

Camino Frances 2013

4/4/13

Well this trip is off to a great start. First the sprained ankle, then the battle with my boss to get out of Deadhorse on time. Then the train and metro tickets from Team In Training never showed up. Now my flight from Seattle to London is delayed 6 ½ hours. I did manage to rebook my London to Paris flight, but won't get there until 11 pm. I can't imagine what will happen there.

4/5/13

I got into the Paris Airport around 11 pm. I was too late to get the train, so I just took a taxi to the hotel. It cost 55 euros but it was my only option. It was a very long flight, but I did sleep a lot. I watched Les Miserables on the movie screen.

4/6/13

Erica Gray is my roommate. She is so nice. We all went on the 5K breakfast run and it felt pretty good. After that, we went to the marathon expo and picked up our race bibs. I got a couple of T shirts. When we got back to the hotel, I took a 2-hour nap then went to the Inspiration Dinner. The food wasn't very good. After that I just went to bed because I was exhausted from the long flight and I was still fighting a bad cold. I'm hoping to feel better in the morning, but I don't have much hope for the marathon tomorrow.

4/7/13

Race day for the Paris Marathon. What a mob scene at the race start. We all stuck together in a horrified little huddle. It was total chaos with no real organization. Forget using the bathroom. To get to our corrals people were having to climb over the barricades. But we finally found our way inside. The race was 45 minutes late starting. It was only 32 degrees at the start too. But the weather did warm up to near 50 and the sun came out. It was a beautiful course past the most famous places in Paris. I still didn't feel very well but was able to keep running. I only stopped at a couple of the aid stations just because they were so crowded. They had small bottles, so I just ran holding my bottle. I grabbed sugar cubes that they had and they seemed to help more than anything else. I did manage to finish in 5:52:51, a bit slow. But fast enough to get my medal. It was such a relief and felt like a miracle after all my trouble with my ankle, my cold, flight delays etc.

4/8/13

I moved over to the Cyrano's Hotel. I was now so sick that I gave up doing anything interesting and just slept all day.

4/9/13

I woke up feeling fine. I went for a walk to the Louvre and found it was closed on Tuesdays. Then I walked to Notre Dame breathtaking cathedral. It rained off and on all day and was quite cold. Through the rain I walked to the Eiffel Tower and took the lift to the top. The view was wonderful in spite of the rain. I scattered my little packet of Mother's ashes into the Seine River across from the Louvre, one of her favorite places in the world.

4/10/13

Today was travel day. First I took the metro to Gare Nord because there was an information center there. I never found it! But I did find the SNCF train ticket office. From there I was able to book my train ticket to Lourdes as well as my hotel room there. My train arrived in Lourdes at 8pm. I plan to spend another night here so I can take in all that Lourdes has to offer. I hope the Tourist Information Office can help me find the walking route to St Jean Pied de Port. I love the idea of starting my Camino here in this sacred place.

4/11/13

I spent the day in Lourdes. First, I went to the Post Office to unload about 5 unnecessary pounds of things to send home. Then on to the Office of Tourism. I was so happy because they gave me a paper map of the route from Lourdes to St Jean. Now I have my route!

I visited the Basilica and the Sanctuary which are both magnificent. I lit a candle in the chapel for my friend Alyce who suffers from Multiple Sclerosis. I lit one of the bigger candles for her in the Grotto and prayed for her healing. I gathered a small vial of Holy Water from the font up on the hill, to bring home to Alyce, something she had hoped I would be able to do. Lastly, I went for a ride on the funicular up the mountain then enjoyed the long walk back down along a lovely trail with beautiful views of the Pyrenees Mountains and the city below.

4/12/13

Day 1 Today I officially begin the Camino.

I took my first steps towards Santiago de Compostela from the Grotto in Lourdes. From there I followed small trails along the river. I had some trouble finding the first trail but was helped by a man in a truck who happened along. It was a long footpath through rolling rural farm country to Rieulhes, followed by a touch of road, then back on trail to St Pie de Bigorre. From there, on through forest and farms to Betharram. On the hill above Betharram was a fascinating collection of monuments marking the way to the top of the hill. They were the Stations of the Cross. The hill was quite steep, and I almost felt like I was walking to Calvary myself! From there, it was down the other side of the mountain along a footpath to the town. I stayed in the parish house in Asson after meeting Patrick, another pilgrim who led me to the albergue for the night. It was very comfortable, and we ate dinner at the restaurant around the corner for 10 euros. I had an interesting conversation with Patrick with both of us using our cell phone translation apps to communicate with each other. I speak only a few essential words of French and he only the same amount of English.

4/13/13

Day 2

Left Asson and grabbed a chocolate Croissant at a little grocery mart. Today brought fabulous weather and was quite warm. The route was mostly forest trails with occasional small stretches of paved roads through Bruges, Mifaget and on to Saint Colome. Low on water I searched the town with no luck. Finally, the church opened up and I asked a couple of men in there where I could find some water. They led me to a water faucet right around the corner and I filled my water bottles.

