

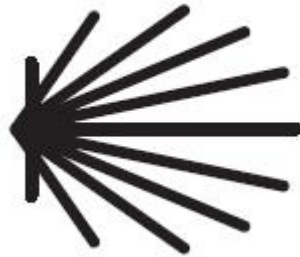
Santiago – walking the pilgrim path

SANTIAGO

Walking the Pilgrim Path

A Spanish journey from Pamplona to Santiago de Compostela

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GOOD WALKING
BOOKS

Santiago

Walking the Pilgrim Path

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Appendix:

Adventure Beckons!

Highly Recommended Reading

Compostela - Certificate of Completion



1 The Legend of SANTIAGO

Black storm clouds swirled menacingly above, blocking out the sun. Down below in the boiling, tortured cauldron of the sea, a small ship was being vandalised by the elements. The shrieking wind slammed the waves into monstrous shapes that toppled and smashed into the ship's wooden hull. Massive volumes of foaming salt water spewed onto the narrow deck causing it to glisten with an eerie lustre. The dangerous sky aimed vivid spikes of heaven's fire at the boat.

Nature had conspired to destroy the vessel. A ferocious wave overwhelmed it with a thunderous jolt, nearly capsizing it. The force of the intrushing water loosened one poor soul's terrified grip and hurled him into the devouring sea. Since passing through the Pillars of Hercules, the sailing conditions had worsened and were now atrocious. Despair had set in.

The tiny vessel was heading for that part of the coast called Finisterre, literally the "end of the world". The captain had been following the rugged coastline of the Iberian Peninsula and was careful not to lose sight of land. It was well known in those days that west of the peninsula lay nothing, and anyone foolish enough to sail further westward could expect to fall over the edge and plunge into the black abyss. All prayed for deliverance from the raging sea.

Along this coast, the sea was often rough and cold, but the sailors knew that the deep estuaries were calm and sheltered, and it was to one of these

that the little ship was headed. For some days and nights the black sea swelled and throbbed, and the crashes of thunder magnified their terror. As well as being terrified for their lives, they feared for the loss of their precious cargo.

The sailors and passengers had had no respite from the stormy conditions and were exhausted. Vomiting and injuries caused by the violent jarring of the journey were suffered by all. Every ship's timber was groaning with the added stress and some had even split, allowing water into the hold. The vessel had to reach land soon or the boat would sink under its own waterlogged weight.

The relentless wind and sea continued to batter the headlands. There! Ahead was an enormous rock jutting out of the saline turmoil. Waves ferociously attacked it. The strongly pulling tide dragged the sodden boat toward it. The captain and crew struggled to avoid the collision, when suddenly a wave of frightening size and strength lifted the stricken vessel out of immediate danger and set it down further away from the rock. Nature had decided on a reprieve.

Eventually, in the drenching rain, the vessel reached one deep estuary and sailed up its length to a small settlement called Padron in the Celtic north western outcrop of Iberia. The passengers thanked God for delivering them safely and hurried ashore with their cargo. Inside the sealed container was a torso and its severed head. These were the earthly remains of James the Greater, apostle and cousin of Jesus Christ.



Only eleven years prior to this risky sea journey, the Romans had crucified Jesus Christ. After the crucifixion His disciples went forth to different parts of the known world to spread His message.

James is reputed to have brought the word of Christ to the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula. A slender amount of information is available of his time on the peninsula. The apostolic history of Abdias tells of the conversion by James of two magicians, Philetus and Hermogenes. In a contest of magical strength, James won and the two magicians destroyed their magical books and “went to undo their previous deceitful work and return their ill-gotten gains to charity.”

James eventually returned to Palestine and was soon arrested by Herod Agrippa. The early history of the Church is shrouded in mist, but we do know from Clement of Alexandria about James, that as he was led to the

law court the soldier who guarded him confessed himself a Christian and begged James to forgive him his sins. James said, “Peace be with thee!” and kissed him. After this Herod had both men beheaded together. Shortly after this Herod got his just desserts and died from a fatal attack of dysentery.

Following the martyrdom of James, his loyal followers obtained his body and boarded a ship at Joppa (Jaffa). They left the Holy Land and set sail for Spain, a journey reputedly completed in seven days. After landing at Padron, in the region later known as Galicia, James’s disciples struck problems. The queen of the area, who was suspicious of their motives, immediately had them imprisoned. After adequately explaining their quest to lay their apostle to rest in the country in which he had once preached, the queen acquiesced and allowed them to continue their journey.

Pulling the cart containing the apostle’s remains, they next encountered a large green scaly dragon, complete with reptilian wings, which barred their progress. These disciples, who by now had encountered all manners of troubles and adventures, held up a crucifix in front of the dragon, who lay down with a smoky sigh and let them pass.

