The Experience of Place and Non-place
Within the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCE OF PLACE AND NON-PLACE WITHIN THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO PILGRIMAGE

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The Camino Francés, a 780km pilgrimage in Northern Spain, has been traveled by millions of pilgrims over the last 800 years. In recent decades the route has been increasingly threatened by insensitive development and infrastructure. Surprisingly little research has been conducted on the nature and ecology of pilgrims’ experiences and the landscape necessary to support the roughly 170,000 people that walk the Camino each year. Adapting methods from recreation and leisure science, this autoethnographic research explored the influence of the environment on my pilgrimage experience as I walked for five weeks in the Fall of 2011. Analysis used a variety of qualitative techniques in creating my own narrative. My research suggests that the landscape is essential to a positive and meaningful pilgrimage experience. Future planning and design efforts for this UNESCO route should incorporate the influence of the landscape on the experience of pilgrimage.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who deserve recognition as aids and advisors to this accomplishment. I am thankful to all those who offered encouragement and support when I had doubts and space when I needed to step back and breathe. To my family and community I am grateful for life, and to the universe I am grateful for the endless opportunities to define my own path through it.

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I would also like to acknowledge my feet. Dear feet; you carried us at times kicking, and frequently screaming nearly 900km across Spain. With only a research proposal, a book of maps and Venus on the morning horizon to guide us, you took one step after another. You endured my expectations, doubts, neglect and my abuse and without your sacrifice, we would not have gone anywhere at all.

To my fellow pilgrims, you’ve enriched my life and I wish you many Buen Camino’s.
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I am writing as the United Nations announces that the global population is reaching seven billion people. In an increasingly crowded world I believe people need places where they can retreat to spend time with themselves; places to find themselves. But even as the population of the world soars the size of our planet remains the same and such spaces become ever more rare and threatened. One of these contemplative places is the Camino de Santiago the medieval pilgrimage route across northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela. The Camino is one of three major Catholic pilgrimages, to Santiago de Compostela, to Rome and to Jerusalem. Among these pilgrimages the Camino de Santiago has been said to be where people travel to find purpose, or to renew it. Finding and holding onto a sense of purpose in our lives can be difficult when we are just one individual among billions which is why places that support and promote this in life are invaluable and need to be preserved.

I set out to research how the landscapes of a pilgrimage route influence the experience of a pilgrim and to do this I became a pilgrim myself. I have always believed that firsthand experience is the surest path to true knowledge and for my master’s thesis in landscape architecture it is the route I chose to walk. This thesis will be foremost an autoethnographic account of my research trip walking nearly 900km in northern Spain along the Camino Frances, the most travelled route of the Camino de Santiago. I also believe that one of the most potent tools for relating experience to one another is through story and so I will tell mine throughout this thesis.

I’ve recently begun to wonder what the truer pilgrimage was for me; the walk itself, or the discovery of previously unseen meaning and value through the continual contemplation of my own experiences. Many pilgrims mention how the Camino continues even long after they have finished walking. This is perhaps especially true for those that write their experiences. I once read somewhere that writers live life doubly when they experience it first hand and then re-experience it while they write. This has certainly been true to for me as I’ve made the pilgrimage to Santiago, first on foot, and then once again in these pages.
Perspective of the thesis

In an ethnography, the anthropologist conducting research transforms herself or himself into an instrument that observes. Autoethnography turns the lens of this human instrument back upon itself. The observer is then both the instrument and the object of its attention, with all the history, beliefs and biases that accompany the person. Autoethnography offers a truly insider perspective full of richness for all its subjectivity.

This thesis, my self and the method of autoethnography are intertwined. As an instrument there is no way I can calibrate myself, or state in numbers how reliable and valid my observations are. For a make and model I can offer only a given name and any of the numbers attached to it through my life, but they would not help to define me. My capacities and limitations can best be expressed by my experiences and decisions. I can try to write as accurate and relevant a portrait as possible, but I can't claim completeness or absolute truth because I am a person in progress. This is not an autobiography nor a memoir and I don't have volumes to fill with descriptions of my life. Necessity demands brevity and focus so I will offer up those aspects of my life which I believe will most influence the ways in which I might behave as an instrument in this study:

I identify as female. I am North American. I am adventurous and I am introspective.

I believe we, as humans, possess a spirit. Whether that spirit ought to be capitalized I cannot say, but because I believe this I would identify myself as spiritual. I am often curious about it and at times even experimental, but I would not identify myself as religious. This is an important distinction and we'll return to it again later.

I believe we are equally products of both the nature of our spirits and the nurturing of our upbringing. I am interested in cultural and environmental diversity and in being able to say decades from now that those things still exist. Socially I am a relativist, which is to say I would like to 'live and let live'. When it comes to the planet, I'm an environmentalist. I do my best to maintain these ethics as core values to the highest standard however, sadly they are frequently at odds. To deal with this reality I adopt flexibility as a value as well and overall try to accept compromise without compromising my self.
This thesis is at its most basic about me going on a pilgrimage, through a landscape to a religious destination. What most needs to be known about me, the instrument, is how I relate to each of those terms as concepts.

Pilgrimage

My romantic self loves the idea of a pilgrimage being the life-defining journey of a solitary seeker who perseveres even in the face of adversity. The hero of such a scenario struggles inwardly and outwardly to reach their ultimate destination where she or he attains some sort of awakening. As much as my imaginative mind holds to this archetypal fairy tale image, my more practical self prefers that words have specific definitions that we can trust to communicate ideas clearly.

The word 'pilgrimage' technically signifies a journey to a religious destination. The pilgrimage is made by a person seeking divine assistance through prayer and sacrifice, repentance for sins committed, or possibly as a show of faith. There might be any number of reasons a person might choose to undertake a pilgrimage but the key components that make it up are the journey and the destination, not unlike life. Regardless of the technical definition I have commonly and frequently heard the word used to describe all manner of journeys in everyday speech.

Now because I am not a religious person, nor am I undertaking this with a religious purpose in mind, I might not properly refer to my own journey as a pilgrimage. However, whilst my primary motivation was academic I had also a spiritual interest in the Camino and I intended to remain as open as possible to whatever the experience of walking it became. I will continue to call it a pilgrimage.
Religion & Spirituality

I've been struggling with how to make a clear distinction between religion and spirituality, my sense is that people who concern themselves with the two ideas each have their own way of separating them. It's difficult for me to draw a line because in some ways I don't really see them as different concepts, so much as the same pursuit for a meaningful life framed in different ways. I have observed people the world over who are seeking a greater sense of meaning in their lives; some people look to God, some within, some people seek out like minded others or align themselves to a group, but I believe the essential experience people are seeking is ultimately similar. Each individual looks for the satisfaction of that goal in whatever system of belief makes sense to them.

I see religion as having somewhat more of an external focus. There is a God, or perhaps several God's, that are entirely separate from oneself. Spirituality I understand more as an internally focused pursuit. The same concepts that are represented by God in religion, are not outside of the self they are qualities inherent in humanity that can be achieved with practice, by looking inward and by connecting to other people. I don't see these things as mutually exclusive; rather two pathways leading to the same source.

Landscape

I relate to landscape in two major ways; spiritually and practically. I've always felt most at ease with myself and connected to what I consider important in life while in nature. And by nature in this context, I mean landscapes that are not densely populated or considerably altered by humans, or at least not perceptively so. My own spiritual life has always been largely nature based and solitary. I have been fortunate enough in my life to have been surrounded by beautiful settings and access to wild areas. Imbuing these places with meaning and spirit came naturally, no pun intended. While this way of relating to nature feels ingrained in my self, I also recognize that it is probably largely a result of my opportunities and upbringing. Up until the age of 11 or so I was home schooled with my two brothers, and I mean no disrespect to my parents when I
say that homeschooling for me was being pretty much left to my own devices. My classroom was the woods outside our home which seemed like a vast wilderness to my young self. We did have curriculums to follow and I remember my father once teaching a course on mythology. The study of myth and story influenced me immeasurably then, and continues to do so now.

Practically my relationship with nature is much more complicated. No simple definition of 'nature' will suffice here and in this context it becomes much more difficult to describe. I don't want to get into a debate over whether wilderness is tangible or a social construct so I will just reiterate what I said above, that I consider myself an environmentalist, enough that I have at times veered toward the radical. It is hard for me to deny at times that what humans have done to the planet looks on the whole pretty bad. I would like to believe in the possibility of humanity living in peace and mutual respect with the planet, not to mention one another, but I worry that the whole concept is a fallacy. Fortunately, I'm still young and idealistic enough to keep hoping and working for co-existence. This planet's ecosystems might be better off without us but that is certainly not the case the other way around, humans without the planet just don't exist. I'm for existence. So on a basic level I see the earth and its landscapes as a matrix for life. I mostly prefer unbuilt environments to cities because the amount of land remaining to sustain other forms of life as well as grow food already makes me pretty uneasy. On the whole I am very interested in finding a way of living that is actually good for the earth, and not just less bad.

This is as complete and succinct a portrait of myself; the instrument of this study, as I can manage in the space and time I have available. I hope that it helps you understand a little better the personal context of my observations. I also hope that it helps you relate to my story, whether you’ve walked the Camino yourself or not. If you haven’t, I recommend it. Buen Camino.
CHAPTER ONE

To understand a landscape truly it must be felt, but to convey some of this meaning to others it has to be talked about, recounted, or written and depicted.

– Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In northern Spain a pilgrimage road exists that stretches 800 km across the landscape and more than 800 years back in time. From east to west, the *Camino Frances* extends from St. Jean Pied-de-Port in the French Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela in the Spanish region of Galicia. The *Camino Frances*, or “French Way”, is actually one section of a larger network of pilgrimage routes extending throughout Spain and France that are together known of the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*. The *Camino Frances* is the most popular section of these pilgrimage routes. All the various networks of routes have as their destination the city of Santiago de Compostela. There beneath the Romanesque Cathedral of Santiago are supposedly housed the relics, or remains of St. James the Apostle. Since medieval times the site of Santiago de Compostela has been a destination for Christian pilgrims similar to Jerusalem and Rome (Melczer, 1993). The story of St. James and his connection to Santiago de Compostela is mythological, political and complicated. For a more thorough explanation of Santiago de Compostela’s religious and historical significance see Melczer (1993). This thesis explores the landscapes of the *Camino Frances*, which I will call the ‘Camino’.

