

The Camino de Santiago – The Way – 2011

Monday 19/09

After a really lovely evening catching up with Oscar, drinking wine and eating olives, I got to bed about 1.30am. Met little Aaron in the morning, who is just adorable and then said my goodbyes and headed for Pamplona.

10.35am train (Euro58). Met my first Pilgrim Jose Maria, 67 from Madrid. Having had a heart attack 2 years ago, his doctor recommended walking....and walking is what he's doing. He's planning on walking to Burgos (11 days), then will return to Madrid for his daughter's wedding and then come back to finish the Camino.

His pack only weighed 7 kg and I liked him instantly.

We walked from the train station in Pamplona to the bus station (I was not mentally prepared for this and my bag weighed me down!!!) Bus left at 6pm for Roncesvalles. Jose Maria and I whiled away the afternoon ambling round a little of Pamplona then eating in the train station and chatting about our lives and adventure ahead.

The bus was full.....I never thought there would be so many pilgrims this time of the year.

There were people with bikes and walkers ...all heading to the same place.

We checked into the Alburge (bed 301) and huge open room with about 40 beds.

Headed straight to the mass in the church at 8pm.

Our journey ahead was officially blessed.....and the adventure had begun.

Went for a wine with Jose Maria before an early to bed evening of about 10pm.

Tuesday 20/09 – Day 1 – Roncesvalles to Larrasoana – 7 hours – 26km – 7.40am-2.40pm

What a beautiful day in every sense of the word. The weather was perfect, the paths were varied and the people I met along the Camino were lovely.

Short stop in Zubiri and was still feeling strong so decided to keep on going to Larrasoana (another 5km). Walked with Crystal from Germany and Signe from Denmark. Queued for a place in the Albergue and then all the pilgrims congregated in the only bar in town! Met Eduardo and his father (also Eduardo) who were doing a section of the Camino and Benito from Mexico.

Wednesday Day 2 Larrasoana to Cizur Menor – 20km – 6hr – 7.30-1.30pm

Peeps got up about 5.30am (are they insane??) I didn't really sleep at all – the beds make huge amounts of creaking noise and there were a few snorers in the dorm!

Left with Eduardo and Eduardo. What a pace we did! Papi Eduardo is a champion! He raced ahead. They barely had time to say goodbye to me in Pamplona as they charged forward!

I wandered round the city. Bought some plasters and some ear plugs. The albergue was beautiful. I really liked it. They separated the pilgrims into dorms by nationality. I was put into the Spanish dorm. I loved that!! Eduardo and Benito were there. We sat in the sun and chilled. Went to Cizur pan Parrilla restaurant with Eduardo, Benito and Derek. Had a laugh. Drank, ate and chatted. Benito made me a 'pamplona – toro' stamp as I wanted one out of a potatoe!!

Late evening I discovered a small blister on my right baby toe!

Thursday Day 3 Cizur Menor to Puente La Reina – 20km – 5hr 10mins – 7.50-1pm

Was a beautiful day walking today. Hydropower windmills (Molinos) You could hear the power they generated as you walked past them. Eduardo had to go back to Madrid as his tendonitis was too bad to continue. Met Walter Cruz who is running the Camino. He ran it last year in 10 days and wants to do it in 5 days this year. Crazy Brazilian man now living in Switzerland. His daughter was born with Spina Bifida and he made a pact with the universe that if she was ok and able to live a normal life he would do the Camino de Santiago 10 times. He has already done 4 and this was to be his 5th.

I walked a little with Benito then went to the village of Puente de la Reina stopping at the supermarket and headed to Albergue Santiago Apostle. Strange place out of town. Chatted

more with 21 year old Claire from Melbourne. Also chatted more with Torsten.

Friday Day 4 – Puente la Reina – Ayegui – 24.9km – 6hrs 15mins – 7.30-1.45pm
Lovely sunrise and walk this morning. Spent most of the day walking on my own. Passed through some beautiful little villages.

Ended up in Ayegui. Was glad to arrive, shower and take my boots off!

Strange Albergue in a sports hall. The guy working there had been walking and working on the Camino for 5 years. Peter from Germany had done the Camino 14 times and been to Finastere 9 times!

I showered and washed my hair. When I walked past Peter in the reception with a towel on my head, he asked if I needed a hair dryer!! What a luxury! He lent me his hair dryer and brush – and I had beautiful straight clean hair. One spotting this – all the other girlies asked to borrow it! Peter was a popular man that day!

Chilled outside with Michael and Avril (Irish couple), Torsten, Crystal, Emma, Cristof, Signe, John and Claire. Hung out drinking tinto de verano then did a group visit to the fountain of wine (Irache)

Lots of fun and far too much vino consumed!! Walked back with Claire and had dinner with her, Signe and Cristof at the Albergue.

I hit the sack pretty much straight away.

Saturday Day 5 – Ayegui to Torres del Rio – 21km – 7.15-2.30 – 7 hrs 15 mins with stop in Los Arcos

Didn't sleep too well. Left the Albergue @7.15. Passed the fountain of wine after walking along a completely dark and deserted main road. Just the smell of it was enough to make me reel!!! Met up with Derek and walked with him through the pine forest and out through endless kms of hay fields. Olive tree groves, almost trees, vineyards and tomato patches. I arrived along in Los Arcos. Beautiful village. My right foot was very painful (with the double blister on the baby toe). I sat in front of the church and had a tortilla baguette. It was delicious!!! Went to have a nosy at the church. Very impressive! Decided to push on another 9km. Was cloudy, so good waking temperature.

