CAMINO PLANNING RESOURCES: 2019

Three Invaluable Books; Gear List; Guidebooks, Apps & Technology; “Must See/Stay” Places; and Stage Summaries for Four Camino Routes:

- Via Podiensis/Le Puy to SJPP
- Del Norte,
- Primitivo &
- Fisterra

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Each Pilgrim walks his/her own Camino—pilgrimage is deeply personal and there is no “one way”. In particular, a fundamental philosophical decision each Pilgrim makes is whether their Camino will be “organic” or “planned & prepared”. The “organic” approach is minimalist with respect to preparation/execution and emphasizes fully experiencing the Camino by largely just letting it happen and taking things as they come. Proponents of the “organic” approach recommend that a Pilgrim not use a guidebook or prepare much in advance beyond training walks, packing the minimally-necessary gear, and just “following the yellow arrows”. The “planned & prepared” approach emphasizes more or less careful
research and use of resources with respect to: the route (stage lengths, difficulty, elevations, route variants); the time of year and related weather considerations; gear; availability of water, food, lodging, and services such as ATMS; whether to reserve some accommodations in advance; and having some advance idea as to “must see/must experience” sites, villages, types of local foods to taste, etc. Just about everyone—myself included—would like to experience the purely “organic” approach and simply “be in the moment” and “be open to the many Gifts of the Camino” for the entire pilgrimage. At the same time, many of us—myself included—experience too much anxiety related to a purely “organic” approach (at least for a first Camino) and our inner control-freak and/or self-preservation instinct demands that we research and plan our Camino to a greater or lesser degree. I ultimately concluded (or rationalized) that the approach for me would be to “Prepare and Plan Diligently and then Let Go of All Expectations and Be Open to Every Change”. As you will see below, I probably over-did it with my research and planning—for better or worse, that is “how I roll” and, at 64 years of age, I was unable to make a 180 degree change for my first Camino even with the kind encouragement/prodding from Robert Forrester (founder of the Via Podiensis Facebook site and a marvelous mentor to thousands of Pilgrims—I call him “Yoda”). At the same time, I do believe in hindsight that my solid preparation permitted me to largely “let go of expectations” once I was a few days into my Camino—I always viewed my “plan” as my servant and not as my master. In particular, my “plan” helped me immensely when I had to make drastic adjustments to accommodate healing of tendonitis that developed after my first 500 kilometers—I ultimately skipped the last 200 kilometers of the Via Podiensis in France, traveled to the beginning of the Del Norte Camino in Spain where I rehabbed my ankles, and then shortened initial stages of Del Norte and increased my number of rest days. Fortunately, I healed completely and was able to return to full stages and even add some 30-40-kilometer days to the Del Norte and Primitivo Caminos. I arrived in Santiago de Compostela and Fisterra having walked ____ kilometer/_____ miles which was 75% of my original plan. At the same time, I will approach my next Caminos in a much more “organic” fashion—I know exactly what to pack and I would just use a single online guidebook/map (Wise Pilgrim is my favorite) and would not make any advanced reservations or otherwise plan ahead—the Camino truly does provide everything a Pilgrim needs.

The following resources summarize what I learned as I prepared and completed my first Camino. Please accept this information only as a reflection of my experience and what did and didn’t work for me. Occasionally, I offer “suggestions” or “strong suggestions”—they simply reflect my personal experience and I offer them to emphasize a few personal learnings that I believe other Pilgrims may benefit from at least thinking about...accept them, reject them or modify them as you determine is best for “your Camino”.

Planning and experiencing the Camino was one of the very best experiences in my life on many levels. My blog covers my experience in some detail. “Connection” with the Pilgrims
who preceded me over the last 1200 years, “connection” with the Pilgrims I met on the trail or who I followed on social media/email, and “connection” with the Pilgrims making future pilgrimages are among the greatest gifts of my Camino. I hope the information in these pages is helpful. Feel free to contact me if I can provide any addition information or if you have suggestions about the Camino I overlooked: oviattmn@gmail.com.

Buen Camino!

B. Three Invaluable Books (For Both “Organic” and “Planned & Prepared” Pilgrims): I highly recommend three books that were invaluable parts of my Camino. The first book inspired me to truly “experience” the Camino—it stirred my soul, connected me to the concept and history of “human pilgrimage”, and it inspired my spirit to focus “inward and upward” as I walked “my Camino”. The second book helped me adjust my expectations, attitude, preparation, and approach to the Camino through its exploration of the mental, physical, philosophical, and practical aspects of long-term travel. The third book taught me the importance of routine foot care including use of foot lubrication and taping—the Kindle version also was a great resource I consulted during the Camino.


C. Gear List: Identifying gear and packing for the Camino is simple—but it is not easy. I experienced four fundamental truths related to Camino gear:

i. **Less is More:** Every Pilgrim is healthier, happier and has a more meaningful Camino experience if s/he minimizes gear, pack-size, and weight. Ultimately, a Pilgrim makes three lists: a) everything s/he could possibly use on the Camino; b) everything s/he wants to take after initially culling the first list and trying to stuff it all in a backpack; and c) the few things s/he absolutely needs in the smallest possible quantities/weights. Only the “List C” items will be in your pack after your first week on the Camino, so save a lot of time and expense upfront by buying your pack and complete a test loading and weighing of ALL of your gear at least a month before departure (you can leave out your warm-weather walking clothes and footwear but pack everything else including a full water bladder/bottles and the “cookies from mom” or other “special” things you intend to take...it will be a sober reality check. **Ideal pack weight is no more than 6-10 kilos/13-22 lbs.**

ii. **The Camino is Unique:** The Camino is not a camping trip, a wilderness trek, a mountain hike, nor a tour. It is a long thru-hike across populated areas on generally good trails/gravel roads with challenging elevation changes but no
high-altitude and very little “scrambling or climbing”. **Note to Campers:** A few Pilgrims camp regularly—most never camp. I love ultra-light camping and have fabulous gear that I wanted to take on the Camino. I consulted some experienced Pilgrims, including “Yoda” Robert Forrester, who wisely advised me that “the Camino is just not that kind of experience”. There are many reasons for this: wild camping is permitted in France but not Spain; wild camping sites are not very practical as the Camino goes through a lot of populated areas; commercial camping is nearly as expensive as Gites and Albergues; regular camping would reduce a Pilgrim’s communal experience (one of the most wonderful attributes of a Camino) that occurs in group lodging and during group meals; and even the most minimal ultra-light camping gear adds a lot of weight to a Pilgrim’s gear. My gear list and other recommendations reflect my conclusion that I would not camp during my Camino. I never once wished I was camping.

iii. **You Will Successfully Rely on Commercial Lodging, Dining, and Resupply for Anything You Need:** Most Pilgrims rely on commercial lodging and dining (or preparing food in the kitchen of a Gite or Albergue). Pharmacies, grocery/merchandise stores, and medical services are regularly available. Specialty stores are periodically available in larger towns. You literally can buy anything you need and most things that you want. You never need more than a day or two of food and never more than the smallest possible size of consumable items like toothpaste, deodorant, lotions, etc. Daily availability is rarely an issue. Understanding the limited hours of operation (daily variation by country/region and holiday closing) is important and that remains largely a mystery to me after an 81-day Camino across France and Spain.

iv. **Gear Priority #1 is Foot Care:** My gear list emphasizes foot care items and I offer below a brief tutorial on thru-hiking footcare along with a key reference book that is available in electronic format. **It is amazing how many Pilgrims neglect the fundamentals of foot care (type and size of footwear, changing socks during the day, lubrication of feet, trimming nails regularly, taping proactively the first week or two and at the first sign of heat or pain, minimizing pack weight, etc.).** If you go overboard on packing anything—do it regarding things you need to keep your feet healthy—especially the first week or two of your Camino. Bar none—your feet are your single most important assets on the Camino and are the assets that will likely experience on the Camino the most repetitive stress they will ever experience...please take care of them.