Jackowski (2000) has estimated that roughly 240 million people undertake some form of pilgrimage annually. Pilgrimage routes, despite the common beliefs that major religions are waning in influence globally, are increasing in popularity. “Mosques, churches, cathedrals, pilgrimage paths, sacred architecture, and the lure of the metaphysical are used prominently in tourism promotional literature,” (Olsen & Timothy, 2006: 1). The Camino has become increasingly popular since the 1980s when volunteer based pilgrim associations and
confraternities began mapping and signing the routes with the now ubiquitous yellow arrow (Frey, 1998 & Melczer, 1993). In 2011 more than 183,000 walkers, bikers and horseback riders completed all or some segment of the Camino (La Peregrinación a Santiago, 2012). Among the pilgrims a wide spectrum of motivations for making a pilgrimage can be found from religious to secular (La Peregrinación a Santiago, 2012). And yet, despite its popularity the actual physical landscapes that ground the pilgrimage have experienced very little scholarly treatment. In the personal narratives of many pilgrims substantial anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that the landscapes of the Camino, are essential to the overall pilgrimage experience. The goal of this research is to describe a personal experience of walking the Camino with specific attention paid to the role and influence of the landscape on that experience. Gaining a better understanding of the Camino landscape and the influence of the landscape on the pilgrimage experience will help to inform future planning and management decisions which safeguard the integrity of the Camino and the aesthetic and experiential qualities of the pilgrimage itself.

**Goal and Objective**

The goal of this project is to describe a personal experience of the Camino and explore the influence of the landscape on the pilgrimage experience. To achieve this goal my objective was to document personal experiences on the Camino by using: written journal entries, voice recordings, photography, annotated maps and tracking my overall wellbeing day to day.

There are numerous factors to consider when conveying a narrative of human experience. On the Camino, differences in religious affiliation, cultural or social background, language, age or physical fitness level and the spatial/temporal qualities of the landscape could all influence the experiences of pilgrims. The experience of landscape and the pilgrimage experience are by definition ‘subjective’. This presents the researcher who is seeking to understand a phenomenon shared by many people with an opportunity to describe the subjective experience in a narrative form which respects the individual nature of subjective experience while presenting it in a format that is accessible to those reading it. Because of the uniqueness of the pilgrimage experience it presents pilgrims with many opportunities to have personally meaningful and memorable experiences similar to the “aesthetic experiences” described by Chenoweth and Gobster (1990). Attempting to portray an experiences like walking a pilgrimage as though they are generalizable
strips them of the personal meanings they may hold for people. It is more respectful to individual experiences to present them in the richness of subjectivity rather than trying to impose an objective viewpoint. What I will offer is as complete a picture of my own experience as possible so that my unique perspective can be understood and related to, even if it is not universally similar to the experience of all pilgrims.

**Theoretical Framework**

Hermeneutics, as the explication of meaning in human stories and actions (Bernard, 1995; Michrina & Richards, 1996) is a natural philosophical framework for this study. The basic hermeneutic model is a continuous cycle of data collection, interpretation and enhancing understanding. I will be living, creating and then examining my own story of the pilgrimage experience to contribute to a dialogue about pilgrimage experiences that can continue to grow to include new observations with future research. As more voices come into discussion the hermeneutic understanding of what a pilgrimage experience is and how the landscape influences it can deepen. This approach, exploring the relationship between person and environment, is also by definition phenomenological. Phenomenology has its own rich history and web of definitions but primarily it is suitable for my work because, “the phenomenological approach seeks to maintain ties of meaning between researcher and phenomenon. The richness and integrity of the phenomenon are protected in that the phenomenologist is required to record aspects of the phenomenon as they reveal themselves to him or her,” (Seamon, 1982: 122).

A note should be made here about validity. In a scientific model of data gathering, the validity of the observations would be assured through repetition and consistency of results. The same is not achievable in this kind of study so validity must come with agreement in discussion between observers and informants (Michrina & Richards, 1996). In my research the observer and informant are both myself, so discussion in my case would be somewhat circular and perhaps questionable. What was done in the present study to ensure the quality of observations (data) was to be as rigorous as possible during the gathering; constantly questioning assumptions and biases. During my pilgrimage I made every effort to collect information regarding my experiences in multiple ways so that I could cross-reference observations.

Methods which contributed to my eventual autoethnographic account included;
journaling, voice recordings, charting my daily wellbeing, photography and map annotations. Being able to draw from such an array of sources has been invaluable to me in reconstructing my pilgrimage in a literary format such that it remains true to my experiences.

The hermeneutic method and phenomenological stance are the philosophical equivalents of woodland guides through my research. My use of hermeneutics and phenomenology is aimed at enhancing the understanding of pilgrimage experiences by re-experiencing a popular pilgrimage route from a new perspective, my own, and adding my insights to the existing dialogue. Hermeneutic research is founded upon the idea of creating a cycle of dialogue between previous work and new work to continually build upon and re-examine knowledge, (Michrina & Richards, 1996). The validity of the research hinges upon the strength of the observations made, in this case my notes and records made while walking the Camino. Over time, as my perspective is added to the ongoing dialogue of pilgrimage experiences than the validity of individual accounts is confirmed by the patterns that emerge of shared experience.

**Study Importance**

As the Camino sees more and more visitors each year the risk that the associated landscapes will be impacted by development to support increased tourism is considerable. Within the narratives of pilgrims there is already reference made to large sections of the trail being negatively influenced by proximity to major roads that in some cases even present major safety risks to pilgrims crossing them.

The results of this study provide a basis from which to argue for greater consideration of the ecology of pilgrimage in future development decisions. While portions of the *Camino* do enjoy a measure of protection under their designation as a European Cultural Heritage Route and UNESCO World Heritage Site, these protections are primarily afforded to the built environments of the *Camino*, the landscape protections are somewhat more ambiguous as we will see.

Extensive research has been conducted on the psychological experience of visitors to natural and wilderness settings and I believe that there are many similarities between the pilgrim’s experiences along the Camino and hiker's experiences of trails. Walking major recreational trails like the Bruce Trail, in Ontario, and Appalachian Trail through the Eastern
United States have been anecdotally compared to walking the Camino. The mention of recreational trails is important because it suggests that pilgrims may have similar experiences and expectations in both instances. The methods often used to study recreational trail use have never before been applied to pilgrimage and I believe the results of this study will suggest that employing them in a pilgrimage context would benefit future management considerations in both environments.

**Methodology**

*Autoethnography*

The primary source of information for this study has been my own observations and experiences collected and compiled autoethnographically as I walked the Camino de Santiago from St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, France to Santiago de Compostela, Spain in September-October 2011. I recorded my perspective of the landscapes I passed through with particular focus on the relationship between the landscapes and my physical, emotional and mental, social and spiritual experience overall.

As a method of social research auto-ethnography places the observer, in this case myself, in the role of both researcher and researched, it demands intensive introspection, honesty and openness about all aspects of personal experience as well as background and identity. It is an insider ethnography, created by someone who is a recognized member of the culture or group being examined. In this case I became a member of the Pilgrim culture the moment I began walking and sharing the experience with the many other pilgrims I met along the way. Auto-ethnography makes no claim to objectivity but is instead able to present a portrait which is at once rich and personal but also something anyone can relate to who has had similar experiences. It does not attempt to remove aspects of the self from the study but embraces them and uses them to turn the study into a story that can be told and understood by anyone Muncey (2010).
Data recording

Photography

The primary use of photography was to record details of the landscapes and environments I passed through. Since I did not have the opportunity to revisit any of the locations of my research in Spain, photographs and video recordings have also served as aids to memory and recall. I followed no specific process to ensure photographs were regular in their coverage. Rather, as with my other methods I allowed the continuing experiences to dictate what was recorded. Nevertheless, I did make a point of not simply taking ‘pretty pictures’ but photographed those landscapes which I felt were influencing my experience regardless of how positively or negatively. The camera I used was a Canon PowerShot Digital Elph, the camera was well suited to the task at hand because it was small, lightweight and easy to keep close at hand allowing me to photograph at a moment’s notice.

Voice Recordings

To record sound I used a Sony ICD-UX200 Stereo Digital Voice Recorder carried close at hand so that I could record details of my surroundings and experiences when it was impractical to stop and record notes by hand. These voice recordings were later added to and checked against my daily journal entries to ensure my notes were comprehensive.

I am limited by the quality of some of the recordings that were negatively impacted by ambient noise such as wind or traffic at times. Some recordings are unintelligible over the static noise. Additionally, the battery of the recorder did not last very long before needing to be charged which could only be done at a computer. As there were not computers available every day it was not always possible to use the voice recorder.

Map Annotation

I used a book of published maps by Brierley (2011) as a travel aid to help me keep a steady pace while walking the Camino as well as stay on the track. As I moved through each of the maps I added my own notes and annotations directly onto the maps recording details such as: major vegetation, prominence of roads or cities, memorable views and place specific
experiences. Upon returning from Spain I traced and refined the annotated maps to show important aspects of my daily experience graphically as a means of further illustrating the relationship between pilgrimage experience and landscape. Map annotation offered a way of representing my experiences in a combination of narrative and graphic styles that proved to be both informative and highly accessible.

One limitation of this method I have found is that the maps I used from Brierley (2008) are not to scale. This scale becomes an issue when trying to combine two maps, as I must do when my actual days walk was not the same as the day depicted on a map. In this case I combined the maps to the best of my ability. This limitation does present an interesting opportunity as well though. Because no physical scale is given, distances are somewhat open to interpretation which allows me to define spaces based on my experience. For example, a distance which felt very long can be represented as potentially greater than its actual approximate physical distance. I say approximate distance because even the noted kilometre distances between two points on any map was not always accurate, did not match road signs or did not agree with other guide books.

Journal Writing

The primary method which I used to record my experience on a daily basis was journal writing. I used a Moleskin notebook and pencils to write with. I used the journal to record all aspects of my personal experience each day from the physical ease or difficulty to the emotional or spiritual. Each day I devoted time after the day's walk, or during when possible, to reflect on the walk, the landscapes, the emotional highs or lows, or any events and experiences that surfaced as I progressed across Spain. Every effort was made to record as much detail as possible to present a comprehensive view of each day. Photographs, voice recordings and map annotations also serve as support to this data set, filling in missing detail where necessary. References to people within my journal will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used as necessary to protect identity.