Arrived at Torres del Rio at about 2.30p. Thank G-d! Beautiful little village. I love it!

Showered and took the boots off. The blister has grown and is taking over my baby toe!

Went to restaurant Lili for a late lunch menu. The best menu so far. I was alone on the terrace in the sunshine and with the lovely Raul as my waiter. 20 year old Bolivian boy who insisted on dancing salsa with me mid main course!! He was pretty good. I had a wonderful time until I hit my table and sent my bottle of wine crashing to the floor! Probably a good thing...I didn't need a whole bottle.

Sat with Torsten, Tardei, Emma, Cristal and Derek while they ate. I didn't. I did however get a free chocolate cake for desert. Backed up some photos.

After dinner we wandered down the road to check out Casa Lili. There wasn't very much happening. I had a quick look upstairs and was planning on going back to bed when I spotted the Spanish group that I had seen in Zubiri. I was invited to join them for a glass of champagne. Had a laugh chatting to them we went down stairs and I got the party started!! It was hysterical, before we know it there was music, disco lights, lazer lights, and smoke filling the small bar in the tiny village of Torres del Rio. Very funny. I obviously requested salsa and make Raul dance with me. So much fun!! I was exhausted after. Said bye to everyone then Raul asked me to dance one more before leaving. This time all the pilgrims stopped to watch!!..I loved it. Raul's great. I didn't feel my blister at all and was full of energy. Got to bed the latest so far....11pm!

Sunday Day 6 – Torres del Rio to Logrono – 21km – 7.25-12.45/1pm – 5 and a half hrs

Woke up feeling strong. So...that's the secret – dance every evening??

Watched a beautiful crimson red globe rise over the distant mountains and pretty much walked alone for the whole day. Some climbs and a large part of the route was through

vineyards. A bit of road walking a blue skied beautiful day. At one point late morning I began thinking about Elisa, not sure why but my thoughts stayed with her for a little while until I heard my phone ring – and who was it – but non other than...Elisa! Lovely to chat to her. Bought some delicious little baguettes in Viana and kept walking. Arrived in Logrono about 1pm. Lovely city. Checked in to hostel, then after a quick shower went for a wander and food with Daniel (Danish) Fabio (Italy) and Signe. Chatted to the Spanish couple (Barcelona) – Nuria and Jose Maria for a while in front of the Cathedral. They're lovely. Let's face it...everyone is lovely. I'm just so filled with love, happiness and joy at the moment!! Bumped into Benito again. Was lovely to see him. Dinner with Signe at a lovely place on the plaza in front of the Cathedral.

Monday Day 7 – Logrono to Najera – 29km – 7.10-2pm – 7 hrs
Hardest day so far!!!

The morning was challenging getting out of the city then there was about an hour or two through a beautiful park. I loved it! Followed a squirrel for about 10 mins – very cute. Felt like a long day. Walked a lot of the way with Cristel, I think everyone struggled today. We eventually arrived at the albergue in Najera where the Hosteleria Jorge welcomed us with opened arms. We were so happy to arrive. Boots off, shower and clothes washing! Spoke to J briefly – lovely to chat to him. Headed down to the banks of the river Najarilla and chilled. Met Lorena from Bs As. My baby toe throbbed! Wandered round the old town with Benito and bought us a yellow arrow pin! I love it! Benito, Derek, Emma, Torsten, Tardei went for a menu at 7pm. Met Italian Dr Alesandra. We went back to the Albergue and she had a look at all our blisters. Derek's were really bad!! She did the needle and thread thing through my blisters – what instant relief!!

Tuesday Day 8 – Nejero – Santo Domingo de la Calzada – 21km – 7.30-12ish – 4 and a half hours ish

Everyone in the 92 bed dorm got up early!! I attempted a bit of meditation. Not so successful. I gave a special shout out to the Pilgrims in my metta!! Highly amusing! Today was a relatively easy day. Walked with Cristof in the morning and then two Spanish guys Jaier and Sergio. Then on my own for a bit. Was almost a sad day today. There was the road of death – with dead owl, and dead snake – then field of dead sunflowers on the way into Ciruena – then the ghost town itself where maybe houses were for sale and appeared that no-one wanted to be.

Met the two English girls Lizzy and Ally for a little.

Arrived into Santo Domingo de la Calzada about midday. Chose the first albergue I came to that was part of the old monastery. Santo Domingo was a beautiful but very touristy place. Chilled and visited the Cathedral and wandered round with Benito. Sat and had a lunch menu after and we were joined by Derek, Cristel, John, Blah and Daniel. Cock and hen fable of the city!!

Wednesday Day 9 – Santo Domingo to Belorado – 24.5km – 5hrs 45mins

Beautiful sunrise. Spent a lot of the day with Claire. Lots of road hugging today. W did a quick pit stop for a swing in the local playground of Vitoria de Rioja village.

Arrived about 1pm My foot was really painful today. Showered, washed clothes, then ambled round the little village.

