to do. We got there by road instead. While there, I stepped on something in the water that either stabbed or stung or impaled me. It hurt mightily, throbbing incessantly. I feared I might not make it back to the hotel almost three miles away. Fortunately, the pain subsided within a half hour, and it has not been an issue since. Finally, on Friday after we left our hotel, we spent a few hours on the beach amidst good weather. Lawrence and Robert baked themselves to a crisp while I wisely applied sunscreen and did not share their fate.

Our 4:15 PM bus to Santiago was delayed by an hour. As it turned out, it was more of a van – 22 passenger – that was actually a tour van. As a result, we got to visit a waterfall and stop for a panoramic view of the Galician coast from one of her many mountains. While taking in the view, I inquired about the endless rows of wind turbines that stood vigil upon each of the ridgelines. Our guide commented angrily that the turbines have wiped out the entire bird population. Oddly enough, I had commented on the dearth of birds in the forests of Galicia just days before.

When we arrived again in Santiago it was 7:30 PM and we had no place to stay. We re-acquired the bags we had left at the pilgrim's office and returned to the streets with destination unknown. We lucked out by getting beds in an albergue a stone's throw away from both office and cathedral. Here we shall remain until the taxi comes to take us to the airport on Monday afternoon. God, as so often before, has taken care of these wayward pilgrims. Speaking of divine favors, I benefited from one this morning. Although we have come to find that there is no plenary indulgence attached to this pilgrimage, I wanted to go to confession at the cathedral nonetheless. Thus, this morning I went to check on times for English speaking confessors. Multiple priests hear confessions for hours in a variety of languages each day in ancient confessionals. Much to my chagrin I discovered that only one of that lot hears confessions in English. While he does so for approx. 5 hours per day, he is not available today, tomorrow or Monday, perfectly coinciding with the remainder of our time here. I was saddened by this, so I asked Our Lord and Sts. Joseph and James to help me out. Sure enough, as I was fixing to leave the cathedral I happened upon a side altar where Mass in English had just concluded. I got ahold of the priest, and he heard my confession right then and there.

So now our last couple of days in Spain. We have met some nice people here in the albergue for whom we shall pray – Lola, the woman running the place, Marissa from Spain, and Estelle from France. Marissa described a Spanish timetable utterly at odds with everyone else. Estelle finds herself sort of homeless at mid-life trying to figure out her path. She has struggled through from St. Jean and is heading to Fisterra. May God grant her the light she seeks.

Meanwhile, Santiago never sleeps, and things are kicking into high gear as they amp up for the feast of St. James, four days hence. As this happens, we shop. We seek trinkets to bring home for the family. They must be small in order to fit in our bags. The whole place is one great big market, emanating outward from the cathedral.



Feast of Santiago, Wednesday, July 25 3:00 PM

Keflavik Airport

Reykjavik, Iceland

As we are in the midst of 11 hours of traveling it seems a fine time to wrap up this journal. Ideally it will occupy the entire forthcoming flight home. Not likely.

Saturday we went grocery shopping for the final time in Santiago. We cooked up a fine meal of soup, pizza, cookies, and bread. The remaining food stretched out over our last day and a half. Meanwhile, we completed our shopping and spent some time Monday going separate ways. The boys roamed the town on Monday as I paid a final visit to the cathedral, Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and St. James. Since the Pilgrims Museum was closed, I toured the cathedral museum. It was uninspired and uninspiring.

We met back up and awaited our 4:00 PM taxi to the airport. The taxi arrived early, and it was soon evident why. We topped out at over 100 mph on the short drive to the airport, whipping around roundabouts as though on a roller coaster. It was kind of a harrowing experience, but we made stellar time.

The flight from Santiago to Paris went smoothly, and we found the hotel shuttle bus without too much difficulty. Around 10:00 PM we checked in at the fancy 4-star Novotel Spa and Convention Center. The wowed us with an unexpectedly high price tag but promised that it would be adjusted at check-out. I had my concerns, and we decided to spend as little money there as possible.

We got a classy hotel instead of touring Paris because, A) everybody was wiped out, and B) nobody liked Paris the first time around. After a near-midnight walk to McDonald's – including a walk through an entire shopping mall that had been closed for three hours – we feasted on Grand Big Macs for our first and only real meal of the day. We then returned to the hotel and bed.

Prior to our food run, we called home. For a brief few minutes I got to hear the angelic voices of those from whom we had been so long estranged. It supplied a nice foretaste of what I so eagerly anticipate now.

On the last day in Paris – actually a hotel 15 miles outside – the boys spent the day at the hotel while I took a walking tour of the surrounding area. We went to Pizza King for dinner, where they just recently added a pepperoni pizza to their menu, we prayed just outside the old church, and returned to the hotel and bed.

This morning we rose at 8:30, checked out (with the price more than properly reduced), and we went to the airport and boarded the plane without incident. And now, as I write, we have just taken to the air over the Atlantic from Iceland.

One of the great wonders of this journey has been the utter absence of travel issues. I do not know how this has come about, but I am grateful to God for it.

As we head for home, some final assessments are in order. So, to that end...

WOW Air – You get what you pay for. There are no frills here. Tough way to fly on such an epic flight. And by and large they were not very timely. However, the flight attendants are dressed like the 50s and are very pleasant.