I arrived in Arudy around 4pm and realized there was no place to stay that was a reasonable distance ahead. So, I was forced to find a place to stay in Arudy. While looking for the parish house, along comes Patrick again. He led the way to the parish house. It is a fabulous place and Father Pierre said mass at the church. I finally got to go to mass along my pilgrimage. After mass he cooked a delicious dinner. I was even able to wash clothes there and hang them outdoors. A little cat lives in the parish and his name is Tiago. Father Pierre has written several books about the cat. He is adorable, as are all cats in my mind. This is a wonderful place to stay along the trail from Lourdes to Santiago.

4/14/13

Day 3

Made it to Oloron St Marie today. I'm finding that it's taking too long and I'm at risk for not getting to Santiago in time. I tried to change my flight, but it wasn't possible right now. Maybe I'll be able to later. I want to start getting up a little earlier, so I can get on the road. But on this route, there are not very many places to spend the night. I've been stopping around 4pm each day, which I think is too early. I hope after reaching St Jean, I am able to go farther each day, since that is a more popular route. The heat was getting to me today. I will definitely try to speed up after St Jean.

4/15/13

Day 4

I left Oloron at 8 am with Patrick. It rained for a little while and was quite refreshing. A lot of the trail today was very muddy along logging trails. It wasn't quite as beautiful as the last few days, but still quite pleasant walking. I reached L'Hopital Saint Blaise at about 3:30pm. The albergue was across from the town hall so I walked in that direction and stumbled upon Patrick once again. He has been so helpful.

I've spent lots of time trying to discern why I felt so compelled to walk from Lourdes instead of starting in St Jean, the usual starting point. I love that I chose this route but wonder if there is some special reason that will reveal itself at some point. I hope I can change my flight to a later one or at least speed up. I like not feeling pressed for time though.

4/16/13

Day 5

Left St. Blaise and ended up staying in Mauleon. It was beautiful and sunny the whole way, through hills and farms. I just made a new phone reservation through expedia and canceled my original flight from Madrid. I can still use that ticket to fly home from Europe within a year. Now I'm leaving the 27th of May instead of the 22nd, giving me 5 extra days to get to Santiago. I didn't like feeling rushed. Today is probably the last day to see Patrick. He left and went on to Ordiarp. I had quite a time trying to communicate with the two little ladies who stamped my credential at the "gita" tonight.

4/17/13

Day 6

I left Mauleon Licharre and climbed many steep trails up mountains to St Just Ibarre. What a blistering hot day it was! Stopped in Ordinarp for lunch by the church, an ancient church from the 12th Century. When I got to St Just Ibarre I was totally bewildered because it looked like everything was closed. There were several hostels/hotels listed but all seemed closed. I called Mme Berhot Louet after seeing her

name and number listed and had a fascinating conversation in French. Somehow, she managed to understand that I needed a room for the night, and that I was currently across from the church. A man on the street had shown me where the hostel was, across from the church. After waiting a few minutes, a sweet little lady showed up in her car. She stamped my credential and when I said I was totally out of food, she gave me a bag of macaroni and some odd spicy sausages. With the tiny amount of cheese I had left, I cooked up an odd, but tasty dinner. In the morning she told me about a boulangerie about 2 kilometers down the road where I could get some breakfast.

4/18/13

Day 7

Oh yes, that boulangerie was an oasis in the desert. I stocked up on oranges, bread, cheese, chocolate croissants, and little pies. Then I trekked all day in a heavy overcast with refreshingly cool weather. There was a little misty rain. It was delightful to finally arrive in St Jean Pied de Pont. I stayed in the municipal albergue with lots of company. Everyone was warned against taking the Napoleon Route due to heavy snow conditions. That was a little disappointing, but I will plan to start out in the morning on the lower Valcarlos Route.

4/19/13

Day 8

And I'm off to the mountains over the Valcarlos, lower route towards Roncesvalles, respecting the warnings about the Napoleon Route. Big warning signs are posted at the entrance to the Napoleon Route. It poured rain over half the distance but at least that kept it cool. I made it over the pass to Roncesvalles, but that place didn't have much appeal. So I continued on another 3 kilometers to the lovely town of Burguete. There is a darling little hotel there so I stayed there instead of an albergue. Sometimes a little privacy is a treat. It was also nice to stay in a real bed for a change.

4/20/13

Day 9

I had a nice breakfast at the hotel then went on in cloudy weather initially. But it cleared up and although it was pretty cold and windy, it was nice in sunny areas. I stopped for a while in Zubiri but decided to go on to Larrasoana. The albergue here is quite simple but good enough, and only 6 euros a night. I want to continue my walk as a prayer for peace. Something this poor world needs.