Did my own stitch of a new blister that I spotted on my left foot!! Big group of us went for a drink in the plaza. Then group dinner at the Albergue. I found out it was Alessandra's birthday today so bought a little muffin and candles and made everyone sing to her after dinner!! 37 today!!

Thursday Day 10 – Belorado to Ages - 27.7km – 5 hours

Lovely varied day's walking with a few steady climbs. Met a lovely Norwegian couple Lizbet and ?? Saw everyone in San Juan. It was Benito's last night and everyone had decided to stay there. I felt strong and wanted to take this opportunity to move on a few km's as maybe

my foot would be worse the next day. However...I wanted to see more of Benito too. My most difficult decision to make ...do I stay or do I move on.

I decided to move on. I continued to Ages. Saw Signe and booked into the almost empty albergue. Was happy with my decision in the end. Ages was a beautiful and tiny village. I met some really interesting people Fran and Javier and German couple walking from their home in Germany to the Canaries where they will start a new life!!

The Spanish group arrived later too.

We ambled round the village and I say and chatted to Maria de la Candelas – 92 year old woman – born and raised and never left the village of Ages! Population nearly 100.

Felisa Repes – Church key keeper!

Friday Day 11 Ages – Burgos – 23km – 7.45-12.45 – 5 hours.

Walked all day with Signe. Was lovely. Found a field with happy, yellow and alive sunflowers!! Was a strange urban route into Burgos but I still enjoyed it. We joined up with Daniel too. Wandered round Burgos in the afternoon. Beautiful city. Went to watch the sunset over the city and bumped into Signe. So.....turns out that I saw the sunrise and the sunset with her. Don't know if I've ever experienced that with one person in one day!!

Went for tapas with 2 new Spanish friends that were in the beds near me in the Albergue.

Raul and Angel. Yum food and entertaining company (especially Angel)

Bumped into dreadlocked hair Argy boy (Juan Pablo). Went for a vino with him, Dani, Edgar and Lena. Hit the sack. Found another blister n my right big toe!!

Saturday Day 12 – Burgos – Hontanas 30.6km – 7.22-2.15 – 6hrs 30mins

Walked most of the morning alone. Sang and chatted very happily to myself. Seemed to be powering it. Caught up with Angel and his brother-in-law Jan. Chatted to them for ages. Had a laugh. Talked about travels and ambitions. Came across Javier and Antonio who had adopted a 16yr old English boy Zac. The first thing lawyer Angel says is 'he shouldn't be on his own, he's under-age'!! That was something I would never have thought about! Jan, 36 been traveling since he was 17. Coming close to 60 countries and his father more than 80! He married when he was 19 and was doing the camino for the weekend to meet up with Angel.

Angel, 35 Lawyer. Stubborn, man's man, selfish, independent wants to sail round the world and do Paris to Dakar by motor bike.

Caught up briefly with Derek and saw Claire and Crystal.

We all checked into the municipal albergue at Hontanas. Did one of the Paulo Coello exercises on arrival to village and walked super slowly – although all I wanted to do was to arrive!

Showered – then went for a menu with Daniel and Signe.

Strange village. Lots of staring men but fun afternoon and evening. Had dinner with Brian (Irish guy) and Signe. He's lovely. Done Vipassana 3 times. Funny guy – reminds me of Cillearn.

Sunday Day 13 – Hontanas to Boadilla del camino – 28.4km – 7.22-2pm – 6hrs 30mins

Angel put some music on for us this morning – 'Video killed the radio star'!

The sun took a long time to rise this morning. Bumped into a German couple (Ushi and Falker) that I keep seeing around. Later on bumped into Angel and Jan @ Castrojerez.

Beautiful village that I liked instantly. Saw Claire. Surprise of the day was the huge hill that presented itself. I thought this section was flat!! I love this section in the Meseta. The long never ended paths as far as the eye can see.

Met a Senegalese/French group travelling with Mona (dog) and Luis (7 month year old).

There was 7 of them in total including 2 black Senegalese girls who were looking after the baby. (first dark skinned people I've seen on the Camino).

It was another long day. Felt more blisters forming – G-d damn it!! What's going on with my feet?? Ended up stopped in Boadilla del Camino. Danced into the village with the 2

Senegalese girls...lots of fun.

Went to the first Albergue that I saw and instantly picked up on some strange energy emanating from guy working there. I asked if I could use the toilet...and wow...the response I got was not an expected one!! He was rude and his energy so bad that I made a very sharp exit. Met Anna (65 year old Spanish lady). She was lovely. Doing the Camino because she loves being active and doing things...no real other reason.

At the other end of the village – an oasis presented itself! 'En el Camino' was beautiful. There was a small swimming pool, garden and best menu I've had so far! Chick pea and garlic soup, beef stew and salad and ice-cream for desert. Yum yum!! Spoke to J on skype for a while and had another early night!

Monday Day 14 – Boadilla del Camino to Carrion de los Condes – 25km – 7.40am-1.10pm – 5hrs and 30mins

Beautiful morning following the river, then road working all the way to the destination. Time passed fairly quickly. I walked alone. Spoke to Susana, Amanda and mum briefly. Played my nestle tea can for a while drumming out different rhythms. I arrived just after 1pm. Had spoken to Angel and headed for Espiritu Santo – beautiful big building in an old school building. All single bed today (no bunks) – which was very exciting! I loved it. I showered, then met Angel and Raul and went for a menu. Met up with Olivia and Darren – who were some friends of Raul's. Had a laugh.

