

Camino Blog & Thoughts

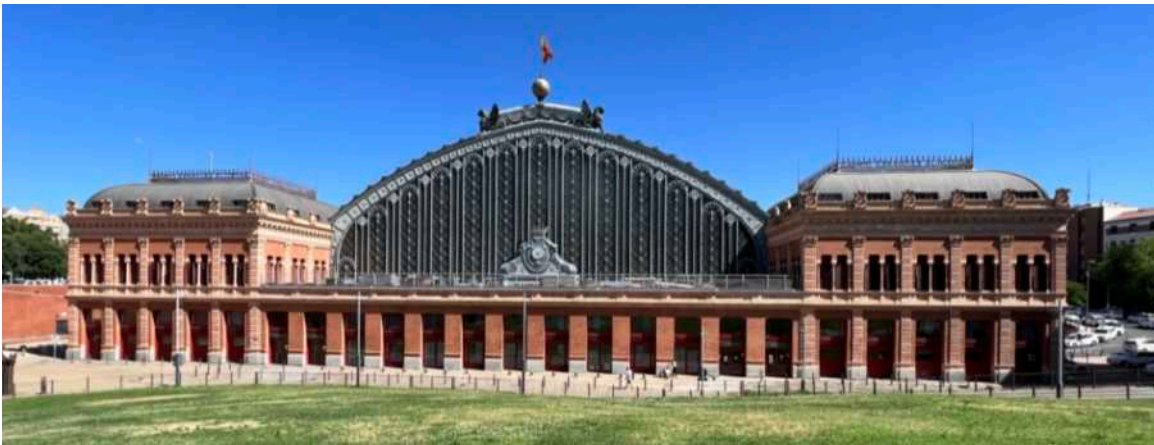
Preface

A smooth easy flight from Dallas to Madrid. I am sure I walked part of these mountains.



Once on the ground, I had forgotten how kind and harmonious humans can be to each other, there is a warmth and kindness from the minute I stepped of the plane. Madrid is a beautiful city, lots of interesting buildings, architecture, plazas and parks. Can't forget people, cafes and restaurants. Madrid is a great city, approximately 6.7 million people in the metro area, roughly 15% of Spain's 47 million population. My favorite part of their culture is the cafes, plazas and relaxed lifestyle.

Atocha Train Station.



Ministry of Agriculture





People seem to enjoy life without overloading their senses, smiling, happy, and living life. The courtesy and mutual respect for each other, the city and nature is gratifying.





One of my favorite spots, Plaza Mayor



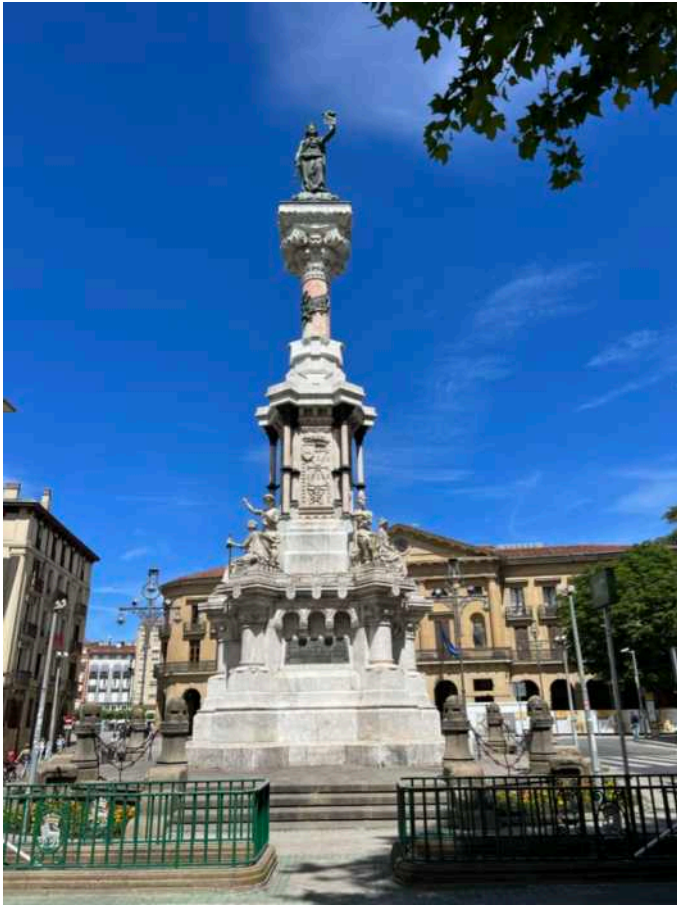


We living in America need to reform, recalibrate our needs and wants and move from the “I and me” to the “we and us”, become gentler, more respectful and more harmonious with each other, our cities and nature. There is a lot of work to be done to get to the “we and us”. I try to do my part but now I will be a bit more deliberate about it.