It soon came to pass that a pair of wild bulls noticed the tiny entourage, and approached it out of curiosity. The disciples, fearing death at the horns of the bulls, again revealed the crucifix to the astonished animals which then became docile and allowed themselves to be harnessed to the cart. This made the journey a little easier. The little group made their way through the verdant land, crossing rivers and climbing hills. Some days later on a hillside, the disciples found a suitable spot and buried their apostle with the prayer - rest in peace.
And that was that.

Until...

In the 700s, the Moors, expanding their empire, crossed over the Straits of Gibraltar from Northern Africa into the Iberian Peninsula. This was a land that was hot and arid, yet more yielding to agriculture than their own parched lands. And in Iberia there were all those infidels, waiting to be converted to the faith of Islam!

The armies of Islam swept northwards across the southern part of the peninsula, and had great success in their battles against the Christian kingdoms of Spain. These victories were attributed to the fact that the Moors carried the *arm of the prophet* with them into battle.

They used this holy relic as a powerful talisman, which gave them an enormous advantage over the Christians, who were desperate for a similar holy weapon with which to vanquish their enemies.

The Moors were pressing Christendom hard. By 712 the Muslim invasion was complete - apart from a ribbon of territory in the north of the peninsula which remained in Christian hands. The Muslim capitol was established at Cordoba and the whole peninsula was administered from there.

Christendom needed a miracle. In the 800s Pelagius, a Christian hermit living in the Padron area, had a vision in which he saw a very large, bright star surrounded by a ring of smaller ones, shining over a certain spot in the hills. This vision was reported to the local bishop, who investigated and discovered a tomb containing three bodies. They were immediately identified as Saint James and two of his followers.

The King of the Asturias, Alphonso II, visited the site and declared Saint James the patron saint of Spain. Perhaps this would be the much needed miracle made manifest. The moral strength of the Christians in the north was given a great boost.

The Spanish Christians had indeed struck gold. The wars between the Moors and Christians raged on, but the tide was turning. The Christians now had a patron saint to guide the country's religious and secular affairs. At Clavijo in 844, King Ramiro formed his men into battle lines in preparation for the mighty battle with his Moorish nemesis.

The soldiers were clad in heavy armour and had been primed for battle by their leaders. In the hot sun the reflection from countless armoured suits and weapons was dazzling. In the distance stood the Moorish army of Abderraman II, also prepared for battle. The colours and metal fixtures of the Moors added an intense fire-like quality to the vast arena of coming war. This was to be an important battle for Abderraman. It was imperative that he crush these annoying Christian attacks on his empire.

For Ramiro and his Christians this was going to be a do or die effort. If they were defeated this time, the Moors would sweep across the remaining Christian lands and all of Spain would fall before those unbelievers. These troops of his were the last defence. Ramiro gave thanks to God and prayed that God be with him and his army in this battle.

Across the wide plain, Abderraman prayed that Allah be with him in this final battle against the forces of the infidel.

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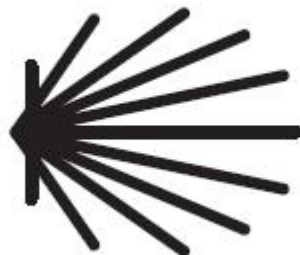
The war signal was given and the armies marched resolutely towards each other. Both armies were well matched and all possible troops were deployed in this monumental struggle. Victory seemed to swing from side to side. Sometimes the Moors gained the upper hand, only to be driven back by the Christians. And just as the Christians appeared to grasp victory, the Moors managed to prevent it. No one could tell who would win.

In the heat of the battle, with the blood and sweat of horses and men intermingled, a mysterious knight, riding a white charger, appeared and provided great military and psychological support to King Ramiro by personally dispatching many of the Moors.

Legend has it that this white knight was Sant Iago - Saint James. The Moors were defeated and gradually the Christians began reclaiming Spain for themselves - the Reconquesta.

After this great battle, Santiago became known as Saint James the Moorlayer. The great Christian war cry became “For Saint James and a united Spain”. Christendom now had a powerful heavenly ally. With St James being the patron saint of Spain, and a proven holy warrior, a church was built on the site of his tomb, around which a town developed and was subsequently called Santiago de Compostela, Compostela being a shortening of campus de la stella - area of the star.

In the eleventh century, Santiago de Compostela became a great attraction throughout Christian Europe, the destination for pilgrimages that drew kings, princes, saints and a multitude of ordinary pilgrims. Pope Calixtus II granted the Church of Santiago the “Jubileo pleno del Ano Santo” an honour which made Santiago a Holy City of the same importance as Jerusalem and Rome. Santiago de Compostela thus became one of Catholicism’s three holiest cities, in line with Rome and Jerusalem. Countless pilgrims would journey to these sites in future centuries.