4/21/13

Day 10

It was very cold through the night and this was not an albergue of many stars! I was up and out by 6:30am. It was freezing cold, and even after the sun came up I was still freezing cold. It got very windy but was still a beautiful clear day. I found a great little café about 9 kilometers out of Larrasoana and met two nice ladies, Stephanie and Kathy. Stephanie is also a Marathon Maniac so we enjoyed lots of running stories.

Today was a relaxing day through forest and sometimes, along with new friends, I wasn't so aware of time and place and suddenly stumbled into Pamplona. In a small town just before Pamplona there was a

footrace going on that held me up for a little while. Just before Pamplona I tripped on some steps because of my bad ankle and nearly fell, trying to save myself with my trekking poles. For a while it hurt more than usual but is now back to its usual mild pain state. I have been living on Advil since I left home.

Pamplona was full of activity and I enjoyed a fascinating walk through the old medieval walled town. I had lunch in a lovely park and shared it with a friendly pigeon who kept coming back for more. I made it to Cizur Menor for the night in a lovely albergue. I had a nice hot shower and cooked a delicious spaghetti dinner in the kitchen. After dinner went to mass at the cute rock church across the street. Today was a really great day on the Camino.

4/22/13

Day 11

Cizur Menor to Puente la Reina was the goal for today. It was cloudy and chilly, but right on the edge of tolerable for me today. I could still have used another layer but was never really too cold. The day started out with the uphill to Zariquiegui where there were tiny shop and vending machines. I am so sick of trying to get balanced meals. I went for a little pack of chocolate chip cookies and a Kinder Bueno, my favorite candy bar. That gave me a big energy boost to get me to Alto de Peron on top of the ridge where the famous iron castings of pilgrims stand. It was mostly downhill from there to the little villages of Uterga, Muruzabel, and Obanos. Then on to Puente La Reina. I chose the monastery hostel run by the Padres Reparadores right across from the simple Iglesia Crucifixe. I went into the church for a quiet prayer for strength, healing of my ankle, healing for Bob up in Deadhorse, and peace in general. Then I walked to the market and went into the magnificent Iglesia de Santiago with its enormous gold and metal altar. Puente la Riena is an interesting place to explore.

4/23/13

Day 12

Today I walked from Puente la Riena to Estrella. What a perfect day it was. My ankle is a bit better but still annoying. There were lots of interesting ancient sites along the trail today. I had lunch on an ancient pilgrim bridge. Most of the day it was sunny with just the right amount of wind to keep it pleasant. Once in Estrella, I took some time to see the sights. Walked to the amazing church and the old castle ruins. I took a walk around the town and by some miracle I actually found a running store. I bought some socks because I had become allergic to the Smartwool socks I was wearing. I had a rash all over my feet and ankles. The old socks are now in a trash bin at the Estrella Munciple Albergue. Had dinner in an American style restaurant and it hit the spot because I was starving.

4/24/13

Day 13

I made it to Los Arcos today. I walked a lot faster, but my ankle still hurts. It was nice weather today, but I still needed the fleece a good bit of the way because of the wind. There was not a cloud in the sky though. At Los Arcos I went to the Pilgrim mass at the Iglesia Santa Maria. It's an incredibly beautiful church, like so many along the Camino. The priest gave us all little prayer cards with he Pilgrim Prayer on them. I managed to lose my gloves and my comb back in my bed in the albergue in Estrella. I can't imagine how I did that. But it was no great loss. I found some work gloves in a gas station, so my hands

will still stay warm. Today's walk was a lovely stroll along gentle hills and trails through some cute mediaeval villages. I ran into Kathy and Stephani again. The same bunch of pilgrims seem to end up at the same place most nights.

4/25/13

Day 14

I had a very long walk today. I got up at 6am and was on the trail by 7:30am. I ate a nice breakfast at the albergue in Los Altos. The morning was very cool but warmed up quickly. A light breeze kept things comfortable. I had a nice lunch in front of the church at Viana then walked all the way to Lagrono and stayed at the municipal albergue. Kathy and Stephanie were here too, and I went to dinner with them and had a delicious egg and cheese sandwich. Then some well earned ice cream for dessert.

I didn't get to go into the beautiful churches here. I miss going to evening mass like I did last night. I like socializing but sometimes I feel like I'm missing the spiritual side that I long for so much. I wish I could go into every church and kneel and pray for just a few minutes. That's one reason I'm here, along with the beauty of nature, history, and new friendships. Right now in the albergue there is so much commotion with people partying and yelling. It's such a contrast to the sense of peace that I feel walking the Camino.

I think tomorrow will bring rain.

