



# ***Pilgrim Footprints***

**HOLA and BUEN CAMINO from the CCoP Board, and your local coordinators.  
What a year it's been so far on the caminos!**

During the first **ten months** of this year, **290,799** people completed one of the caminos (mostly the Camino Frances). Within that number, between 7000 and 8000 are Canadian. Were you one of them? Congratulations!

Of the total number, close to 200,000 walked the Camino Francés. That's a lot of people to have wandering through a country on the same path!

Local people, albergues, hospitaleros and especially the volunteers at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago are stretched farther and farther each year with the increasing number of walkers, bikers, wheelchairs and horse riders. Thank you to all volunteers.



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# Canadian Hospitaleros Giving Back

Every year Canadians who have walked the Camino decide that they would like to **'give something back'** and they participate in a weekend training to prepare them to serve as **Hospitaleros** in Spain, France or Portugal. Postings are made and each hospitalero serves for two weeks, usually as part of a team of two or three. **In 2017, thirty-six Canadians volunteered to serve their fellow pilgrims by hosting in albergues.**

**Clare Lewis** sent this account of her time in Alcuéscar on the Via de la Plata.

*We had about 33 peregrinos over 16 days. Many were Spanish and about ten were cyclists. **Because we are at a monastery there is an opportunity to eat together in the evening with a meal provided by the kitchen staff. Surprisingly, not a lot of people opted for that.***

***We really enjoyed getting to know some of the peregrinos** and we had some fascinating conversations. I had the feeling that a number of peregrinos just wanted a bed for the night, but didn't want the camaraderie of being peregrinos together. One woman asked me to sign a receipt so she could claim her donation on her income tax. That was a first! I would recommend this albergue, especially if the hospitalero/a has a car. **There are a number of communities of significant historical interest less than an hour's drive from here.***

*There is a full-time volunteer hospitalero who lives here and he is quite willing to sign people in if they arrive while the hospitalera/o is out. He is a kind of back up person when there are hospitaleros posted here. We went out during the day after our chores/cleaning was done and loved seeing the local area. **The albergue is closed during siesta** and so we would come back around 4 and greet peregrinos.*

*The **Via de la Plata is not very popular especially during the summer** and so there are not a lot of peregrinos and hence the pace of work is quite manageable! The monastery is on the edge of a very small town, with easy access to bars and grocery store.*

**Here is Clare wearing her Hospitalera scarf and "cleaning" at the albergue.**



**Judy Gayford and Marlene Dott**, both of Calgary, served together at Refugio Gaucelmo, the UK's Confraternity of St. James' albergue in Rabanal, on the Camino Frances. They were there during one of the weeks that CCoP sponsored in 2017, and so they displayed the **Canadian flag** and some **Canada 150** items, and answered questions about our sponsorship and about Canada. During their 2-week term they hosted **139 pilgrims from 27 countries!** For more reports or further info. on how to participate,



check out the Canadian Hospitaleros website at:  
<http://canadianhospitaleros.blogspot.ca/p/canadian-hospitaleros-in-spain-and.html>



# CCoP Credential Elves



Although it *may* appear that the Canadian Company of Pilgrims is a large machine operating out of a central office – **it is in fact run entirely by volunteers working off their dining room tables!** And one core group is critical to fulfilling all the orders for memberships, credentials and badges that come into our website.

These are the '**Credential Elves**' who take on the many steps in the process of filling orders. This team processes approximately 1400 credential orders each year, ranging from a high of 280 in March (peak demand time!) to 50 in a quieter month.

When you order your pilgrim credential online our **Secretary Grace Cameron in PEI gets an email**. She collects the order details onto an Excel sheet, and at the end of the week she prepares a document with mailing labels for the orders. Grace also answers emailed questions about orders and assists those having difficulty with online ordering.

Grace's next step is to

email the labels to a 'credential elf' in Victoria where the supplies are kept. This is a rotating position – depending on who is available. We have a team of 10 individuals who fill this role. Many are great travellers or may be away walking yet another Camino. The receiving 'elf of the week' prints the labels and then fills the orders.

**Our newest 'elf' is Gordon Webster** who takes his job very seriously, to the point of having a special 'elf' hat that he wears while on the job. Although his family has encouraged him to leave the hat at home when he goes to the mailbox, he has dutifully carried on with it until the job is done!

