

Camino de Santiago

Blog & Thoughts - Part 3

Day 21 - El Burgo Ranero, 17 (434) KMs - Sun 7/03;

Took a little detour because I was chatting with Alexandra from Venice and was not paying attention. I recognized her because she was carrying a Girl Scout flag. I met her near Logroño and we walked a few KMs together. The reward for the detour was another field of sunflowers, lots of them.



The brown wheat fields are now green corn fields. There is lots of irrigation canals and sprinklers everywhere.



Bitter sweet, to hear how so many young peregrinos, 1/2 my age were injured or not able to walk on their own for various reasons. Several needed to bus/taxi or like 1 person, just quit Camino. I am grateful for my body, strength and perseverance.

I love farm equipment, so cool to see it in action.



Approaching town I met Nicole from Syracuse, a newly minted MBA from Michigan State University starting as a consultant at Deloitte in NYC. She is walking Camino to build endurance for her next stage in life, long, long hours. (She mentioned it was said multiple times as part of the interview process. Great to hear that there are still people not afraid of hard work.)



At check-in, I just met the first rude owner operator, the strangest thing is that it was so unexpected that it took me by surprise. Everyone on Camino, hotels, restaurants, café, markets, etc. have been so friendly and welcoming. I have been longing another rest day, only 2 short days until Leon, where I will stay 2 days.

Day 22 - Mansilla de las Mulas, 19 (453) KMs - Mon 7/04;

Beautiful sunrise, and happy July 4th. May America heal itself and return to the land of harmony and the Nation that made it the most sought after country to live. I decided to get an early start, and have breakfast at the next town. The sunrise was beautiful.



The shrines, flowers and sunflowers always following the sun, look so happy this morning.



Among the many peregrinos I met along the way, Antonio from Poland carrying a cross in appreciation of everything he has received from God, was inspiring.



A lot of maintenance on Camino. Water is also abundant, many canals and crops requiring water.



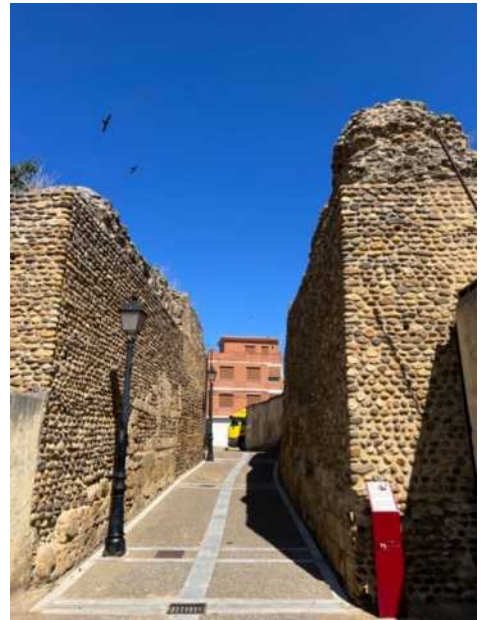
As the day wore on, I only met a couple more peregrinos today, many choose to take a bus or taxi from Sahagún to León. While the town in between these two cities are bland with little or no real charm, I chose to walk the entire way.

Admittedly, walking among the many peregrinos is enjoyable and energizing, some stretches of nothingness disappear, but the Camino is also about the solitude and peacefulness encountered while

walking. Always remember that how and when and how much you walk is a personal preference. Each Camino is a very personal and individual experience.



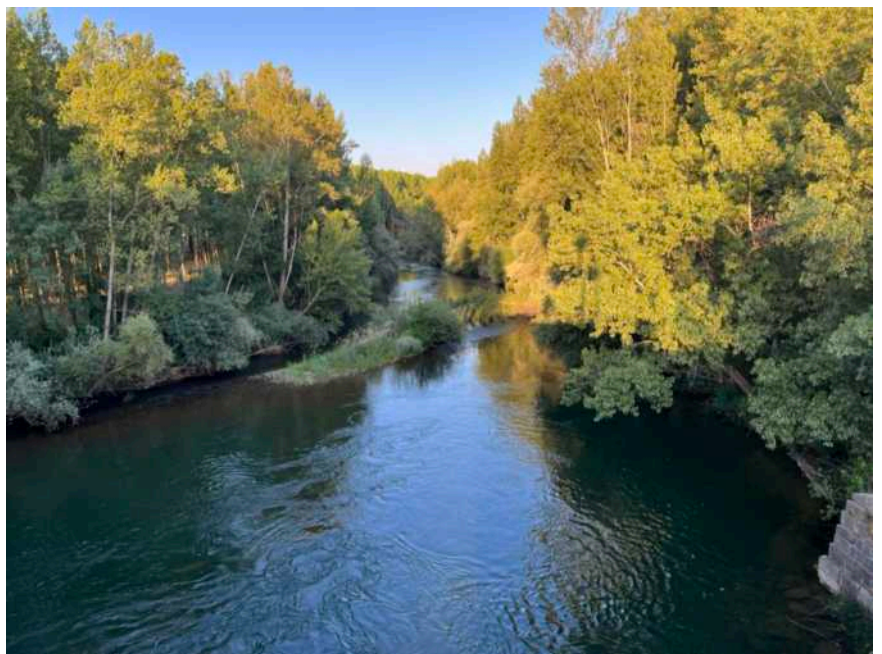
The town, Mansanilla de las Mulas, was beautiful, very typical with lots of unique features and architecture. Here are some pictures





