

# Canadian Company of Pilgrims

**Volunteers supporting Canadians planning a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela**



## Welcome From The President

I'm delighted to have a new team to bring together a newsletter for the Canadian Company of Pilgrims. This is an important element in communicating between all our far-flung Chapters, as well as exchanging information amongst members and all Canadians interested in the Camino.

My role as President is to support each Chapter, and to try to facilitate communications between them. Since January 2016 our team has worked hard to make changes to move CCoP forward – newly designed website, ability to order memberships, credentials and badges online, distribution of credentials to local Chapters to facilitate last-minute orders (or work around a postal strike!), and development of an online database of members.

My predecessor, Austin Cooke (el Grand Queso) always maintained that the many Chapters of CCoP are the most important elements of our organization. I heartily support this point of view. The Chapters are the heart of the Canadian Company of Pilgrims, and that is where the most important 'work' is done.

As the Fall season approaches I encourage you all to get involved in your local Chapter. That is what will make it stronger and more vibrant. Share your Camino stories and photos, chat with those planning their first Camino, show them your gear, or lend a hand with the organizing of the Chapter's activities. No Chapter in your area? Let us know if you would like to lead one – each existing one started small, and established Chapters can offer support to new ones.

Whether you are a new or an experienced pilgrim, I hope that you will find many friends and new meanings through your Camino experiences, both on the road and at home.

## Recent Initiatives

Some other recent initiatives include:

- Support for the operating costs of the UK's Confraternity of St. James albergues in Rabanal on the Camino Frances, and in Miraz on the del Norte route.
- Support for Canadian soldiers who are suffering from PTSD after their overseas service to walk the Camino as a healing method in 2017.
- Hospitalero training for people across Canada who want to give back by volunteering in an albergue on the Camino.
- Funded the hot water heating system in the Confraternity's albergue in Miraz on the del Norte route.
- Support CCoP Chapters across Canada in covering the costs associated with their informational meetings for past and future pilgrims.

## Keep Your Camino Alive!

There are volunteer opportunities involved at many levels.

- Offer to speak or set up chairs at locals meetings
- Write an article for the newsletter
- Collect information about best tips for fitting backpacks, preventing blisters, pre-training or any other camino-related activity
- Offer best pictures for the newsletter so everyone can see them
- Volunteer at the national level (see below)

### Opportunity Available

We've had two excellent hard-working national executive members for the past few years – Renée Dupuis-Leon as **Secretary** and Adrian Camfield as **Treasurer**.

Both are stepping down at the end of 2016, so we are now seeking interested folks to fill these roles. Neither are onerous but if you would like to give back to the Camino by being involved at the national level of CCoP, here's an opportunity!

**Volunteer or nominate someone for either of the two positions:**

1. **Secretary**
2. **Treasurer**

Nomination forms and job descriptions will be available shortly.

**Talk to President Wendy if you're interested:**  
wendy@santiago.ca

### Did You Know?

So far this year there have been **240,420** pilgrims who arrived at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago.

Of those pilgrims, just over 10%, about 22,500 started from St. Jean Pied-de-Port.

Almost 15%, 34,981, were over 60, with seniors walking mostly in April, May, June and September.

### Keep Your Membership and Your Memories Alive

Your membership in the Canadian Company of Pilgrims helps keep your memories and your experiences with like-minded others alive. It also helps makes the dream of walking the camino possible for others.





## Canada Week at Rabanal and Miraz

Note to Wendy Loly  
Canadian Company of Pilgrims  
Canada

Albergue San Martín, Miraz  
27229 Miraz (Lugo)  
España

Dear Wendy,

I am writing from Refugio Gaucelmo to thank you for your generous sponsorship of this week. We have had a wide variety of pilgrims, the majority from the USA – but we sent some of them on their way with “Canadian” pins.

Here are some details about your week:

# of pilgrims during the week – 142

Nationalities: USA, Italy, Germany, Poland, Holland, South Korea, the UK, New Zealand, Australia and a few from Canada.

The weather, at last, was warm and dry.

Yours sincerely

Betty MacDougall  
Hospitalera

Ms. Wendy Loly,  
Canadian Company of Pilgrims  
Canada

Dear Wendy

Re: Miraz Sponsor-a-Week

Thank you for your very kind sponsorship of the Albergue at Miraz; it is lovely for us to feel that our little spot on the Camino del Norte is being supported by friends in distant Canada.