The train ride to Pamplona was uneventful along the country side.



The vibe in Pamplona was a more relaxed Madrid, equally alive and beautiful. Plaza Mayor, lots of quaint narrow streets bordered with cafes and restaurants.





The next day I explored more of this beautiful city:





The Running of the Bulls occurs every July 7th-14th in Pamplona. 6 Spanish fighting bulls, along with 6 steer, run from the Corrales de Santo Domingo to Pamplona's Plaza de Toros (bullfight arena.) Over 1 million spectators watch thousands of runners over the 8 days of the San Fermín Festival.





And I spotted my first Camino signs that I will follow when I walk here from St Jean Pied de Port.



Day 0 - SJDPDP - Sunday 6/12; The bus ride from Pamplona to Saint Jean Pied de Port gave me a preview of what was ahead on the first stage of my Camino. Masks are still required on public transport, buses, trains, etc. Plenty of up/down hills and many switchbacks. This stretch would make a beautiful motorcycle ride. Umm, perhaps in the future.



St Jean Pied de Port (SJDPDP) is beautiful, great walking tour, Only 791 KM to Santiago, haha







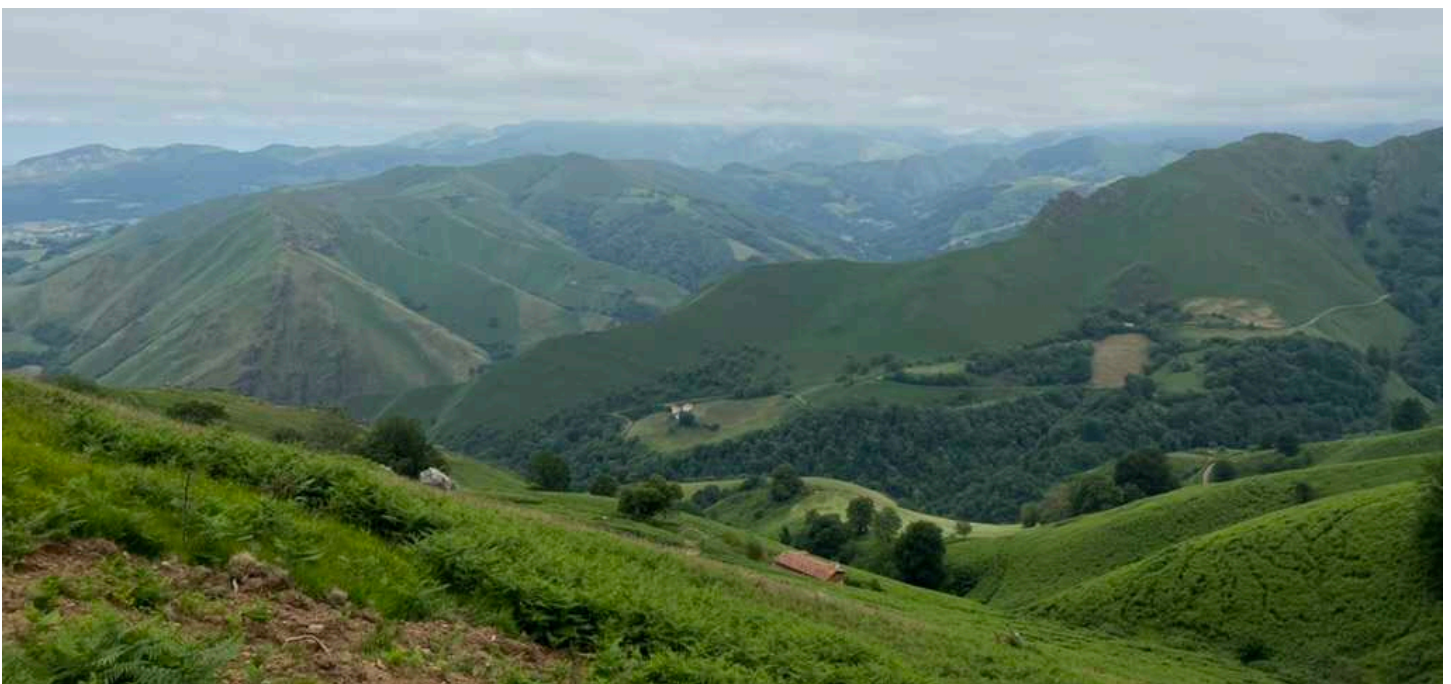
Not a good start, hotel oversold and on a crappy part/away from town. Trying to make the best of it. Remember it's a journey and don't let one day spoil everything. The Pyrenees became hidden with fog, one can no longer see the "Way". Will depart midday tomorrow and wait for the chilly morning to pass.