Come back – Chilled. Played basketball with Angel and he won ☺ Hung around in the courtyard chatting. Lizzy found out that she's been accepted into a law firm – so we all celebrated with Cava and vino!! Angel put on some music. What strange taste in music he has!! Very unexpected romantic 80's tunes. Went to sleep with throbbing feet!

Tuesday Day 15 – Carrion to Terradillos de los Templores – 26km - 7.22-1pm – 5hrs and 40mins

Got up and wrapped my feet and headed off. Was a long stretch of road for 17km. I loved it (even if my feet didn't). Day dreamed most of the way. Passed through a few villages and chatted to locals. Crystal left her mobile photo in Carrion and had to walk back! Headed to terradillas de los Templores. Met Elizabeth (French) and Marcy (Washington State) and headed to the same Albergue on arrival. Was happy to take the boots off. Showered, washed clothes and ate a menu with Claire and Daniel (that had arrived later). Chilled and chatted. Met Jane (61 year old from Florida – writing book on women doing the Way). She asked to interview me – I declined. Listened to an Italian pilgrim singing opera as the sun set. Retired to bed early!

Wednesday Day 16 – Terradillos to El Burgo Ranero – 30km – 7.30am-3.45m – over 8hrs with break in Sagahon.

Took a while to get through the foot pain today! Walked with Claire, Christel, Signe, Derek and Daniel. We walked the 12km to Sagahon and had a long, lingering breakfast in the plaza. Had a huge baguette with ham, cheese and fried egg. Said our farewells to Christel. Everyone continued on their walk. I stayed with Claire as she wasn't feeling so great. It was a loooong day but a good mental challenge. We did well – but were happy to arrive when we did. Albergue was full – so we ended up in another one down the road. 10 Euro for a double room. Perfect!

Sweet village but no ganas to explore at all. Met Sonia from Spain in the supermarket very briefly but thought to myself that I'd like to chat more to her. (little did I know.....) Was in bed super early!

Thursday Day 17 – El Burgo Ranero to Puente Villarente – 25km – 7.30-2pm – 6hrs 30mins Bumped into Sonia!! (34, from Barcelona). I loved her instantly and we chatted happily for hours covering all manner of subjects.

Revelation of the day was...we are on the yellow brick road!! This IS the Wizard of Oz! Follow follow follow follow follow the yellow brick road....is Follow follow follow follow follow the yellow arrow!!

Everyone is looking for something or asking for something! Dorothy wanting to go home, the tin man and his heart, the scarecrow and his brain and the lion and his courage!! What am I looking for??

Left Sonia in Mansilla de las mulas and continued on 6km with Claire. Chatting all the way. Was a day of talking today!

Paula and Sari – Two lovely Finnish women who had sailed the Atlantic. Luis and Oscar (bicigrino) both Spanish. Paul from Switzerland, Bernard from Montreal and Fergal (very unhappy feetwise) from Ireland.

The Albergue was lovely. We hung out in the garden area, relaxing the weary feet and bodies. Playful cat and old sleepy dog! Got some aloe vera from Hospitalerio Julio for the bite on my neck! We all ate the menu together that evening. Had a laugh. Me, Derek, Claire, Signe, Daniel, Paul, Bernard, Paula, Sari and Fergal.

Worst night so far of snorers! Didn't sleep well at all!

Friday Day 18 – Puene Villarente to Leon – 14km – 7.45-10.30 – 3 hrs – super short day! Nice stroll into Leon. Wasn't as bad as everyone said. I quite enjoyed it. Chatted to Daniel for a while. Saw a sad donkey that I wanted to help escape! Fed him the tow carrots that I had. Claire, Signe and I went for breakfast on arrival in Leon. Big tortilla baguette. Went to see the Cathedral and then decide if I was going to stay in the albergue (with a 9.30pm curfew) or splash out on a hostel (and enjoy the Leon nightlife). I opted for the latter. So did Signe (and Sonia and Maggie). We spent 25 Euro on 'Guzman El Bueno' and was very happy there. Sheets and blankets and private shower/bathroom and central heating. All very cosy! The temperature had plummeted and it was a wee bit nippy. Sonia and I went to warm ourselves up outside with some vino. We found a tapas bar in Barrio Humido and whiled away the afternoon sitting in the sun, chatting, drinking, eating and laughing. Some locals from Leon (Ruben and Ruben) and Francisco and Susana (who danced salsa). I had already located a salsa bar (conveniently located about 20 steps from the hostel ;))...and Susana said she would lend me some shoes!!

Had lots of fun. Came back – bought a quick dry top and new socks for 26 Euros (they better work magic for that price). Saved some photos onto my usb then at 7pm met Derek, Claire, Signe and Cristof (whose last night it was and who had just caught up with us). I ate sooo much and couldn't face any more wine. Realised that I left my usb in the computer at the internet café so had to run back there. Luckily it was where I left it. Everyone went back to the Albergue – Signe and I wandered round Leon. Went for a hot chocolate and chat. She spent a month in Cuba in January and didn't see or really hear any salsa!!?? How does that happen?? I just can't believe it at all.