Day 23 & 24 - León, 19 (472) KMs - Tue & Wed 7/05 & 7/06;

I am so excited for León today, only a short 19 KMs/12 Miles, can't wait. Morning coffee and off I go. Very nice country side and a nice farm with lots of animals.





Mansanilla Mayor along the way.



Villas Abariego



Only 500,000 Steps to Santiago and gas about US\$8 per gallon



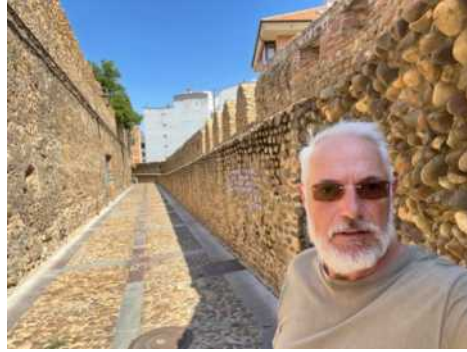
Nice city approach with the mountains in the background. First peek at León's prominent cathedral.



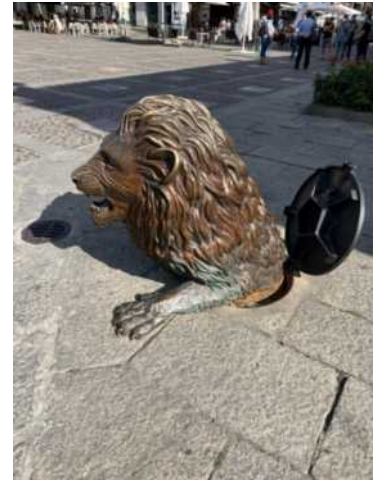
This city is beautiful, it's overwhelming. Although I was surrounded by people, for the first time I felt really incomplete and somewhat empty without someone special. This is the type of place you need to share with someone to fully take it all in.



Upon arrival, I purposely stayed away from the Cathedral because I was overloaded by the rest of the city and the Cathedral is supposed to put you over the top. Since tomorrow is my rest day, I will visit the Cathedral leisurely and take it all in. The city is surrounded by walls.



And of course, many statues.