Day 1 - Orisson, 8 KMs - Mon 6/13; Orisson is only 2.5-3 hours away, but all uphill 900m elevation gain. Very foggy, no views for now. A pleasant uphill walk. I remembered “pole-pole” (slow-slow) from my Kilimanjaro climb. Burned 1,200 active calories, haha.



As the fog burned away in the mid-late afternoon, I backtracked to capture some photos. All shades of deep greens. Simply breathtaking. Met many pilgrims from all parts of the world. Very fun day.





Refuge Orisson was great, it broke up the 26 KMs to Roncesvalles into a more manageable chunks, 9 and 17KMs. This is key as the way is steep and only the beginning of a long journey. Highly recommend this overnight stop.



At dinner tonight, there were about 40 peregrinos, the delicious bean soup was followed by roasted chicken and peas with potatoes. Red wine and some kind of cake for dessert.

After dinner, everyone briefly introduced each other and their reasons for joining Camino. It was so cool to hear all the different countries represented and their perspective reasons for walking Camino. An older Irishman on his 4th Camino said something that resonated with me. To him, each Camino was like a massage for the physic.

Sweet dreams to me, breakfast at 6:30 tomorrow as it will be a hot day on the way to Roncesvalles.

Day 2 - Roncesvalles, 17 (25) KMs - Tues 6/14;
A bright and early sunrise, both me and the Sun.

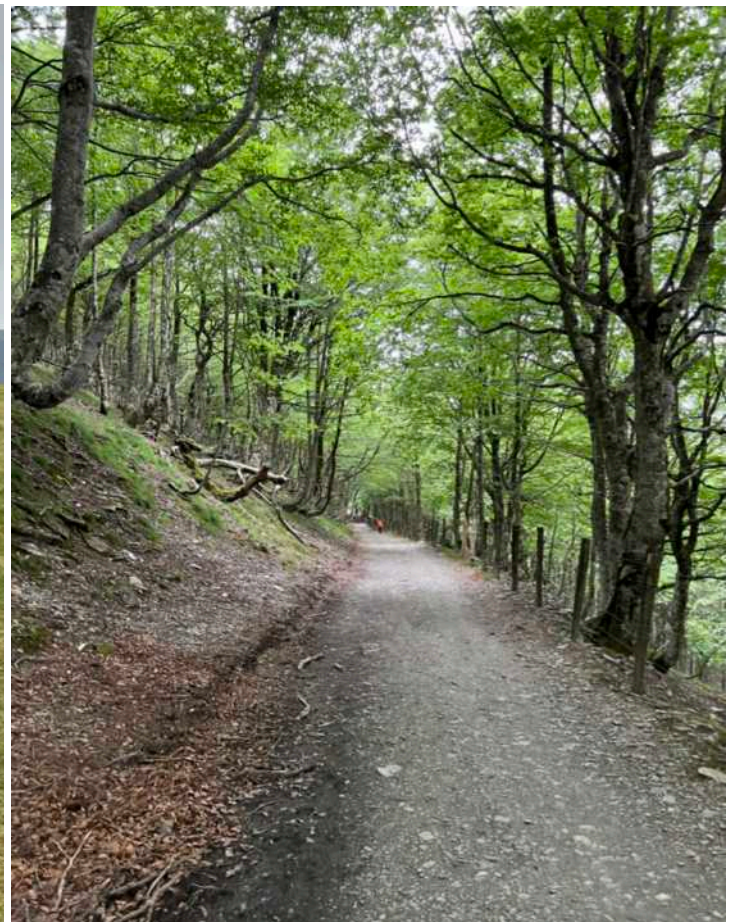


Breakfast was at 6:30, a bit early for me, but after a large cup of strong coffee I was ready to tackle the Pyrenees. Today was supposed to be in the ninety's, but luckily it remained overcast and cool.