At 11pm I met Sonia and we headed to 'Palacio de la Salsa' !! It was very dodgy. About 4 people there and all about 12 years old. I decided to wait it out! Ordered a rum and coke and observed when a salsa song came on. A couple more peeps arrived and a couple of dj's I asked someone to dance and it was surprisingly good! He became my partner for the evening. Had a laugh.

Sonia went out after...I went back to bed. She was upset and said that she would never see me again.....little did she know... hehehehe

Saturday Day 19 – Leon to Villadangos del Paramo – 23km – 10am-3pm – 5hrs

Signe woke me up at 8am when she left. Did half an hour meditation. Left Leon leisurely at 10am. Met up with Claire after about 1 and a half hours (when out of the city). I put on my 'magic socks' ...and I tell you....they were magic!! I was told that I had to put them on directly. No plasters, no compeed, no Vaseline – no nothing. Arrive AT Villagango and decided to stay. Alburge was ok (one big room). Went to the one shop there was and bought soup and tomatoes. Javier, Orlando and Antonia were there. Chilled. Ate soup and tomatoes with Claire! A group of 5 pretty good eye candy cyclists arrived late afternoon. They'd done 120km! They were all good fun but there was a connection with one in particular. We all chatted for a bit – most people were in bed early. The Spanish were eating. Javier, Antonia and Orlando – then the 5 cyclists. Before going to sleep Salvador asked if I was planning to

spend more time in Spain and gave me his card. 'Don't lose it – this is important' he told me. As I fell asleep I continued to feel this really bizarre energy with Salvador. I couldn't really see him properly (as I had taken my eyes out) but I 'felt' him.

Sunday Day 20 – Villadangos to Astorga – 27km

Left with Claire. It was bloody freezing. I said by to Salvador – but hoped to see him pass later. Chatted away with Claire. I have to say in the back of my mind I was wondering about Salvador and soul mates. We arrived at Hospital de Orbigo – what a beautiful place. A huge (well largest in Spain) Medieval bridge was the entry point to the village. It was gorgeous. We sat on the terrace of the restaurant that had the perfect view of the bridge and pilgrims entering the village, and had a coffee. Just delightful.

I set off again on my own. The run into Astorga was also beautiful and I walked with blue and brown grasshoppers and butterflies. Bumped into Derek and we headed to Saint Javier Albergue. Showered and put my stuff in the washing machine, then went out to see the city and sit in the plaza. Very beautiful city I really liked it. Decided to send Salvador a text message to find out where they all were and make contact. Was really cold in the shade and at night the temperature dropped again. Derek, Claire, Marcy, Daniel and I went for the recommended menu at the Gaudi Hotel (12 Euros instead of 21). Had a laugh. Started receiving messages from Salvador...that Daniel enjoyed taking the piss out of. Good to know that not everything is in my head!!

'Hola guapa! Estoy en lo alto d la montania con el sol. Muy muy contento de saber de ti! T consejo pases por manjarin. Hay unos hombres muy sabios. Beso de todos'

'Esta manana te he buscado en el camino por k tenia una cosa par ti en un trozo d papel. K decia'

'peregrinar es renunciar a casi todo...a ti casi es imposible eres una cosa Hermosa en un camino hermos. Gracias por cruzarte bonita. Keep in touch x'

'si..esto decia. Aun lo tengo encima. He sentido una conexion contigo muy interestane...eres muy intuitive como si supieres lo k la gente piensa. Me gusta volv vte'

Monday Day 21 – Astorga to Foncebadon – 26km (7.55-2pm) – 6 hours

Left alone this morning. The way today was really beautiful. Winding pathes that snaked round the main road, through villages and forests and up the mountain. There seemed to be a lot of pilgrims today, but I soon found myself waking on my own for the first few kms. After stocking up with drinks I was joined by Magnus. Lovely 50year old Swedish man. Single father of 3 who works as a group developer/leader. We chatted all the way to Rabanal. Thoughts, feeling, actions – certainty and uncertainty. I really enjoyed our brief interaction – even if I was hesitant at the beginning to engage. On arrival in Rabanal I decided to continue on another 6km to Foncebadon. A tiny , yet beautiful little village near the top of the hill. I want to 'Cruz de la Fiero' Albergue' which was clean yet clinical and had an amazing shower!

Went with a wander with Nena (lovely Spanish single mother of 3 29,25 and 24 year olds) who is looking for a little peace! Walked passed a place that smelt so good, had to enter. Ended up eating a very tasty menu and meeting the beautiful volunteers Patricia and he tow boys jack Robin (12, amazing boy. Very old soul in a very young vessel) and Jonas (8). Sat there for hours. Very cool place. Watched the sky change colour and the moon rise. One of my favorite little stops so far. Hung out with Sonia early evening.

