MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

St James’ Day saw the launch of the revamped Australian Friends of the Camino website (see page 24). We are excited about this venture which has led to an increase in queries. The website has made the process of applying online for membership and credentials easier, both for those using the site wishing to contact us, and for us, in processing requests. Accessing information on the site is straightforward, and the addition of information from groups that meet around the country is more comprehensive. We are hoping that people looking to make contact with a local group near them will be able to do so with ease. But please remember that we need your help in keeping the information flowing to us so that it can be added to the web page.

There seems to no abatement in those interested in the Camino, with queries and membership applications coming in at a steady rate. What is it about the Camino that continues to capture the imagination of pilgrims?

In the concluding paragraph of his book, The Santiago Pilgrimage (reviewed on page 20), Jean-Christophe Rufin says: I would not be able to explain the workings of the Way, nor what it truly represents. I only know that it is alive and that you cannot say anything about it except everything, as I have tried to do in this book. But even then the essential part is missing and I know it. That is why, sometime soon, I’ll set off again.

So many of us feel similarly. We return from the Camino, satisfied at our accomplishments, only to find weeks, months, or even years later, the urge to set off again besets us. We miss the road - the sights we see, the comradeship of The Way, and the freedom walking (or riding) it brings. Many have told how, on returning from their pilgrimage, there is a yearning to return, a yearning to recapture those feelings and experiences of their first Camino.

As we continue to supply credentials to our members it is interesting to see how many of our members are setting off yet again - either repeating a Camino they have walked previously, or venturing on a different one. Thus, like Rufin, they have acted on the thought: …sometime soon, I’ll set off again. If we go with an open mind and a minimum of expectations, the subsequent Camino is likely to be as fresh, as stimulating, and as challenging as the first.

Buen Camino.

Janet Leitch OAM (SA)

Cover photo: Pilgrim Hospital, Hotel Dieu Saint-Jacques, Toulouse (see article, Arles Way, pp.4-11)
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ARLES WAY—OCTOBER 2015

My cousin Fiona, my neighbour Gabi, and I met in Paris on the 3 October, and travelled by train from Gare de Lyon to Marseilles on the 5th. From there we caught the local train to Arles. Arles, situated at the River Rhone’s mouth, is an interesting town with historical buildings from the Roman days to the more modern cafes that claimed connection to Van Gogh who lived and painted in the area. It was an interesting place to visit for a couple of days while we settled into French life and worked out where the start of the GR65.3 - or Arles Way - was.

On 7 October we began our walk. The tourist office had provided us with a local map that also showed the GR route. It was a little difficult to negotiate as the marks were not easy to see in the town, but manageable if we kept our eyes open. Once out into the country, the path was pleasant and well-marked, with both GR and occasional Camino marks. Fairly flat terrain proved to be an excellent way to get our legs and feet used to walking. We stopped for the night in St Gilles du Gard, after a 22km walk, staying in the auberge Maison Marcel du Pelerin near to the abbey church of Saint Gilles. The abbey made an interesting excursion for the afternoon, including a visit to the crypt of St Gilles which was a peaceful place for quiet contemplation.

October 8 found us walking 17km to Vauvert - reasonably flat and quite pleasant walking. In Montpelier we stayed in the St Roche aubergue, a large old hostel for pilgrims where we found several other walkers, as well as cold showers and the beginning of the French paranoia about bed bugs!

We rose early on the 9th, and caught a tram to the outskirts of the city to recommence our walking. The path was well marked initially, but we were advised by a local walker that the route had been changed due to some works. He recommended we follow the red arrows painted on the ground and we’d be ok... After a lot of confusion, we decided to catch a bus back to the Montpelier city centre and reconsider our options. We were later told by another walker that he followed only the yellow arrows out of Montpelier and had no trouble walking to Montaurand.

The next day we walked 23km to St Guilhem le Desert. It was a good day walking through oak-forested hills well marked through to Aniane, after which we lost the trail. However, we found the marks again at the Pont du Diable, from where it was a spectacular walk alongside
the river to St Guilhem, where we stayed in the monastery gite for the night.