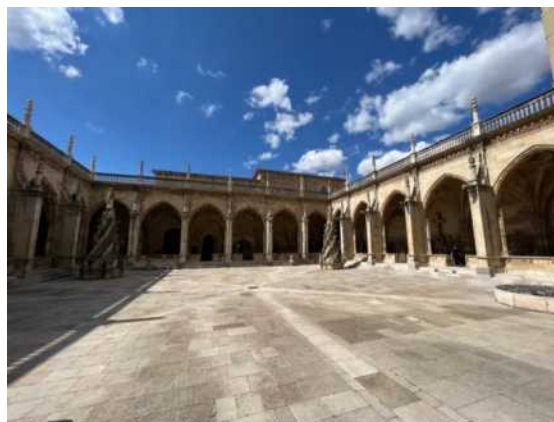


Rest Day – Highlight is the Cathedral

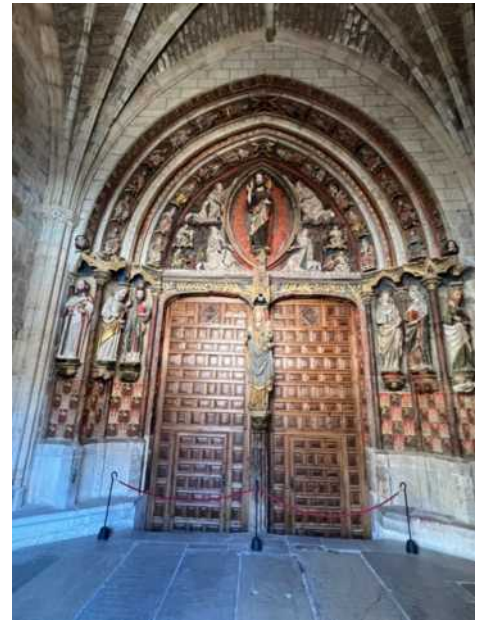
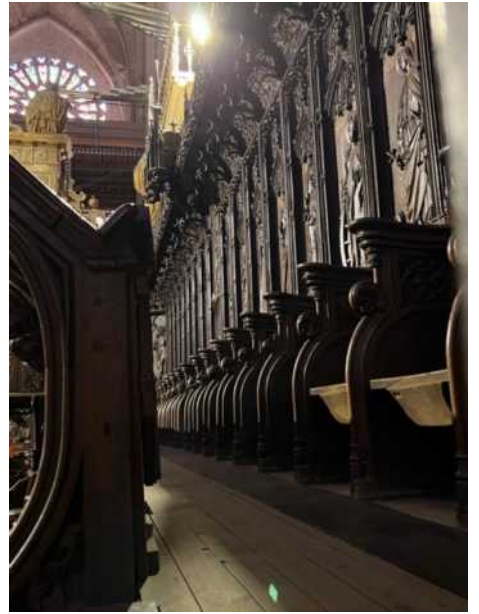
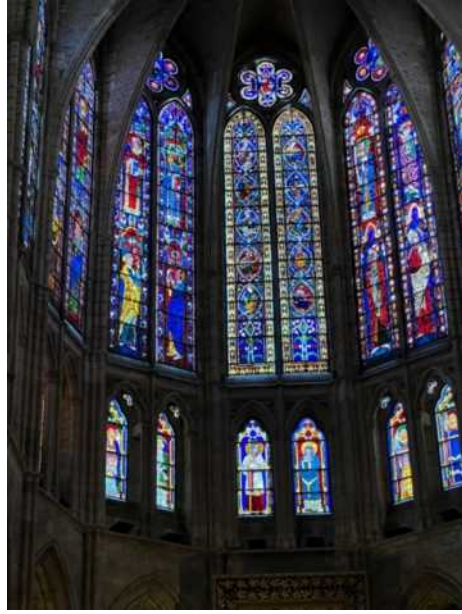
After breakfast, I enjoyed a morning walk along the river, a long trail with separate bike lanes on both sides of the river. It is amazing how clean everything is, no litter. Ditto for the river.



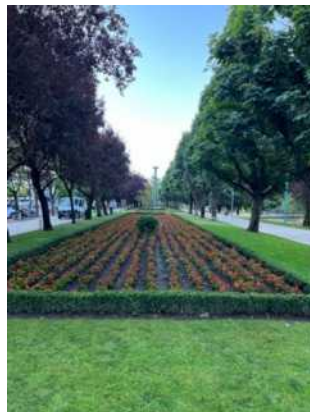
The Cathedral in León is stunning, goosebumps stunning. What an amazing place. Actually, the entire city is one of the most pleasant places I have visited on this trip. I feel so fortunate and am very thankful to have had the privilege of being here. While picture don't really do it justice, my mental picture will stay with me forever.



And the inside just as stunning:



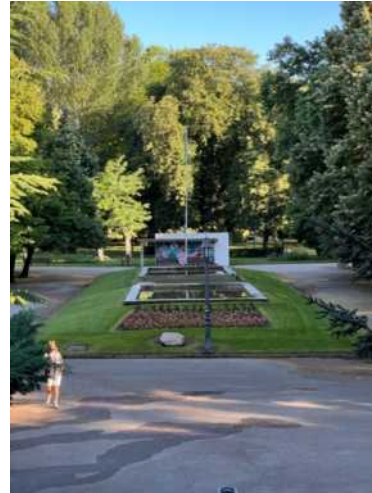
Some additional pictures of Leon



Need to come back to León, so much to see and enjoy here.

Day 25 - Villar de Mazarife, 21 (493) KMs - Thu 7/07;

On the way out of town, I passed the Museo de León building and it is impressive, as are the riverfront gardens and flowers, all meticulously kept. 36 hours is way too short for a Leon visit, 1 week is probably the minimum.



Leaving León took a while, pretty urban and lots of traffic (for Spain). Hard to tell what time is rush hour in Spain because of all businesses have spaced out hours, some early, some late, most close for a siesta or lunch hour.



Many Camino signs all along.