In my journals I was most limited by time. The majority of days I began walking at between 6:30am and 6:45am, in the dark and would commonly walk between 9 and 12km before taking a short break. After the break I would walk the remainder of the distance, another 10-15km and arrive at my day’s destination between 1 and 3pm. Once stopped for the day it was
necessary to: find a hostel, wash laundry by hand and hang it to dry, shower, shop for food, cook or find a restaurant, and get to bed by the hostel’s curfew which was usually between 9:00 and 10:00 pm. Finding adequate time to write was not always easy, especially while also trying to explore the pilgrimage towns and socialize with other pilgrims so as to not neglect these considerable portions of the common experience. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) suggest that at least half as much time to three times the amount of time spent observing in the field should be spent recording field notes. Because I was walking most days between 6 and 8 hours, it was a rare opportunity that I would ever have as much time available to fulfill this suggestion. Most of my recording was done in 1 to 2 hour sessions.

Charting my Overall Wellbeing

Upon arriving at the pilgrim office in St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, France I was given a document which divided the distance to Santiago into 34 stages between 20-30 km long and showed an elevation profile for each section (Les Amis Du Chemin De Saint-Jaques De Compostelle Pyrenees Atlantiques (2009). I decided to use these profiles to graphically record my wellbeing through the course of each day. “Wellbeing” here means a synthesis of my environmental, physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual experiences throughout each day. This representation is not intended to stand alone, but to support the experiences that are recorded in more detail in my journal entries.

I established a consistent vertical scale on each profile by drawing a line of equal length on the y axis. I next drew a horizontal line bisecting the vertical scale to represent my “average wellbeing” which I could gauge daily experiences against. At the end of each day in conjunction with writing my journal entry I would draw a continuous line representing my wellbeing in reference to my subjective impression of “average”. Good experiences are shown as higher than average on the graph, and poor experiences are shown as below the average line.

For each day I walked in addition to keeping a journal I charted my overall wellbeing as I felt it changed through the day. This chart, rather than a specific reference to my social, physical, emotional or spiritual experience is a holistic reflection on how those individual themes came together. Because of where I recorded the information, on a graph of the elevation profiles for each day’s walk, my wellbeing appears to be correlated to the topography. However, it was for
convenience sake that I recorded it in this way, not because the topography was the only influence, though it was one.

There are limitations with this method of recording experience. One limitation is the difficulty in establishing “average”. It goes without saying that “average” in this case is highly subjective. My experience of “average” also likely changed through time as I became accustomed to different types of experiences on the Camino. Another limitation is that the line shows the total day's experience as either better or worse than average, but not how or why. For this reason it cannot stand alone but is useful for graphically visualizing the experiences described in my journal entries. An additional potential limitation is that the graphs do appear to suggest that the experience recorded is in direct reference to the topography, when in actuality the elevation profiles just provided a convenient place to record personal experience.

Data Analysis

Open Coding

The first layer of analysis began with typing all my journal entries, voice recordings and compiling photographs into days. The process of sorting and typing gave me the opportunity to read through all my data a couple of times. Once I had it all typed I printed off a copy for each day and read through it once again to identify general themes in my writing. The four general themes which I identified were: social, physical, emotional and mental, and spiritual. Using different coloured highlighters I went through all my data once again and highlighted text which fell into one of these categories. At the end of each day I tallied the number of times I referenced each theme that day and entered these numbers into a spreadsheet.

‘Social’ items included references to: other pilgrims, walking partners, acquaintances, conversations etc...

‘Physical’ items included: body, energy levels, food/ eating, sensation, breathing, actions (ie. Climbing, laying down… etc.)

‘Emotional and mental’ items included: feelings (ie. Happy, sad, nervous, uncertain..etc), thoughts, opinions etc…
‘Spiritual’ items were harder to define and very context dependent but included reference to feelings or senses like: magical, familiar, uplifting, gratitude (not directed at a person), awe, inspiration etc…

**Graphing**

Using the numbers entered into the spreadsheet I created a series of bar graphs which visually depicted the occurrence of these four themes in my data over time. The graphs helped me to visualize patterns and trends, or lack thereof, and identify potential connections between themes. A synthesis of this graphic data is available in figure 1.

**Narrative**

The next step in analyzing my experiences was to synthesize everything I had observed and recorded into a narrative of my own experiences. This narrative was broken into three pieces, one for each of the stages of the Camino. Once my narrative was complete and accurate a representation of my own experiences I was able to proceed with a focused literature review and discussion of the meaningful and prominent themes that arose. Holding off on the literature review until my own narrative was complete was one of the ways in which I avoided biasing my experiences based on other experiences or pilgrimage accounts.

**Key Terms**

Before getting into the depth of the pilgrimage experience it will be helpful to define some of the terminology which I will be using frequently and relying upon.

**Autoethnography** is a method of social enquiry which relies upon the observations of an insider within the culture being observed. In the case of this thesis I became a pilgrim by walking the Camino in a spirit of discovery and open-mindedness. My detailed observations of the experiences I had along the way as a part of the pilgrimage community became the material with which to create my autoethnographic account.
When I refer to pilgrimage experience I am foremost referring to my own understanding of the totality of experiences which I had along the length of the pilgrimage route. I do not mean to refer specifically to the experience of other pilgrims besides myself, but I do aim to describe my own experience in such a way which is rich and evocative enough to relate value to readers who may not have has similar experiences.

Aesthetic Experience refers to a subjectively important and valued experience brought about by direct interaction or observation of an environment (Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990).
CHAPTER TWO

The language of landscape is our native language.
- Anne Whiston Spirn, The Language of Landscape

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The focused literature review carried out here is brief by design and intended to orient readers to the ideas discussed later. The areas I have reviewed were partly determined by the results that emerged from my own research and the literature was reviewed after I had completed recording my own experiences and observations. The validity of my research hinges upon the accuracy with which I record and portray my experience and so I did not want the literature to influence my experience or what I recorded. In this chapter I have reviewed some of the prominent works that have dealt with: pilgrimage and pilgrims experiences, experiences within nature, the experience of ‘place’ and ‘non-place’, and as well the current conservation measures operating in the context of the Camino de Santiago.

I begin by discussing the anthropological literature on pilgrimage in general as well as some important studies which have been done specifically in regard to the Camino. Then, since my own work centres upon personal experience I bring in some scholars that have influenced the way pilgrimage experiences are thought of. To follow pilgrim experience I’ve covered nature based experiences because it has become my opinion that the experience itself is similar, only the context changes. Next, there is an overview of the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘non-place’, as I found the distinction between the two to be helpful for describing the Camino as I wanted it to be and the Camino as it seemed to be becoming. Finally, the the literature review concludes with some work on conservation in general and specific to the Camino.


Many an exploration of pilgrimage begins with the works of Victor and Edith Turner. The Turners (1978) seminal *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* was a response to the growing interest in pilgrimage as a field for anthropological study and as such it formed the base from which many other authors have begun their own work. Christian pilgrimage for the Turners was a willing action on the part of the pilgrim wherein they entered into a “liminoid” state; temporarily freed from their previous social status and responsibilities. By performing the ritual of pilgrimage, pilgrim’s motivations and intentions are “converted into a commonness of feeling, into ‘communitas’,” (Turner & Turner, 1978: 13). The concept of ‘communitas’, which is central to the Turner’s work, is a kind of group equalizer that the Turner’s believed to be potentially subversive and sought after by pilgrims as ‘anti-structure’ (Turner & Turner, 1978: 32).

In opposition, Eade and Sallnow refuted the Turner’s model on the grounds that, “the necessary alignment of pilgrimage and anti-structure not only prejudices the complex character of the phenomenon but also imposes a spurious homogeneity on the practise of pilgrimage in widely different historical and cultural settings” (Eade & Sallnow, 1991: 5). Instead they proposed treating the Turner’s views as one of a multitude of discourses concerning pilgrimage. They suggest that the study of Christian pilgrimage should shift to investigating the many and varied views of how pilgrimage sites emerge and are created, and move away from generalizations. This view certainly leaves more room in which pilgrims of various motivations and denominations might interpret and actively shape the meaning of their own pilgrimage in a way that suits them. As many pilgrims now publish their pilgrimage accounts they are continually re-examining the meanings of pilgrimage. “The power of a shrine…derives in large part from its character almost as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices.” (Eade & Sallnow, 1978: 15). If this is true of the shrine; arguably the most solidly defined space within a pilgrimage, then certainly the landscapes that contain the process of the pilgrimage are open to individual experience and interpretation.

In response to this debate recent studies in pilgrimage have accordingly focused on pilgrims individual stories, exploring them with more of a phenomenological approach. Nancy Frey (1998) conducted a detailed ethnography of pilgrims on the Camino Francés; of their varying experiences, motivations, goals, and the hallmarks of the journey as well as the culture.
that exists among pilgrims. For Frey the pilgrimage route to Santiago is distinguished from other European Christian pilgrimage centres by the emphasis placed on the journey itself. The journey gave her an opportunity to follow a group of pilgrims and reconnect with them at multiple points along the route with the result of being able to present a rich depiction of pilgrims own stories.

In a similar vein Mercedes Quesada-Embid also did ethnography on the Camino Francés by walking it herself and engaging with both the pilgrims, the local people and the landscape that connected them. She believes; “a landscape in wholesome condition is one that reflects a merging of the human and non-human components as an integrated entity… People have created, shaped, and moulded the Camino landscape; the landscape simultaneously and in return, has created, shaped, and moulded them,” (Quesdada-Embid, 2008: 8). Quesada-Embid suggests that there is a culture of “dwelling, walking, and serving” on the Camino which is essential to its preservation and existence as a traditionally peopled, cultural landscape. In a landscape like this that functions correctly, preservation occurs naturally as a result of the people who live in it and walk across it; she terms this “organic preservation”, (Quesada-Embid, 2008: 14). A shift toward less interaction between dwellers and walkers is resulting in decreased preservation, especially in places like the Meseta that are emptying as globalization continues concentrating population around urban centres.