4/26/13

Day 15

Today was a nice walk from Lagrono to Najera. The day started out with rain but it wasn't terribly cold. It was a very long walking day though. The last few miles from Ventosa into Najera were getting quite hot. I was starting to believe I would never get there. Once reaching the city there were several more kilometers to go. When I finally found the albergue, unfortunately it was full. But the next one did have room. It was one big room with the beds next to each other. It was a very tiring day and painful for my foot and ankle. I walked for 9 hours. I went to a little bar with Karen from the Netherlands and a couple others. We all drank a little wine. I had the same amount as the others, but when I stood up, I was so dizzy that I was unable to walk on my own. My friends half carried me back to the albergue. Once in my bed, I threw up my entire dinner. I had originally claimed the top bunk, but of course ended up sleeping on the bottom. It was pretty awful, but I slept well. I'm not much of a drinker!

4/27/13

Day 16

I was well rested, but I could tell the night before was a little confusing. I had no idea where my shoes were. Apparently, folks had put them in another room when they helped me into my bed. Makes me wonder why people actually seem to enjoy getting drunk!

Today was yet another very long day with lots of rain and even a little snow and hail. But my ankle felt great. The guide book suggested Santo Domingo as the stopping point, but it was only 2pm when I got there. So, I decided to continue on to the next town of Granon. It is a very special place with an albergue attached to its ancient church. We all slept on mattresses on the floor and it was nice and warm in the ancient building. There was a huge dinner for everyone staying here.

4/28/13

Day 17

Leaving Granon this morning it is so cold today. There is a little rain and a little snow and lots of wind. It was about 18 miles from Granon to Villafranca Montes de Oca. At Belorado that I bought a warm hooded sweatshirt in the restaurant/albergue there, to try to keep warm. It was still cold with that, but more tolerable. I was no longer following the recommendations in my guide book so was now meeting new people and adding some miles. I hope to gain a day or two at the end to give me more time to get to Finisterre.

4/29/13

Day 18

I left Villafranca in the cold, wind, rain and fog. It was a beautiful climb up over the mountain. I planned to stay in Orbaneja where my guide book claimed there was a nice new rural hotel. But upon arriving I found it to be closed. That was disappointing. So I continued on to Villa Fria, another 3.5 kilometers where there was a nice hotel for \$38 euros. It was a welcome sight after a horribly windy walk along the highway by the Burgos Airport. Cary and Marco, fellow peregrinos from the night before had also found themselves there. We had dinner together. We are all so close to Burgos now.

4/30/13

Day 19

Let my comfortable hotel in Villa Fria once again, in the pouring rain and freezing cold. What a long long walk along the highway to Burgos. I had freezing hands and wet gloves. I hoped to find some better gloves today, but never did. I stopped in a small café for a chocolate croissant and hot coffee. Then continued the long cold walk into Burgos. I was so cold and tired when I got there. The cathedral was splendid, but I didn't go in the paid entrance. I was more interested in getting out of the city. I stopped in a shopping mall but found no gloves. But it did stop raining and warmed up a bit. I finally got out of the city and went 10 kilometers to Tarjados for a bite to eat. I considered stopping in the next town of Rabe, but I felt too good to quit that early. I continued on to Hornillos, another 10 kilometers. I was shocked when I arrived because all of the albergues were full. Even space on the church floor was full. I panicked at first. Then I called a number of a casa rural in the next town, and to my delight, they drove the 2 kilometers and picked me up and took me to a gorgeous hotel room. It was still only 40 euros and it was well worth it for the hot bath and no crowds. It was delightful! The walk from Tarjados to Hornillos was gorgeous green rolling hills. It was waring up and the clouds were breaking. I am so glad I had continued on to Hornillos.

5/1/13

Day 20

It was a long walk but a beautiful day that started with fog. I got a ride back to Hornillos from the Casa Rural where I stayed last night. It was a beautiful walk through the green countryside to Hontanas where I had a snack and a Coke. Then on to San Anton and the ruins of the San Anton Convent. Time seemed to fly by and I suddenly realized I had reached Castrojeriz. It's a lovely town with amazing churches and architecture. It was only about 1:30pm so I went on, leaving behind the crowds who were following the

guide book that said to stay there. I continued another 11 kilometers to Itero de la Vega, beginning with a very long hill climbing up to Alto Mestelares. It seemed to take forever but I finally crossed the Rio Pisuerga and into Itero where I stayed in a private room in the albergue. I met Ray and Angie from the UK. I ate dinner with them and had a fun time chatting with them.

5/2/13

Day 21

I left Itero de la Vega on a chilly morning but at least it wasn't raining. I walked on a long dirt road to Boadilla de Camino and along the Canal de Castilla to Fromista for lunch. From there the trail was a 'senda' trail, a path that follows the highway, to Poblacion. At that point there were two options. I chose the one along the Rio Ucieza instead of the senda along the road. It was wild, deserted and beautiful. I'm staying in a nice hostel in Villalcazar de Sirga.