From this point on, the walking became more challenging with warm weather and steep climbs. On the 11th we found ourselves hot, tired and hungry at Arborus. It was a Sunday, and the shops closed at midday, not to be reopened until Wednesday morning. The gite in Arborus was closed so after calling the number without success we started to worry. A local man, Eric, came to our rescue and offered to drive us to the town of St Jean de la Blaquiere where we could use the municipal gite. As luck would have it, as we got out of the car the lady who runs the gite was walking past with a complimentary bottle of Eric’s wine. Eric was a local winemaker, and the wine was evidence that he was good at his job. We were let into the gite, and advised that although there were no shops open, we were welcome to the pasta and any food stored in the gite. I guess that this was a common problem as we found packets of pasta and olive oil in many of the gites. We had grapes picked during the day for dessert, as well as roasted chestnuts.

The following morning, we discovered that the bar across the plaza was open so we had breakfast and coffee. It was lovely walking through oak forests, but our first taste of cold rainy weather. Still no shops open until we got to Lodeve about 3pm after only 15km of walking. We stayed at the Atelier du Soulondre, run by an English artist and his daughter, with private rooms with bathroom, and a
bath, and large breakfast for 37€. It was sad though to discover that the artist’s wife had died suddenly the week before.

The next morning we continued to explore Lodeve for a while, but realised we could not make the distance to Lunas, 29km, by foot as by this time foot injuries and blisters were limiting our abilities. We chose instead to make it a rest day and so caught the bus to Lunas. Here we found accommodation closed, but the private auberge Gourmande opened a room for us, and we were able to eat in the bar Le Redondel, whose owner told us he was going to open a 10-bed auberge in early 2016 because he was observing the increasing numbers of pilgrims walking now and saw it as a business opportunity.

Unfortunately on the morning of the 14th we took the wrong direction from Lunas. Half the day was gone by the time we returned and started again in the right direction. Our progression then became the 4km to St Martin d’Orb. It was too late to commit to the next stretch over the top of the mountains. However, we stayed in a lovely private residence, the Gite de Rosslynne.

A late start the next morning at 9am: a day when an early start was needed but didn’t happen. We had a nice breakfast though ready for a hard day of climbing over the mountains which peaked at 1022m, and 26km to the next village of St Gervais su Mare. The mountain climb was steep, but when the rain cleared provided some lovely views although it was very cold - not too far from snowing. By this time we were all suffering from injuries ranging from blisters, twisted ankle and tendonitis, which slowed us considerably. About lunchtime we met a French walker, Sam, who walked with us all the way to Finisterre. We arrived in St Gervais after the 5pm closing time of the Mairie (mayoral offices) accommodation. The tourist offices were the saving grace for us for finding accommodation, but it was necessary to get to the destination village before they closed for the day. Sundays were the problem as there was nothing open except for bars and the occasional café. We decided we should probably stay an extra day whenever we arrived at a village on a Saturday.

The morning of the 16th was the day Fiona left us for Toulouse, so Gabi and I walked on with Sam. The destination for the day was Murat su Vebre, another 26km walk, climbing to 1020m, but it was very pleasant walking through oak, chestnut, beach and pine forests. We stayed in the Gite L’Etape des Menhirs.

Next was a 22km walk on beautiful forest and moun-
tainous trails with autumn leaves, dappled light through the trees, and crystal clear streams. It was -4°C when we started in the morning, but pleasant, with the occasional open sunny spots during the day. The steep descent into Le Salvetat brought one casualty when I accidentally stepped onto a small piece of wood which rolled from under my boot, resulting in me falling face forwards onto the bitumen road. It was quite a shake-up and a reminder to watch where I stepped. We stayed in the very basic gite communale and, after being warned at the tourist office about heavy rain the next day, decided to stay two days. Unfortunately there was no sleep-in though, as the church bells woke us at 5am. We did manage to go into the church and view the 11thC black Madonna.

We walked again through mountain forests on the 19th for 19km arriving at 3pm in Angles, booking into the gite communale and, as usual, had it to ourselves. Here, Fati, who owned a private gite, visited us and said she would cook a tagine for 13€ each. We enjoyed a nice dinner and conversation, but unfortunately no wine as she is Muslim. I retired to bed early as the cold weather had brought on a cold with a worsening sore throat that I suffered for the next two weeks.