We have been busy doing all of the usual hospitalero jobs. We have also opened the church – giving a brief guide to those who are interested and leaving time for peace and prayer for those who choose to reflect. We are certainly enjoying our time here and hope to have made some small contribution to the camino.

# of pilgrims during week – 89

Nationalities: Australia -13, Austria -12, Czech Republic -5, France -2, Germany -13, Ireland -2, Italy -11, Poland -4, Spain -30, Switzerland -3, UK -4, USA -27, Sweden -3, Norway -2, Slovenia -2, Korea -1

Weather – Mixed with some cold nights and mornings and some lovely hot, sunny days.

Hospitaleras: Finola, Henrietta and Roma - UK



## Porto to Santiago by Lori Noble

### The Coastal Way

We get off the overnight plane, grab some fruit and high five each other. Let's go! Which way?! Four hearts, tugging in four directions. Cathedral Se for our first stamp, and a plethora of pictures. I am tired, and looking up the word toilet in Portuguese.

It is my intention to write a poem as we cover ground.



### When Did My Camino Start?

Day 3 and a theme has emerged. Where does the Camino start and where does it end? Did it start when the plane touched down, or when we decided to walk the Camino? My feet are sore, blisters have surfaced in our group.

Next day, the poem's theme continues. Did the Camino walk start when I was born, possibly ends when I die? Poem title, "Life is a Camino" forms. I start to wonder if we needed to come to Portugal at all? We could set a path from home, visit inspiring places, walk a long distance. I recognize that I have doubt, "this Camino thing may be more hype than anything else."



### The Symbol I Recognized

I come to a set of ancient stairs. There was a plant growing out of a crack in the step, and a cigarette butt mashed at the base. I set the poem down for a while.

Day eleven and we are three quarters into a planned twenty-four km stretch. I wonder if it is time to pick the poem back up? "Why am I walking this path? Couldn't I just declare the rest of my life a Camino and move on? Is the Camino real?" Here, yes, here, is where I encourage you to go back and read my last question because THIS is when the image appeared, set directly in my path, smack right between my eyes. It popped my head back and slammed straight into my heart. It was a symbol that I recognized, one that speaks to me, knows me, could not be denied. "Here is the answer, do with it what you want."



### My Biggest Takeaway

The Camino exists, it is. My Camino started with my first stamp, at the Cathedral Se, and ended with my forehead ceremoniously resting on the lip of the Fountain of the Horses, in Santiago de Compostela.

What we perceive, feel, learn, take with us, leave there, is part of the Camino. The Camino is as real as the colour of my eyes. Thank you for being there Camino de Santiago, and for finding me on your path. I am home. A fabulous cloud appears in the sky. A new poem title surfaces, "Did I End My Camino at the Fountain?"

# On The Other Side of the Credential

## What it's Like Being a Hospitalero? by Tom Friesen

Many who walk the Camino de Santiago, realize that our pilgrimage experience is strongly influenced by the welcome we receive in the albergue, from the hospitaleros who staff them. But fewer realize that most hospitaleros are volunteers - people who walk as pilgrims and wish to "give back" to the camino. These pilgrims take training and return to the camino to work as hospitaleros.

Trainings for the role of hospitalero or hospitalera are carried out around the world, normally in three-day workshops. Mary Virtue from Victoria, other experienced hospitaleros and I have trained volunteers during weekend courses in Canada over two dozen times since 2007. Hundreds of Canadian trained 'hospis' have worked for a half month (or more) in dozens of albergues in Spain or gites in France.

What is the experience like?

Like pilgrims' Caminos, time of year, number of pilgrims, companions, locations and pure luck can create very different experiences for the volunteer. Many hospis work once and find that is sufficient to satisfy their curiosity and desire to be on the other side of the pilgrimage experience. Some of us are "repeat offenders" who go back repeatedly. Why would we do this?

The hospitaler@ is the "Rock in the Stream". The pilgrim tide washes in and we experience meeting a variety of very interesting people from all over the world.

Some groups arrive very integrated with different pilgrims taking on roles as guide, translator, cook, medic, counselor, etc. Other groups are disparate, and sometimes in the albergue you can link and transform people through introductions, meal-time prayers and

songs, vesper services or simply conversations and create the conversion from hiker, tourist, adventurer to pilgrim. For me, to watch this transformation is a major reason for me to work very hard for a half month every year since I first served in 2006.