5/3/13

Day 22

Wow, too many back to back 20 mile days! I think it caught up with me. It was a beautiful sunny day, though now very warm. I left Villalcazar and got some groceries in Carrion. Then followed the long and straight pathway for 17 miles to Caldadilla de la Cueva. I fully intended to go at least another 6.4 kilometers to Ledigos, but when I stopped for a Coke, I realized I was exhausted. Ledigos only has one albergue and I really worried that it would be full, since it was already 3pm. The place where I got the coke was also a hostel, so I gave up and got a room there. I took a 2 hour nap then went for a walk through town. I ran into Marco from Italy, who I met in Burgos. He is off to Sahagun and the train home tomorrow. I will reach the halfway point from St Jean to Santiago sometime tomorrow.

5/4/13

Day 23

Another very long day from Caldadilla de la Cueva all the way to Calzadilla de los Hermanillos. I was getting tired and my left foot kept giving out. I decided that it was time to give up the big sweatshirt since it was getting warmer. I packed it and some other extra things planning to mail them home. Then I realized it was Saturday and I would have to wait until Monday to do that. Much of today was along a 9 kilometer stretch of old Roman road. From Calzada de Cota to Hermanillos. It was warm and peaceful. I think most people take the newer route along the highway. I think that would be kind of boring.

5/5/13

Day 24

Today was rather short after yesterday's 23 miles. I was kind of tired after that. But the weather was perfect today, sunny but cool. I continued 24.5 kilometers along the peaceful Roman road. There were very few other pilgrims. But there were no services along this route so I made sure I had enough supplies for the day. About halfway, along came a sweet little cat. He was still not fully grown and was very friendly and came running to me. I gave him some cheese and some water from my extra scallop shell. He seemed lost and followed each person who passed by. I had lunch with him. A couple came along who seemed to want to rescue him and were soon carrying him along. I hope they took him to the next town or to a safe place. Maybe they will take him all the way to Santiago then home with them. He was 10 miles from the nearest town, so was probably a Camino cat mooching off of the pilgrims.

When I got to Mansilla de las Mulas I felt like I was on my last legs with both feet hurting badly. I felt like it was too short of a day to feel so tired. At Mansilla all of the albergues were full but there was room at the albergue, thank goodness. It is now full with the addition of me. Stephanie is here and I had pizza with her and John. I found a store and stocked up for tomorrow. I took a shower and as soon as I was covered with soap and wet hair, I lost hot water. Ahh, albergue life!

5/6/13

Day 25

Today I left early at 7am from the albergue in Mansilla de las Mulas. It was a beautiful morning with high clouds and a gorgeous sunrise. Stephanie asked me to walk with her, but she is so fast that I think she was a mile ahead before I got my pack on. One big goal for today was to unload that bag of extra stuff weighing down my pack. Mainly the sweatshirt I had picked up in Baldorado. I know it will probably get cold again, just because I mailed it home. But the extra weight hurts my back and makes my ankle worse. It seems like my ankle is acting worse the last couple of days. I hope it stops. I dropped off the extra clothes at the post office and mailed them home. I wandered through Leon and took a few photos. I wanted to go into the cathedral, but it was closing for the afternoon, so I gave up. The city itself was so much like all the cities that I was glad to finally get to La Virgen del Camino and grab the hostel for the night.

5/7/13

Day 26

Today was a perfect day to walk from La Virgen del Camino all the way to Hospital de Orbigo. It was very cloudy but with a cooling warm wind and one heavy rainstorm. It was gentle, peaceful and green with birds and frogs gracing me with their songs. My ankle behaved and I had a really nice walk. There were a couple of small villages along the way, and very few pilgrims. One adorable gentleman from Ireland joined me for a while. His accent was wonderful, as were his jolly stories. He was tired and stayed in Vilar de Mazarife. But I went on to Hospital de Orbigo. The old mediaeval bridge is astounding, and I got an amazing photo from my hostel window of the bridge and the storm clouds with my phone. I love the Camino so much. I want to go to mass again. I seem to miss it each time.

5/8/13

Day 27

I left Hospital de Orbigo at 8am in the rain. That hostel was ridiculously expensive, especially the dinner. But the view from the window was spectacular and worth the extra expense. It was a beautiful walk through wild country, green fields and forest most of the way. I stopped at Cruceiro de Santo Toriblo and admired the view of Astorga below. Astorga was a beautiful town, but like most, I was unable to go into the cathedral. Very few of the churches are ever open, so it isn't possible to go in and spend a few moments in prayer. It seems a shame since they are along a popular pilgrimage route. The walk itself is a prayer of its own, but I had hoped to visit more of the churches along the way. The rain stopped after Astorga and the weather continued to improve all the way to Santa Catalina de Somoza where I am staying in the lovely albergue. The people are so nice here and the town is ancient and beautiful. A stork is sitting on her nest outside my window on the church's bell tower. There seems to be a stork sitting on the top of every tall structure in this area. I took a walk all over the town. It has a population of only 50 with old stone buildings that mostly look like they are from the 12th Century.