Paris – For the most part it was pretty but dirty. It was cosmopolitan. The town we were in yesterday was tidy and sort of serene. The people we met were nice. After so much time in Spain, we could not stop talking to them in our few Spanish words and phrases. All told, we spent way too little time in France to make a judgment. It felt a lot like home, and so it was comfortable, but the Muslims were everywhere, which was frankly sickening. [Note, when I speak of the Muslims this way, it is not of any of them personally, rather it is in reference to the religion to which they adhere and the beliefs they presumably bring with them. These are repugnant and offensive to whatever remains of Christendom and to humanity in general. May St. James arise again to remove this scourge from Europe.]

Spain – Spain's culture is far more distinct from ours than the French (that we saw on such a limited basis). I don't believe that we ever adjusted to their timetable, but we came to understand it. With their siesta and the late nights they maintain, they go their own way. Oft times, I suspect, their own way is less profitable. All the more admirable to my mind that they keep to it.

The Spain that we walked through did not wallow in any sort of material riches – a few places in and around the cities excepted. It was, however, awash in kindness and pride. They were good folk across the board that we met. Mostly they were simple country folk. And they were simply decent.

They used to be Catholic folk. But since Vatican II and the death of Franco, that light has gone out. The leaders of the Church have failed her in her hour of need. So while they keep the great feasts of the Church, for their culture has been entirely formed around them, on a daily basis they imbibe at the font of American secular paganism, aka pop culture.

El Camino – The Camino is a religious pilgrimage route to the earthly remains, the relics, of the only one of the original twelve apostles to step foot in western Europe, St. James the Greater. Since the Middle Ages it has been a means of

imitating Our Good Lord Jesus Christ in carrying the cross, of offering up trials and travails of the journey as a sacrifice to God. It was in that light that we undertook this venture. And so we trudged on quickly, painfully, inexorably toward the final objective. And God pulled us through, hopefully to His glory.

As far as I am aware, no massive change overtook any of us; there was no life-altering realization or awakening within us; there was no apparent manifestation of the “magic” of the Camino. We didn’t establish any permanent friendships either. But that was not the point (see preceding paragraph). But this is where the Camino leaves me kind of sad. For that *is* the point for the overwhelming majority of the people on it. Like in the movie *The Way*, their motivations, hopes, and expectations lie purely within this world. And that to me is sad. [To be clear, I applaud those who engage in the Camino for these reasons, I just bemoan the absence of the religious motivation generally.] On the other hand, if this is an opening for God to bring them back to Him, well I for one will not second-guess His wisdom and His ways. All I can say is from appearances it is like a microcosm of the Spanish Church(es) in general – spiritually resplendent on the surface, but hollow within. May God reward the efforts of Fr. Daniel and friends at Sahagun, and others, to make it otherwise.

The Boys – Lawrence and Robert were put in a difficult position when I posited this pilgrimage to them. Their sacrifice was the greatest. They gave up the bulk of their summer, a trip to South Dakota to see Grandpa and Grandma Jacobs and fam, and the multitude of other things they could have done, all in order to slough 500+ miles across a country they never cared to see in the first place. And this was to be done while hauling a backpack through uncertain weather with uncertain lodging, while daily doing their own laundry, shopping for and often making their own meals, showering in uncertain showers, etc. It is impressive for a teenager to want to do this and make it happen, but for the ones upon whom it was merely sprung, it is almost heroic. I am so proud of these two boys for accepting this burden without complaint (although certainly not occasionally – perhaps often – without regret), for waking up all summer long and walking long before sunrise, for dealing with their father in close quarters non-stop for a month+, etc. They have earned my respect along with, no doubt, countless graces.

Home – I love and appreciate it now more than ever. Living in an alien land with strange customs and an incredible barrier to virtually all communication is for the birds.

My Family – More than anything else this trip has made me aware of how much I love and cherish my dear wife and children. They were never far from my mind and often in the forefront. It is now under four hours until I see them again and am with them again. Thank you, dear God!



Camino de Santiago
Credencial del Peregrino

PRESENTED TO:

Jason Thomas Winschel
FIRST AND LAST NAME

PASSPORT # 583913162

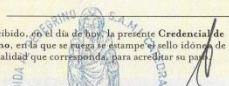
ADDRESS Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
United States of America

AFFILIATION: American Pilgrims on the Camino

BEGINNING THE 23 OF 06 OF 2018
DAY MONTH YEAR

STARTING IN ST JEAN PIED DE PORT

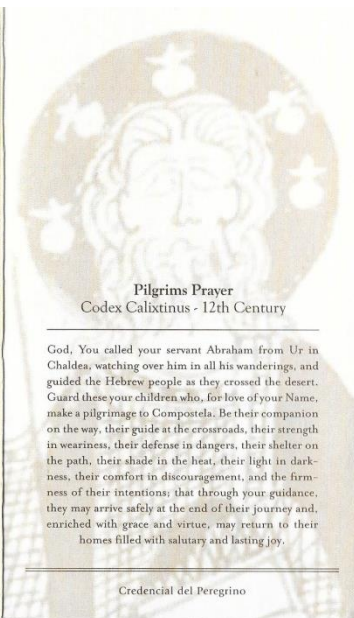
ON PILGRIMAGE TOWARD SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA
ON FOOT ☒ BY BICYCLE ☐ ON HORSEBACK ☐

SIGNATURE 

Y ha recibido, en el día de hoy, la presente Credencial de Peregrino, en la que se pueda estampar el sello idóneo de la localidad que corresponda, para acreditar su paso.