The next day presented another pleasant walk through forests to the town of Boissezon, a distance of 23km, where we booked into the gite communale. Gabi decided to catch the bus to Castres on the 21st, as she was having foot problems, while Sam and I walked the easy downhill 16km to Castres. We arrived at 2pm in time for lunch and booked into the Hotel Riviere with individual rooms but lacking the charm of the gites. My sleep was disturbed by a ringing noise the hotel phone kept emitting - my son rang me in the middle of my night with a question about the lawnmower!

The next day we enjoyed a pleasant forest and country trail walk to the village of Dourgne and onto the Abbaye Saint-Scholastique, a little difficult to find. The nun in charge was very helpful and
welcoming, and we had the place to ourselves complete with industrial kitchen. Sam, being a chef, was at home and soon took charge making a pasta meal. Apparently this is a traditional evening meal in the south of France where the culture is linked to Italy.

Next day we walked 16km to Revel, where the gite provided breakfast and a clean shared room for 16€ each. We were able to enjoy a sunny afternoon relaxing in a café and wandering around the historical area. On the 24th we were again walking but this time alongside the canal for 15km to Les Casses. We climbed the hill towards the town and visited the historic fort where the Cathars were besieged and 60 people killed as part of the religious genocide, an early 13thC tragedy that was very common in the Languedoc region, with nearby Carcassonne being one of the most significant centres for the persecution of the Cathars.

Having been advised of a short cut (not way-marked) that would reduce our walk by a day to Toulouse, we were able to follow directions to Beziers on the 25th. It was a pleasant day of walking across rolling hills, villages and farms for 25km to the Gite Amis de Saint Jacques en Occitanie.

We stayed four days in Toulouse to recuperate. This city is a great place to spend a few days, with a vibrant French culture, historic buildings and great restaurants. Gabi stayed longer as the doctor had insisted she rest her tendonitis for another week.

Sam and I left Toulouse on the metro travelling by train and bus to Colomiers on 31 October. From there we used his GPS to find the GR route again, turning left then right from the bus stop. 16km of pleasant forested walking found us in Leguevin for the night staying in the very clean gite communal, Maison Saint Jacques, for 8€.

Saturday 31 October saw us walking through the forest Bouconne on badly marked trails. We managed to lose our way for several kilometres before back-tracking. But the walking was beautiful, very peaceful with just the sound of fallen forest leaves underfoot.

The villages in the vicinity were all small with no shops. We found that the private gites usually had basic food for sale if they didn’t provide meals. Le
Grange was a lovely place to stay about 1km off of the trail, but well worth the trouble for 13€.

The night was very windy with a storm moving in and as a result we had an uncomfortable day walking in strong wind to Lisle Arne, a total of 16km for the day. We stayed in the Gite Lamothe for the night for 15€ each. It was deserted but we had gained permission to stay there by Lillie at Le Grange the previous night. We found that we received a lot of invaluable advice and assistance from the people running the gites, especially as we were travelling outside the accepted season. The accommodation at Lamothe was good with our choice of beds.

The next day presented us with cooler, overcast conditions after the storm. We had a more challenging walk over rolling hills and farm trails for the 24km to Auch where we met Gabi at the Tourist Office, having again caught the bus. The YMCA proved to be the place to stay - the city itself was interesting with the unique Gothic cathedral, Saint Marie, well worth seeing. Auch has an association with d’Artagnan, the Captain of the King’s musketeers, which the tourist industry utilises effectively.

To recover some time we caught the bus to Motenade from where we had a very steep climb in lovely sunny weather for the 13km to Montesquiou. It was early evening by this time and, finding no accommodation available, Sam phoned a farm stay and arranged to be collected for the drive to the farm. The farmhouse proved to be really lovely and we were made very welcome. The beautiful old provincial farmhouse was furnished with antiques and only cost us 12€ each, including meals.

On 5 November, Louis the farmer drove us back to the trail where we walked 21km to Marciac. It was a warm sunny day but spitting rain in the evening. We stayed in the private gite of Ferme de Laoueillou, with accommodation in a three-storey tower for 12€ each. We shared breakfast with the local ducks who poked their heads through the kitchen window and entertained us!