5/9/13

Day 28

I had solid rain the entire day. Eventually my rain jacket failed, as they all usually do. I guess plastic is the only solution, so I'll be looking for a poncho for the next downpour. I felt great today and my ankle didn't even cause problems. Maybe it was the cold that made me walk faster. I left Santa Catalina sort of planning to stop in Foncebadon and tackle the hill to Cruz de Ferro the next day. But I arrived in Foncebadon at 11:30am, which is so early that I certainly couldn't stop there. I had another coffee and a snack, then back into the rain. That hill was steep but really pleasant in spite of the rain. At the famous iron cross I tossed the rock I had carried from Deadhorse into the huge pile tossed by other pilgrims over the years. It was a renewal of my pilgrimage journey for me. I said a prayer for peace and a promise to strive to do my best to make the world a better place in some small way, at least. I made a promise to be closer to god and more spiritual. That is hard even here. I have distractions from my ankle, the weather, and other people. I feel some disappointment because the churches seem to always be locked. I had hoped for daily mass on this journey but have had only a few opportunities for mass. It seems like an essential part of a pilgrimage. I want to stop in each church and pray, but so rarely can.

I ended the day in Acebo, a darling little old town. I'm hoping for sunshine tomorrow.

5/10/13

Day 29

Today was a very short day. I really wanted to go farther but it was another 23 kilometers, over 14 miles to Cacabelos, so I ended up taking the afternoon off and staying in the castle town of Ponferrada instead. I explored the town and toured the castle and even had a few minutes to visit the cathedral and pray quietly. That was very nice. I stayed in a small hotel there in the center of town. I think I needed the rest.

5/11/13

Day 30

I made up for yesterday's short day with a 35 kilometer (22 mile) beautiful sunny walk today. I went from Ponferrada past Villafranca del Bierzo on the rural route. It was beautiful and peaceful. There are alternate routes, and some can be difficult to find. After Villafranca, I really messed up. The recommended route was all trail over a big hill. I had it right, but a local man insisted I was going the wrong way. So I believed him and took a different path. It was very confusing because the path I took was clearly marked as the Camino, but after awhile it just felt wrong. I had taken the alternate route along the road to Trabadelo. It was spectacular along the river and shady from the trees that lined the road. Fortunately, there was little traffic and it was quiet along the protected path. In reality it may have been the better route. It made me think of how difficult it must have been for early pilgrims without guide books, trying to find the right path. I think that both paths are really right because there are many paths to Santiago. I will pay close attention now and not get distracted by people who give me bad advice. I figure I have about 7 more days to reach Santiago.

5/12/13

Day 31

Another beautiful day! It was chilly leaving Trabadelo but warmed up fairly soon. There was not a cloud

in the sky. After Herrerias, I climbed fairly steadily to O'Cebreiro with gorgeous views. One thing I loved today was that all the tiny ancient churches were open and I could walk in and say a prayer instead of just admiring them from outside. I Saracin castle on the mountain above Vega de Valcarce. After O'Cebreiro th route was a little up and down on dirt paths to Linares. Then 15 minutes later I walked into Hospital de la Condesa. From there it was a long steep climb up a trail to Alto do Poio where I stayed in a hostel. It is the highest point in the area. I loved the nice weather and hope it holds on for a few more days. I'm getting close to Santiago now, with about 6 days left. Then I'm onward to Finisterre.

5/13/13

Day 32

I left Alto do Poio in the icy cold but totally clear morning. A spectacular beautiful day. First, I walked the long downhill to the town of Tria Castela. I had lunch there on a little bench in the sun. From there it was beautiful trails that were mostly uphill but with gentle slopes, through mysterious little villages that looked like remnants of medieval times. At Balsa and San XII, I ran into old Camino friends, Marian from Brazil and Thierry from Bordeaux, France. I haven't seen them since Burgos. We had a short visit then I ran into them again in Furela where I got some ice cream. It was such a beautiful day that I continued all the way to Sarria. There was not much in the way of accommodations until Sarria, and most hostels were full. Only 110 kilometers left to Santiago.

5/14/13

Day 33

Today was cloudy and overcast all day, but perfect temperature for walking. When I am wearing all my layers, my pack is lighter. I left Sarria around 7:30am and walked through tiny villages of stone. I remember most, the huge oak and chestnut trees and how it was so green everywhere. I had lunch in Portomarin, then crossed the river and on for another 12.8 kilometers to the albergue in Ventas de Naron. The first albergue in a while instead of hostels. It was only 10 euros. I love the low price. I have only 3 more days to Santiago.

5/15/13

Day 34

It was a short day today but with some of the most interesting weather yet. Blue skies one minute then showers the next with huge cumulous clouds. It was perfect walking temperature through miles of forest punctuated with farmland and ancient medieval villages. I left Ventas de Naron just as the sun poked through the fog. I ran into Thierry along the trail shortly after Palas de Rei. He plans to reach Santiago tomorrow. I'm expecting to take one more day.