A pilgrimage, as Neil Smelser (2009) depicts it, is one of several subtypes of the larger label “odyssey experience”, of which a pilgrimage is a quest type because it is by definition goal oriented. Smelser identifies social features of an ideal odyssey experience: Finite boundaries; existence outside of routine; a ‘passage’ or ‘transformation’; elements of ‘uncertainty’ or ‘danger’; and entrance into a ‘special’ state, (Smelser, 2009: 10-15). He also notes a further four common psychological features of the ideal: Being caught between ‘excitement’ and ‘uncertainty’; feelings of being ‘privileged to participate’; occasions of ‘intense solidarity’ or ‘bonding’; and an outcome of “personal betterment, growth, regeneration, or even rebirth,” (Smelser, 2009: 16-18).

Focusing in even further on the phenomenological experiences pilgrims on the Camino have, Sean Slavin (2003) explores the way in which the physical experience of walking promotes spiritual experience, “The walk becomes meditative as the body falls into a rhythm,” (Slavin, 2003: 9). Slavin also discusses the ways in which pilgrims construct their identities through the physical mode of pilgrimage; adopt solitude or avoid discussions of the past or future to maintain
present; and avoid or reject aspects of modernity that disrupt the meditative ideal. These conscious pilgrim practises that Slavin finds of; remaining present, and embodying the pilgrimage experience additionally aid in the production of strong place memories, thus reinforcing the perceived spiritual power of the Camino landscape. To perceive a spiritual power or sacredness in a specific place, what some might call a “religious experience” is what Mircea Eliade would call a ‘heirophany’ (Eliade, 1957). For Eliade, religious experience uncovers sacredness and meaning in places that then become defined by that experience. Not unlike what Slavin describes.

These pilgrimage studies have several common foci; “person, place, text, and movement [that] powerfully inform accounts of tourist voyages and destinations,” (Roseman, 2004). To these foci Roseman believes ‘culture’ should be added as one of the major influences. Having investigated literature pertaining to the pilgrimage including; both Church related and tourist information, as well as the cities recent bid to become one of the European Capitals of Culture, Roseman asserts that culture is a major determinant of pilgrim and tourist motivation and should be dealt with equally in future anthropological work. By comparing pilgrimage and tourism, rightfully so on an increasingly secularized route, Roseman (2004) is also arguing for a less homogeneous interpretation of pilgrim meaning and motivation.

**Experience of nature**

Shifting away from experiences specifically within the realm of pilgrimage we’re now going to enter the realm of experience of a more secular nature. Foremost among my favourite terms for describing the experiences I had while walking the Camino is Chenoweth and Gobster’s “aesthetic experience”.

“The aesthetic experience seems to isolate both us and that which we are experiencing aesthetically, from the flow of daily experience. We feel as though life had suddenly become arrested, for we are absorbed in the object of our attention and abandon any thought of its utility or function. We do not classify it, study it, judge it, nor consider it for any ulterior purpose it may serve. We are wholly in the present with not thought of the past or future. There is not purpose or motivation behind our experience other than just having the experience for its own sake.”

(Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990: 4)
This study asked university students to record and describe any aesthetic experiences they might have. The study investigated four aspects of “aesthetic experience”: “Its nature, its ecology, the object of the experience, and the subjective value of the experience.” (Chenoweth & Gobster, 1991: 2). Essentially; ‘nature’ is the subjective perception of the experience, how it felt; ‘ecology’ was an effort to understand the distribution of the environments in which aesthetic experiences occurred; ‘object’ refers to what about the environment caused the experience; and ‘value’ was measured both by how the perceiver valued the experience relative to other events and also how it affected them afterwards in terms of their mood. They found that aesthetic experiences recorded by their study group tended to have more differences than similarities but were frequently “memorable”, “very pleasant” and were more likely to happen spontaneously than as a result of being “sought out” and that rather than subscribing to a narrow definition, the label of ‘aesthetic experience’ might be applied to a range of experiences (Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990: 1-5). Chenoweth and Gobster were building upon what psychologists had described as ‘peak’ (Maslow, 1964) and ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) experiences and attempting to understand the expression of such experiences in the environment.

Abraham Maslow described ‘peak’ experiences as standing out in people’s lives, they are; “poignantly emotional, climactic, autonomic response to the miraculous, the awesome, the sacramalized, the Unitive” (Maslow, 1964: 4). Further, “it is quite characteristic in peak-experiences that the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole.” The ‘peak’ experience was Maslow’s (1964) way to describe in psychological terms what would otherwise be considered a religious experiences or “revelation” and in describing it anew argue for its scientific study. Since his initial arguments considerable work has been done to expand this field of study from within circles ranging from environmental to transcendental psychology.

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi more recently described a kind of ‘optimal experience’ that he calls ‘flow’. The use of the word ‘flow’ came from description of a state in which his research subjects felt as though everything was ‘flowing’ well. He describes a consciousness which is ordered and focused and “congruent with goals” as being in a ‘flow’ state, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The opposite state of mind would be distracted by unwanted thoughts or ideas, disordered and confused; this is described as ‘psychic entropy’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 36).
Place and non-place

Many other psychologists and professionals from related fields have described similar kinds of experiences but those above should suffice to orient us in the current thesis. Now we will turn our attention to the establishing the context for such experiences as I myself had, and many others as well; the environment. There is an extensive body of literature that deals with the human perception of the environment. More specific to this thesis, the human definition of space and place has also been treated to volume upon volume of theorizing, much of it and languages I do not read. I cannot possibly present even a fraction of these arguments but we will be concerned with the idea of place and non-place so those will need some definition. ‘Place’ for our purposes here will be used in reference to a physical location that has definition due to a history of human interaction with it. ‘Space’, then, is a more theoretical concept of undefined and undifferentiated environmental context. This is a fascinating subject; for more on the specific philosophies and theories concerning space and place, and also time consult Swaffield (2002).

My thesis has been particularly influenced by the concept of ‘non-places’; the absence of place. Augé (1995: 42) describes ‘place’ as defined by “inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points… but who also detect in it the traces of celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography”. ‘Non-place’ then is a space which can’t be understood as “relational, or historical, or concerned with identity,” because those markers have disappeared or been homogenized, (Augé, 1995: 77-78). Hough (1990: 85) equates a similar idea to recent history: “The apparent shift away from what is distinctive to what is similar in the contemporary world is the consequence of the complex social, economic, and technological changes that have occurred with increasing rapidity since the industrial revolution”.

‘Supermodernity’, responsible for the proliferation of massive highways, strip malls and globalized space is also responsible for the creation of non-places. Augé depicts supermodernity as being situated in excesses of time, space and ego: Time in the sense that there is now accessible by written history so many events as to be somewhat overwhelming; space, because the rapid pace of contemporary travel has made nearly all places equally accessible and thus equalized in many ways and; ego because of the increasing focus on individuals and individual
perspectives. The irony Augé alludes to is that in having access to so much history, so many places, and so many perspectives people become overwhelmed by their options and revert to simpler, homogenized, ways of being and become alienated from actual history, place and identity. According to Augé, non-places are often those associated with rapid travel; highways, airports, and bus stations because these spaces, designed to move people through quickly, present little opportunity to contemplate the space itself. The presence of most observers within non-places is fleeting. Hough (1990) also is very clear that modern road-centric developments are connected with a decreasing sense of connectivity between people and the landscape by isolating people in a “no-man’s land” of travel corridors.

Naturally a good many landscape architects have made it their business to better understand the way in which people interact with the natural environment, joining them in this pursuit are a host of other disciplines ranging from anthropologists to environmental psychologists to geographers. Prominent among these individuals in Yi-Fu Tuan who has written extensively of ‘place’ and environmental perception among people. Tuan coined the term ‘topophilia’ for “the affective bond between people and place,” (Tuan, 1974: 4). The landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn (1998: 160) describes ‘place’ also: “A place is particular, a tapestry of woven contexts: enduring and ephemeral”.

Conservation

Apart from the system of ‘organic preservation’ suggested to be in place by Quesada-Embid (2008), the Camino does enjoy protections as a consequence of its recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993. The Camino, is clearly not quite as simple to assess or protect as other more, delimited, sites on the World Heritage register. With 800 km of route designated on the Camino Francés alone, it is certainly by far the largest, longest really, property among the World Heritage Sites. The Camino is further complicated by crossing national boundaries, multiple provinces and five separate autonomous regions of Spain.

Martorell Carreño (2005) has reviewed the Camino among other cultural routes to identify the challenges to adequate preservation. Part of the challenge is immediately apparent in its designation as a heritage site and a cultural route. As a cultural route, the Camino is recognized by ICOMOS as a pilgrimage route historically and presently, but also as a route for; sport,
tourism, and leisure or personal experience, (Martorell Carreño, 2005) against the wishes of the Catholic Church. UNESCO is charged with ensuring preservation of both the tangible and intangible elements of the Camino, no small task when there is a conflict of interest as to just how far those elements extend, and at present the World Heritage system is not being evenly employed along the entire route. “The Route of Santiago includes [under UNESCO] an extension of 30 metres in not urban areas, as buffer zone [sic]. It is necessary to redefine the extension of this zone, taking into account heritage and environmental specific situation and landscaping values,” (Martorell Carreño, 2005). Currently only the province of La Rioja is considered to have an exemplary management plan. Martorell Carreño (2005) advises that there is a need to “protect the Route against all kinds of risks, especially the negative repercussion of tourism”. However those ‘negative repercussions’ will have to be identified and agreed upon.

In other route situations where there is a risk of overuse the concept of carrying capacity has been employed, often in park settings. “Carrying capacity is the level of use beyond which impacts exceed levels specified by evaluative standards,” (Shelby & Heberlein, 1986:18). Establishing those levels involves “value judgements regarding the type of experience to be offered and specific standards defining the important dimensions of that experience,” (Shelby & Heberlein, 1986: 7). It is not simply a matter of reducing the number of people on the trail, studies have not shown a relationship between crowding and user dissatisfaction. Helping to explain this are several ideas: Displacement theory suggests people who are bothered by crowding will decide to go elsewhere; there are also multiple sources of satisfaction, in the case of the Camino more people might actually be desired if community is a motivator; and Rationalizing might occur as people looking to have a good time actively try to make the best of the situation, (Shelby & Heberlein, 1986: 57-58).