So even before you receive your credential in the mail your order has crossed Canada from east to west – just the beginning of its journey!



# Honourary Patron For CCoP

**CCoP Embassy liaison Austin Cooke recently met with the Spain's new Ambassador to Canada**, briefing him on Canadian pilgrims' participation on the Camino and, as well, presenting him with a few recent books about the Camino by Canadian authors. His Excellency said that he was impressed with the energy of Canadian pilgrims and is looking forward to meet CCoP members during his time in Canada.



In response to our request that he serve as our Honourary Patron His Excellency **wrote** ***"It would be an honour for me to take on this role and continue the work of my predecessors by supporting the ties between Canada and Spain through pilgrimage."***

**Enrique Ruiz Molero, the former general director of the Spanish Foreign Service, is the fourth Ambassador to hold this symbolic role of Patron.** He has served as Ambassador in Mauritania and Mali, and as Consul General in Los Angeles and in Perpignan (France), where he first encountered pilgrims to Santiago.

The role of the Honourary Patron is essentially symbolic. In our case, where **the Spanish Ambassador is our Honourary Patron, he represents the link between Spain and the Canadians who walk the Camino to Santiago de Compostela**, and this underlines the importance of the pilgrimage in the relationship between our two countries.

**The Camino is perhaps the largest single non-trade link between Canada and Spain**, and every year thousands of Canadians learn about Spain and its people through kilometres of dusty and sometimes muddy trails.

# Personal Safety On the Camino

As the numbers of people who walk the camino increase each year, so does the potential for both increased positive and negative experiences. Please note that the following comments are based on comments from the camino forum.

**Women planning to walk the camino often ask if it is safe to do so alone.** The answer to that question is not as simple as it was ten years ago.

You may begin your Camino alone, but you will rarely finish it alone. In between there will be many opportunities to walk with others. This is part of the joy of the Camino. And you easily can buddy up with another pilgrim any time you are feeling uncertain or unsafe.

**The authorities along the routes are watchful and concerned about pilgrim safety.** They are continually concerned about incidents affecting female pilgrims.

## We reiterate the advice given by a number of pilgrim associations and the Spanish authorities:

- **Before** you set out, **programme the emergency number 112 into your telephone.**
- Consider **downloading** this App issued by the Spanish government:  
<https://alertcops.ses.mir.es/mialertcops/info/info.xhtml>

**The app allows anyone in Spain to send an alert from a mobile device straight to the police.**

- Check out the Facebook group CAMIGAS. It's a buddy system for women on the camino, and provides advice and opportunities to arrange a walking buddy. It's a closed group but just send a request to join and you'll hear back quickly.

If you feel threatened or uncomfortable, or if you are assaulted in any way, **TRY TO REMOVE** yourself to a place of safety immediately.

**Call the police** – the best number to use is **112** which covers all of Spain (and much of Europe) and which has operators who speak English.

And please, please, **REPORT** all incidents to the police. Too many of these unlawful aggressions are never reported, which means that the full extent of the problem is hidden from the authorities. The police want to help, and to prevent further incidents - but need to know where and when they happen. Spain may well be safer than your home town. Everyone can help keep it that way!



# Walking the Camino at Home

The Vancouver chapter of the Canadian Company of Pilgrims invites past and potential pilgrims for a walk each Sunday (and some Saturdays) to discover the local area on foot. The groups change and all “camino” people are welcome, along with any friendly dogs.

This year, so far, they have walked every Sunday (42 walks) and gone 570 km. They also completed another 295 km during 24 Saturday walks. They have explored most of the outlying communities, walked through the North Shore hills, rivers, seaside, and even some of the downtown Vancouver streets during their walks.

**This coming Sunday, when their walk is completed, they will have reached the equivalent of the walk between St. Jean Pied-de-Port and Finisterre!!**

Congratulations to Donna Coutts, John MacLean, everyone else who helped plan the walks, and to all participants. **Way to keep the camino alive at home Vancouver and the Lower Mainland!!**

Here's a photo of their walk last week which 40 people attended (thank you Peter Thompson)



# Who Walks the Camino and Why?

Most of us have had friends or family who have asked us WHY. Why on earth would we want to walk the camino? The reasons are varied and unique to each person.