**My Gear List:** These are the items that were in my pack when I arrived in Santiago and are the items I will take on future Caminos:

1. **Pack:** 35-40L is ideal—28-35L is even better. Unless you have camping gear or some special medical or other need, the pack really should not be larger than 40L. Larger
pack size is an invitation to bring unnecessary items/weight—see Fundamental #1 above. I use an Osprey Kestrel 38L. Key attributes I looked for: integrated rain fly with small storage pocket on bottom of pack; relatively lighter weight than equivalent packs; durability; adjustability and comfort of harness system; adjustability of “compression strap” system to keep pack tight; water-bladder pocket; strong loop on top to hang entire pack (keeping packs off the floor is a fundamental step in preventing bed-BUG infestation); exterior mesh pockets (bottle carrier and places to stuff my light jacket or other items I want readily accessible without opening the pack); daisy-chain loops to attach items with carabiners; “suitcase” or “top” access options—I prefer “suitcase” access to contents vs pawing from the top down through all the gear in a pack; top storage compartment with separate access (for valuables/money/items I frequently use) and bottom storage compartment (in addition to the main compartment) with separate access (I kept rain gear and items I might need during a particular day in the lower compartment for easy access) in addition to the main internal storage area. If you know you want to carry-on your pack rather than check it on your flights, carefully review current size/weight restrictions of each airline (European airlines are more restrictive than US carriers, currently) and buy a pack that meets the guidelines when fully loaded other than water and travel clothes. I strongly recommend that you read and follow any “pack fitting/adjustment” instructions that come with your pack or that are available online (Osprey has an excellent tutorial online) or seek assistance from a knowledgeable person if you are not. I have backpacked for over 40 years and thought I knew everything about packs, but a German Pilgrim showed me how to wear my pack higher on my hips and it was a fundamental improvement I enjoyed for the next 700 kilometers.

2. **Hiking Footwear:** See the next section for a discussion of “hiking boots vs. trail-runners” and the key points in a daily foot-care routine on the Camino. I tried both Altra Lone Peak 3.5 and Salomon XA Pro 3D GTX Trailrunner shoes during my training walks. The Altras are like slippers—soft, very light-weight. The Salomons have firmer soles, are heavier, offer three levels of weather-resistance, and just felt like a more solid fit for me. The Salomons made it all the way to Santiago and Fisterra. I also took a pair of Teva “Float-light” sandals for off-trail use. The Tevas are incredibly light-weight, but the straps have no padding whatsoever so they caused pain and injury when I walked up or down steep hills (which are everywhere and in every village) so I will take light-weight Tevas with good strap-padding on my next Camino.

3. **Footcare Items:** **Per the “Footcare” section below,** my pack includes: foot lubrication for use every morning after I taped and before I put on socks (Foot Glide sticks are great and available at Target, Amazon, and most sports stores—similar products are available in most Pharmacies or sports stores in Europe); KT-Tape (big roll that will largely be used up the first two weeks with preventative taping and initial “hot spot” taping—full name is Kinesiology Therapeutic Sports Tape and it is
generally available in the US (Target, Walmart, Amazon) but not readily available in France or Spain); Hypa-fix tape (rolls are small and light-weight) for taping toes and edges; 5 each of blister pads (they go around the blister but have a hole in the middle so the blister area isn’t covered) in multiple sizes or moleskin to be cut into blister pads as needed (probably won’t need all of them but they are a welcome and light-weight gift to Pilgrims who need them and didn’t pack them); liquid bandage/new skin, nail clippers; and Desitin (small tube to heal wet feet—also good mixed with Vaseline or AD ointment for “chafing” or, God-forbid, “baboon-ass”).

4. Hydration: Minimum of 2 liters of water at the beginning of each day. I used and highly recommend a 2-liter bladder (Osprey or Nalgene or any quality bladder) that fits inside the bladder pocket of your pack and has a mouth piece on a hose that has a magnetic clip that attaches the hose to the front of one pack strap so the mouth piece is exactly where you want it for convenient access. I also took a 1-liter soft plastic bicycle water bottle that fit in one of the mesh pockets on my pack and which I could put in the mesh pocket of my day-pack or could have with me around the Gite/Albergue and near my bed at night. I am a firm believer in chugging a liter of water in the morning just before starting to walk so I stay ahead of dehydration—especially on warm days and steep ascents. I daily check water availability on the stage ahead of me (see my Stage Summary at the end of this document) and usually topped off my 3-liter maximum capacity unless I was certain I could refill water enroute...even then, it is surprising how often I and other Pilgrims would forget to top off our water when it was available, so starting with a full supply is a good practice and, in my view, justifies the extra weight (1 liter of water weighs 1 kilogram/2.2 lbs.) Unless marked non-drinkable, all water from taps I encountered was fine...no issues whatsoever and no need to filter.

5. Sleeping Gear: silk or other “sleep sack”—Sea to Summit Thermolite 15 degree worked for me but a lighter model would be sufficient in hot weather; minimal sleepwear that is comfortable and light-weight but maintains your self-respect when climbing up to the top bunk in a dormitory and when walking to the bathroom, etc.—naked probably isn’t a practical option from the perspective of other Pilgrims. An optional item that I feel is worth the weight is an ultra-light camping quilt (such as a Big Agnes King Canyon UL Quilt (8 ounces) or many less expensive brands/options)—I preferred it over the supplied blankets as I am a bit of a germ-aphobe and I used it when sitting around at night on parts of the Primitivo in November when it was very, very cold. A full sleeping bag doesn’t justify its added weight/bulk even in early spring or late fall as blankets are almost always available.

6. Walking Clothing: One set of clothes you will use every day for walking—you’ll wash the top, underwear, and socks every night and you’ll get used to the fact that “everyone looks the same every day”. It is critical to buy quality, “quick-dry” materials that hang-dry completely overnight:
a. **high-tech short-sleeve top** such as Merino wool (Note: technical wool is amazing—it dries overnight, is warm when wet, is cool when its hot outside; and it greatly reduces smell compared to synthetic technical gear (once synthetic gear stinks, you just can’t wash the funky smell out));

b. **long-sleeve high-tech top** for added warmth when layered over short-sleeve top—a half-zip with mock-turtle collar is very versatile;

c. **hiking pants (1 pair of long and one pair of shorts)**—I prefer technical hiking gear that has some water-resistance and the long pants have gaiter material on the bottom, zippered pockets, and zippered ventilation openings down both legs—I use Norrona and Bergens gear made in Norway;

d. **underwear**—quick-dry, technical material such as merino (the maximum you could need are **3 pair total** and even with 2 pair you should always have dry/clean underwear to change into at the end of each day’s hike after your shower);

e. **hiking socks**—technical, moisture-wicking socks such as Bridgedale or Icebreaker or Zealwool (my favorite) with some padding for your feet (**3 pair are sufficient** as you will wash the dirty ones each night—I find that 2 low-rise pair and 1 full-rise is a good combination). Some Pilgrims love “toe-socks” to prevent chafing/blisters on the toes—I brought a pair but gave them away early in my Camino as I didn’t have toe-blister issues.

7. **Off-Trail Wear:** One set of clothes you will use every day after your walk while your walking gear is drying or airing out:

a. **Another short-sleeve or long-sleeve technical top** (preferably, one that you can switch with your other one to share the wear-and-tear inflicted by the pack straps);

b. **Comfortable pants or sweat-pants/wind-pants.** Light-weight, technical slacks that perhaps look a little less like “trail pants” are a good choice to break up the monotony but also are functional trail pants if needed.

8. **Outer Wear:**

a. **1 of my 2 long-sleeve technical tops was a heavier Icebreaker ½ zip that was perfect as an extra layer in the morning or in the evening.** A pull-over or fleece is an alternative, but they are bulky to pack.

b. **1 wind-proof and highly water-resistant, light-weight, hooded, zip jacket.** Mine is made by Bergen’s of Norway which I could put over the Icebreaker top and I was plenty warm until November in Oviedo, Spain on the Primitivo Camino (unseasonable gale-force winds, rain, snow, and cold for 10 days). I purchased a packable jacket, gloves, and a stocking cap from Decathlon in Oviedo which I used every day for the rest of the trip but didn’t need them prior to the Primitivo.

c. **1 Rain Poncho or a completely waterproof rain jacket.** Rain pants are **optional** and unnecessary if you have high-quality, water-resistant long hiking pants with gaiter material at the bottom of each leg. **My Frogg-toggs**
poncho worked very well—I recommend the longer version with a “hump” on the back to accommodate your pack and it snaps down the side so you have the option of closing it for warmth/extra rain/wind protection or leaving it open for better ventilation and can wear it “long” or “short”. The only downside is that Frogg-toggs is thin and less durable than heavier rain gear. In particular, there are a lot of brambles/thorny-vines on the Camino which will easily tear any clothing and, especially, a poncho that doesn't fit tightly and is more likely to brush into the overgrown thorny-vines on walls adjacent to the trail or in the woods. Fortunately, duck tape will fix any rain gear. I have Outdoor Research Helium ultralight raingear, but it just doesn’t breathe enough for me unless I am at high altitude or in a very cold climate—neither exists on the Camino, so I didn’t take it with me and wouldn’t in the future unless walking very early spring or very late fall.

9. Other Clothing: 1 hat of choice—sun protection is the key consideration and a rainproof bill is a plus; 1 or 2 large “cowboy print” or other handkerchiefs or buff or balaclava or “dew rag” to serve as versatile headgear, sun protection, sweat management, and/or as a handkerchief.