As I topped the Pyrenees mountains, I was somewhat chilly with the strong wind. The climb was steep; the trail was a 1 lane road, an easy surface to push forward. Pole-pole up the hill. Lots of vistas today and many, many farm animals, cows, sheep, horses and horned sheep. Very picturesque and peaceful.







Roncesvalles is a few buildings, encompassing a church, a couple restaurants and the Posada hotel, my cozy room for the night.



The town is just the one monastery, my hotel's entrance is just beyond the white van, and the famous sign, Santiago de Compostela, 790 KMs.



Day 3 - Zubiri, 22 (47) KMs - Wed 6/15;

Typical breakfast although eggs were a rare, but lots of bread and butter and strong coffee.



With the Pyrenees mountains behind, the Camino flattened out a bit, although there were a few steep ascends and a very rocky descent into Zubiri. Scenery along the way:







Many houses had flowers outside their windows; I later found out that the “Red Cardenals” help keep the mosquitos away when the windows are open at night. Very cool, functional and decorative.



Crossed the bus route several times approaching Zubiri.





There are several trails that converge in this entire part of the Pyrenees mountains.



Hard to see the steepness of the descent, but it was.



Many times it felt like pieces of my life, walking through eggshells, watching every step. Tripping would be painful because of the sharp rocks on either side. I endured this path for many kilometers, but as they say life is not a bed of roses. Kind of nice to have your own fresh garden.



I have a beautiful room, with a nice warm shower and a great dinner.

Day 4 - Pamplona, 23 (70) KMs - Thurs 6/16;

The day started with a delicious breakfast, more English style vs the bread, butter and jam that is more typical in Spain.



A very hot, hot day, but lots of interesting things to see and people to talk with making the walk shorter. I met a few Basques, that say they are neither French or Spanish, but Basque. The are very proud of their heritage.



Some random photos along the way:



I noticed lots of critters on the foot path, ants, bugs, beetles, salamanders, etc, even a small snake and was very careful not to step on any of them. Yesterday I stepped carefully to protect myself, today I stepped carefully to protect the various critters. As I try to be a better human, I need to remember not to step on others along my path, but simply to either help or get out of the way.



Thought a lot about my kiddos today, especially Caroline who is going through a rough patch. And my Mutti, how she would have loved to do this walk.



Scenery along the way, beautiful...



Same photo





The whole countryside is planted with wheat, oats, and rye.



I love visiting markets, somehow I did not see this one during my stay in Pamplona, but I am glad I saw it on the way to my hotel. Mercado Santo Domingo.



Everything looked so fresh and yummy.





Pamplona, a very cool and familiar place. I had been to the Alda Hotel on my way to SJPDP, where I left a backpack with stuff. Glad to reunite with all my belongings again.

Tomorrow has another very hot day in store for me, 102°F. Will start right after the 7:30 breakfast. I actually wish breakfast was at 6:30, but going slow will get me there.

Day 5 - Puente la Reina, 24 (94) KMs - Fri 6/17;

I am sleeping so well, And after an even better than “English” breakfast I ate the Alda hotel, I set out at 7:50 or so. Today’s route took me through Universidad de Navarra campus and back onto the planted country side.





Lots of windmills, far better than burning coal.





After a steady long climb, I reached Alto del Perdón. No services for about 5 KMs, and the mercury was approaching 100°F/38°C. A nice view and after catching up with my Irish friends, I begun my descent to Utegra. A steady very rocky or large loose gravel surface that was very hard on the feet. It reminded me of my motorbike ride to Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, an endurance test.



Lots of shrines along the way...



The trail was surrounded by wheat fields and it is there that I relived a great childhood memory. My Uncle Juan and some of our cousins created a handy system to purify wheat kernels to eat. Take a spear, roll in hand blow the loose husks, repeat until all that is left is clean kernels, and eat. Very fun.





Obanos was really nice.



Near the end, for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel well. I think I sweated all my minerals out and while I consumed as much water as I wanted, my body felt dehydrated.