CUMPLIO LA PEREGRINACIÓN
ARRIVED IN SANTIAGO
del día de de año

Credencial autorizada por la S.A.M.I.
Catedral de Santiago de Compostela





Immes dies et noctes quasi sub una sollemnitate continuato
gaudio ad Domini et apostoli decus ibi excolluntur. Valve eiusdem
basilice minime clauduntur die noctue, et nullatenus nox in ea fas est
haberi atra (cf. Ap 21, 25), quia candelarum et cereorum splendida luce ut
meridies fulget. (Códice Calixtino)



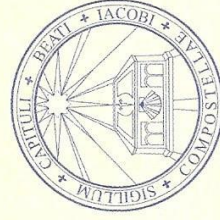
El Cabildo de la Santa Apostólica Metropolitana Catedral de Santiago de
Compostela sita en la región occidental de las Españas, a todos los que vieren esta carta
de certificación de visita, hace saber que:

J 23 M T N 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

ha visitado la Basílica donde desde tiempo inmemorial los cristianos veneran el cuerpo
del Beato Apóstol Santiago.

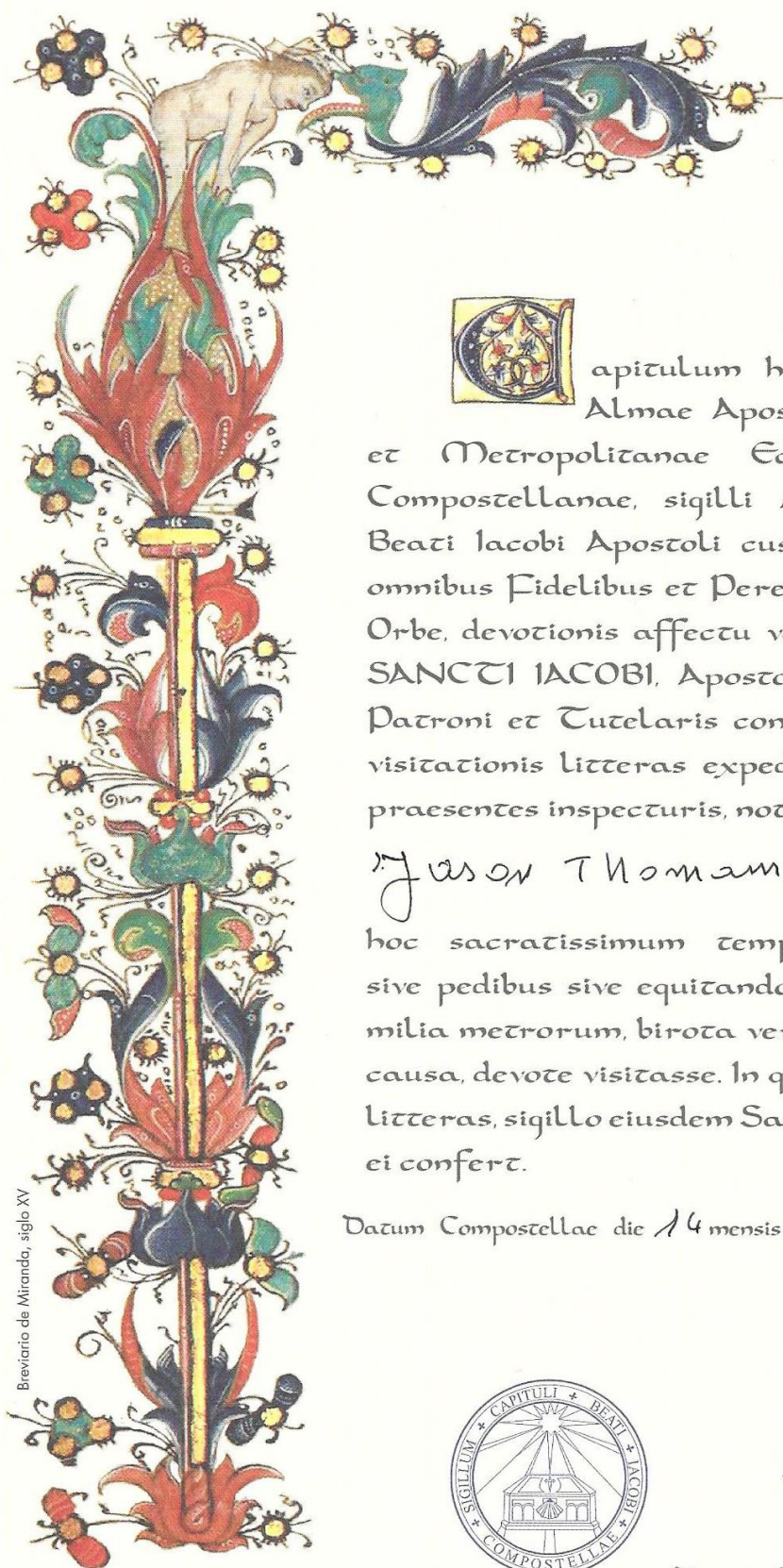
Con tal ocasión, el Cabildo llevado del deber de caridad, al tiempo que con gozo, le dan al peregrino
el saludo del Señor y piden -por intercesión del Apóstol- que el Padre se digne concederle las riquezas
espirituales de la peregrinación, así como los bienes materiales. Bendigalo Santiago y sea bendito.