10. Hiking Poles & Extra Rubber “Off-Trail” Caps: Poles are definitely a personal choice item. I have used them for 20 years and know they make a huge difference in reducing wear-and-tear on my knees and they prevent falls. On the other hand, they are one more thing to carry/store and one becomes “hiking pole-dependent” in terms of balance and navigating tricky terrain. If you do get poles, buy quality ones that can be reduced to 3-pieces each so they fit in your pack. TSA does not permit hiking poles as carry-on though many Pilgrims get away with carrying them on inside a small pack that otherwise meets carry-on requirements. I always put my pack and poles in a transport bag (either one the airline provides or an IKEA bag or similar) and check them to my initial destination. Alternatively, it is easy to purchase hiking poles at Decathlon or another sports store at the starting city of each Camino. “Off-Trail Caps” are important to keep available at all times and to use when walking through villages/towns—the “click, click, click” of hiking poles on cobblestone is very annoying to locals and to other Pilgrims. My Leki “Off-Trail” Caps lasted 81 days but a number of Pilgrims said they went through several pairs of them. I only used them “off trail” and that might be why mine lasted so long.

11. Toiletries & Medication: Do Not Overdo it—these items weigh a significant amount and are readily available on the Camino. Other than some rare prescription you may need, you can easily replace/restock all common toiletries and medications almost every day. Bring the smallest possible size of each item and don’t bring “just in case” items unless there is a very high likelihood you will need them and, even then, they should be available on the Camino when needed. Essentials include: deodorant (please—we all “love our own brand” but others don’t); toothbrush, toothpaste, floss (surprisingly versatile stuff), sunscreen; pain-
killers/anti-inflammatories; lip balm; smallest bar of soap in small plastic bag (liquid soap weighs more); 1 disposable shaver; and small shaving crème (I tried the little packets but they were a mess and I ended up with the smallest can available).

12. Waterproofing, Insect-proofing, and Cleaning Pack & Gear: Both waterproof gear and water-resistant technical clothing require periodic care. I find the Nixwax products to be very good for refreshing used gear—wash technical gear in Base Wash to get it very clean and then treat it to enhance/restore water-resistance with either Tech Wash or TX Direct Spray. I prefer the spray—hang items to be treated outdoors (away from sunlight, so a garage with an open door works) and spray them until wet and let dry overnight. There is no odor or mess. The spray also works on packs; however, packs inherently are not waterproof given all the seams/zippers, so spraying at pack does not replace use of a rain-fly. Spraying them does help with minor sprinkles.

Insect treatment is controversial as are discussions about the prevalence of bed-bugs on various Camino routes (I didn’t experience any bed bugs). If you choose to spray, then using Permethrin (Sawyer is a common brand in the US available at Home Depot, etc. and Klacko or other brands of permethrin are available in France and Spain including at some Gites/Albergues). I treat my sleeping sack, socks, hiking pants, and pack—you simply spray it on (outdoors out of sunlight) and let it dry overnight. It is effective for 30-40 days, so I treated my gear before leaving for Via Podiensis and retreated it at the start of the Del Norte Camino. For daily use on the trail, I didn’t encounter many insects but carried a small spray bottle of high-Deet content insect spray as I expected more issues than I encountered.

13. Extras: Quick-dry pack towel; small flashlight or head lamp (though flashlight on mobile devices work well); photocopy or take a picture on your mobile device of all credit cards, passport, health insurance; prescriptions (probably want a paper printout of any essential prescriptions); and other valuable documents you may need to access or replace; small notebook/journal and pen; ear plugs (wax-type seem most effective/comfortable if you follow the directions); extra glasses or sunglasses or contacts as needed; 2-3 carabiners, 1 larger carabiner or S-hook to hang your pack to keep it off the floor/ground; stuff sacks to separate major categories of clothes/gear within your pack but don’t overdo it as they do add weight; a very light-weight day-pack can double as a stuff sack and is really handy for consolidating valuables and toiletry items you take to the bathroom/shower and as a day pack around town or at your bedside (often larger packs are not permitted in the sleeping rooms); small roll of duck tape; multi-tool (I prefer a Swiss Army Knife with a little scissors that I use for cutting tape for my feet and a blade for cutting hard cheese/dried meat for picnics but it is not TSA compliant and must be in checked baggage); hotel-type sewing kit (I never used it and really don’t know how, so this may come off the list next Camino); extra main plastic buckle for pack—if your buckle gets stepped-on/crushed, it may be a week or more before you will find
a replacement and your pack will be heavy on your shoulders until then (it is a good practice to snap your hip-belt together and tighten it so the buckle isn’t laying on the ground when you set you pack down for breaks/meals, etc.; **2-3 plastic bags of various sizes** come in handy to store wet gear, cheese/bread, etc.; **For daily washing of tops/socks/underwear, bar soap works fine and I also bring “wash wafers”** that come in 50-wafer little packs and 1-2 in a sink is plenty to wash gear (I got them through Amazon)—liquid soap of any type is relatively heavy.

14. **REREAD “LESS IS MORE” FUNDAMENTAL ABOVE:** At least one month before departure, pack all of your gear—EVERYTHING (OTHER THAN YOUR TRAIL CLOTHES AND POLES) INCLUDING MEDICATIONS AND TOILETRIES AND FILL YOUR WATER BLADDER/CONTAINER TO THE MAX—weigh it, and take it on a 15-mile training walk. When you come back, you will naturally identify the “C List” items that you truly need and only those items will go with you on the Camino...and even that will be 2-3 kilos too heavy and you will discard things daily the first week or two.

D. **Footwear and Footcare:** The single most important decision you make regarding your Camino is your footwear choice: type, model, and size. The single most important part of your daily routine on the Camino—especially the first two weeks—is monitoring and caring for your feet morning, evening and immediately upon experiencing any “hot spots”.

**Fundamental considerations** include:

1. **Size:** Footwear must be **at least ⅛ size and I need a full size larger than I would wear in the same shoe for daily use.** This is a HUGE DEAL—Pilgrims must get this right. Feet will swell every day and toes end up hitting the front of the “toe box” if shoes are not ⅛ to a full size larger than normal size. Lacing and no-tie systems are very effective (if Pilgrims actually learn to lace and adjust them properly—there are great articles on this topic that are worth reading if you want your hiking shoes to be “perfect” on ascents and on descents). Modern shoes can be adjusted so the extra length doesn’t result in the heels slipping or other issues. It is worth the time and expense of admitting one bought the wrong footwear and replace them before departure on a Camino if training hikes indicate that the ones initially purchased are too small or just don’t feel right. I trained in size 10 ½ Salomon XA Pro 3D Weatherproof trailrunners and discovered that I needed them another ½ size larger (my large toe-nail turned black and eventually fell off from hitting the front of the toe-box after a 15-mile training walk). I also discovered that I preferred the Gortex rather than “Weatherproof” model after I experienced that “weatherproof” shoes are much hotter than Gortex or non-rain-resistant models of the same shoe. I still use the smaller size shoes for daily use, so the money wasn’t wasted, but they never would have worked on the Camino given how much my feet swell after 10-20 miles every day. **Aging & Shoe Size:** Not only do shoe sizes vary between brands/models, but most people’s feet get larger as they age. It is well-worth having an experienced shoe salesperson measure your feet if it has been awhile since you bought
shoes other than on-line or without assistance.

2. **Break-in**: All hiking boots need to be broken in though some less than others. Many hiking boots are durable enough for training walks and for a single or even a double Camino route. Trail-runners generally need much less break-in though it is still critical to do training hikes (even if just getting in lots of miles walking around town and walking places you otherwise would drive out of habit) so you confirm that they are a good fit and, in particular, that your toes don’t hit the toe box even on descents (this is a function of shoe size, toe box design, proper lacing, and your particular feet). **Unfortunately, a single pair of trail-runners will likely not last through both extensive training hikes and even a single Camino.** Most of the guidance I reviewed recommends replacing trail-runners at no more than 500 miles/800 kilometers—the cushion and other critical functions of trail-runners deteriorate before they visibly deteriorate. Timely replacement is critical for Pilgrims since the Camino provides the greatest variety and longest duration of relentless repetitive stress that most of our feet ever experience. If you can afford it, I suggest that you buy a second pair of the same trail-runners once you are sure of the brand, model, size and style that works for you. Alternate wearing them but use the pair your plan to leave at home more on your training hikes and take the relatively fresh pair on your Camino. You definitely will want to toss your stinky shoes when you reach Santiago/Fisterra (as a favor to other passengers on your return transportation if nothing else), and you’ll enjoy having a serviceable pair of the same shoes to return to at home. **How much training to do** is highly individual and depends on what is available to you in terms of time, terrain, and weather. You will walk 10-20 miles per day on the Camino, so do a couple of walks that far with a fully loaded pack (or equivalent weight in the pack) and you’ll know whether you have an adequate base or not. If you are generally active and work out regularly, I don’t think you need any additional “training” beyond ensuring that your shoes are a good fit and that you are getting some good base miles in with them—even if on a treadmill or walking around town. If you are sedentary, you probably should build up your walking base over at least 2-3 months to where you are comfortable walking at least 10 miles with your loaded pack or you will experience a lot of pain and possible injury during the first weeks of your Camino. You can always shorten your stages, take rest days, make other adjustments on the Camino, or just “gut it out”; however, you’ll have a better experience if you are in reasonable shape before you begin. There is really no substitute for a good training base.