The experience of working in the albergue creates a brotherhood of people linked by a different Camino experience. Hospitaleros visit and support each other during and between half month working stints. We understand the work and effort behind the scenes. We are linked in a deeper and wider experience than we had as pilgrims - as memorable people, emotional experiences and lots of fun translate into interesting stories and memories. Other hospitaleros are my sisters and brothers.

What I personally wish was different about the Camino is that the pilgrims had a better appreciation of the life of the French and Spanish people in the towns and cities where the pilgrims walk through. As pilgrims we operate on totally different schedules than the local people. As hospitaleros who stay in one place, we meet the local people, see the rhythm and sights of a specific place and are 'ciudadanos' for a time. I once read that the difference between a traveler and a tourist is that travelers open themselves up to find the sacredness of a place. Being a hospitalero lets me do this.

Around my neck I wear a muñequito. This symbol of the figure with hands outstretched in welcome is one of the important symbols of my identity. I can only earn this, I cannot buy, sell or trade it. It tells the world that I value hospitality and service. I am lucky enough to be empowered to give this emblem of our service to others who go to serve. I can think of few others things that give me as much pleasure.

## Keeping the Camino Alive Back Home in Canada

Beginning a regular column of shared experiences - by Valerie Beyers

You've traversed the Camino Frances, or perhaps the Camino Norte, the Camino Portuguese, or one of the other routes that has taken you to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela and the tomb of Saint James.

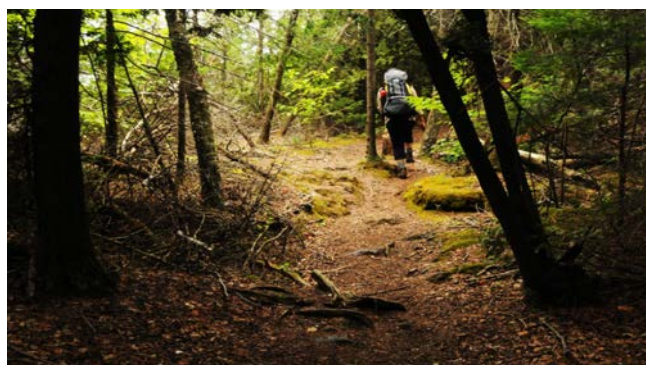
You're elated, enthralled and exuberant from the experience. You've returned home to Canada, shared your experience with all who will listen and you wonder "Now what? My soul has been awakened; what do I do with this passion that has been ignited within me?" You're not alone in asking this of yourself!

In the poem, 'Blessed you are, pilgrim' it concludes by stating that you are indeed blessed "because you have discovered that the true Camino begins at the end." So, with your arrival in Santiago, receipt of your Compostela, and opening of your eyes to what was previously unseen, you are ready to "make of your Camino a life and of your life a Camino." How? So glad you asked!

Many pilgrims have found various ways to keep that "Focal Living Experience" alive even though they are more than 5000 kilometres from Santiago. For me, after I completed my first Camino (yes, it has drawn me back again and again...) I wanted to give back to this incredible, life changing experience. I registered for and completed training as a Hospitalera with Tom Friesen and Mary Virtue. I then served as a Hospitalera at Rabanal del Camino within the Refugio Guacelemo with dear friends Rosann and Gene – fellow pilgrims whom I had met along the Camino and with whom a tight, deep friendship had been formed

That experience has led to participation as a facilitator in several Camino 101 workshops, yearly sojourns along the Bruce Trail\* and establishing a Camino group within Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

\*(The Bruce Trail is a 900 km trail that follows the Niagara Escarpment - one of the thirteen UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves - from Queenston on the Niagara River, near the Niagara Falls to Tobermory on the tip of the Bruce Peninsula).



Connecting with other pilgrims – whether they are Camino hardy or those with intent – is what keeps the Camino alive for me back here in Canada. I never tire of hearing of their experiences or answering the myriad questions of those about to depart on their first Camino. It is rejuvenating and invigorating. It takes me back to the path; to my first steps as I gazed upon the Pyrenees in front of me and the way marker indicating that Santiago was a mere 730 kilometres away...

As the issues of this newsletter unfold, **we're inviting you to participate – to tell us how you have, or are keeping the Camino alive in your life. If you are interested in doing this, please contact me at Valerie@santiago.ca to discuss further.**

Valerie serves as coordinator of the Kitchener-Waterloo Pilgrims of the Camino group and gets back to the Camino paths in Spain every chance she gets. In the interim, she strives to keep that focal living experience alive in all that she does in her day-to-day life in Canada.



## Contacts and Camino Information

### Executive

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