The matter of what kind of experiences pilgrims are looking for while they walk the Camino has been given some treatment in the anthropological literature. But what has yet to be examined is just how the landscapes of the Camino currently support or detract from those desired experiences. It is my hope that this work will help to begin a dialogue around the experience of landscape on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route so that some of these management concerns might be resolved in the future.
Opinions have shifted on Christian pilgrimage from believed universal motives and experiences toward a more phenomenological approach which respects the individual and the subjectivity of experience. The initially presumed religious motivation of pilgrims is no longer taken for granted and pilgrims are now identified largely by their own experience and participation on multiple levels from the physical to the spiritual or metaphysical. As pilgrimage study shifts away from focus on the religiosity of motivation and toward the phenomenology of the experience it edges into the realm of nature based experiences. Within this field it’s been suggested that the term “aesthetic experience” could be used to describe a range of meaningful experiences, possibly even the religious. My own research fits into this overlapping area of pilgrimage and nature based experience studies and, like the more recent trends, is much more phenomenological in nature.

Within the more theoretical sphere of environmental psychology and anthropology there has been much discussion of the ideas of ‘space’, ‘place’ and ‘non-place’: ‘space’ being a kind of theoretical void of meaning, ‘place’ being given meaning through the experience of it, and ‘non-place’ as having somehow lost that meaning or lost the markers of it to homogeneity. These ideas became central to my work as I moved through the landscape and through the analysis and saw that as the landscape was stripped of meaning by ‘non-place’ so too was my experience of it. Finally, in the literature there is a wealth of approaches to conservation of both natural and cultural landscapes, and the Camino, really has both. Here I tried to identify those approaches which are currently being employed on the Camino so that I might analyze their effectiveness in light of my experiences. What is clear from the literature is how much of a challenge the Camino presents for conservation with so much land and so many different values criss-crossing the landscape. Out of this research I hope a new set of studies can begin which will help to resolve some of the challenges which are preventing the Camino from being better preserved.
CHAPTER THREE

ONTO THE LANDSCAPES OF THE CAMINO

Introduction

In my readings and conversations with other pilgrims on the Camino I often heard people dividing the journey into three parts. Based upon a metaphor for pilgrimage being a journey of body, mind and spirit, the Camino is broken into sections that correspond to one of these traits. The beginning of the Camino is associated with the body, the middle with the mind and emotions and the end with the spirit (Quesada-Embidx, 2008.) If you look at the landscapes, the beginning, middle and end are also environmentally distinct. The first and last sections of the Camino consist of mountains, valleys, forests and fields divided by the middle section known as the Meseta a long, flat and relatively featureless plain. Like other authors of Camino narratives (Quesada-Embidx, 2008) I find this distinction between beginning, middle and end a useful and appropriate way of organizing my own research. This chapter will consist of three main sections: Stage 1: Body will take us from St. Jean Pied de Port, France all the way to Burgos, Spain. Stage 2: Mind begins in Burgos and crosses the Meseta to Astorga where we begin to climb again. In Stage 3: Spirit, we will move from Astorga into the province of Galicia to Santiago and then further on to Finisterre.

The beginning stage, from St. Jean Pied-de-Port to Burgos takes us through the Pyrenees and through hilly, sometimes mountainous, wine country. The landscape of this stage is rolling and the soil is often red. There are large forests especially in the more mountainous areas, and open fields for straw as well as vineyards and orchards. The pilgrim crosses into Spain on the first day into the region of Navarre, and then continues on through La Rioja and into Castille y Leon.

In the middle stage, pilgrims pass through Burgos and enter the Meseta, a vast, dry plateau. The Meseta makes up a huge area of Spain and in the North is a massive agricultural plain. As far back as the Roman occupation of Spain the Meseta was known as the bread basket of Rome and continues to be a vital agricultural landscape for Spain to this day. Once passing
into the *Meseta* the land levels out and dries up. Orchards, vineyards and forests largely disappear and endless fields of straw take their place.

The land begins to change again after passing through León and after leaving Astorga behind climbs back into mountains and out of the *Meseta*. Within a few days of leaving behind the *Meseta* the pilgrim road passes into the last province of Galicia and enters a more temperate climate, and mountains covered with eucalyptus groves, ancient chestnuts and oaks and frequent cover of clouds and rain. This final stage takes the pilgrim into Santiago and, if they choose, on to the coast at Finisterre.

Why does my story really matter? Looking back, re-reading my journals and trying to glean something from all the information I collected is like making the pilgrimage once again, mentally. All the physical difficulty I experienced in the beginning of the long walk has now become the mental work of translating my experience into a thesis. My mind is absorbed in discovering themes, finding patterns or contemplating the absence of them. I have tried to look at my notes, my voice recordings and the record of my overall wellbeing I kept in different ways to distil it all into its most basic expression. However, in distilling my data I turned experiences into

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1**: Graph shows relative number of times each theme was represented in daily journal entries over the course of 37 days. Numbers were established by highlighting passages as referring to one theme and then adding up the number of highlights.
numbers and graphs that, while interesting and illuminating in many ways, had lost their character. I can look at Figure 1 and see that there are certain days where themes were in-sync, which is to say that the number of times I mention them in my journal is similar and seemingly in alignment, but I can’t relate to ‘day 8’ as numbers. Nor can I imagine that those numbers are meaningful to anyone else. But Day 8 as the journey in between Los Arcos and Logrono brings me back to that landscape. To anyone else who has walked this same way these are places that hold memories. Distilling places into numbers evokes no feeling or personal meaning. Reducing a landscape to a number allows for a more objective perspective and exposes the patterns that are otherwise difficult to see. But, quantifying experiences also strips them of their individual narratives that give them meaning and thereby takes away a quality which gives it value. Without the values that are gained from experiencing places and landscapes personally, there is little motivation to preserve them. So instead I want to share my story, not my data. More than just write one more account of walking the Camino I want to share my story specifically in an academic context in hopes that it might reach a new audience. I am a firm believer in the value of subjective experience because it is that which moves people to action. It is my hope that after reading this thesis, my story, and people will be more informed of the significance of landscapes for supporting pilgrimage experiences. But more than that I hope people will be inspired by my story and my perspective to consider whether the landscapes of the Camino or of any spiritual, cultural or natural route might be more deserving of our attention and stewardship.

**How to Read This Chapter**

In this chapter I am going to tell you my own Camino stories and experiences drawing directly from the journal entries and voice recordings I kept while I walked. Within each of the three stages I’ll share some of the experiences I had while I walked that strongly influenced the way I came to see the Camino as a holistic experience.

For each of the three stages I will present a day-by-day account of my major experiences and observations both textually and in the form of an annotated map. The source material for my writing is drawn from the journal and field notes I kept while walking. The maps are largely derived from a guidebook I had with me when I walked which I annotated as I went through each day (Brierley, 2011). Up the side of each map will be an additional graph that shows both the
elevation profile of the day as well as a graph of my wellbeing on that day. My wellbeing graph was recorded at the end of each day as well and was an effort to draw together all my thoughts and feelings of the day into a single, holistic representation of my experience as either above average, average or below average. At the end of each stage I’ll write a narrative summation of that stage and highlight some of the major themes or outliers, important observations or turning points and the common or uncommon veins through the story. Within this summary I will also once again return to the landscape and re-emphasize the role it played during that stage.

The landscape architect R. Burton Litton (1918-2007) often used hand drawn maps as a means of representing meaningful aspects of a landscape both as a professor at University of California-Berkeley and as an employee of the United States Forest Service. A map like this can both tell a story and represent the context for that story. Since I was very interested in showing the landscape context in my research annotating maps seemed like an ideal method for representing my experiences. The maps that I produced can stand alone as graphic vignettes of my experience day to day or they can be taken together as time line of experiences stretching over 37 days. The textual daily accounts support the maps and are able to include more detail.

**STAGE 1: BODY**

**DAY 1: ST. JEAN PIED-DE-PORT, FRANCE - RONCESVALLES, SPAIN**

‘Intense’ is perhaps the best word to describe this beginning. A 27 km hike which feels like 32 when accounting for the 1,390m elevation gain across a primarily sun exposed and windy mountain side. There was a process which began when I actually start to walk the pilgrimage wherein I started to acclimatize to the unfamiliar environment but, also to the pilgrim community, the physical demands of walking, the emotional and mental impacts of knowing just how many kilometers lay between me and Santiago and also the potentially spiritual implications of what I had undertaken. In almost every way it was a day of ups and downs when everything felt like an extreme manifestation of itself as I struggled over the mountain and into my research.
Figure 2: Record of wellbeing day 1.

Wellbeing

- Erratic
- Mostly influenced by topography and associated physical and mental exhaustion

Environment

- Topography dominated my awareness of the days environment
- Mountainside was open pasture with rare patches of chestnut and beech trees
- Along very quiet road much of the day, asphalt underfoot except between cross and the peak where the trail was earth and gravel
- Sunny and a buffeting wind all day, trail nearly always exposed and open to the elements
- Beautiful, panoramic views of Pyrenees when I had the energy to look up. Mountains all around, thickly forested slopes and patches of green pasture, dotted with herds of white cows and sheep
- Few patches of trees were peaceful, light and open with sunlight streaming in

Themes

Social

- Saw few other solitary pilgrims and didn’t speak to many people
- Spoke to other pilgrims over dinner, but language was a barrier
• Social experience is more environmental than personal or internal

**Physical**

• Feelings swinging from strength and energy to defeat and exhaustion
• Extremely physically challenging
• Struggling to inhale
• Beginning to become sore and exhausted
• Stop and go throughout length of climb
• Injured my hip near the peak
• Trouble with finding enough protein as a vegetarian

**Emotional and Mental**

• A roller coaster ride ranging from excitement and elation to nervous, doubtful and afraid
• Dream of clinging to the body of a dragon that was trying to tear me to shreds as it flew off a cliff
• Treed areas memorable and gave a sense of peace, familiarity and welcoming
• Enjoyed sound of sheep and cow bells

**Spiritual**

• Mentioned once in journal
• Thankful for blackberries at the end of the day
DAY 1: ST. JEAN PIED-DE-PORT - RONCESVALLES
DAY 2: RONCESVALLES - LARASOAÑA

Day two could hardly compare to the real physical challenge of day one and yet it seemed almost as difficult if not more so. Much of the difficulty however, originated in the exertions of day one. As I gradually descended in steps from the elevation of Roncesvalles the landscapes around me were more wooded and broken now and again by small towns, fields and rivers. My attention, thoughts and feelings were internalized and very focused on my physical condition which was itself primarily painful. What had been up and down yesterday was now primarily down as doubt in myself began to creep in and infect my experience.