On the 6th, we had a pleasant sunny walk of 17km, with the Pyrenees looming in the background, to Maubourguet. As Annoye was our planned destination on the 7th, Sam and I set out in the morning while Gabi caught the bus. The walking was again very pleasant with rolling hills, sunny weather and the Pyrenees in the distance.
It was quite exciting to see the mountains now knowing that soon we would be crossing them. We decided to take another short cut to make up a little time - and then got lost again. As a consequence we didn’t arrive in Annoye until well after dark. I guess our karma was catching up with us. Food and wine was available so we were able to make a satisfying meal before venturing to the sacred spring to bathe our feet. It is said that all pilgrims who bathe their feet in the spring will be successful in walking to Santiago de Compostela. It worked for us!

After Gabi rested her foot on the bus and, with the miracle of the spring at Annoye, we all walked the 15km to Morlaas on 8 Nov. It was a warm day with lovely rolling hills, but being a Sunday we were unable to buy lunch, or even worse, coffee during the walk, so were pleased to see the larger town of Morlaas with good facilities. We were able to stay in the gite communale at the camping ground near the lake. After much discussion about our significant loss of schedule and the ongoing injuries of Gabi and Sam, we decided to catch buses and trains to Pau and then to St John-Pied-de-Port where it would be possible for Gabi to get bag portage and reduce the load on her foot. While it was disappointing to have to leave the Arles route unfinished, both Sam and I were keen to cross the Pyrénées from St John-Pied-de-Port to fulfil our dreams of starting the Camino Francés from this point. I hope to return to Pau another time and travel the rest of the Arles route to complete this journey.

Comments
Without a reasonable command of French, it was difficult to find accommodation in the small villages. As we were in the off-season we found it better to phone ahead to ensure a place to stay. In the towns it was easier, as people usually spoke English and there was usually a tourist office to help out. An Australian Sim card was expensive - a French Sim card was best, but again the ability to speak French would be very beneficial. Access to Wi-Fi was not great in the smaller villages and even when the gite had a modem, it was often turned off early. WhatsApp accounts enabled most communication to home. Due to limitations of accommodation and the larger distances between villages, it was not possible to maintain our schedule without risking missing out on a place to stay. Allowance should be made for this in preparing a schedule. Overall the terrain was very enjoyable to walk through—mostly forest trails, along canals, or small roads, but also some very rough trails in places and several stream crossings. We found the local people always friendly and supportive. The hospitaliers often gave us information of conditions ahead and advised us where we could stay, sometimes ring-
ing ahead to book for us. October was very pleasant walking weather but shops and gites were not always open. The walking was more difficult than the routes in Spain. I would recommend that walkers attempt this route in the recognised season and follow on to the Camino Francés after, which would provide the better weather for both. We found it was quite cold and wet by the time we got to Santiago de Compostela in early December.

The charm of walking the Arles route is the element of adventure experienced in walking a traditional route that is not heavily utilised, given the time commitment and difficulties as mentioned above, combined with the benefit of less commercialism so sadly experienced on the Camino Francés now that it is heavily trafficked. The solitariness of the Arles way, especially the off-season, provided plenty of opportunity for quiet contemplation and engagement with the environment, with the unknown quality of the path more readily facilitating that ‘in the moment’ experience. There is a strong sense of the long history of the area, especially the medieval times, but also the Roman influence from the past. When one considers that the architecture of the regions walked through, well preserved over the centuries was mostly associated with the violent times in which they were built, a level of respect for these structures increases, acknowledging those lives on which the history was built. Also enjoyable were the genuine interactions of the local people we met in our journey, with many expressing their own desire to walk The Way, or anecdotes of when they did walk, or sometimes asking why we would do such a thing. After all we could catch a bus couldn’t we?

I would recommend that anyone who is drawn to walking the Arles route do so, but in the knowledge that it can be challenging and maybe not recommended as a first pilgrimage. If approached with a flexible and positive attitude, it is most rewarding.

Peter Angrave (SA)
Santa María de Eunate is a 12th century Romanesque Church on a comparatively short detour off the Camino Francés. To reach it the path detours south east at the village of Muruzábal, returning back to the main path at Puente la Reina.