Back to the country side. For the first time I see the land not being used for crops. However further along it came back to full utilization.



Shrines along the way, even a bunny made an appearance.



A small town with a modern church bell tower.



And finally, Villar de Mazarife, my overnight.



Nice little village with lots to see.



Day 26 - Astorga, 32 (525) KMs - Fri 7/08;

Left at dawn this morning, very different views.



A bit cool, and after a few steps back to the farms. I noticed the sunflowers in the fields are lined up like soldiers. Passed the 300 KMs marker, 500 down, 300 to go. 62.5 percent done.



Frogs chirping in the water canals, I was able to spot a few.



I missed the alternate turnout and ended on 120 frontage for more KMs than I wanted. A bit noisy from truck traffic on some stretches, but safe quite a few feet from the pavement.





32 KMs is a long way and I was tired arriving Astorga, it was also hot. The city is beautiful, their plazas lined with cafes and a beautiful Cathedral.



I hanged out at a plaza and people watched as my feet came back to life.

Day 27 - Rabanal de Camino, 20 (545) KMs - Sat 7/09;

A nice morning, 2 cups of coffee, ham, tomato and olive oil, yogurt and bread. Yummy. I just passed the 260 KMs marker, and now I am getting close to Santiago. Starting to think about what is next after Camino? Old fashion wooden guard rail, and more beautiful country side.



Along the way, small villages with their churches and cool scenery.



From Teepees to a restaurant called Mesón Cowboy to peregrino well wishes. Camino always inspires and provides.





I walked a few KMs with James from Montreal, Canada. He warned me of the steep rocky descend into Ponferrada followed by and uphill and a downhill.

Up next was the iron cross at Cruz de Fierro, a major landmark of the Camino where you leave a stone that you have carried from home, the stone represents your burdens/sorrows. You leave the stone there relieving you of your burdens/sorrows, in essence, lightening your load. I left a stone there to relieve me from the sadness of losing my Mutti.



The terrain was as described by James, very rocky and very steep.





As I drank a lot of water as the day was hot and was expecting the typical water fill-ups, in Molinaseca. This time, there were no fill up stations.



I thought I was going to die of thirst, for the first time I worried about heat exhaustion and was very tempted to use a Taxi.



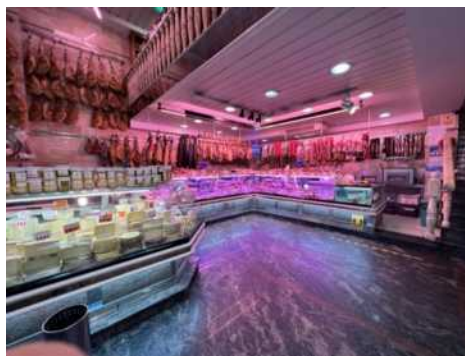
Just after Molinaseca, I saw 2 older ladies in a very delapidated house and asked them if there was water anywhere, they said no, but offered to fill me up from their home water. Camino always provides.

I entered Ponferrada vía Campo, a desolated area and by city slums until you reach the townhouses before the castle. The historical area of the city turned out to be very nice. I was exhausted, hot and still somewhat dehydrated. I went straight to the hotel to relax and cool off with a long shower.



Day 2

Walking leisurely through the city, in no particular order, beautiful carnicería



Plazas everywhere



The castle, too bad it was closed on Mondays





The churches, even the garbage cans are pretty



Vistas and the river walk, it was awesome to sit at a plaza and people watch while my feet were resting until tomorrow.



Day 30 - Villafranca del Bierzo, 23 (602) KMs - Tue 7/12;

Another awesome breakfast, eggs and bacon, fruits, bread with tomato and olive oil, butter, jam and two good size cups of coffee. I am well rested and feeling great.

I decided to take lots of pictures as I feel my trip is starting to end. On the way out of Ponferrada.



Camino is adorned with beautiful flowers, so colorful.



And Camino signage including a yellow cuchi, haha





And now, less than 200KMs / 120 miles to go, the next town is Cacabelos, very typical, church, plaza, coffee shop and mercado.



A very cool wine press. Ooops, watch the finger.



Pressing on to Villafranca del Bierzo, more beautiful country side.



Entering city limits and my overnight.





I lost most of my Camino friends because they continued without staying an extra day in Ponferrada. In retrospect, I should have continued also. I do feel well rested and my feet recovered after the descend into Ponferrada, which was awful.

At the rest stop another South Korean couple, they shared that Villafranca del Bierzo is very well known in South Korea because of an establishment owned and run by a South Korean serving original South Korean cuisine.

Progress thus far.