Dada en Compostela, Meta del Camino de Santiago, el día 14 del mes de Julio del año 2018
Después de realizar 799 km Desde SAINT JEAN PIED LE PORT
donde comenzó el 23 de junio del 2018 por la ruta del CAMINO FRANCÉS



Segundo López

Segundo L. Pérez López
Deán de la S.A.M.I. Catedral de Santiago



Breviario de Miranda, siglo XV

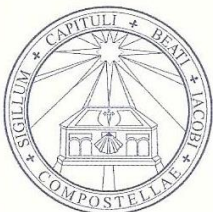


Capitulum huius
Almae Apostolicae
et Metropolitanae Ecclesiae
Compostellanae, sigilli Altaris
Beati Iacobi Apostoli custos, ut
omnibus Fidelibus et Peregrinis ex toto terrarum
Orbe, devotionis affectu vel voti causa, ad limina
SANCTI IACOBI, Apostoli Nostri, Hispaniarum
Patroni et Tutelaris convenientibus, authenticas
visitationis litteras expediat, omnibus et singulis
praesentes inspecturis, notum facit:

*Dñm
Jasón Thomam Wimschel*

hoc sacratissimum templum, perfecto itinere
sive pedibus sive equitando post postrema centum
milia metrorum, birota vero post ducenta, pietatis
causa, devote visitasse. In quorum fidem praesentes
litteras, sigillo eiusdem Sanctae Ecclesiae munitas,
ei confert.

Datum Compostellae die 14 mensis *de Iuli* anno Dni 1518



Segundo Pérez

Segundo L. Pérez López
Decanus S.A.M.E. Cathedralis Compostellanae



Códice Calixtino

Camino de Santiago
Credencial del Peregrino

PRESENTED TO:
Lawrence John Winschel
FIRST AND LAST NAME

PASSPORT # _____
ADDRESS Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
United States of America

AFFILIATION: American Pilgrims on the Camino

BEGINNING THE 23 OF 06 OF 2018
DAY MONTH YEAR

STARTING IN ST JEAN PIED DE PORT

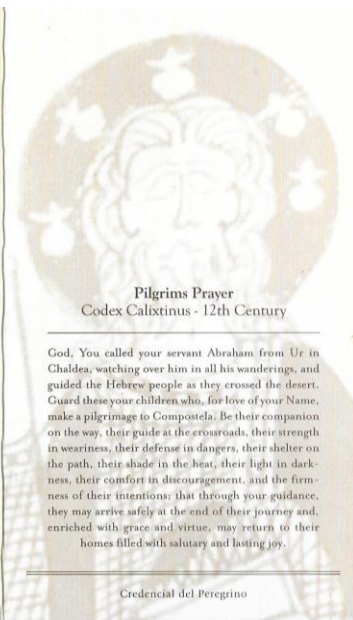
ON PILGRIMAGE TOWARD SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA
ON FOOT ☒ BY MULE ☐ ON HORSEBACK ☐

SIGNATURE _____

Y ha recibido en el día de hoy la presente Credencial de Peregrino, copia que se rubra y se empe el sello idóneo de la localidad que corresponde, para acreditar su paso.

CUMPLE LA PEREGRINACIÓN
Acreditada en el año _____
el día _____ de _____ del año _____