The church sits in the fields and is surrounded by uncovered cloisters, a very beautiful, peaceful building, set in tranquil surroundings. For pilgrims on the Camino Aragonese there is no detour and the Church is approached across the fields.

Like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Torres del Rio, the Church at Eunate is an octagonal building, and like most Romanesque buildings, has a simple beauty about it. Both churches are in the province of Navarre and are well worth a visit if you are able to co-ordinate with the opening hours.

For some time pilgrims taking time to visit the Church have been unlikely to find the church open, but earlier this year that changed. *For the month of September the church will be open from 10.30-13.00 in the morning every day. Sadly it will not open in the afternoon.*

Unfortunately, there is no longer an albergue open at Eunate, despite the fact that a number of guides say there is one there.

The website for the church (in Spanish) is [http://santamariadeeunate.es/](http://santamariadeeunate.es/)
LETTER FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Australian Friends,

Did you know that Cape Town now has a Camino?

It is called Cape Camino and we are interested in connecting with other Camino groups around the world. Please get in touch via email peggy@capecamino.co.za or info@capecamino.co.za

Look forward to connecting.

Buen Camino
Walk Your Way...

Peggy Coetzee-Andrew

[PS: Editor—They also have a Facebook page]

Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies;
Oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations!

★★★★

William Wordsworth, 1770 - 1850
DEL NORTE CAMINO (RUTA DE LA COSTA), 2016

This year we started our walk in Irun on 24 May, or more appropriately on the International Bridge connecting France (Hendaye) with Spain (Irun). My walking companions were friends Bob and Paul whom I walked the Camino Francés with in 2013, and my brother Phil, who walked with Bob and myself from Granada in 2014. While time was not an issue, we had to arrive in Santander on 3 June to meet Paul’s wife Jane who was to accompany us for the remainder of our Camino to Santiago. Jane completed the Tour Mont Blanc with Bob, Paul and myself in 2014. While the TMB is not a Camino, it is certainly one of the great walks in Europe.

Much of the first few days were along the coast passing through the well-known city of Donostia, San Sebastian and eventually reaching Bilbao six days after leaving Irun. This section of the walk was probably the most difficult as it required a lot of ascents and descents as we crossed headlands between the numerous coastal towns. However the pain was more than compensated for by the spectacular views and lovely coastal villages.

For this section we walked with James, a most interesting character. James is the verger at a major church in London (St George’s of Hanover Square) and entertained us with many stories of his life in the UK and his employment, while we tried to educate him in all things Australian. In Bilbao, we also caught up with Susie who Phil and I met on the Via de la Plata in 2014.

The route between Irun and Santander required a number of ferry crossings which added variety to the walk. Of particular note was the crossing to Laredo (the anchovy capital of Cantabria) where we boarded the ferry off the beach. Another interesting crossing was across the Rio de Bilbao to Portugalete on a suspended platform bridge which carried both pedestrians and vehicles across the river on a platform hanging below a high level structure on cables.

Initially we had planned a rest day in Santander before once again heading for Santiago. On arrival we found that due to a festival that there was little available accommodation and consequently we decided to walk on after only one night and have a shorter following day. Bob, who is always restless, decided to dispense with the short day and continued on by himself while Phil, Paul, Jane and I spent the night at a private albergue in Boo de Pielagos... who could resist staying in a town called Boo!.. This proved to be an excellent choice, as the albergue rated as one of the best that we stayed in on the Del Norte. Following Boo, we stayed a night in Santillana del Mar, a
picturesque medieval town where we can recommend the albergue, Casona Palacio, in the town centre. We were not sure if it was an albergue or a museum, but in any case well worth the 30€ for a large double room with your own facilities.

Comillas was also worth a visit as it is the home to another of Gaudi’s spectacular buildings, the Capricho de Gaudi. If you are in Comillas, it is a must-see. Having stayed at Boo, we could not resist a night in an albergue at Poo (Playa de Poo). Unfortunately this albergue was the exact opposite to Boo and was not highly regarded.