The route to Santiago de Compostela

2 Time Waits for No-one

One night, during the closing years of the second millennium, a spark of bluish white energy left the firmament and headed towards earth. It circled the earth's aura seeking a particular point, leaving an iridescent wisp in its wake. Locating its target it entered the heart of a sleeping man.

Life was flat. There was that dullness of unsatisfactory routine. Working paid the bills. But there must be more to life than just this. How come things were always changing, yet most of us were struggling just to keep up with it all. Was it all just a big lie that if we would just wait a bit longer, things would improve?

Yes, I had dreams and aspirations, and equally I had a huge collection of excuses specifically designed to avoid realising those dreams. Like: maybe next year; when I have enough money; when the time is right; am I capable enough? what would others think?

At the end of a hard week at work, it was nice to just sit and catch up with friends and the newspapers. And anyhow, I still reckoned I had time to live my dreams. There was a knock at the door. I grumbled as I got out of my comfortable position and went to answer it. It was weird. A strange light permeated the hallway.

Upon opening the door, a burst of brilliance made me shield my eyes as I saw a luminous being with carefully folded, large, white wings.

An angel! I never really thought that I would ever see one. I was astounded. My voice froze.

The angel calmly said, “Please follow me.”

I didn’t even ask, “Where to?” as we gently rose into the air and effortlessly floated towards a large plateau. Then, in an instant I found myself solidly on the ground again, standing on a desolate flat space. In front of me was a gigantic, horizontal clock that was ticking, spinning and making horrid crunching sounds. I looked at the angel and felt a deep sense of sadness.

The angel said, “I’m sorry, but your time is up.” An angel tear dropped into the dust and left a sympathetic, wet mark.

“It is your turn to meet Time.”

Confused and worried, I asked, “What’s happening?”

The angel said, “There is a natural law concerning the use of time that you have triggered. It has detected that you have not used your allotted time to express your dreams and fulfill your purpose.

“It assumes that you have no further use for it and will return the unused part back to nature.”

“But I’ve still got so much I want to do!” I protested.

“We must go.”

My heart was racing and I tried to moisten my dry throat. I was sweating profusely and felt sick. We moved towards a squat, bald figure dressed in brown leather garments holding a large open book in his arms.

He said, “It is written that you have finished with your time here. You have wasted it. When the hand of the clock touches you, this dimension of time and space will bid you farewell.”

At this moment, I had an awesome realisation that I still had a lot I wanted to do. I didn’t want to die. The fat bookkeeper didn’t care. He wouldn’t hear me. He was stoically bureaucratic, and I was really in trouble. I turned to the angel and saw her crying as she disintegrated in front of me.

Some powerful force was pushing me towards the edge of the cliff. Suddenly I saw an image of a glowing cathedral and the word “SANTIAGO” was emblazoned into my mind as if by a white-hot brand from a fire.

I saw an old man, whose face expressed the wisdom of centuries, standing in front of the cathedral, pointing to what appeared to be a treasure there.

“Go to Santiago, on the path” were the last words I heard. I tried to keep my focus on the glowing Cathedral and the old man, but I began falling over the edge into the inky blackness, screaming.



This intense dream was timely. I had been thinking about travelling along the old pilgrim’s path to Santiago de Compostela for some time. The dream prompted me to act. I would do it! And I would journey on foot.

I was aware that as yet unknown challenges were to be an integral part of this experience. The time was now right to follow this path. I shared the dream with my partner, Carol. Cautiously she embraced my vision. We began reading books about the pilgrimage and joined the London-based Confraternity of St James, studying their excellent guidebooks.

I was surprised to discover how many contemporary pilgrims there are. The more I read the more I wanted to join them and each book further increased my desire. From the reading it was obvious that the trek wouldn’t be easy. Both of us realised that there were personal issues that would have to be confronted throughout the journey.

I was passionately committed to walking every step of the way. Carol, who at 54 was 11 years older than me, felt concerned about her physical ability to keep up. I knew I wanted her with me. By now I was feeling really enthused, but I only had four weeks annual leave.

Historically, pilgrims have started from destinations as far flung as London, Paris and Rome, spending many months on the journey. How far could we walk in 25 days? That was our first challenge.

We decided to start in the north eastern area of Spain, in the city of Pamplona, and omit the middle, 160km stretch of arid meseta between the cities of Burgos and Leon, over which we would take the bus. We would walk a total of 500km to reach our goal, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and the tomb of St James.