![Graph showing elevation and wellbeing over distance](image)

**Figure 3: Record of wellbeing day 2.**

**Wellbeing**

- General downward trend, wellbeing worsened through the day
- Worsened particularly with deteriorating physical condition
- Ended day pretty dreadfully overall

**Environment**

- Stars visible above low hanging fog
- Foggy, misty mountains in distance
- Wooded sections early in the day and a long wooded section later with pines, spruces and hardwoods, darker and dense
• Topography much less extreme than first day, landscape gently rolling in comparison to the steep Pyrenees
• Criss-crossing over the highway during the day
• Overcast through the day
• Weird fake, flagstone paving as trail in steep sections where there would be erosion problems, most of the day was on earthen trail
• Ugly factory between Zubiri and Larasoña, loud and smelly, earth chewed up and piled

Themes
Social
• Internal focus much of the day prevented me from reaching out to other pilgrims
• Few brief conversations were very distracting and made me feel happier

Physical
• Soreness in hip from injury, hard to lift leg
• Exhaustion and poor nutrition leading to nausea and tiredness particularly in the afternoon though I had felt alright starting out
• Frequently stopping to rest

Emotional and Mental
• Morning happy, enjoyed mist and scenery
• Mid-morning and onward I was doubting myself and worrying about how far I would make it
• Unhappy and on the verge of tears in waves
• Zubiri full when I went to try and stop there, having to continue to next town I was resolved and determine, then dejected and miserable

Spiritual
• No experiences of a spiritual nature
DAY 3: LARASOAÑA - PAMPLONA

The downward trend which began on day two continued for the first part of the day as I continued to be sensually overwhelmed by my pilgrimage beginnings. Asserting a modicum of self-control and forcing myself to rest, eat and drink water did remarkably improve my experience and sense of wellbeing. The rural landscapes I had spent the first two and a half days in gradually gave way to the even more overwhelming urban environment of Pamplona and my improvements began to wear away. Here was the first real juxtaposition of the Camino as rural, interconnected pilgrimage route versus pilgrimage route cutting though a context of urbanization and fragmentation.

![Graph showing elevation and wellbeing over distance](image)

**Figure 4: Record of wellbeing days 3 and 4.**

**Wellbeing**
- Wellbeing poor to begin with owing mostly to physical and emotional distress.
- Dramatic improvement mid-way through the day after eating.

**Environment**
- Juxtaposition of urban and non-urban or rural contexts as I moved from the quiet countryside into the edges of Pamplona
- Walk along river scenic, quiet, many familiar plants. River section also more enclosed by vegetation, trail felt more sheltered and like a tunnel
• First half of day on natural trail, earth and gravel until passing underneath highway outside of Pamplona, then it was all asphalt or cement paths inside the city
• Within the city the Camino was hectic and noisy with traffic and bustling crowds. Much calmer within the older centre of the city, less car traffic, but more tourists

Themes

Social
• Still largely internally focused
• Once within Pamplona it was easier to connect to other pilgrims because suddenly, surrounded by locals and tourists identifying as “pilgrim” put you in a specific group, a minority in the city and there was a desire to band together. There was definition as a group
• Pilgrim hostel within Pamplona was much larger, impossible not to interact with other pilgrims and by now, people were recognizing each other from the trail

Physical
• Compounding physical exhaustion from previous days made my body stiff and sore
• No energy
• Found a small cafe serving Tortilla de Patata, and it “saved” me
• Protein from Tortilla got rid of nausea and faintness and I was physically much improved
• Found relief from terrible pain in my hip with yoga stretches

Emotional and Mental
• Very unhappy in the morning largely because of hip
• Emerging feeling of loneliness
• Frustration with physical limitations
• City initially overwhelming but then made me feel more connected to the pilgrim group and less lonely
Spiritual

- Desire to find or make more time for contemplation and reflection, had none yet
- Taking more notice of churches as part of the spiritual environment, not one I felt connected to previously
DAY 4: PAMPLONA - CIZUR MENOR

CITY: Busy, noisy, high traffic, disorienting!
Shady, lined with plane trees.

DAY 3: LARRASOÑA - PAMPLONA

Pretty river, but not feeling well and not paying much attention to scenery.

NATURAL PATH CROSSING RIVER, EASY RACING TERRAIN.

DAY 4 ABOVE

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DAY 4: PAMPLONA - CIZUR MENOR

The day began in a state of confusion, indecision and unease which improved markedly as soon as I decided to get out of the city. It is not even that Pamplona was an unpleasant town, on the contrary I’m certain that as a tourist I would have loved to explore its winding streets and cultural gems. But as a pilgrim I believe I was caught between very conflicting suggestions: From the Camino I heard to live simply and press on, and from the city I felt pressured to idle and spend. The experience was disorienting to say the least! Everything improved once outside the bounds of the city and back within one of the smaller, quieter towns which make up most of the stopping points along the road to Santiago.

Wellbeing
- Began poorly again and worsened the longer I remained within the city, indecisive
- Improved dramatically with choice to leave city, and a change of scenery to Cizur Menor

Environment
- Pamplona and the city was noisy and hectic
- A few parks within city did provide small spaces of relative calm within the haste
- Walking along road to next small town, noisy from traffic, heat radiating off sidewalk and asphalt road, trees few and far between

Themes

Social
- Pressure to keep pace with group
- Met a couple of other younger pilgrims in Cizur Menor, funny people, nice to chat with

Physical
- Slept poorly in Pamplona, noisy crowds of pilgrims, had bad dreams
- Morning nausea still, food didn’t help
• Wanting to rest and recuperate
• Pain also compelling me to press on, “get it over with”
• Health food store made my day
• Cooked own dinner at hostel in Cizur Menor which was a nice change

*Emotional and Mental*
• Tension between staying and going
• Desire to hide in a hotel room but also desire to hurry to Santiago
• City is disorienting and confusing creating a juxtaposition between city and natural, rural trail
• Sense of city not being part of Camino, like it doesn’t count somehow
• Felt hugely relieved to leave city even to just decide to leave
• There is a sense of comfort and familiarity in recognizing the faces of fellow pilgrims
• Calmer and more settled in small town

*Spiritual*
• Contrast of how I personified Camino vs. City
• Roads and cities “don’t count”

**DAY 5: CIZUR MENOR - PUENTE LA REINA**

This day seems almost like a turning point when all points of my experience began to shift toward a more positive overall pilgrimage experience. Socially I began to come out of my internal shell, physically my body began to feel stronger and more able, emotionally and mentally I felt more optimistic and enthusiastic and with all of these changes came the first instance of a spiritual experience. The landscapes I walked through on day five supported me every step of the way offering just enough challenge to be dynamic but also enough comfort and familiarity to be relaxing and rejuvenating. It was a beautiful day for me personally, and also in regards to the landscapes that were quite scenically beautiful.
Figure 5: Record of wellbeing day 5

Wellbeing
- Started out better than average and steadily climbed through day owing to beautiful scenery, improved physical and emotional condition and a spiritual experience toward end of day which made all of my experiences synchronize

Environment
- Moonlit fields in morning
- Cool breeze, soft on my skin
- “Sublime” looking fields
- Scenery distracted me from body rather than vice versa
- Steep climb, but not daunting
- Windy mountain top, sun streaming into valleys and beginning to touch peaks
- Wind turbines emerged from fog, ethereal noise
- Sun reached me at the bottom of mountain as I descended
- Rolling fields, orchards and vineyards
- Beautiful, sunny and warm
- Landscape seemed supportive; even the plants around me were mostly edible or medicinal
- Junipers and hedge oaks along the trail in places
• Puente la Reina was a lovely old town
• Bed by courtyard window

**Themes**

**Social**
• Set out with young pair of pilgrims from yesterday but got ahead, chatted with a couple people on the road but mostly walked alone
• Interviewed by Jane Blanchard for her book in Puente la Reina

**Physical**
• Feeling much better
• Well-fed starting out, better rested

**Emotional and Mental**
• Happy to see familiar faces
• Not daunted or dispirited by climbs
• Enthusiastic, feeling strong and self-assured
• Calm and content
• Spiritual experience in church

**Spiritual**
• Overall sense of wellbeing
• First church visit and subsequent spiritual experience in the church
• Reminder to be present from church bells
DAY 5: CIZUR MENOR - PUENTE LA REINA
DAY 6: PUENTE LA REINA - ESTELLA

Following on the heels of my first really positive day (no pun intended), day six was more sobering. My feet presented themselves, quite forcefully, as anatomically more deserving of my care and attention. After five days of walking, the reality of the distance I still had to cover was beginning to hit me. Overall the day was more of a plateau than a downward slide; only toward the end did my sense of wellbeing dip below average. The landscape around the Camino was now changing from the alternating forests and fields of the descent from the Pyrenees and becoming the wine country this part of Spain is well known for.

Figure 6: Record of wellbeing day 6.