I stayed in a hostel in Melide where so far there is no hot water or heat. The man says, no problem. At least in the albergues I expect that, but not in the hostels.

5/16/13

Day 35

Once again, pouring rain all day long. I'm soaked to the skin, poncho, rain gear, nothing kept the water out. I'm so glad I could protect my camera in a dry gear bag. Even my pack itself got wet in spite of the rain cover. But even with that discomfort, the walk from Melide to Arca O Pino was quite beautiful

through forests of eucalyptus. I found a nice hostel for the night and it even has continuous heat. So I might get things a little dry anyway. The woman at the front desk booked me a room in Santiago for the next two nights. I will get to Santiago tomorrow. How exciting!

5/17/13

Day 36

I stumbled joyously into Santiago de Compostela about 2pm today after a rather short walk of continual rain showers. I did manage to stay dry this time. I stood in line for about one hour at the Pilgrim Office to pick up my Compostela Certificate and get my Credential stamped. It was a thrill to even be standing in the line. Then I walked through the cathedral and said the prayer of recommitment before the crypt of Saint James. Then I passed by his statue and gave him the traditional embrace. But the highlight of my arrival that nearly brought me to tears was the evening mass when the Botafumeiro started to swing. I think that was when I fully realized that I was actually here, had walked the entire way, and had fulfilled my dream of walking the Camino de Santiago. I will have to really explore the city tomorrow and go to the noon mass and visit all the sights. Then I'll prepare for my solo walk to Finisterre. I hope the rain stops!

5/18/13

Day 37

It was another rainy day in Santiago. I did a little shopping and some walking. I visited the crypt and the Saint James statue again and went to the noon mass, which is the Pilgrim Mass. I got there an hour early and actually was able to get a seat. It was a very touching service with blessings of the pilgrims in many languages. It was touching for me to see people's arms wrapping around the Saint James statue behind the altar as people passed through to pay their respects. Later I went to the evening mass and there was a spectacular service beginning. There were so many priests, bishops, cardinals and hoards of Franciscan Friars Minors there. All in colorful red and white robes. After a little research I discovered it was the ordination to the office of bishop of Jose Rodriguez Carballo, head of the Friars Minor to a post in the Vatican. It ended with the Franciscan priests swinging the Botafumeiro. It was a magnificent celebration and how fortunate I was to be able to see it.

There were street musicians playing traditional Galician music outside of the monastery. I feel renewed and ready to head to Finisterre tomorrow.

5/19/13

Day 38

I started my trek to Finisterre before sunrise on a beautiful morning with barely a cloud in the sky. But it was still pretty chilly. There was almost no one on the trail with me so it was quiet and peaceful. It was mostly trail with just a few short stretches of road. All of the cafes were closed so I was getting very hungry. After about 12 kilometers I finally found one open and got my morning coffee and just a candy bar. Then it started to rain and I quickly added my raingear. I made it to Negreira by 1:15pm and checked in at the albergue. It's a little too far to the next option for accommodation so I'm staying here. I had no food and heard that the stores close at 2pm. So I ran back to town and grabbed some bread cheese, yogurt, cookies, juice and Diet Coke just in time. When I got back to the albergue it started to

pour rain. I got back just in time to avoid another soaking. I'm planning an early start for the 30 kilometer walk tomorrow.

5/20/13

Day 39

This was a very long day but at least it was sunny and beautiful the whole time. I left Negreira at about 6:30am and it was foggy and barely light. I hoped that I would be able to find the way markers. There were a few times where I wasn't sure, but I never made a wrong turn. It was nearly noon before I finally got some coffee. Nothing was open and few cafes even existed along this rural route. It was very rural with lovely farmland, hilly terrain and dense forest. I did make it all the way to Olveiroa, so tomorrow I will reach Finisterre. That will be very exciting.

5/21/13

Day 40

Today was another very long one, but I was feeling great. Cafes were very scarce though. I didn't get my first cup of coffee until I reached Cee, which is over halfway to Finisterre. The whole route reminded me of the Lourdes to St Jean trip because it was almost totally rural on trails with little road. They were beautiful tree-lined trails too. Even though it was long, it was generally downhill plus it was cloudy and cool. The closer I got to Finisterre though, the more sun I had. When I reached there, it was clear blue sky. I stopped at the first albergue I came to, left my pack, and found a lovely deserted beach at the foot of a very long stairway. This was the perfect place to send off my little packet of my mother's ashes that I had carried with me. I put them in my extra scallop shell and let it sail out to see on an outgoing wave. It was amazing how quickly it disappeared. It sailed away but went under with the next wave. I think my mother would have liked that.

After that, I took a long walk up to the lighthouse then followed the long path to Monte Facho and Monte San Guillermo. I was not really sure of the way down but kept following any trails that seemed to lead back to down to Finisterre. That added another 10 kilometers to my day bringing the total to 40 kilometers or about 25 miles. I bought a sandwich and ate half, saving the rest for tomorrow's trip to Muxia. It was 10pm before I got to bed.