3. **Hiking Boots vs Trail-runners**: There is a lot of information on the relative advantages and disadvantages of boots vs. trail-runners. I used Vasque hiking boots for over 40 years of mountain trekking but I switched to trail-runners for the Camino. The decision is, unfortunately, more emotional than logical for many Pilgrims since we all know what has worked for us in the past (old boots are right up there with the dog in terms of blind-adoration) and we “know what we know”. My personal experience is as follows:
i. **Trail-runners are up to 1 lb. lighter PER FOOT than hiking boots**—eliminating that weight on the end of your leg is like eliminating 5-10 pounds from your pack and it has eliminated chronic knee and/or hip pain that many of us have regularly experienced with hiking boots.

ii. **Hiking boots do have some clear advantages**—this is especially true regarding significant snow, very cold weather, extended amounts of significant rain, and scrambling/climbing-type terrain. Those conditions are rare on any Camino route other than very early spring or very late fall.

iii. **Trail-runners can be enhanced to add more “boot qualities”**—wearing hiking pants with built in gaiter material at the bottom or wearing “low mountain” gaiters will keep rain and debris out of trail-runners; trail-runners come in a variety of sole/tread-options so it is easy to pick trail-runners with firmer soles/tread for more challenging Caminos like the Primitivo; trail-runners come in a variety of materials/finishes from non-water resistant, to water-resistant, to Gortex, to weatherproof. Each adds protection against rain but also increases the warmth of the shoes. Many Pilgrims prefer non-water resistant trail-runners especially for warm weather—feet are less likely to sweat in them and the shoes dry more quickly than water-resistant/Gortex/or weatherproof trail-runners or boots if they do get wet.

iv. **Comparative Ankle Stability is An Open Question**: Many “boot advocates” and some literature claims that boots offer more stability and avoid ankle sprains. Many trail-runner advocates and other literature claims that, while over-the-ankle footwear does offer some increase in stability, they do not reduce actual sprains or other injuries much if at all—especially on the relatively less-severe type of trail/paths/roads on the Camino. In contrast, most of the literature I reviewed concludes that reducing weight by up to a pound per foot by using trail-runners over boots does significantly reduce impact/stress on the feet, knees and hips every step you take on most types of surfaces.

v. **Individual Choice**: The “boot vs trail-runner” debate is one of the great open questions among Pilgrims—right up there with “guidebook/map vs no guidebook/map”, “planned stages vs make-it-up-as-you-go”, “advanced reservations vs see what’s available”, and “Gite/Albergue-only vs some private rooms/pensions are ok”. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers—each of us walks our own Camino.

4. **Secondary Footwear**: Pilgrims need a secondary pair of sandals or shoes to use at the end of the hiking day and around the Gite/Albergue—often, your primary shoes must be left in a shoe rack by the door to the Gite-Albergue and are not allowed inside. Considerations regarding secondary footwear include: light as possible (they will be in your pack during the day); comfortable and allow feet to breathe; possible double-duty
as shower wear if you wear footwear in the shower; versatility—decide if you will ever hike in them or not. If yes, then you likely will want somewhat heavier **trekking-sandals with strong sole/tread and well-padded straps or good running-shoes**. If no, then **flip-flops or very light-weight sandals/tennis shoes** will do. **Caution:** Do not use light-weight footwear for hiking and don’t walk up or down significant hills (which are virtually everywhere outside of your Gite/Albergue) in super-light weight flip-flops or sandals. I developed tendonitis by hiking up and down the steep hill into Lauzerette, France to/from my Gite in the evening wearing my light-weight Tevas. The straps were not padded at all and they severely compressed the tendon on the front of both ankles (in part because I was an idiot and just walked through the initial pain) and I ended up having to take 2 ½ weeks off to recuperate.

D. **Footcare Daily Routine and Specific Issues:** The following suggestions are based on the book I recommended in Section B above: Vonhof, John *Fixing Your Feet: Injury Prevention and Treatments for Athletes*, 2011: Birmingham: Wilderness Press. Much of this was news to me even though I have done distance-hiking for 40+ years (and suffered a lot of blisters, black toenails, and foot/knee pain). These suggestions will seem anal and excessive—but IT WORKS. **The first week or two of a Camino is a critical period when you must pay attention to your feet and address issues immediately.** Developing a new routine and adopting new foot care methods is like any new habit—it takes some discipline and focus to overcome inertia and procrastination. **The keys are following the morning and evening suggestions and also stopping immediately on the trail to address any “hot spots” or other foot discomfort as soon as you become aware of it.** The tendency is to “walk a ways to see if it goes away” (it never does) or to continue to the next break/lunch/destination so you don’t have to slow down and take off your pack or slow down any Pilgrims you may be walking with. Every minor foot issue that you ignore will become a more serious foot issue that will cause you a lot of discomfort and may jeopardize your Camino. **Practice on Your Training Walks:** I suggest that you practice application of foot lubrication (literally takes 20 seconds) and taping the places on your feet that you know you sometimes develop blisters or other issues as part of your training walks (takes another 2-4 minutes....less when you get used to it). You will avoid injuries on your training walks and you will get comfortable with the taping process so it only takes 2-4 minutes each morning on your Camino:

i. **Each morning:** Check for cracks, cuts, blisters, hot spots, or redness and treat immediately and tape/cover areas as needed; check nails and trim/file as needed; check nail beds for redness or tender areas; inspect old blisters; check for callus buildup and address as needed (calluses are not your friend); apply foot lubrication to bottom of foot, heels, toes, and along the sides of your feet—lubricate feet daily after you apply any tape you need.  

ii. **Each evening:** Soak Feet in tap-cold/cool water for 5-15 minutes—especially if you experience any foot issues whatsoever. Most Gites/Albergues will have a small tub you can use or just use a clean stream. This speeds overnight reduction of swelling, it is good for every potential foot issue, and it feels great.
iii. **Lubricate**: use body glide daily on feet—especially heels, ball of foot, edges of feet, and toes (or use foot lubrication lotion on toes which is a bit easier to apply and is readily available in pharmacies in Europe); **refresh on the trail as needed** (lunch break or mid-afternoon break);

iv. **Change Socks 1-2 times per day**;

v. **Wash & Dry Socks Inside-Out**: this helps get rid of debris/ grit

vi. **KT and Hypa-fix Tape**: Especially during the first week or two of a Camino, apply tape prophylactically in the morning to the several places you know you have developed issues in the past and on any “hot spots”, cracked, or calloused areas. Taping is amazingly effective—it not only prevents issues but it can completely eliminate discomfort from otherwise excruciating blisters and sores that do develop. **Apply as needed before applying foot lubrication** (KT Tape for 90% of needs; hypa-fix tape for toes and edges of taping) EXCEPT put small amount of lubricant on blisters or areas you don’t want tape to tear off when tape is removed; **Keep tape smooth when applying and overlap to accommodate direction of natural force** (ball of foot—force is toward the rear so forward piece should overlap the rear piece—heel is the opposite and bottom piece should overlap higher up piece.) Less overlap is better than more. Do not apply tape too tightly; put small amount of lubricant on tape edges to reduce potential friction when walking. **Roll socks on and off over tape to avoid making uneven spots in taping**. Remove tape slowly working from outside to center—shower with tape on and then it comes off more easily. **You DO NOT need to tape every part of your foot every day**—just the areas you have issues or think you are likely to develop issues—here are all the options:

1. **Bottom of Foot**: one 3” piece of tape—I do this before the “Ball of Foot” so the “Ball of Foot” tape goes over the front of the “Bottom of Foot” tape; bring back up and over heel and fold over each side like gift wrap and then cut off excess; then tape sides of foot (if needed) per instructions for side of foot;

2. **Ball of Foot**: KT Tape conforms nicely to ball of foot. Tape 1” up on top of foot on both sides. Trim to keep sides smooth. Avoid any tape getting into toe crease or touching toes.

3. **Side of Foot**: apply 1-2” strip around entire foot and across back of heel; slightly overlap with bottom of foot taping.

4. **Heel**: Run 2” piece of tape around back of heel or under the heel from side to side. Keep tape edge under ankle bone and end just forward of ankle bone. Trim if necessary to keep it smooth.