Wellbeing

- Plateau. Started out above average and remained level and above through the day only dipping toward end with growing tiredness
- More mundane, keeping on

Environment

- Between river and steep bank in the pre-dawn
- Sewage treatment plant which smelled pretty awful
- Just enough moonlight to see by
- Arid, pines and scrubby brush along steep embankment
- Criss-crossed road throughout the day
Trail mostly passed through vineyards
White cliffs on the horizon ahead
Soil changing to a deep red
Picturesque towns, Cirauqui in particular
Walked along a short section of old Roman road
Polluted river with chewed up banks passing beneath a medieval bridge
Trail earth and rocky, demanded attention so I didn’t trip.
Flies were annoying, first time I was bothered by insects

Themes
Social
- Walked alone all day
- Met briefly people on trail
- Saw Clair and Mark in Estella but only briefly on road

Physical
- Feet feeling very sore, blistered - worrying about infection
- Difficult to walk on uneven rocky trail
- Rest in church
- Soreness is okay, can handle
- Not eating much sugar

Emotional and Mental
- New worries about feet,
- Hard time writing
- Mood steady, almost plateauing
- Dip, flagging mood in heat and sore feet towards Estella
- Fear of blister infection
- More “mundane”, just “keeping on”
Spiritual

- Nothing in journal to suggest spiritual experience, although several references to landscape could have been perceived that way
DAY 7: ESTELLA - LOS ARCOS

After an entire week of walking usually 20-25 kms day in, and day out, this was officially the furthest I’d ever walked in a week. I felt more positive once again largely owing to the distraction of having a walking companion in the afternoon. This was the first time I’d walked with someone for any length of time and it changed the experience quite a bit, directing all my attention outward. Although this person was new to me, many people I was seeing on the trail during the day were starting to become quite familiar as pilgrims settled into a steady pace. Prior to coming to Spain I’d read about the community which forms among pilgrims and I was now witnessing this formation around me. Today was also the first time I experienced ‘synchronicity’ on the Camino.

![Graph of Elevation vs. Distance]

Figure 7: Record of wellbeing day 7.

Wellbeing
- Climbing again after a plateau yesterday
- Highly social day distracted from other, more challenging aspects of experience, and environment was beautiful

Environment
- Started in dark, climbing immediately out of Estella, though not for long
- More vineyards
- White cliffs I saw yesterday ahead were now off to the right the first time there
was a recognizable element in the landscape to orient me. Passed the *Fuente del vino*, a fountain (*fuente*) offering a choice of water (*agua*) or wine (*vino*)

- Bright sun
- Noticing a theme of skipping non-scenic areas among fellow pilgrims
- Easy, gentle path through straw fields, with mountains of hay stacked up
- Rainstorm in the evening
- Blackberries on the trailside once again

**Themes**

*Social*

- Very social day, had company all day
- Met more people in hostel, ate together
- Chatting in morning, meeting other solo walkers

*Physical*

- Feet feeling better
- Wearing sandals instead of shoes
- Set out early which was becoming habit
- Stopped for coffee and a snack
- Big lunch with company
- Cooked dinner

*Emotional and Mental*

- Tentative to start, worried over feet
- Very different, pleasant to walk with company
- Feeling good
- Mood climbed through the day
- Sense of synchronicity in familiar (occult) topics arising making me feel “delighted”
- Surprised by English speaking volunteers at the hostel
- Harder to write and observe environment with company but not as lonely
- Feeling hopeful

_Spiritual_
- Synchronicity as spiritually meaningful
- Esoteric topics coming up for first time
DAY 8: LOS ARCOS - LOGROÑO

On this day I approached the city with the knowledge of how Pamplona had affected me and made me feel so disoriented and unhappy and curious about whether I would have a similar experience of Logroño. Between Sansol and Viana the trail wound back and forth through vineyards and olive orchards. It climbed up short, steep hills only to descend into river valleys and agricultural fields were terraced to accommodate the topography. It was quite beautiful and peaceful despite winding around and crossing the highway several times. From Viana the industrial outskirts of Logroño became visible and dominant on the horizon and what I had been experiencing as a really positive day started to become less so. Just prior to entering the city I passed out of Navarre and into the region of La Rioja where immediately the trail management changed. Just outside Logroño and inside La Rioja the Camino widened to a size which could easily allow two lanes of traffic, was paved over with a brick red asphalt material and given curbs as it headed into a web of roads, overpasses and industrial buildings. Though I had found Pamplona disorienting, this I found dispiriting as though it was a soulless and placeless trail, not the Camino. It was at this point which I began to distinguish between areas of the Camino which were in keeping with a character of ‘Place’ and those areas which seemed to be ‘Non-places’ (Augé, 1995), out of context and out of character.

Figure 8: Record of wellbeing day 8
Wellbeing

- Started out above average and climbed through the early morning remaining steady for the rest of the day dropping only when approaching and entering the city

Environment

- Flat, straight, drizzly, dark, vineyards made me feel “jumpy”
- Lightening as path began to bend toward Sansol
- Mountain off to left covered in cloud and mist, looked like cloud was “clawing at mountain”
- Short section of road into Sansol
- Hilly, winding trail, criss-crossing road, terraced fields beautiful (despite road and exertion)
- Small stone huts along trail. Not sure if they were for pilgrims, farmers, shepherds or... who?
- Viana a nice town
- Clouded over in the afternoon with the threat of rain
- Ugly, industrial outskirts of Logroño visible beyond Viana
- Bird reserve nice from within but views beyond were all of industrial areas, saplings had been planted to block views
- Trail into city wound through highways and several overpasses, neglected “non-place” feeling
- Wide asphalt trail, unnatural in landscape
- City smell and noise of traffic and firecrackers.
- Willows and lavender along river.
- Drunk people and sticky streets (cultural event)

Themes

Social

- Kept to self today mostly, left Anita and Jessica in Los Arcos
- Met Irish woman, older in Viana
• Talked to American walkers briefly about “AT”
• Ate dinner alone in hostel

**Physical**

• Sweet smell of plants in damp from rain
• Feet sore, but doing okay
• Lots of exercise in the hilly section
• Coffee and tortilla in Viana
• Energized and “lively” leaving Viana
• View and smell of city smoggy and industrial
• No eggs
• Easier to overcome physical difficulty when feeling better about my ability (not doubting self)

**Emotional and Mental**

• Jumpy” in the darkness
• Satisfied and happy feeling through winding hills
• Though of approaching city made me feel “hurried”
• “Ignored” looking landscapes - non-places
• Preferred quiet of hostel to noisy drunk city
• Identified personal “devil as doubt”, affecting my mood enormously
• dream

**Spiritual**

• Personal demon, devil, self-doubt
• Had a dream of a sinking ship and a ‘starman’ visiting me to warn of my impending death
• Sense of mystery and femininity while watching mist pouring over mountain in early morning
The beginning of the day was a bit messy and the streets were literally sticky with spilt wine and urine. Getting away from the city included a long, somewhat ironic, walk past rows of car dealerships which seemed a strange place to locate a pedestrian pilgrimage route, and retail developments. Once away from the city though the scenery improved. It was beautiful within the large park and then, after passing through Navarette, the landscape was rural straw fields and occasional orchards once again. The latter part of this day became quite social as I met up with and walked to Nájera with another woman and then inside Nájera met up with my friends from a couple days ago as well as a whole new group. The party atmosphere of La Rioja’s wine festival continued here as well and the hostel we stayed in was freely dolling out drinks to all the pilgrims and making giant paella’s for everyone (unfortunately the were made with meat and I couldn’t eat them).

Figure 9: Record of wellbeing day 9.

Wellbeing

- My wellbeing started out a little below average, challenged by the city from both the smell of the street party’s aftermath, and also the prolonged walk through placeless roads, retail development and industry to get out
- Once out of the city my wellbeing immediately began to improve and climbed through the day to reach a finish well above average
Environment

- Morning hours were getting out of and away from Logroño through crowds of still drinking festival goers and past car dealerships and commercial strips with no character
- Passed through a large park on the outskirts of the city that was much more scenic than sprawl, though it felt artificial to suddenly walk through a field of turf
- Chain-link fence with makeshift crosses until Navarette, actions of pilgrims were beautifying an ugly fence separating the Camino from the highway
- Outside Navarette moved back into more of the countryside with vineyards and orchards again primarily the rest of the way into Nájera
- Outskirts of and most of the interior of Nájera was pretty uninspired new development with no sense of context or place, but the older city sections, across the river were nicer set up against a sandstone cliff and fit into the surroundings better

Themes

Social

- Began the day solitary and walked alone much of the day meeting and having only brief conversations with other pilgrims
- Outside of Navarette, met up with an Irish woman who I walked with into Nájera, she continued further on
- Met up with a whole group of people in Nájera who I spent much of the evening with, very social day by comparison to past

Physical

- Cool weather all day, light rain for last half hour of walk then clearing up again
- Gradual elevation gain through the day, not very tiring
- From a booth inside the Grajera Park, I received a poplar walking stick from “Marcelino Peregrino Pasante”, a pilgrim supporter
- Walking companion in afternoon walked very quickly and I had to work to keep up, my hip was stiff and sore by end of the day
Emotional and Mental

- Happy to get away from city and the noise and bustle
- Growing attached to new walking stick, considering naming it
- Didn’t get to writing until next day because of socializing and felt guilty, but I felt that I was missing an important aspect of the experience by keeping to myself

Spiritual

- Impressed by makeshift crosses on the chain-link fence along the road
- Discussion of Celtic, pre-Christian tradition on the Camino landscape with Irish woman prompted by seeing the triple spiral (triskele) sign painted by an arrow. A sign of enlightenment and symbol associated with the pre-Christian Celtic inhabitants of Northern Spain
I began the day before dark actually giddy from finding myself all of a sudden surrounded by friends. One woman referred to me as the “poster girl of the Camino” on account of my giggling at 6:30 in the morning with a full day of walking still ahead. At this point I was undaunted by the physical challenges ahead. My feet hurt, my hips were stiff and the beds were rarely comfortable in large rooms filled with loud snoring people… but I was happy. In regards to the pain I experienced still, I was beginning to move past it freeing my attention to experience a greater richness. Accepting the pain allowed my awareness to grow, this was an expansive and spiritual feeling for me. The quiet and scenic settings I walked through much of the day supported my mood.

Figure 10: Record of wellbeing day 10.