While numbers walking the Del Norte were greater than expected (approximately 80 per day leaving Irun, with that number halving where the Primitivo and the Del Norte split), there was always adequate accommodation. The only times that we had slight difficulties were in Bilbao and Santander, due to our walk coinciding with local festivals. We stayed in municipal albergues, private albergues, hostals, pensions, hotels, a monasterio (Monasterio de Zenarutz) and an albergue run by nuns (Casa de la Trinidad). Often due to 7am starts, we found that we would arrive at our destination town before the albergues were open. In these circumstances we often chose to find alternative accommodation which was usually a pension or a in a few cases hotels. Prices for accommodation varied depending on availability. If there was no competition, prices were higher and, if competition existed, a hotel or a pension could often be found for very reasonable rates.

For this Camino we preferred to keep our daily distances down to 25km per day where possible. Phil had a ‘20km left knee’ (bone on bone) and started to suffer at around the 20 kilometre mark. While we did walk a couple of 30s out of necessity, we tried to restrict our walking to lesser distances.

It was interesting to note that the Spanish along the north coast appeared to be more affluent than their counterparts in the south. There were less derelict buildings and very little rubbish dumped outside the towns, which was a common sight on the Mozárabe and Via de la Plata. One thing that was in abundance in the north (apart from donkeys and big dogs) was the ubiquitous Australian eucalyptus trees, planted almost continuously from Irun to Santiago de Compostela. I guess that most of the paper in Europe is made from eucalyptus trees planted in the north of Spain.

Has anyone taken the time to take a look at the placement of the scallop shell motive that is used to mark the Camino route? From Irun to Ribadeo (the first
town that you come to in Galicia) the base of the scallop shell almost always points towards Santiago. Once we entered Galicia, the head of the shell is pointing to Santiago which was somewhat confusing at first. Then to make it even more confusing, sections from Arzúa to Santiago have had new way markers installed. Here, the markers on the one side of the route have the base of the shell pointing to Santiago, while those installed on the other side of the road have the head of the shell pointing to Santiago. Very confusing for a couple of engineers who like things in an orderly and organised manner.

We took our only rest day in Gijon, and used the day to visit Oviedo on the Camino Primitivo. Both Gijon and Oviedo were lovely cities and worth the visit. Oviedo in particular has some magnificent public art including a bronze of Woody Allen for anyone who may be interested.

Having stayed overnight in Ribadeo, we visited Mondonedo relatively early in the morning hoping to enter through the cathedral and the Holy Door which is open this year. As seems to be the norm in Spain, the cathedral was closed as was the Holy Door. I am yet to understand why the Camino routes take us past almost every church and cathedral in northern Spain, 95% of which are invariably closed. While I don’t mind walking past endless churches, I would like to see more of them open.

While the weather was generally good, although overcast for much of the time, we arrived in Santa Marina in pouring rain. The rain continued overnight and advice the following morning was to avoid the paths which had turned into small rivers and keep to the road. Given the weather conditions, this was also a relative dangerous option. Not wanting to spend a second day in a very small one-bar village, we decided to take the train to Luarca. Arriving at the train station at Santa Marina was an adventure in itself. Access to the station was by an overgrown path that had little in common with what we usually expect when walking to a rail station. The station itself was equally surprising, wedged between a viaduct and a tunnel. Overall the weather was kind to us with only two and a half days rain over the 36 days that it took us to reach Santiago.
Walkers on the Del Norte were mainly from Europe, with Germany being well represented. We only met one American and one Korean during the walk and for most of the walkers it was not their first Camino. One of the criticisms of the Del Norte has been the amount of road walking. While there was a lot of hard surface walking, it was not unpleasant and usually on quiet roads although on the odd occasion there were sections (usually short) on busier roads.

Throughout the walk we used the usual yellow arrows, shells and maps in the Cicerone guide by Perazzoli and Whitson as the basis for our navigation. While the maps in the guide were reasonable, they did not show motorways and were limited in their scope. Not including motorways resulted in confusion at times (i.e. I can see a road but it is not on the map), and for those of us who occasionally wander off the marked route, the limited scope of the Cicerone maps made them next to useless. As usual, we found that the Germans, Dutch, French and Spanish have better guide books than those published in English.

I should also mention that it is quite a shock to arrive in Arzúa and find that there were approximately 1200 pilgrims a day coming down the Camino Francés. The Pilgrim Office in Santiago advised that 1500 pilgrims were arriving daily during late June.