Credencial autorizada por la S.A.M.I.
Catedral de Santiago de Compostela



FIRMAS Y SELLOS

23/06/2018 No 18

23.06.18

Pensión Zubizarren Eliza

C/ Camino de Santiago, 2
Tfno.: 948 304 293
31630 ZUBIRI - Navarra

24-6-2018

25/6/18

M. I. CATEDRAL

25 JUN. 2018

PAMPLONA

FIRMAS Y SELLOS

25-6-18

26-6-2018

AYEGUI KM 100

MONASTERIO DE SANTA MARÍA LA MAYOR DE IZABE

TORRES DEL RIO

ALBERGUE CASA ALBERDI

Los Arcos - Navarra

Tfno. 948 64 07 64

FIRMAS Y SELLOS

28-6-18

28/6/2018

HOSTAL Villa de Navarrete

La Cruz, 2-C

Telf. 941 440318 - 627 904798

26370 NAVARRETE (Lo Ríojo)

28/6/2018

EL HOTEL

JACOBO

San Juan 24 - 68004 BURGOS

Tel. 947 26 01 02 - Fax 947 26 01 01

03/07/2018

FIRMAS Y SELLOS

02/07/2018

03-7-18

04-07-18

05-7-2018

FIRMAS Y SELLOS

06-07-2018

07-07-2018

08 JUL. 2018

08-07-2018

FIRMAS Y SELLOS

09-7-2018

10-7-2018

11 JUL. 2018

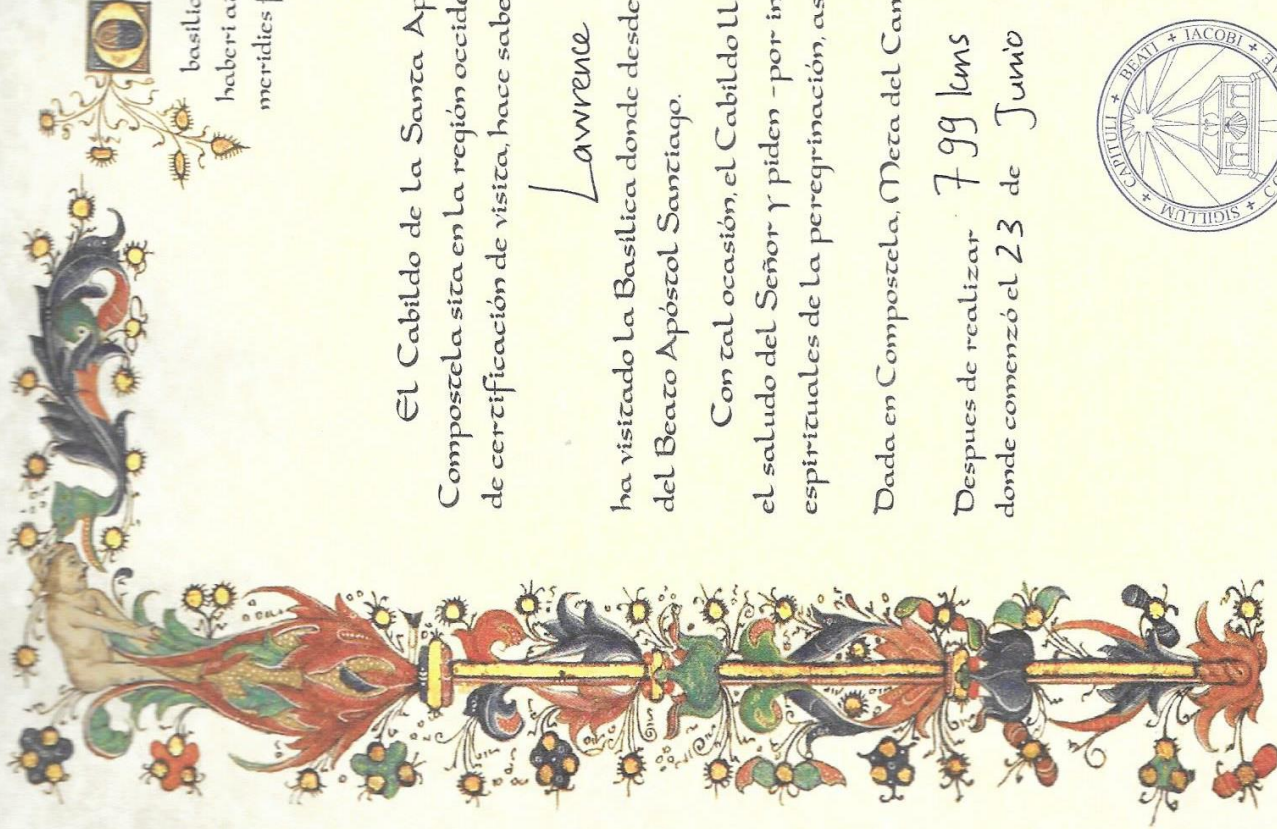
FIRMAS Y SELLOS

11 JUL. 2018

12-7-18

14-7-18

14 JUL. 2018



innes dies et noctes quasi sub una sollemnitate continuato
gaudio ad Domini et apostoli decus ibi excoluntur. Valde eiusdem
basilice minime clauduntur die noctique, et nullatenus nix in ea fas est
haberi atra (cf. Ap 21, 25), quia candelarum et cereorum splendida luce ut
meridies fulget. (Códice Calixtino)



El Cabildo de la Santa Apostólica Metropolitana Catedral de Santiago de Compostela sita en la región occidental de las Españas, a todos los que vieren esta carta de certificación de visita, hace saber que:

Lawrence John Winschel

ha visitado la Basílica donde desde tiempo inmemorial los cristianos veneran el cuerpo del Beato Apóstol Santiago.

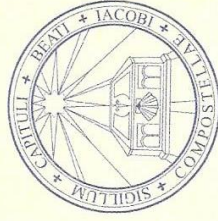
Con tal ocasión, el Cabildo llevado del deber de caridad, al tiempo que con gozo, le dan al peregrino el saludo del Señor y piden -por intercesión del Apóstol- que el Padre se digne concederle las riquezas espirituales de la peregrinación, así como los bienes materiales. Bendígallo Santiago y sea bendito.

Dada en Compostela, Meta del Camino de Santiago, el día 14 del mes Julio del año 2018