5. **Toes**: **Hypa-fix tape**—apply 1” piece from top around front to underneath toe—pinch folds and trim; then apply 1” piece wrapping around toe from one side to other over tip of toe—pinch folds and trim; keep smooth with no seam in sensitive areas between toes.

6. **Toe-Nail Pain**: put second skin or liquid bandage over toenail before taping for cushion.
vii. **Blister Care:** Apply a Blister Pad, New Skin or Moleskin/KT Tape for Blisters and Hot Spots or over drained blister before taping—bend toes/flex foot when applying so it goes on over maximum extension/stretch; use alcohol or sterile wipe first if on trail or feet are not clean; can put slick side of duct tape against blister under KT tape to protect blister so it doesn’t tear off when KT tape is removed.

- **Taping:** Tape must extend well outside blister area to adhere—
  bigger the blister, the more area you tape;
- **Intact Blister:** Use Blister Pad or cut moleskin about ¾ inch larger around the blister with a hole in the center for the blister; put antiseptic ointment in the hole on the blister after putting pad/moleskin on; then put a piece of tape over the pad/moleskin; apply pad/moleskin/tape smoothly;
- **Drain Blisters larger than .8 inch in diameter on weight-bearing areas of foot (toes, arch, ball of foot, etc.):** Use alcohol wipe to clean skin around blister; sterilize pin/needle with flame; lance 2-4 puncture holes; move needle side-to-side to make opening larger so it doesn’t seal up; avoid making one large hole as top of blister can come off more easily; puncture holes should be on top and sides so drainage tends to go towards back of foot; use finger pressure to push the fluid and blot the fluid away with tissue; clean and dry the skin and don’t remove the outer layer of dead skin.
- **Calluses and Blisters:** A blister under a callus is extremely painful and challenging to treat. Proceed per above instructions, but you may just have to take a few days rest to help heal this difficult issue. Lubricating your feet regularly and wearing padded socks can reduce callus build up.

viii. **Desitin:** magic for rain-soaked feet;

ix. **Socks:** on training hikes, experiment with liner socks and with padded socks (I decided against liner socks in favor of Zealwool low-rise, padded socks—they are so fitted that they have a R and L sock and they wick moisture; I also had a pair of “toe-socks” which I never needed and gave away—they largely eliminate toe-chafing issues;

x. **Lambs Wool:** as needed for toes and in place in the front of shoes to keep toes from hitting front of toe-box (especially helpful on days with big descents—ballet dancers have used this hack for years);

xi. **Lacing:** skip cross-lace in middle of shoe/boot (don’t lace 1 or 2 sets of eyelets in the middle to eliminate pressure on top of foot) and “lock-in” heel for downhill days—many walkers don’t realize that the very top set of eyelets (which often go unused) are there for “lock-in” lacing for descents. There is a lot of online guidance for this, e.g. [https://trailrunnermag.com/training/trail-tips/trail-shoe-lacing-tricks.html](https://trailrunnermag.com/training/trail-tips/trail-shoe-lacing-tricks.html)
xii. **Gaiters:** wear “low mountain” gaiters every day to keep debris and rain out of your shoes or use the built-in gaiters in many technical hiking pants (there is a hook on the front, inside seam that hooks to the front of your shoe laces if the gaiter material doesn’t naturally drape over your ankles sufficiently).

E. **Guides, Maps, Apps & Technology Including Sim Cards:**

i. **Paper Guide Books & Maps:** It is very easy to over-do-it with paper Guidebooks and maps—the simple fact is that no pilgrim wants to drag a heavy paper guidebook or map 500 or 1,000 kilometers over very hilly terrain. Additionally, my experience was that very few Pilgrims consulted paper guidebooks or maps much enroute and, if a guidebook or map was needed, there were copies available in most of the Gites and Albergues (Pilgrim housing) or from a fellow Pilgrim who didn’t get the memo about not dragging a heavy paper guidebook or map along. I found the primary benefit of a guidebook and of a detailed map was that they provide a comprehensive overview of my particular Camino routes along with all the basic “planning” information a Pilgrim needs: gear list, reading list, recommended places to stay or to avoid, “must-see” sites/location/experiences along the route, a sense for the elevations/geography along the route, etc. Other than providing some notes that I carried with me in an electronic copy of my Summary, the paper guidebooks and map I purchased stayed at home.

ii. **Electronic Guidebooks & Maps:** I found my iPhone to be the only resource I needed enroute. Whether one has a “data plan” or just relies on Wi-Fi and GPS on a smart phone, the available apps provide all the guidebook and map resources a Pilgrim can possibly need. I am a big Kindle fan and most of my reading is on my Kindle App on my iPad (which is a luxury I took with me on my Camino and definitely would take on all future Caminos). I also took an iPhone which would have been completely sufficient for accessing the Kindle guidebooks and the Map apps I used (but not satisfactory in my view for general reading which I prefer on the larger iPad). **The Kindle guides I used and recommend are (they are also available in paper versions):** “The Way of St James–France: Chemin de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle–Le Puy to the Pyrenees by Alison Raju (Cicerone Guides); and “The Northern Caminos: The Caminos Norte, Primitive and Ingles by Dave Whitson & Laura Perazzoli (Cicerone Guides). While there are many, many other guidebooks that are just fine, the other set that I found to be particularly good are “The Wise Pilgrim Guides” that are available both in print and in apps (which I highly, highly recommend) for the following Camino Routes: Del Norte; Primitivo; Finisterre & Muxia; Frances; Portugues; Via De La Plata; and Ingles. (see next section for more detail about the apps). **For those walking Via Podiensis from Le Puy, the only reference you really need is “Rob’s Guide” available for free as a download**
from the Facebook site “Way of St James–Via Podiensis–Chemin du Puy-en-Velay”. It is a succinct summary of the entire route in Excel and PDF formats that includes distances, all available “pilgrim” lodging recommended by members of the site, ATM locations, water availability, food options, etc. “Rob’s Guide” is an invaluable gem for any Pilgrim walking Via Podiensis. Also for the Via Podiensis route only, the French guidebooks Miam Miam Dodo are the traditional favorite set of guides. I purchased the online versions but didn’t use them much as I just didn’t find them easy to navigate (a reflection on my technological limitations and inability to read French more than a reflection on the content or design of Miam Miam Dodo—many, many Pilgrims love these guides and you can find a free copy to consult in most Gites or from other Pilgrims). They are in French only but the app can be translated into English with some success. They have outstanding maps and detail about lodging and food.

iii. Apps for Guidebooks & Maps: My strong recommendation is that new Pilgrims identify a guidebook app and a map app that will be your primary resource enroute. Once you learn to use them on your available device, it is very easy and convenient to access them when needed—especially for the all-important questions: “Where the Hell am I right now?” and “Where the Hell am I going to sleep and eat tonight?” In France, I used the Cicerone guide listed above along with the iPhiGeNie Map App and I also used the Maps.me App. iPhiGeNie requires an inexpensive subscription ($14, I believe) and has the best topographical maps of France both on a macro and micro detail level. Importantly, iPhiGeNie works on “gps only” so doesn’t require any data usage. The app opens to a map of your immediate surrounding area and has an icon that both indicates your exact location and the direction of your current progress (or lack thereof when lost or going in the wrong direction). It became my “go-to” map app in France. Maps.me is every bit as good as iPhiGeNie, is free, also is “gps only”, and has worldwide coverage (you have to download country-specific maps which consume some memory). For Spain, I absolutely loved the Wise Pilgrim Apps for Del Norte, Primitivo, and Fisterra. The apps include both detailed guidebook information plus a truly amazing gps map of the Camino covered by the app. The map has great macro and micro detail plus it lists all of the pilgrim accommodations and dining options along the entire route which makes navigation and estimating distances really easy. When you click on a city or specific lodging or bar/restaurant icon, a window opens with all of the related detail such as every accommodation in the city including Bookings.com links to those you can book online along with information on type of beds/rooms, cost, whether meals are available, etc. The pop-ups for lodging lists all of the detail plus contact information including email, phone numbers, and websites. Information is not always up-to-date on the Wise Pilgrim app but it is updated more frequently than the information in paper guidebooks. It is also easy to look
up specific lodging on Google, Safari, etc. Finally, I found Google Maps to be excellent when I had sufficient wifi or used data—currently, you can download 100 square kilometer sections of Google Maps for off-line/GPS use and I expect Google will expand that capability.