We reached Santiago 36 days after leaving Irun on 28 June. Overall it was a great walk and as usual we met and enjoyed the company of numerous like-minded pilgrims. On attending the midday mass at the cathedral, we able to enter the cathedral through the Holy Door and witnessed the swinging of the botafumeiro.

John Mapleson (VIC)
John’s blog can be found at http://rutadelacosta.simplesite.com

Left: Phil and Gaudi admiring the Capricho de Gaudi. Right: Arrival at Santiago: Paul, Jane, John and Phil
THE BASQUE CROSS

Crosses, in many shapes and sizes, are a familiar and much-loved sight along the Camino. Every cathedral, village church, cemetery and town square in Spain has at least one prominent Christian cross as a religious symbol of peace, security and community. Other images of the large red crosses of St James and the Knights Templar are also abundant in Spain. They can be found on everything from ancient castles to modern jewellery, swords and souvenirs - and is especially well-known in Santiago as the symbol dusted onto the top of the traditional (and delicious) Santiago torte!

But what about the Basque cross? Or ‘lauburu’ in Basque? Have you noticed this particular symbolic cross while walking Camino routes in the Basque region in the north of Spain? Pamplona (Navarra), or Irun, San Sebastian, Bilbao? The people of the region (including part of France across the Pyrenees) continue to assert their independence as a nation.

The ‘four-headed’ lauburu has been a symbol of the Basque country and the unity of the Basque people since at least the 16th century. It can often be seen above the doorways of homes and shops throughout the Basque region, and is also used as a decorative feature on tombs. It is interesting to note that the icon fell into disuse in Spain for a period under Franco’s dictatorship which repressed many elements of Basque culture, but it has resurfaced since then on the flags of Basque nationalist political organisations.

There are many theories about the shape and form of the Basque cross. Some historians believe it represents a solar cult and dates from prehistoric times. It is also suggested that the four ‘comma-like’ arms of the cross are meant to
signify spirit, life, consciousness and form. Lau bu-
ru mean ‘four heads’, ‘four ends’ or ‘four summits’
in Basque. However, whilst its original meaning
may be lost in time, most Basques today agree that
the cross represents prosperity and unity across the
region. It is also a feature of nearby Celtic and Galician cultural traditions.

The origins of this form of a cross date from Neolithic times - or earlier. Carvings
and symbols have been found dating from the Bronze Age in England, and from as
long ago as 10,000-13,000BC in Central Asia, Egypt, China, the Indian sub-
continent and Japan, amongst other places. There are many variations in form,
but all feature the same four arms - sometimes rounded as seen in Spain, and
sometimes straight with right-angled bends and corners.

The cross is also an ancient religious symbol of three major Asian religions:
Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It is still revered and in common use.
In Sanskrit it is called a ‘svastika’ - a chilling connection to the straight-edged
form of the cross that we all recognise and scorn today. The swastika, as we
know it, was adopted in pre-World War in Europe and later by the Nazi
Party and Nazi Germany prior to World War II.

It can be seen that this fascinating symbol has many meanings - peace, harmony,
unity and auspiciousness in its rounded form - and power, aggression and division
in its modern representations.

Why not look for the lauburu on your pilgrimage through Spain and pause to
reflect on the history and
mystery of this ancient symbol?

Margaret Gadd (SA)
(Thanks to Wikipedia for much of
the information in this article.
Photos: Alison Bell)

Church of Santiago, Madrid

Two lauburu
symbols from
Rajasthan,
India

L-R: Plaque at Roncesvalles; Plinth in Galicia;
Cross at Albergue Los Templarios Terradillos

Church of Santiago, Madrid
BOOK REVIEW

THE SANTIAGO PILGRIMAGE
Jean-Christophe Rufin

Jean-Christophe Rufin is a doctor, historian, novelist, and the former French Ambassador to Senegal and Gambia. He is also one of the founders of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders.

His latest book, *The Santiago Pilgrimage*, is a memoir of his pilgrimage on the Northern Route to Santiago de Compostela. He discussed his new book with the much-loved Australian author, actor and teacher, Ailsa Piper (*Sinning Across Spain*), at the Sydney Writers Festival in May.