Después de realizar 799 kms
donde comenzó el 23 de Junio

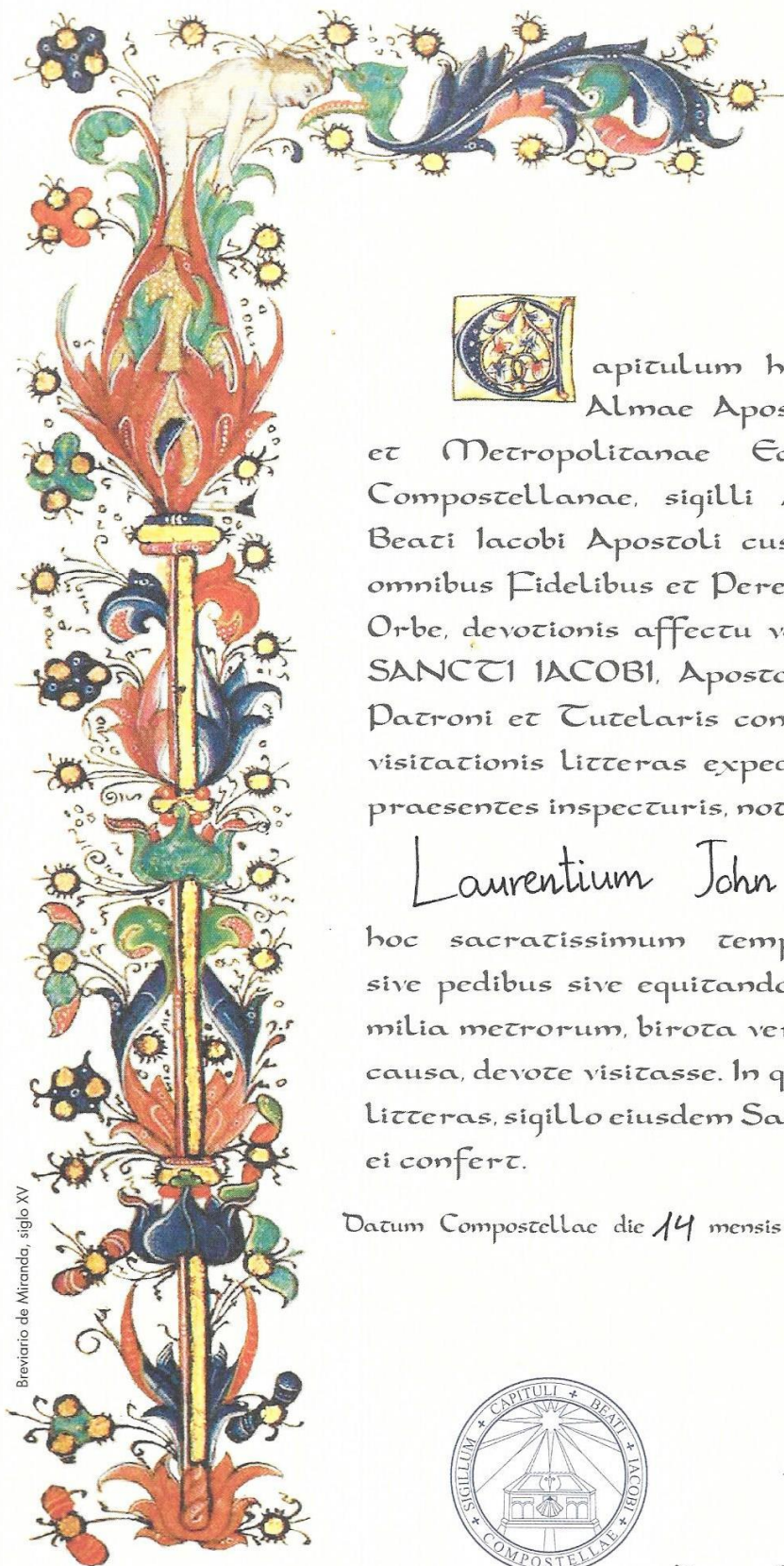
Desde Saint Jean Pied de Port
del 2018 por la ruta del

Camino Francés



Segundo L. Pérez López

Segundo L. Pérez López
Decán de la S.A.M.I. Catedral de Santiago



Breviario de Miranda, siglo XV



Capitulum huius
Almae Apostolicae
et Metropolitanae Ecclesiae
Compostellanae, sigilli Altaris
Beati Iacobi Apostoli custos, ut
omnibus Fidelibus et Peregrinis ex toto terrarum
Orbe, devotionis affectu vel voti causa, ad limina
SANCTI IACOBI, Apostoli Nostri, Hispaniarum
Patroni et Tutelaris convenientibus, authenticas
visitationis litteras expediat, omnibus et singulis
praesentes inspecturis, notum facit:

Dominum
Laurentium John Winschel

hoc sacratissimum templum, perfecto itinere
sive pedibus sive equitando post postrema centum
milia metrorum, birota vero post ducenta, pietatis
causa, devote visitasse. In quorum fidem praesentes
litteras, sigillo eiusdem Sanctae Ecclesiae munitas,
ei confert.

Datum Compostellae die 14 mensis Julii anno Dni 2018



Segundo Pérez

Segundo L. Pérez López
Decanus S.A.M.E. Cathedralis Compostellanae



Códice Calixtino

Camino de Santiago
Credencial del Peregrino

PRESENTED TO:
Robert Edward Winschel
FIRST AND LAST NAME

PASSPORT # _____

ADDRESS **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**
United States of America

AFFILIATION: American Pilgrims on the Camino

BEGINNING THE 23 OF 06 OF 2018
DAY MONTH YEAR

STARTING IN **SAINTE JEAN PIED DE PORT**

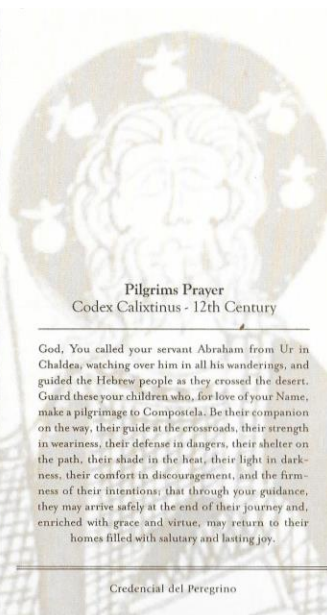
ON PILGRIMAGE TOWARD SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA
ON FOOT ☒ BY BICYCLE ☐ ON HORSEBACK ☐