iv. Facebook Groups: I am not a big Facebook user, but I remain highly impressed with the quality of information and with the wonderful community spirit Pilgrims find on the “Closed Groups” dedicated to specific Camino Routes. By far, the best site I found is “Way of St James—Via Podiensis—Chemin du Puy-en-Velay” which currently has 3,000+ members. It is open to anyone who has walked or intends to walk Via Podiensis that starts in Le Puy, France and non-members can view all of the content. The administrators and members of that Site are incredibly organized, friendly, respectful, helpful, and truly wise regarding virtually anything anyone ever wondered about regarding Via Podiensis or the Camino in general. Even if you don’t currently plan to walk Via Podiensis, if you think you might some day and are planning to walk another Camino route, I recommend that you request membership in this Site and use it as a primary planning tool. The Administrators keep discussions on topic and many helpful resources are linked on this site. Personally, I spent some wonderful hours going back three years on that Site and scanning through every post, searching for key words such as “pack size”, “gear list”, “recommended Gites”, “route variants”, etc. –it provided me with an “organic” understanding of the Camino and a very practical understanding of everything I needed to prepare for the Camino. I am so grateful to the Founder of that Site, Robert Forrester, and to the many members and Administrators on that Site that provided me with both general information and very specific information about my questions and plans. Additionally, the Site became a wonderful way to follow in real-time the journeys other Pilgrims made in the past or were making at the same time I was walking along my exact route. It is a great way to connect with others who may just be a few kilometers ahead or behind you and an amazing way to keep up on “what’s happening” along your route. Other Facebook Sites I found very helpful include: “Camino del Norte” which has 5,000+ members; “El Camino del Norte—The North Way to Santiago” which has 1,000+ members; and “American Pilgrims on the Camino” which has 19,000+ members.

v. Websites: Cameinoways.com (excellent overview of every Camino route and related resources); Gronze.com (truly amazing site with everything you need to plan your Camino—the site has macro, micro, and review information on virtually every route, stage, place to stay or visit, weather planning, etc.—priceless site; csj.org.uk which is the website of The Confraternity of Saint James (very comprehensive overview and resource reference site for every Camino route); Godesalco.com (This site includes a sophisticated “planner” interactive tool for the nine major Camino routes with which you can generate different files

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(images, spreadsheets, html tables, pdf files and GPS files) that will reflect various data related to your pilgrimage: coordinates, distances, altitudes, accommodations, stages, and solar and lunar calendar.) There are many other websites and blog sites that offer helpful information, but the above sites are the best I found and are ones I used extensively in creating my Summary.

vi. **Other Apps:** Some other apps to consider adding to your mobile device include the following (best to download them while on your home WIFI to avoid trying to do it on more limited free WIFI along the Camino or using data): Rome2Rio (superb app showing all means of transport, routes, timing, and cost from any two points in the world—amazing); Skype; WhatsApp; Trainline EU; GoEURO (buses); Blablacar (Uber equivalent); Maps.me and download maps for France and Spain (Free and uses gps rather than data); iPhiGeNie French gps map service with amazing topographical features and the Camino is highlighted; PlantSnap (identifies plants and trees); Facebook; Messenger; any banking software you need and are will risk using on Wi-Fi or data; Bookings.com; AirBNB; VRBO; airline apps; Audible or other books on tape; Currency Converter; Dropbox; Gmail; Google; Google Maps; Google News; Google Photos; Miam Miam Dodo app; Night Sky or Puniverse to check constellations.

vii. **Mobile Devices & Sim Cards:** If you choose to take a mobile device, the linked articles provide solid background information on your choices (using your existing sim card, purchasing a sim card for Europe, and related considerations): [https://travelhoney.com/using-your-cell-phone-in-europe/](https://travelhoney.com/using-your-cell-phone-in-europe/); [https://travelhoney.com/choose-best-sim-card-europe/](https://travelhoney.com/choose-best-sim-card-europe/)

A key decision is whether you need to have your existing phone number operational while you are on the Camino—if you install a European sim card, your current number will be disabled until you put your existing sim card back in the device when you return home. I found that I primarily wanted a European phone with a small data plan to call Gites/Albergues and to send WhatsApp messages to other Pilgrims I was coordinating with from time to time or ones I wanted to keep in touch with. If you reserve accommodations ahead, many Gites/Albergues do not want non-European phone numbers and it is helpful to have a local phone number (which you can only get with a European sim card). I ended up taking an older iPhone that was no longer being used and I bought an Orange plan/sim at the Orange Office in Le Puy. You must have your passport with you to purchase a sim card/plan. I made sure the Orange folks installed the sim, activated the service, and we tested it on phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp to make sure all of the “settings” were set to Orange requirements—not an intuitive process for me. It was easy to purchase additional Data at tabac shops in France and the shop clerk took care of everything to ensure that the
new data was recognized by Orange and was added to my account. When I got to Spain, the Orange office in San Sebastian explained that their staff do not know anything about Orange plans purchased in France and they couldn’t add any data or assist me in any way. I ended up using an online data service that sells Orange and other provider’s data and it worked—I paid with PayPal rather than with a credit card and that limited my exposure somewhat in making an online purchase. See the linked articles for more specific information.

iPad or Kindle: My primary “gear splurge” was the luxury of bringing my small iPad. It completely justified its weight as I am an avid reader and kept many books (downloaded excellent histories and historical novels and novels about France, Spain and the Camino) along with my Wise Pilgrim Guide and my two Cicerone Guides. I also enjoyed the larger screen for surfing news and my online magazine subscriptions occasionally when I had sufficient Wi-Fi. It also served as a place to backup all pictures taken with my iPhone. For full disclosure, I will admit to a number of other “gear splurges” but I shed almost all of them by Conques except for the iPad. A number of Pilgrim friends I met along the way were particularly merciless in helping me shed unnecessary and even ridiculous gear, e.g. why in the Hell did I think a trekking umbrella was essential...how do you hold it if you use trekking poles?

Controlling Data Usage: Whether you use a sim card and data plan from home or buy one in Europe, you will want to control data usage. It is important to make any setting changes on your mobile phone BEFORE you leave home—you can immediately incur a daily fee or large roaming fees if you turn on your device after landing in a foreign country and then try to change the settings. In my experience, the only 100% certain way to use zero cellular data and to avoid triggering a “daily plan charge” is to keep your device in “Airplane Mode” except when it is connected to Wi-Fi. I have tried many other suggested actions but my iPhone always sneaks a little data somewhere and I spend time with my carrier talking my way out of a $10 per day charge. Other ways to reduce data use include: turn off background app refresh; go into the cellular menu and turn off access to cell phone data for all apps that you don’t need if/when you use data—they will all still work when you are on WIFI; turn off “Data Roaming” except when you intend to roam under your plan—usually calls and texts will still come through depending upon your carrier and plan; reset the data usage statistics just as you board your flight to Europe so you can track your usage easily and quickly identify any unexpected data usage; activate WIFI calling after confirming with your carrier that it is free under your plan—sometimes you can call home free with WIFI calling; set your email to “Manual”--if it is on “Fetch” you can run through lots of data in a hurry; and “Messaging” should be set to “turn off ‘Send as SMS’”.

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F. ATMs, ATM Fees, and Cash Considerations: The Camino remains largely a “cash economy” though cards and electronic payment are increasingly used in some more populated areas. ATMs are readily available (“Rob’s List”, which is available for free on the Via Podiensis Facebook site, lists all ATMs on Via Podiensis as does the Wise Pilgrim Guide/Map App and many other map services and other apps for other Camino Routes.) ATM fees can be an issue—I obtained a Schwab Bank Card for the Camino because it can be used at all ATMS worldwide and Schwab fully refunds all ATM fees. I usually withdrew 500 Euros at a time and started looking for ATMS when I got down below 200 Euros. I kept 200 Euros readily available (in small denominations/coins whenever possible) and the rest was with my passport/key documents (in my pack when walking, in a “money pouch” I wore around my waist when off the trail, and under my pillow in bed). I experienced no theft and never felt insecure. I sometimes paid for reservations online (PayPal or Bookings.com with credit card) but often the facility collects the payment and cash is often preferred (plus I am cautious where I use my credit card as having it disabled seems a bigger risk and potential inconvenience than keeping cash secure). Personal preferences vary, but that worked well for me.