There was much about this book that I found surprising. I had not expected that Jean-Christophe Rufin would write with such humility and with such humour. He has a vivid imagination which is very entertaining! There are countless passages in the book which will make the reader smile; for example, an encounter with an Italian pilgrim in a *farmacia* which was hilarious. For those who have walked a Camino, there is so much to identify with and for those who have not, there is so much to appreciate purely as a wonderful memoir.

There are beautiful descriptions of scenery and small moments which gave him a huge amount of pleasure. On the other hand, there were more than a few circumstances which caused him a certain amount of frustration! Such is a pilgrim’s lot!

Most significantly for me, there were statements throughout the book which were so powerful that they brought me to tears. Those statements have stayed with me and I find myself reflecting on those statements often, and giving thanks to Jean-Christophe Rufin for the gift of those statements. These are statements to make any pilgrim’s heart sing – they really are.

I would recommend this book to anyone considering walking the Northern Route and to anyone who is interested to learn more about the Northern Route generally.

Jean-Christophe Rufin is open, honest, and writes in a most engaging way. This is a book that will become a favourite Camino memoir.

Jenny Heesh (NSW)
Mouse mat bought in Santiago
The Theft of the Bells

[excerpt from
Legends of the Camino de Santiago: Ediciones Los Cuadernos de Urogallo, 2010]

Almanzor only found an empty town upon entering Compostela in 997 and destroying all that along his way. A monk, that appears to be San Pedro de Mezonzo, alerted his neighbours for them to flee and hide in the surrounding mounts, while he remained there praying next to the tomb of the Apostle. When the Andalusi leader entered the cathedral, he only found an old monk whose life he pardoned. But, angry for not finding anything interesting to pillage, he decided to take the doors and the bells of the cathedral back to Córdoba, transported on the shoulders of the Christians who were captured in these lands.

It is said that Almazor took his horse to drink from a fountain in the square now known as Platerias. After drinking the animal died from exhaustion. Popular imagination chose to believe it was divine punishment. But the restitution for the offence committed in the cathedral would not take place until 1236, when King Fernando III conquered Córdoba. Although it seems the bells have been melted, he was able to recover the doors which, on this occasion and perhaps as compensation, he ordered be transported to Compostela upon the shoulders of the Moors he had made prisoners during this campaign.
BELLS ALONG THE CAMINO

[Editor, Alison Bell:
With the surname Bell, I cannot help but collect bell pictures!]

Cathedral Museum, Santiago

Basílica Nuestra Señora de la Encina, Ponferrada

Santa María Magdalena de Puente Ulla

Santa María de la Asunción, Rabanal

Astorga Town Hall

Iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari, San Nicolás del Real Camino
August saw our first full month of usage of the new www.afotc.org website. This follows on from the launch which coincided with the celebrations around St James’ Day in July. In August we had a total of 29,777 hits on the site which represented 1573 unique visitors. This is the first month we have had real stats.

The website represents a large investment for us in being able to provide the kind of access to helpful and interesting information on pilgrimage and the Caminos that we see as part of our vision. As most would know, this website replaces an earlier one and I would also like to thank all those who worked very hard on that over time. Your contributions are very gratefully acknowledged. Our new website will take us forward with a considerably easier means of managing content and a fresh and hopefully very appealing look. Again, thank you to all who contributed to the design of the new website.

Having been a pilgrim on the Camino Francés myself, in 2012, I also understand the importance of having a place where insights and the extraordinary pilgrimage experiences we have can be shared with others. At the moment there is a backlog of new content that we want to put on the site which is mainly due to my own busy-ness and I would encourage members to continue to provide their blogs and other content to either Janet Leitch or Alison Bell, in the first instance, as a central point of contact. Your content will make it to the website. It may just take a while and I appreciate your patience in that regard.

Over time we also hope that the various Camino groups around Australia will make use of their own calendar pages on the site to advertise various events and happenings and help us to make the site even more useful.

I have been wondering what Camino learnings and values also guide the use of the website... one of them may be that the journey is the important thing and that by taking the first steps and then the next, a journey of 500 miles is made and that we walk it in company. The website is certainly always going to a work in progress and something that we all can contribute to in our own ways.

Scott Jordan (TAS)
Web Manager