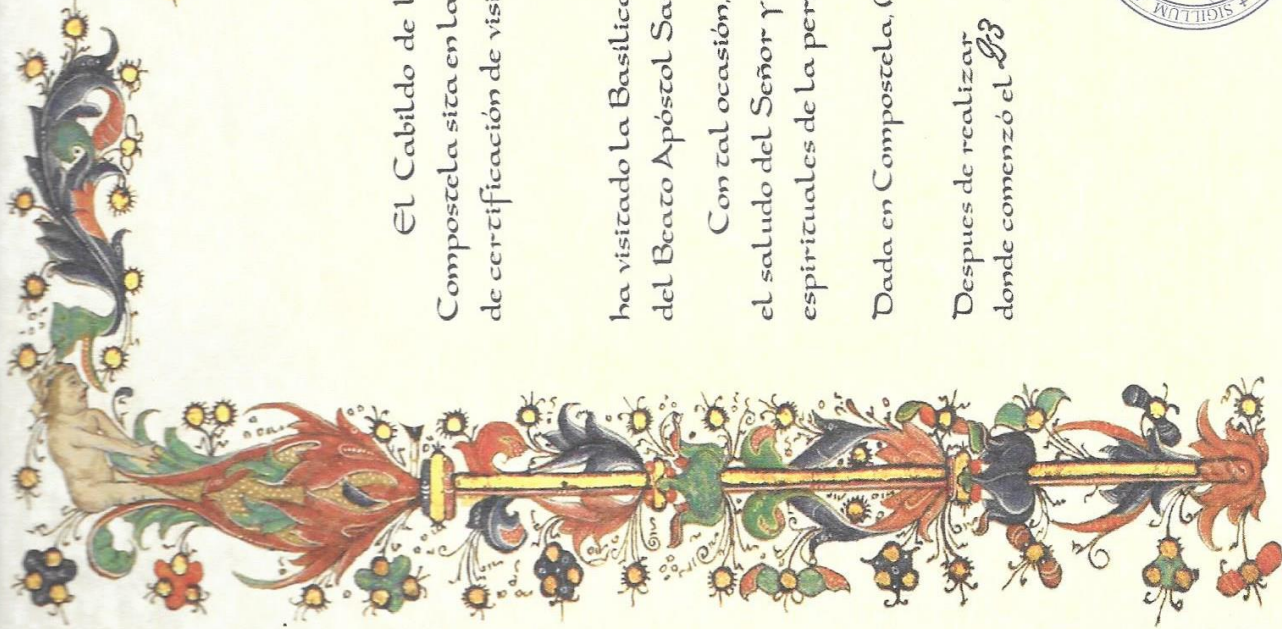
SIGNATURE _____

Y ha recibido, el día de hoy, la presente Credencial de Peregrino, en la que se rúpa se otorga el sellado de la localidad que corresponde, para acreditar su paso.

CUMPLIO LA PEREGRINACION
ARRIVED IN SANTIAGO
el día **14 JUL 2018** del año _____

Credencial autorizada por la S.A.M.I.
Catedral de Santiago de Compostela





innes dies et noctes quasi sub una sollempnitate continuato
gaudio ad Domini et apostoli decus ibi excoluntur. Valde eiusdem
basilice minime clauduntur die noctique, et nullatenus nox in ea fas est
haberi atra (cf. Ap 21, 25), quia candelarum et cereorum splendida luce ut
meridies fulget. (Códice Calixtino)



El Cabildo de la Santa Apostólica Metropolitana Catedral de Santiago de
Compostela sita en la región occidental de las Españas, a todos los que vieren esta carta
de certificación de visita, hace saber que:

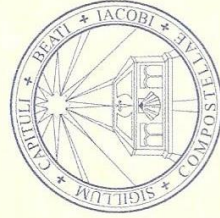
Robert Eduard Wirschel

ha visitado la Basílica donde desde tiempo inmemorial los cristianos veneran el cuerpo
del Beato Apóstol Santiago.

Con tal ocasión, el Cabildo llevado del deber de caridad, al tiempo que con gozo, le dan al peregrino
el saludo del Señor y piden -por intercesión del Apóstol- que el Padre se digne concederle las riquezas
espirituales de la peregrinación, así como los bienes materiales. Bendigalo Santiago y sea bendito.