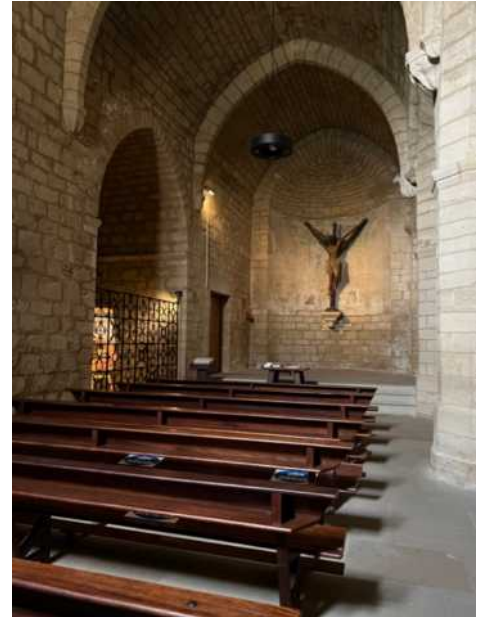
I begun to think about my body, many, many thoughts raced through my head. I am pretty lucky that I am able to do so many physical activities, without the need of braces, wraps, or great pain. More on this later. The country side approaching Puente la Reina is so pretty, I could not stop taking pictures



I reached my hotel, checked in, but no luggage. My handy AirTag quickly identified the location of my carry-on at a different hotel. It was easy to get it moved over and everything turned out great. I found a pharmacy and bought some minerals supplements to add to my water. I quenched my thirst.

After a quick walk through town, and hydrating with potassium and magnesium pills, I felt better. I am going to breakfast at 6:00AM tomorrow to get an early start to Estella as the weather person promised another scorcher day tomorrow with a high of 102°F, totally unusual for June. Haha!

Puente la Reina, big church and a Plaza Mayor.



Progress on my stamp collection and dinner, Paella.



Day 6 - Estella, 23 (117) KMs - Sat 6/18;

6:00 AM breakfast, check, 6:15 departure, check. Early departure was indeed the best move today as the mercury hit 111°F or 41°C.

Leaving Puente la Reina, I took some great pictures



An uneventful day, nice walk, lots of churches and quaint town along the way. Felt much better with the magnesium & potassium tablets added to my drinking water.

No deep thoughts or feelings, it was just hot and I thought about the arrival at Estella. Met and caught up with many other peregrinos from the first night at Orisson. Kind of nice how we all take care of each other.



Mardi, my walking friend from Chicago texted me, she is Uber'ing to Estella from Puente de la Reina because of a fire. Puente is surrounded by fire. I suppose with this heat and the number of smokers, fires are ripped to be lit. I hope they are able to contain the fire quickly. Tomorrow is supposed to be cooler.

Day 7 - Los Arcos, 20 (137) KMs - Sun 6/19;

What a day, it started normal, an early start to take advantage of the cooler morning temperatures.

After my first water stop, I smelled smoke, like a forest on fire smoke. And it was. Wow, many people were panicking and decided to wait for a shuttle to drive them back to town and try again tomorrow.

I spent the day rerouting myself away from the fires, but was able to walk to Los Arcos, a slight detour from Caminó, but it worked. The hardest part was walking parts of it on a hard road surface. I found a farm road and while it was longer, it alleviated the pain. I had to ration my water and skip my lunch and thought about survival hundreds of years ago. These peregrinos had it hard, no water stop, bars

or cafes or ice cream along the way. And forget the Taxi to the next town in case things don't work out. How soft we are when it comes to survival? Good question, I will think about it some more.



With the fires behind me, I started to enjoy the scenery once more. The beginning of wine country.



Los Arcos was a typical town, a Plaza Major and big church. I was shocked when I found out that its population is only 1,200 people. I think the entire town could fit in the church.



When I arrived at my hotel, the air conditioner was on in the room, wow, what a surprise, air conditioning is very rare. I missed it. Now I definitely need to think about how soft are we when it comes to survival. Haha.

Later on the evening, the big news finally came out: The Camino in Navarra is closed (from Roncesvalles to Logroño). Pilgrims found walking will be fined. I was so lucky to be able to get ahead of the fires and not have to taxi or skip any part of my walk.

TRAVEL

When I say I want to travel, I don't mean I want to stay at fancy resorts or buy keychains from souvenir shops. When I say I want to travel, I mean I want to explore another place and become part of it. I want to discover coffeeshops and hidden streets in Europe. I want to hike mountains and walk along quiet beaches. I want to meet people who are not like me, but people who I can like all the same. I want to photograph the people and places I see. I want my mind to be in constant awe of life on Earth. I want to see things with new eyes. I want to look at a map and be able to remember how I was transformed by the places I have been to, the people I have met and the things I have seen. This, I think, is what is at the heart of adventure and that is exactly why I plan on making my life one.

-Unknown

@wanderingfables