G. Lodging Considerations: I generally alternated 50/50 between dormitory rooms in (Gites/Albergues) and private rooms in Gites/Albergues/Pensions/B&Bs. All of the places I stayed are listed in my “Stage Summary” below along with a list of other places recommended by sources I trust. I booked ahead for my first 10 nights on the Camino. Thereafter, I booked ahead 1-3 days at a time. A primary reason I booked ahead the first 10 days is that I tend to always push myself physically and my research indicated that it is wise to take it easy the first week or two out of Le Puy as the hills are relentless. I also had some minor medical issues that were healing at the beginning of my Camino. I therefore shortened and modified some of the early stages, I added rest days, and I reserved ahead, in part, to avoid the temptation of “seeing how much further I can go today”. I also reserved to quell the anxiety that travelers have felt for centuries that “there will be no room in the Inn when I arrive”. Pure “organic” Pilgrims frown on making reservations—at least on reserving more than a day in advance (most suggest that it is courteous to book no later than the morning of arrival as opposed to “just showing up” because hosts need to know how many to plan dinner for that evening—especially in France where dinner at Gites is the norm and less so in Spain where dinner at an Albergue is the exception). I can live with their frowns as my approach worked really well for me on my first Camino. Everyone walks their own Camino. Here are some other “lodging” observations from my Camino:

i. Arrival: Greet your hosts in French/Spanish no matter how limited your language skills. Offer your Pilgrim Passport/Credencial to get it stamped or to find out if they prefer to stamp it after dinner or in the morning (it is easy to forget to get it stamped and most Pilgrims like to get stamps each day). Confirm meal time and any
preferred/required process for doing your laundry and hanging it to dry.

ii. **Booking Ahead:** If you decide to book ahead, reserve ahead 1-3 days (3 days or more for really popular places and on weekends); Aug/Sept are busy times due to retirees; Gite hosts can assist as can tourist offices in larger towns or email (see template below) or call.

iii. **Dinners & Breakfasts:** Book demi-pension at gites (including meals) when possible except in larger cities that have restaurants you want to try. Also, book the gites/farms where the produce is local when available. The “ferme” gites are farms and always have regional/local cooking—“produits de la ferme” means from the local farm. Dinners often are not available at Albergues in Spain. Breakfasts in France and Spain are a bit spartan by American standards—usually its bread, jam, cheese, and coffee with warm milk. Oatmeal is non-existent. Dinners are usually delicious and substantial. A week or two into my Camino, I became aware of two dining themes: 1) I wasn’t getting enough protein as I am not a big red-meat eater—I learned to buy eggs periodically to boil and eat or to make scrambled eggs in the kitchen of Gites/Albergues; and 2) finding mid-day meals was sometimes challenging due to a lack of restaurants/bars/grocery stores or the available ones were closed or, at least, the kitchen was closed when I was passing by. I generally kept a small stash of nuts, dried fruit, hard cheese, dried meat, and a small amount of bread. Over time, I almost preferred to just plan to have a picnic when I felt like it or to snack on those healthy items during multiple rest breaks rather than going through what was sometimes a hassle and a bit of a frustration trying to find a place to eat that was actually open and the kitchen was actually serving food at that hour (much more of an issue in France than in Spain).

iv. **How to Make a Reservation:** Email works well for making reservations and many Gites/Albergues have “web forms” on their websites for making reservations—most were very responsive. Calling also works well though the language barrier can be challenging (usually the person who answers will speak some English or can find someone who does) but you have no tangible confirmation of your reservation when you make it over the phone. All Gite/Albergue owners and staff are very trustworthy, but language barriers and just my own confusion about “what day/date am I reserving” and about “what kind of room/bed/meal option am I reserving” created some confusion, so I always felt that email requests/confirmations served me best.

v. **Email Template for Reserving Rooms:** Below is the template Chloe Rose (a Canadian Pilgrim with a nice blog of her Camino a few years ago) used to make reservations with hostels along the route---the English translation is included in brackets alongside the French.

Bonjour,

Je suis un pèlerin sur Le Chemin Compostelle, et je voudrais faire une réservation pour le Monday 03 September 2018 (I'm a pilgrim walking El Camino, and I'd like to
make a reservation for Monday the 3rd of September). Une personne pour une nuit, avec demi-pension, B&B-HB si possible (One person for one night, B&B with dinner and breakfast, if possible; otherwise, a shared room is fine if B&B room is not available).

Mon numero (My telephone number): [insert European # if you have it]

Mon email (My email): oviattmn@gmail.com

Je vous remercie! (Thank you!)

Jonathan Oviatt
oviattmn@gmail.com
[Insert French Phone #)

Words to Substitute:
- Are you a woman or a man? "Pèlerin" is masculine, "Pèlerine" is feminine.
- Want breakfast only? Replace "demi-pension" (dinner and breakfast) with "le petit déjeuner" (breakfast).
- Want dinner WITHOUT breakfast? Replace "le petit déjeuner" (breakfast) with "supper seulement" (only dinner).

H. “Must See/Must Experience” Sites, Accommodations, & Route Variants: My “Stage Summary” provides a lot of detail and my Blog supplements it regarding these topics. I briefly note a very limited number of highlights from my Camino:

i. **Sites:** These are some of the top sites/experiences on my Camino. The Camino is highly personal and the best sites/experiences often involve much serendipity and “atmosphere” related to other Pilgrims or locals, so one Pilgrim’s favorites might not be very moving to another Pilgrim. Nevertheless, the following have very high-potential and I recommend that others at least consider experiencing them:

- **Every Church/Abbey/Cathedral and Adjacent Historic District:** A key feature of Via Podiensis & Del Norte Caminos is that the route passes immediately next to each significant church/abbey/cathedral along The Way. A very meaningful daily experience on my Camino was my habit and intention to stop at every one of them and, if open, to go inside, set my pack down briefly, and then recite the same three prayers as I either focused on the altar, closed my eyes, or surveyed the interior. Inevitably, these pauses generated gratitude and compassion that put a very nice spin on my day. Additionally, I was always conscious that these places of worship are almost always in the center of the local historic district. Whenever possible, I took my picnic or snack breaks nearby where I could admire the exterior architecture and artwork—often there were picnic tables in the church yard or there were cafes/bars nearby. The French places of worship seemed to always be open—early to late—and unstaffed. The Spanish places of worship were almost always locked
other than for Sunday services or when staffed (in the larger towns/cities).

**Via Podiensis Sites/Experiences**

- **Le Puy**: Church of Saint Michel d’Aiguilhe—the walk to and the hike up the steps to this ancient Pilgrim Chapel and lodging place provides an unforgettable opportunity to reflect on the beginning of a Camino—how I ended up on the Camino, how many Pilgrims stood in the same spot over the past 1200 years, what my hopes and intentions are for my Camino, etc. Similarly, the Le Puy Cathedral Pilgrim Blessing Service was a “must experience” start to my Camino and the Cathedral is fascinating to visit.

- **Soulie/Espeyrac**: Gite d’Etape Chretien-Accueil au Soulie de Saint Jacques—located 2 km before Espeyrac on the GR 65, this is a classic “donativo” Gite with a Pilgrim-spirit that is a “must experience” stop...especially for old Hippies!

- **Conques**: Abbey of Saint Foy—the evening service, light show, and organ recital is unforgettable. Be sure to pickup a brochure on the Tympanum (carved scenes over the main door of a Cathedral/Abbey) to appreciate the detail and the stories.

- **Livinhac-le-Haut**: BioGîteLaVitaéBella is a “must stay/must experience” Gite. Hosts Jani and Andrew are Pilgrims and create the most wonderful atmosphere in their Gite—similar atmosphere to Gite in Souilie/Espayrac with “donativo payment for food/drinks” but more cozy and smaller.

- **Cele Valley Variant**: From Figeac to Cahors, I highly recommend the Cele Valley Variant. It is generally two days longer than staying on the GR65 but it is a wonderful experience.

- **Canoe/Kayak from Marcilhac-sur-Cele to Cabarets**: Located on the Cele Valley Variant, this 15-20 km canoe/kayak trip is unforgettable in nice weather. See my suggestions for booking the trip in my Stage Summary.

**Del Norte Sites/Experiences**

- **Cibourne/St. Jean de Luz**: While not on the Del Norte, these beautiful coastal villages in France are the perfect place for a little rest and relaxation after completing Via Podiensis and before starting the Del Norte Camino in Irun, Spain which is just 12 kilometers away. It is a further introduction to the beautiful and proud Basque culture.

- **San Sebastian**: An extra day or two in San Sebastian is wonderful. Enjoy Basque culture and food and the best urban beaches in the world. This can either be a rest day after the initial challenging stage of Del Norte or it is easy to visit San Sebastian and then take a short train ride back to Irun to begin Del Norte.
• **Monastery of Zenarruza** (6km past Markina in Ziortza) where Cistercian monks operate a 1-room, 11-bunk Albergue; The Church, cloister, porch and grounds are really fascinating to explore and to experience. Attend evening vesper. The Monks brew beer that is for sale in a small gift shop.

• **Guemes**: Guemes Hostel (1km from the Del Norte on a well-marked detour) hosted by Father Ernesto Bustio who presents his philosophy of life in a meeting/discussion with Pilgrims after dinner. Most Pilgrims love this place—a few dislike it, but it is an iconic Albergue to experience on Del Norte.

• **Santillana Del Mar**: Unique, preserved stone-cut village to experience—looks like Mexican villages in Clint Eastwood movies. 12th Century Collegiate Church complex is a true gem to explore (cloister, Church, museum).

• **Comillas**: Wonderful variety of historical sites and Gaudi architecture in a phenomenal beach setting.