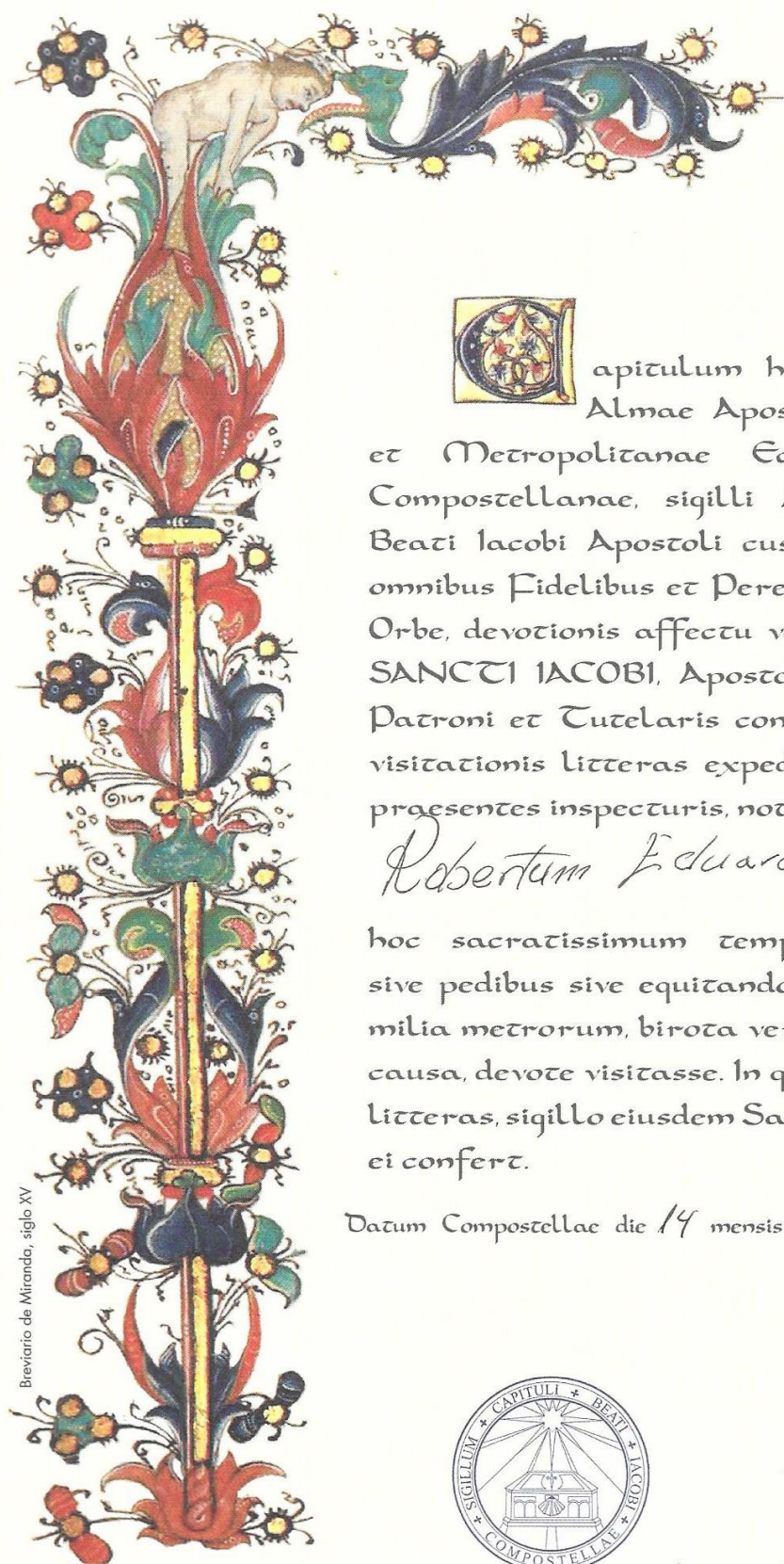
Dada en Compostela, Meta del Camino de Santiago, el día 14 del mes Julio del año 2018

Después de realizar 799 Km. Desde Saint Jean Pied De Port por la ruta del Camino Francés
donde comenzó el 23 de Junio del 2018



Segundo Pérez

Segundo L. Pérez López
Decán de la S.A.M.I. Catedral de Santiago



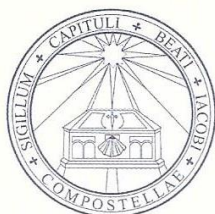
Breviario de Miranda, siglo XV



Capitulum huius
Almae Apostolicae
et Metropolitanae Ecclesiae
Compostellanae, sigilli Altaris
Beati Iacobi Apostoli custos, ut
omnibus Fidelibus et Peregrinis ex toto terrarum
Orbe, devotionis affectu vel voti causa, ad limina
SANCTI IACOBI, Apostoli Nostri, Hispaniarum
Patroni et Tutelaris convenientibus, authenticas
visitationis litteras expediat, omnibus et singulis
praesentes inspecturis, notum facit: *Dominum*
Robertum Eduardum Winschel

hoc sacratissimum templum, perfecto itinere
sive pedibus sive equitando post postrema centum
milia metrorum, birota vero post ducenta, pietatis
causa, devote visitasse. In quorum fidem praesentes
litteras, sigillo eiusdem Sanctae Ecclesiae munitas,
ei confert.

Datum Compostellae die 14 mensis *Iulii* anno Dni 2018



Segundo Pérez

Segundo L. Pérez López
Decanus S.A.M.E. Cathedralis Compostellanae



Códice Calixtino



June 23



June 24



June 25



June 26



June 27



June 28



June 29



June 30



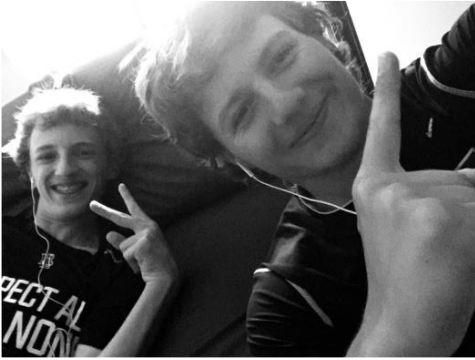
July 1



July 2



July 3



July 4



July 5



July 6



July 7



July 8



July 9



July 10



July 11



July 12



July 13



July 14



July 18