5/22/13

Day 41

Today was not as long as the last two, but I think it was the hardest of the entire trip. I was exhausted from yesterday. Also, the breakfast at the albergue was very light. I was planning to add to it as I went along since my guide book mentioned several places to eat along the route. But none of them appeared to exist. I was so hungry that I ate my half sandwich by 10am. I never found anything else to eat. There were lots of hills and strong headwinds most of the way. But what a gorgeous forested route! At times there were lovely ocean views, but the clouds were pretty low. The route was not marked well and I did get lost a couple of times. But I finally got back on track. I only saw four other people going my way and about the same number passing from the other direction. I was surprised at how few were coming and going from Muxia.

I got my first blister of the whole trip. I couldn't believe it, after all those miles. I was barely moving when I finally got to Muxia. I went straight to a hotel. I was too tired to mess with another albergue. I

grabbed some junk food, which is really shameful, and I never ate dinner. I went for a walk and found a church. A man was ringing the church bell and told me mass was about to start so I went to mass there. It was nice. When it was over, I tried to do some walking but was too tired and too tired to fight the howling wind. I'll do my sightseeing in the morning, then catch the bus back to Santiago.

5/23/13

Day 42

This was crazy! I had reserved the nice hotel I stayed in before when I got to Santiago. But when I arrived, they only had me booked for one night, but I needed two. Using their Wi-Fi and Expedia I booked another hotel about a half mile down the road. It wasn't quite as nice and a bit farther to walk, but it was fine.

I did spend most of the day wandering in Muxia. It was sunny in the morning and I got beautiful pictures from the top of the hill. The bus didn't come until 2:30 so I left my pack at the hotel to do my wandering. Muxia is a very beautiful and enchanting place, with strange legends around the Virgin Mary arriving in a stone boat to convince St James to continue his ministry. The rocks do look a little like parts of an ancient ship. Muxia feels like a very holy place.

At the bus stop I ran into Thierry again my friend from France. Funny how we keep reconnecting. I got a kick out of him and his lady friend from Germany. The bus ride was nice and the bus stop not far from the cathedral.

5/24/13

Day 43

Today is my birthday and now I am 67 years old. How nice to spend it in Santiago! I went to the noon mass and again to the 7:30pm mass, which used the Botafumeiro. That thing just fascinates me. The noon mass had more beautiful music though. I went to the Museo del Perigrinos, which was interesting though all in Spanish. It showed how the cathedral has evolved over the centuries with its various excavations and restorations. I would like to know more about it. I have a small book about it which I will consult when I get home. I got some gifts, and souvenirs and a book about the Camino. There is so much more to the Camino than one could ever grasp in a single trip. I see why so many people repeat it. It's possible that even I will one day.

5/25/13

Day 44

I had to check out of my hotel so took my backpack with me. The hotel was a little far away to store it there. I wrote out 10 postcards while sitting by the cathedral for inspiration. The post office was open, so I got stamps and mailed them off. It was a long day of wandering because I took the all-night bus at 9:30pm to Madrid. I went to noon mass which was particularly great with guitar music and a group of singers. One last time I got to see the Botafumeiro swing and smell the wonderful scent of so much incense. I was so glad they used it for that mass.

I did a dry run walk to the bus station to be sure I could find it. I walked around and around and went to the cathedral museum. I spent a half hour before the Blessed Sacrament taking full advantage of the quiet free time I had to cement my commitment to my actual purpose for the pilgrimage. I'm hoping it

made me a better person somehow. I went to the bus station early and read my Camino book for a while. Got on the bus at 9:30pm and off at 6:30am. It was a long 8-hour bus ride with little sleep.

5/26/13

Day 45

I'm totally exhausted today. The goofy gal on the bus behind me kept making long loud cell phone calls and keeping me from sleeping. I think I may have gotten about one hour though. When I got to Madrid, I found my hotel easily. It is a block from Puerta del Sol and very easy to find on the metro. I had to kill time until the afternoon when my room was ready. I walked to the Madrid Cathedral. It seems odd that on a Sunday morning the cathedral is closed. Seems like it would be a good place to hold Sunday mass, but I guess they don't.

The stores were all closed until 11am so I had a quick breakfast and did lots of walking. Even when the stores did open, I was too tired to think. I got in my room at 12:30pm and took a nap until 5pm. I took a shower then tried some shopping, hoping to find a birthday gift for my sister. But nothing inspired me. My shoes were really breaking down and killing my feet, so I made it my mission to find new shoes. I found some darling pink Sketchers that are light and comfortable with Velcro instead of laces. My feet feel so much better. I tossed my old ones ceremoniously into a trash bin in Madrid, where they now belong since they would be useless for running or anything at this point. The new ones will be great on the plane.

I had dinner at McDonalds and am going to bed early. Catching the metro to the airport at 6am.

Time to head home.