Tuesday Day 22 – 20kms – Foncebadon to Molinaseca - 7.30-late arrival

Received a very early morning message from Salvador:

Headed up to the cross de Foro in the morning. Got a great shot of Javier. The colours of the early morning light were beautiful and the warm and cold breezes that passed during the climb were bizarre. The way today was one of my favourites. Varied and lush with small paths, winding down paths, postcard perfect villages and interesting interactions. At the bottom of the hill in a gorgeous village called Acebo, I connected with a Spanish guy working in one of the hostels who was the spitting image of Luis. Freaked me out completely. He invited me for a coffee and as there was free wifi, I made skype contact with J. Chatted for ages and had a good catch up. I moved on from the village even though something was wanting me to stay. Walked alone for most of the day until the afternoon when I met Triana sitting under a tree. I then met up with Maggie again. We walked together until Molinaseca. Triana was doing the Camino without money and has been walking and travelling this way for a few years. She plays the flute and busks where she can and sells clothes and jewelry. We arrived into Molinaseca- crossing a lovely bridge...and I loved it instantly!! Maggie and I decided to stay here and Triana continued as she needed a bigger city to busk and earn some money. Waited for Sonia to arrive (she had had a traumatic day and hurt her foot) and then we went into the village for a drink. Me, Sonia, Maggie, Magnus, Nicolas, Derek – chatted, laughed and heard more of Sonia's story. At the menu in the evening. Washed and dried clothes (but not the magic socks).

Wednesday Day 23 Molnaseca to Villafranca de Bierzo – 30.7km – 7.30-4pm – over 8 hours with stops

Was a long but fun day. Walked alone in the morning with the full moon until the sun rose and the moon set. In Ponferrada I met Sonia in the café in front of the castle and we walked on from there together. Spent the rest of the day with her. We passed village after village (pueblitos!!!) and laughed the whole way to Villafranca. Took lots of silly photos and ended up in the Albergue Vina Fermita with single beds and hydro massage showers! Showered and then went for a wander into the beautiful village of Villafranca. Went to the other albergue, which was very cool. Lots of personality and Triana, Nenea, Javier, Orlando, Antonio etc were there. Found the main plaza which was buzzing and a restaurant serving an all day menu!! Perfect end to another wonderful Camino day!. Came back to the albergue. Used Dennis' lap top and sent 2 photos of Javier to myself and the family I had received a message from Luis a couple of days ago! How freaky is that. After seeing Tashe – I knew I needed to contact Luis – but low and behold a message appeared from him first. I love the Camino. Always the strangest things happening. I was in contact with Salvador too. His last message I loved.

'Estar abierto es siempre bueno. Ya tel vendra lo k tenga k ser.....yo estoy igual. Confia en la vida y flueye x'

Thursdau Day 24 – Villafranca – O' Cebreiro – 30.5km – 7am-2.30pm – 7hrs 30mins with breaks

'Que pena!!' The most amazing beds and clean sheets but an unfortunate night's sleep. Nicolas (Magnus' friend) is a champion snorer!! At 6.11 I was up and there was no point in trying to sleep any longer. Sonia and I were outta there by 7am (my earliest departure yet). It was a truly magical morning. We walked by the light of the full moon (or very recently waning) and entered this type of natural amphitheatre with dark mountains surrounding us, the sound of the river passing below and the stars above that were actually twinkling!! It really was special. Sonia and I passed another day walking together. Time passed effortlessly as we laughed, sang, danced chatted, stopped for coffees and covered about 30km! Jordie waked with us for a little while. It was quite a climb to O Cebreiro to day but good to feel as if I was doing some exercise! Was stunning today and the way reminded me a little of the Inca Trail. Green and lush. Today we entered Galicia!!! Got to O'Cebrero, headed to the Albergue , showered and washed clothes. Not the best Albergue at all!! Today

it was time to brave washing the 'magic socks' (it had been 5 days)
Sonia and I went for a menu as we hadn't really eaten anything all day. I was in bed at 7.39pm!

Friday Day 25 – O' Cebreiro to Samos - 30.7km – 7.30-4.30pm – 9 hours with stops
A really long yet super fun day. Very varied with ups and downs, forest, rivers and pueblitos!!! Another day with Sonia – laughing, singing, dancing. We stopped in Tricastela and decided to move on towards Samos. Derek ran up to us to pre-warn that we had another 9k to go and only 36% natural path! We carried on regardless. The was lovely. Longest stretch ever without yellow arrows along the highway, then into the forest. Very weird villages – doooo dooo dooo dooo – old lady with maiz and washing but no people anywhere! There was however a vending machine in the middle of nowhere – just when we were in desperate need of a drink! The way will provide!!
Eventually arrived in Samos. Beautiful village – Monastery albergue wasn't too great. It looked dirty and with no personality. Bumped in to Signe. Decided to go to another albergue – Val de Samos' Most expensive albergue yet (11 Euros) but worth every penny!! Great shower, sheets and couvet!!!! We loved it!
Bought loads of food for supper, breakfast and lunch. And ate soup, and salad, with vino.

Saturday Day 26 – Samos to Sarria – 13km – 10.30-2.30pm – 4 hrs
Was sooo cosy in bed. Didn't want to move!! Eventually got up. We made some sandwiches and hit the road about 10.30. We were the only ones in the albergue. It was as if it was our home!! Walked super slow. Another day chatting and laughing . Interesting how I very much wanted to walk the camino alone and I've ended up walking with Sonia. And been more than happy with her company. Also interesting how I was so close to walking the camino with Spanish Sonia (Dominguez) and I've ended up walking with another Spanish Sonia.
We ended up in a lovely Albergue with only 3 other pilgrims and a kitchen and lovely little dining area. It was like our little home (once again). Copied photos to my usb and then went to the supermarket to get food. Make soup and salad – drank vino and whiled away another great evening on the Camino.