Some walk to celebrate, some to grieve, some to support their faith and some to try to understand it, some to ask for absolution, and others to heal. Sometimes we resolve our issues. Other times not so much – at least not immediately.

The story on the next two pages is about several individuals who served our country and, like many others, suffered huge consequences from those experiences. When offered the opportunity to walk the camino as a part of their healing, these people accepted, and walked the first **Royal Camino**.

## The Royal Camino Initiative: Supporting Soldiers with Extended Stress Disorders

Master Corporal Dave Brydon (Ret'd), worried about the increasing number of serving soldiers and veterans suffering from stress issues and wanted to help. After two personal journeys on the Camino Francés, and testimonies from other Canadian and international soldiers, he decided that walking the camino could be a useful strategy as part of a healing plan for many soldiers who were having difficulties recovering from service-induced stress.

He put together a proposal, and in May 2015, approached his local branch of the Royal Canadian Regiment in Kingston, with the conceptual idea of having some of these soldiers walk the Way of Saint James as a physical, psychological and spiritual means of self-help. The Camino Francés was chosen for its historical significance, existing infrastructure, and economic feasibility.

By August 2015, the plan was formalized, presented to, and endorsed by the RCR Association, the RCR Senate and the Colonel of the Regiment. Dave then walked his third camino to identify costs, determine logistics, challenges and support required for the journey, and to promote the initiative online.

By March 2017 the money was raised, details were refined and participants were recruited and selected. On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, 4 men and 4 women (2 serving/6 retired) left Canada to begin their camino on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The members of the group from across the country had only met via a closed Tea Chatroom prior to their trip together.

After a briefing in Pamplona by Dave Brydon, the group was eager to bus to Saint Jean Pied-de-Port to start the journey. This Basque village is a centuries old convergence point for several camino paths from France, at which point the path forward to Santiago became the Camino Francés. It is the most popular path by far. (cont.)





## The Royal Camino (continued from page 7)

The Royal Camino journey launched in sunshine - about noon on April 22<sup>nd</sup> - and ended at Refuge Orisson for the day. This was the group's first experience sleeping in hostel-like accommodations and eating peregrino meals en masse. The next day, after more uphill climbing, the group learned, as all eventually do, that downhill can be a lot harder than uphill, in spite of what we may have believed an hour earlier.

The individual soldiers quickly learned that all aspects of the camino are easier when we can do things at our own pace, and started to break away from the full group to pair up with those who woke and walked closer to their own natural pace and timing. Regular stops included café con leche, chocolate-filled pastries and pilgrim menus as the availability of restaurants became more frequent.

The first group member reached Santiago de Compostela after 30 days, with the remainder filing in over the next 6 days. One member marched on to Finisterre, at "the end of the earth" – an additional 90 km. from Santiago, and others joined by bus in support of the walking member.

As the premise of this initiative was a self-healing and awareness approach to aid recovery from service-related stress disorders, several pre- and post-departure questionnaires were completed by participants.

**By all accounts**, from team members, to group administrators/support staff as well as the group psychologist who analyzed all the data, **the Royal Camino Initiative was highly successful in its development, approach and implementation.**



The Royal Camino Administrators and Group Members, wish to thank the Royal Canadian Regiment Association, Colonel of the Regiment, general supporters and **the Canadian Company of Pilgrims** for their belief and overall support for this incredible and highly promising initiative.

And a huge thank you from the Canadian Company of Pilgrims, to those who have had the courage to join the forces, serve and dedicate themselves to the protection of democracy – even at such a high cost to themselves!



# Pilgrim House in Santiago

**Pilgrim House** in Santiago de Compostela is a place where pilgrims are welcome to gather together and share stories of their Camino, to hold onto the sense of community that forms along the Camino, and to keep the conversation going about the deeper issues in life.

**Pilgrim House** is centrally located at Rúa Nova 19 in the **old city of Santiago**. They provide **services to pilgrims**, such as **bag check** and **storage**, **printing of boarding passes**, **free wifi**, **laundry**, a **kitchenette** for food prep, **communal space** to visit and catch up with fellow pilgrims, a **quiet space** for meditation, reading, journaling, praying, and **scheduled meditation services**.