• **Surfer Beaches**: There are so many on Del Norte. I was fortunate to actually stay on or very close to several classic beaches—most notably the Berria on Santona and in La Vega. In addition to taking the beach route on Del Norte whenever possible, be sure to take breaks and even a rest day when you can thoroughly enjoy and explore one or more of the truly stunning surfer beaches of Del Norte.

**Primitivo/ Frances Sites/ Finisterra Experiences**

• **Oviedo**: Oviedo was a major pilgrimage site/destination for centuries and served as the capital of Spain. The Cathedral is a “must see” (actually, there are three historic Cathedrals in Oviedo) and the city is full of interesting sites. Oviedo shopping offers everything a Pilgrim could need or want and includes a conveniently-located Decathlon store for quality hiking gear and clothing.

• **Hospitals Route from Campiello to Berducedo**: The “high route” option on this stage is a “must” if weather permits (and is a “must not” in bad weather). It was the most dramatic and beautiful stage of my entire Camino (coastal hikes on Del Norte were a close second but the variety, extremes, history, and vistas of the Hospitals Route take the prize).

• **Lugo**: Pilgrims can stroll around the ancient city on top of the completely preserved Roman walls and then enjoy historic sites, quaint places for food and drink, and planned/unplanned reunions with other Pilgrims you met along your Camino. Lugo is a “must see” city and many Pilgrims take a rest day there—either planned or spontaneous after they initially experience lovely Lugo. Lugo also marks the beginning of the final 100km to Santiago on the Primitivo Camino and the end of the most challenging stages so it is a natural place of transition for Pilgrims.
• **Melide:** Plan a 2-hour lunch break at either Pulperia Ezequiel or Pulperia A Garnacha to experience delicious octopus (like nothing you have every tasted and with a texture that is far from what many of us associate with octopus) and amazing Pilgrim community. Most Pilgrims make this stop so one continues the planned and unplanned reunions with other Pilgrims that start in Lugo and continue into Santiago and on to the coast in Fisterra and/or Muxia. Melide is a great place to “slow down” and to begin to anticipate what “arrival in Santiago” does and doesn’t mean on your individual Camino and also to start adjusting to the increasing number of Pilgrims you will see as you join the Frances Camino route for your final stages.

• **Santiago de Compostela:** An extra day here is a wonderful place to reflect and to have planned or unplanned reunions with Pilgrims you met on your Way.

• **Fisterra/Muxia:** I stayed three days in Fisterra. Reflecting on the “geographic” end point of my 81-day Camino was as moving and meaningful to me as was the somewhat more hectic “spiritual arrival” in Santiago de Compostela. I personally didn’t feel the urge for another long stage to Muxia and enjoyed some relaxing solitude/reflection mixed with Pilgrim reunions in Fisterra. There are infinite ways to do it, but I strongly suggest that Pilgrims reserve sufficient time and a location that facilitates reflection, processing “your” Camino, and transition from Walking the Camino to Living the Camino the rest of your life. The world is a busy place and the Camino moves our minds and our spirits to a place of calmness and clarity free from the modern thickets of busyness...reserve time to savor where you are and where you are going before inevitable re-engagement begins.

**ii. Accommodations:** As with the “Sites/Experiences” above, “must stay” accommodations involve a lot of personalized preference, atmosphere and serendipity that varies from one Pilgrim to another. Nevertheless, the following accommodations have very high-potential and I recommend that others at least consider experiencing them:

- **Le Sauvage**—Domaine de Sauvage
- **Le Estrets**—Le Gevauden
- **Saint Come-d’Olt:** Espace Angele Merici & Gite du Couvent de Malet
- **Espeyrac/Soulie:** Gite ‘d Etape Chretien—Accueil au Soulie de Saint Jacques
- **Conques:** Centre d’Accueil, Abbaye Sainte Foy located directly behind the Abbey Church.
- **Cahors**—Chambre d’Hotes CHEZ PIERRE
Del Norte Accommodations

• Ziortza (6km past Markina): stay at fascinating Monastery of Zenarruza where Cistercian monks have 1-room, 11-bunk Albergue. This is also a “must see/experience” place to visit.

• Guemes: Guemes Hostel (1km from the road by well-marked detour) hosted by Father Ernesto Bustio. This is also a “must experience” place to visit (see above).

Primitivo Accommodations

• Bodenaya: Albergue de Bodenaya, which is two days out of Oviedo on the Primitivo, is another “donativo” classic Pilgrim lodging in a remodeled stable run by dedicated Pilgrims who create an amazing atmosphere and offer a nice meal and dormitory accommodations.

I. Miscellaneous Issues: This section briefly summarizes a few issues that are good to quickly review and to address if applicable.

i. Visas: It is critical to check on current visa requirements applicable to your nationality and to the countries you will visit. Currently (2019), Americans are permitted to stay in Schengen Treaty Countries (Most of EU other than Great Britain) for a maximum of 90 days out of every 180 day period without a visa or registration. Some type of pre-registration seems to be a likely change coming in 2020 but the same 90-day limit will likely apply. Pilgrims should be able to complete any two Camino routes within the 90-day maximum period barring health or other issues that require extra rest days. If you travel in Schengen Treaty countries before your Camino or plan to travel there after your Camino, those days will count against your “90 out of 180” limit.

ii. Insurance: Many US health insurance policies—including Medicare in the US—do not cover medical expenses outside of the US or they provide minimal coverage. Air evacuation coverage is another consideration—it is inexpensive, often included in health coverage that does include international travel, but is less essential in Camino countries where healthcare is generally good than in some other parts of the world. Travel insurance probably isn’t of great value for a Camino since you don’t have many reimbursable fixed costs other than your round-trip air fare but it might come with your international health insurance. Prescription drugs and other medications are generally much less expensive on the Camino than in the US, so it may not be worth the hassle of submitting for minimal reimbursement for common medications.

iii. Language: Having or developing some proficiency in French and Spanish certainly helps but isn’t essential. My experience is that there were a higher percentage of Pilgrims and locals on the Via Podiensis who spoke little or no English than I found on Del Norte and Primitivo in Spain. My experience also is
that it is extremely difficult to “learn French” just for the Camino—if that is a longer-term goal, then it certainly can be done but I found it impossible to learn much from online apps/classes. It is important to master the basic phrases in each language—the Fodor’s Travel Phrases App is quite good for providing a free list of common “traveler” phrases along with a link to an audio of the correct pronunciation. For $2-3 US per language, one can download a more extensive list of phrases on the Fodor’s App and the phrases can be printed out. **Ultimately, effort must be made to learn basic French and Spanish if one hopes to carry on any conversation at all—just knowing and using phrases will allow you to be respectful/polite but phrases are a one-way street if you don’t have any idea what the response of the person you are talking with means.** Still, if a Pilgrim at least tries in the local language, others are much more willing to respond using as much English or other common language as they know. I regret not making a better effort to learn more basic French and to practice my very rusty Spanish on the Camino—I intend to “try harder” next time.

iv. **Souvenirs, Mementos, & Gifts:** Weight and pack-size limitations greatly restrict ability to carry souvenirs/mementos of the Camino or gifts for special hosts/acquaintances. If you buy anything to take home, plan to ship it home or buy it at the very end of your Camino. Postal services are convenient in France/Spain and, while somewhat expensive, still preferable to carrying items 800 kilometers in your pack. There are many “Camino” items available at the end of each Camino route, so you don’t need to pick them up along the way. City-specific and Cathedral-specific items are only available in that City or Cathedral. Regarding gifts for hosts and special acquaintances, try to only bring the lightest weight items possible—something from your home area (decals/fridge magnets/etc.) are light and somewhat personal reminders of you. High quality dark-chocolate is readily available on the Camino and is always appreciated as a gift.

J. **Detailed Stage Summary for Via Podiensis, Del Norte, Primitivo & Fisterra Camino Routes:**
The attached “Stage Summary” (available in PDF or Word versions on the first and on the last entries in my Blog: Camino2018oviatt.wordpress.com) is a detailed planning tool I developed to summarize information from the multiple resources I have referenced elsewhere in this document including Facebook sites, guidebooks, Gronze.com and other websites, etc. Purely “organic” Pilgrims will probably not even want to look at this information much less use it, but I suspect there are a number of other Pilgrims who, like me, feel the need to plan their Camino a bit to reduce anxiety and, hopefully, to enhance the experience. Please use anything that you find helpful and ignore the rest.

The following information is included regarding my planned stages on Via Podiensis, Del Norte, Primitivo, and Fisterra Camino Routes:
i. Stage length, elevation change, and difficulty;

ii. Cumulative distances; and

iii. Notes regarding:

• recommended lodging options;
• route notes (mostly summarized or taken verbatim from Gronze or from a guidebook);
• availability of water/provisions;
• notable sites;
• route variants;
• alternate stage end points; and
• background on regional culture, geography, and food.

BUEN CAMINO!