Sunday Day 27 – Sarria to Portomarin – 23km – 8am-2.30pm – 6 hrs and 30 mins with stops
The Camino was really beautiful and varied today. We made super sandwiches for the journey and yoghurt and boiled eggs for breakfast. Lots of enchanted forest and wizard of oz path! Another 'holiday' day chatting, laughing and living our moments. Stopped for a giant 1.80Euro coffee and then later in a really beautiful place 5m before Portomarin. It had the terrace and lap top that I'd asked for - but we felt as if we wanted to go on....so we did. Our timing could not have been better. We were greeted by a shepardess and her cows/sheep and dogs We ended up walking with them for at least half an hour of the camino. It was amazing and such a 'Camino experience'! I loved it.
Walked slowly, played with photos and ambled into Portomadrin. Went to the municipal albergue and I have decided that this will most probably be my last. Too many people, not clean, no doors on showers – na!! I would like better.
Saw a group of horses. So now we have peregrinos, bicigrinos, turigrinos and motagrinos!! It's been slight freaky how everything I've been 'asking' for has been appearing. (Rainbows, specific albergues, reastaurants and drink machines and rubbish bins) In fact the only think so far that hasn't – has been the soul mate. Perhaps there was something in the connection with Salvador – but maybe I wasn't being specific enough...and the universe sent me Sonia. She could well be something of a soul mate as we connected instantly...and I know she will be in my life forever.
We went for food and chatted to Jane and Dennis.
Back at the albergue – Sonia had my camera as she was busy writing her diary and looking through the photos for memory sake and inspiration. A group of bicigrinos were in the beds near us. One of them said – 'wow, que camera. Pesa mucho?' to which I replied 'si...pero valio la pena! They all broke into song. Was very entertaining. It turned out that Dani dances

salsa...and the excitement he showed when he heard I did...was very cute. Muy majó. He went to download the song.

Monday Day 28 Portomarin – Palais del Rei = 24km – 8am-2.30pm ish – 6 hrs and 30mins Didn't sleep at all. Snoring man (friend of Dani's) was directly above me. The bizarest sounding snoring I've ever heard actually. Got dressed, donned my boots then danced a salsa to 'Valio la pena' with Dani. Very funny. It was a great warm up dancing linea between the bunk beds!!

The was was nothing extraordinary today. Lots of road walking. It did start with the typical Galicia moist that everyone talks about. Very mysterious and beautiful as it hung low on the ground for a while before dissipating. Love was also in the air today. We passed a few couples holding hands. Very cute. Jane and Dennis and Bruce and Glenda from Tennessee. Passed a very Peregrino looking peregrino – long hair and beard that had walked the camino a few times! Stayed in Buen Camino albergue in Palais del Rei. Was lovely. Lots of character. Drank tino de veranos and shared a washer/drier with paula and Sari.

Went for a menu. Me, Sonia, Paula, Sari and Gaby (a German woman who needed a break from her family and routine life back home)

The camino really is about being in the moment. Every day – something different. Alert yet open and flexible to subtleties that present themselves.

Met Angel and Jave (super hyper Spanish policeman)

Tuesday Day 29 – Palais del Rei to Ribadiso de Baixo – 26km – 7hrs

Was in a strange mood today. Almost felt as if I needed to walk alone – but just remained a little quieter than usual. It was an observing day. Bumped into Orland, Javier and Antonio. It was a varied Camino (landscape wise). Ups, downs, road, forest, villages...

Stopped in a beautiful little albergue in San Xulian for a hot chocolate then later on in Melide for a Sonia to try the pulpo!

Arrived about 3pm ish and decided to go to the private albergue. It was cute. Sonia and I went straight for food. I had a sandwich and a couple of tinto de veranos. We sat in the only restaurant and chatted. We sat in the only restaurant and chatted. Went back to the albergue and showered. Put on my pyjama's and chilled in our little 4 bed dorm – shared with Angel and Javi (the hyper one from the night before). Tried to copy photos using Pauline's lap top, but it didn't work. Had to go through my camera and delete some to make more space!

Wednesday Day 30 – 21.5km Ribadiso to O Pedrozo

We work up at 7.30!! Couldn't believe that there were still lots of people sleeping in the other room. Left after 8. Ambled the way – but the way wanted us to appreciate fully the luck we have had for the rest of the journey. Today we received rain! What a difference. In ponchos/raincoats – hot – uncomfortable and unable to take photos. We found a café and stopped to sit out of the rain. Had a lomo, cheese and tomato sandwich. Chatted to ma on skype. Set off again when the rain had eased. As usual – it took us hours to arrive. Played with a few arrow photos and headed for the private albergue. Was cut and we bumped into loads of peeps that we know. Went out to eat. Had a menu in 'che' and ended up stilling there over 3 hours!! Sonia got a wee bit emotional. Attempted a wee meditation. Slept ok. Joun got her ipone stolen in the middle of the night.