**All pilgrims are welcome in Pilgrim House. They are there to offer a helping hand and a listening ear. Whatever you need, their doors are open.**

CCoP just received a letter of thanks for our grant to help with the purchase of computers for pilgrims to use.

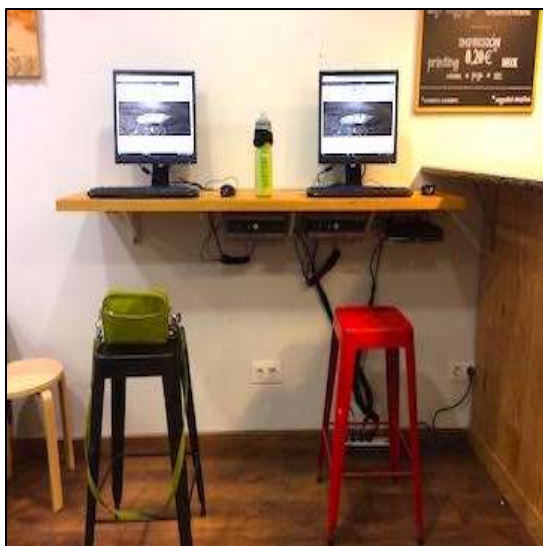
*Dear Canadian Company of Pilgrims,  
Thank you so much for your grant that enabled us to purchase and set up two new pilgrim computers in our Pilgrim House Welcome Center in Santiago! They've been receiving a lot of use from pilgrims who need to print boarding passes, book flights or trains, or research the next leg of their travels/ Camino, and book accommodations. It's been our dream since we opened to offer something like this, and we're so grateful for your help in making it happen!*

*I've included a few pictures so you can see what the computer station looks like, and we were able to even include two Canadian pilgrims, Rob and Penny, in the photos.*

*Thanks again!  
Faith Walter*

[www.pilgrimhousesantiago.com](http://www.pilgrimhousesantiago.com)

Terra Nova Pilgrim House  
Santiago de Compostela, Spain





# We're Here to Help

***The Canadian Company of Pilgrims supports Canadians interested in the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.***

<b>Executive</b>		<b>Camino Email</b>
President (BC)	Wendy Loly	wendy@santiago.ca,
Vice-President (BC)	Neville Tencer	neville@santiago.ca,
Secretary (PEI)	Grace Cameron	secretary@santiago.ca,
Treasurer (MB)	Alvin Thiessen	treasurer@santiago.ca,
Past-President (ON)	Austin Cooke	austin@santiago.ca,
<b>Directors</b>		
Fredericton	Kevin McKinney	kevin@santiago.ca,
Winnipeg	Ivor Lockhart	ccopwpg@gmail.com,
Victoria	Mary Virtue	mary@victoriacamino.ca,
<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>Camino Email</b>
Halifax	Cathy Cavanaugh	halifaxpilgrim@santiago.ca,
Halifax	Katherine Gartner-Kepkay	halifaxpilgrim@santiago.ca,
Fredericton	Kevin McKinney	kevin@santiago.ca,
Ottawa	Austin Cooke	austin@santiago.ca,
Toronto	Mike Gurski	mike.gurski@gmail.com,
Kitchener-Waterloo	Val Beyer	valerie@santiago.ca,
Hamilton	Loretta Ray	hamilton@santiago.ca,
London	Tom Friesen	tomfriesen@hotmail.com,
Winnipeg	Ivor Lockhart	ccopwpg@gmail.com,
Saskatoon	Lea Pennock	saskatoon@santiago.ca,
Calgary	Judy Gayford	judy@santiago.ca,
Edmonton	Thaya McKee	thaya1@rogers.com,
Kelowna	David Cram	kelowna@santiago.ca,
Vancouver	Donna Coutts	vancouver@santiago.ca,
Vancouver	John MacLean	vancouver@santiago.ca,
Victoria	Mary Virtue	mary@victoriacamino.ca,
Whitehorse	Dianne Homan	whitehorse@santiago.ca,
Canadian Hospitaleros	Mary Virtue	maryvirtue@shaw.ca,
CCoP Newsletter Coordinator	Cecelia Pineda	cecelia@santiago.ca,