Thursday Day 31 – O Pedrouzo (O Pino) to Santiago – 20km

The last day of a month's long walking journey. It felt strange. We were in no hurry. Stopped at Monte de Gozo to take some photos and prepare ourselves for the last 4.7km stretch to the Cathedral of Santiago! We slowed down, linked arms, and make our way. Santiago was a city – like every other. There was not really anything specifically pilgrim welcoming about it and the way not so beautiful. I'm not sure if anti-climax is how I would describe it but more of a realization that this end of such an incredible accomplishment, really is only the beginning of other moments and paths that will and have opened up for all. The city could have

perhaps gives us more of a welcome – but what the Camino teaches I and the Camino gives is the confidence to know and believe in yourself and appreciate that ‘the Way’ is within as well as without and if people maintain the alertness and openness that they felt whilst walking – they will live richer moments in their lives.

We bumped into Javier, Antonio and Orlando (which was perfect as I’d asked for it and wanted a photo)

Went to the Cathedral to hug the saint and get our Compostela.

Then went to Casa Monolo for brunch. Amazing 3 course meal. Bumped into Derek (perfect as I really wanted to see him before leaving) and Brian. Found a great pension in a perfect location for 50 Euros a night. Very happy there. Showered and washed my hair (there was even a little hair dryer!).

7pm went to the Cathedral to meet Derek, Jane and Dennis, Paula and Sari and a few others. Went for drinks. Lovely group of individuals and it was an honor to have shared this experience with them.

Friday Day 32

At 8am we were up - G-d damn it!!

Found the most perfect café. Sat by the window catching up on diaries, with beautiful music playing in the background and congratulating passing pilgrims just arriving into Santiago.

Perfect moment!!

What has the Camino given me? Well...to be honest...the Camino for me has been a representation of my life so far. The varied and ever changing stages and eras, the transience of the wonderful people, cultures and landscapes coming and going from my life. My attempt to always live every moment to its fullest – always observing and remaining present. A consistent uncertainty of exactly where the path (way) will take me – but always a consistent certainty and confidence that if you follow your heart (yellow arrow) you will always be guided in the right direction. The journey is what is important – not the destination. The people, places and lessons you learn and discover along the way will shape who you are and enrich your life.

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery – Today is a gift ..that’s why it’s called the Present

Everything changes – that is the law of nature. No craving – no aversions –
annnniiisshhhahahaaaaaa

I LOVE LIFE!! Special moments and special people

Keep moving forward – the energy will carry you.

No life changing revelations – but I’m happy for my life to be just as it is....for now.

Saturday the 22nd of Oct

Said ciao for now to Sonia and went to meet Jane and Dennis at 9am.

Walked to the bus station and got the 10am bus to Finisterre. Met 2 long distance walkers Anne and Sue. Anne re-nouned for breaking bones (!) and Sue very recently had 2 knee replacements. Both usually solo walkers, they had decided to do the Camino together.

The way was truly beautiful and it was so good to see the sea again.

Arrived – and found some accommodation then headed to El Faro to the end of the world

Met hippy Rob and English guy that had arrived in Finisterre 7 weeks ago and not left!

Met up with Jane again. Went for a glass of wine and did the interview with her. At the end of the ‘chat’ I saw Signe!! Yaaaaayyyyyy! I was so happy to see her again!

Went with her and Jason (30 year old American actor that felt he needed to change something in his life) and went to Mar de Foro. Beautiful beach and a beautiful sunset – this was the way to end ‘this Camino’. Almost full circle. Started my time in Palma – with the sea then ending at the sea. Love it!

Sunday the 23rd of Oct

The weather had turned. Talk about perfect timing!

Met Signe for breakfast in a funky little café full of pilgrims waiting for the bus. Bumped into Jeordi. The 11.45 bus was full – and the rain began to fall as we left Finisterre. I sat next to Nancy from Maine. Her and her husband Tom had taken a little under 2 months to complete their Camino. She had loved it. She told me about a school group – 9 students and 2 leaders that had been walking with them. She had 3 children and had her last one at the age 41 – so told me I still had plenty of time! She as lovely and we chatted the full 2 hour journey.

It was pouring on arrival back in to Santiago. Wow...what a difference! Ended up sharing a taxi and killing time. Bought an arrow tile, little T-shirt for Leo and 2 conch shell pendent things (one for me and one for Sonia).

Went into the restaurant that I had met Derek in a few days earlier and ordered a sandwich and hot chocolate. Who did I see looking at the menu 10 mins later...Daniel!! Yaaaaayyy!! Didn't think I'd see him at all. We had a catch up – then Torsten, Alessandra and Martina found me too. Amazing!! So pretty much everyone minus Benito. The Camino was complete and had come full circle. Benito – I'll have to see in Mexico!! Spoke to Sonia. She had had a horrible day walking in the rain. Hung out with Torsten, Alessandra, Martina for the rest of the evening. Took them to the old retro café then Dakar to eat. Walked to the train station about 9ish and waited for the train. Looooong journey with little sleep and man next to me with hacking cough that made the most disgusting sounds – I was repulsed.

Monday the 24th

Train arrived late into Madrid. It was another rainy miserable day.

I decided to just go straight to the airport and wait there.

I passed time effortlessly.

Natalia Cohen - 2011