Wellbeing

- Day began almost giddy having made so many new friends last night and wellbeing climbed to a peak around mid-day coinciding with a more spiritual experience
- Afternoon was slightly more challenging, wellbeing gradually decreased but still ended day well above average
**Environment**

- Climb away from sandstone cliff in the morning through trees but very dark. Sky was starry in the morning
- Cool weather most of day
- Rolling straw fields through day in autumn bronze colours, with occasional emerald green vineyard patches, very beautiful and picturesque
- Unsurprising to find a golf course situated among the fields here
- Cirueña somewhat surreal, new housing development for golf course, empty and out of place in farm fields
- Sketched the fields they were so lovely

**Themes**

**Social**

- Socializing in early morning as everyone got ready for the walk made me sort of giddy
- Walked alone today but met up with my group in Santo Domingo de Calzada
- Thinking about family a lot today and that it would be nice to walk with family
- A bit of a party atmosphere in Santo Domingo de Calzada, still the *Fiesta de San Mateo*, the wine festival of La Rioja

**Physical**

- Slept well having gotten used to wearing earplugs
- Ordered an Americano for first time instead of the more common single espresso “Café solo”, very energetic leaving Azofra
- Body is adjusting to the pains and challenges of walking. Feet still hurt, hip stiff but feeling good anyway, despite the pains
- New pain in right hip slowed me down in afternoon

**Emotional and Mental**

- *Giddy* in morning with new friends, and mood remained high through the day
• Expansive feeling of awareness turning to other aspects of experience beyond the physical
• Greatly enjoyed the silence of the walk today, away from any traffic noises
• Sentimental feelings thinking of family

**Spiritual**

• Feelings of gratitude again
• Expansiveness from accepting physical pain and not dwelling on it
• Mid-afternoon while sitting and sketching the sun had the experience of warm sun on my back and a cool breeze on my face on the very scenic fields that felt like being *embraced by the weather*
• Noted that quiet and peaceful sections are more *conducive* to accepting and enjoying the pace of walking
DAY 10: NÁJERA - SANTO DOMINGO DE CALZADA
DAY 11: SANTO DOMINGO DE CALZADA - BELORADO

Rereading my journal to place myself in this day I find now, as then, my experience of the day is greatly coloured by the proximity to roads much of the day. In my journal I suggested the Camino was *flirting* with moving away from the highway to pass through some of the towns along the way only to return to the side of the highway again. The noise of traffic was so loud that passing trucks obscured conversation and even my own voice when speaking into my recorder. There was admittedly some scenery as beautiful as days I saw as nicer, but it was so much more difficult to experience that quality over the more forcefully present highway. I stopped for some time in the town of Grañon enjoying coffee and the conversation of passing and pausing pilgrims, not to mention the distance from the highway. The final kilometres stretched on and on with no sight of Belorado until nearly upon it. Fortunately the quiet evening in Belorado, now outside La Rioja and its ongoing festival, was quite restorative.

![Figure 11: Record of wellbeing day 11.](image)

**Wellbeing**

- A slightly confusing and industrialized start kept my wellbeing low until moving away from the road into the countryside again
- Climbed up to a highpoint and then began to decrease again along a long stretch of road finally ending at a little below average
Environment

- Early morning was slightly industrialized and along busy roads, nearly left trail accidentally a couple of times
- Camino stayed mostly near to the highway throughout the day except to pass through a few small towns which were otherwise out of the way
- Landscape was a familiar mixture of rolling straw fields, the number of vineyards beginning to drop off dramatically leaving the La Rioja region
- Long stretch along road leading into Belorado was loud from traffic, un-shaded, hot and dry and unsightly

Themes

Social

- Walked alone
- Met up with group again in Belorado and we all cooked together

Physical

- Easy terrain today, only a very slight climb over the course of the day
- Un-shaded and long walk along road was exhausting though and unbroken by anywhere to stop and rest

Emotional and Mental

- Some confusion by Camino direction in the early morning
- Saddened that adjustments to Camino seem to consider only convenience and not experience
- Memory of day coloured by ire I felt toward the highway and its noise and haste
- Community at end of the day restored my happiness and spirit

Spiritual

- No mention of spiritual experiences today
DAY 12: BELORADO - SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA

Unlike yesterday the highway was not a presence for the entire day. Though the trail wound around it a bit in the morning, it was rarely right alongside. The sunrise outside Tosantos was quite spectacular and I walked with a new acquaintance today who later described the sunrise as a ‘religious experience’! The two of us walked quite quickly together covering 11km in just over 2 hours through dry fields. Leaving Villafranca Montes de Oca we climbed steeply into a wooded area which, though tiring, was rewarded with beautiful views and no roads. The remainder of the walk was mostly wooded with a few climbs and descents eventually emerging into the tiny town of San Juan de Ortega. The timing was serendipitous as we arrived in this town, unplanned, on the day of the fall equinox the same day as a special sunlight display in the medieval church.

Figure 12: Record of wellbeing day 12.

Wellbeing

- Beginning above average again and climbing toward a peak coinciding with a beautiful sunrise
- After sunrise wellbeing flagged as the Camino wound around the highway and reached a low when I had to walk right on the busy highway
- Climbed again the Camino left the road behind and climbed into wooded hills
Environment

- Early on the trail stayed near the road but was only a couple of times directly alongside it
- First half of walk was gradually climbing up through fields and small towns toward small mountains
- Mountain that made up second half of walk and were almost completely tree covered with a mixture of oak forest and pine plantation
- Final 6km leading into St. Juan de Ortega were through pine plantation but on a very wide, red sandy trail that looked like a logging road
- Town of St. Juan de Ortega a tiny and quiet place surrounded by forest and mostly consisting of a Medieval monastery
- In the church at St. Juan de Ortega we witnessed the miracle of light during the equinox

Themes

Social

- Started out alone but met and walked with a Swedish girl close to my age for most of the day, we had a lot in common and conversation was easy
- Met up with rest of the group in St. Juan de Ortega and had another largely social afternoon and evening

Physical

- More of a physical challenge today with the steep climbs in the afternoon, but though tiring I was not daunted by them
- Walked very quickly with company today and did not observe the scenery as much as a result
- Accomplished and bodily satisfied feeling at end of the day

Emotional and Mental

- A little nerve-wracking along the highway, roads seem to have the most single impact on my experience day to day
• Enjoyment of the quieter, road free walk, heard other’s refer to last stretch as “boring”, which surprised me I found it a relief to be away from traffic
• Felt blessed to be in St. Juan de Ortega for the equinox and the illumination of the relief carving
• Enjoyed the exercise that came with walking quicker to keep pace with my friend

_Spiritual_

• My walking companion described the sunrise as a “religious experience”
• _Miracle of light_ in St. Juan de Ortega, did not find the illumination itself especially moving, but that I happened to be there on the right day I found powerful and an experience of synchronicity
DAY 12: BELORADO - SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA
DAY 13: SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA - BURGOS

This final day of the first stage ends at the edge of the *Meseta* in the large city of Burgos. I walked from one of the most peaceful mornings in a dark misty forest around San Juan de Ortega, to one of the most hectic afternoons making the long march into Burgos. The juxtaposition of rural - urban, old - new, quiet - loud, place - non-place is becoming more apparent to me each passing day and the Camino seems to be both the line which separates them even as it is the line which connects them. What I mean is that walking the Camino was an experience for me rooted in history, in a historically quiet and rural countryside steeped in the character of its places. And yet even while walking this trail and getting glimpses of that past, the present trend toward loud, urban and characterless places is evident at the edge of every large city and along the busy highways. On the Camino I feel sometimes caught between the two as though it is a border and yet, because it remains a continuous trail, the Camino connects these various landscapes and locations together. The experience however, is not continuous and the Camino seems under threat of being lost in parts as modern developments fracture the sense of continuity on the trail.

![Graph of elevation change](image)

**Figure 13: Record of wellbeing day 13.**

**Wellbeing**
- Climbed in steps up to a highpoint as I began descending into the *Meseta* toward Burgos
Descent and crossing into Burgos was a long *slog* that gradually sapped my wellbeing to a low point at the end of the day

**Environment**

- Leaving St. Juan de Ortega the landscape was dark, misty, quiet, woods that led into cow pasture and oak savannah before heading down into the valley
- Crossing the valley through Atapuerca there was still a low cloud hanging over straw fields and occasional small woodlots in the fields
- Passed by one poplar grove rustling in the wind very early, the back of the grove was obscured by mist
- Climbed up an oak covered and rocky slope to the cross and a rock strewn field with first view into and over the *Meseta*
- Descending from this hill down into the *Meseta* there were beautiful views to the south over meadows with sunflowers and to the north a large, smelly and loud mining complex
- Sunny fields and sunflowers, quite nice and quiet even along the road a ways into Orbaneja
- Once crossing the A-1 highway the rest of the walk into Burgos was along highways and roads past industrial areas, commercial strips and housing developments for hours
- Major juxtaposition of countryside and cityscape today

**Themes**

*Social*

- Started out alone and saw no one until around Atapuerca where I met a few people briefly
- Met up with a friend again in Orbaneja and we continued into the city together
- Very social evening in Burgos as almost everyone I had met up to then came together in the same place
Physical

- Easy going in the morning within the mist
- A little bit strenuous climbing up the onto the rocky mesa outside Atapuerca, but earth trail nice to walk on after road through the valley
- After crossing the A-1 the walk was all on hard surfaces and it became really tiring under foot especially

Emotional and Mental

- Really enjoyed the peaceful morning to myself, musing on how safe I always felt on the Camino, even when alone in the dark woods
- Exciting moment, as well as a little sobering when looking out over the Meseta and seeing at once so much land I would be covering in the days to come
- Felt sandwiched between beautiful countryside to the south and the mining complex to the north, caught between two worlds almost
- Emotionally exhausting walking into Burgos, such an unpleasant stretch it made me feel a little disgusted with modern life.
- Once again the community aspect made it better, to share the experience

Spiritual

- Mystical feeling when passing by the misty poplars in the early morning
DAY 13: SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA - BURGOS

FROM ORBANEDA ON INTO BURGOS: ANGEL, CHARACTERLESS, HARD ROAD, UGLY, SUBURBS, STRIP MALLS, ROADS, FACTORIES... "PLACELESS" 10 KM.

LOUD, UGLY: SMELLY MINE COMPLEX

MOUNTAIN TOP STREWN WITH DEATH, PEOPLE USING THEM TO WRITE NAMES, BUILD SHRIBLS

DUNE OF OLMO BALBOA

EARLY MORN HARD, MISTY

ALONG IN DIRT, QUITE, FOREST, LIGHT PRECIPITATION, VERY NICE

ST. JUAN DE ORTEGA
STAGE 1: BODY: ST. JEAN PIED-DE-PORT - BURGOS

Beginnings are always interesting; I can never really know what I’ve gotten myself into until I begin. Sensations and feelings are all the more intense for their newness and unexpectedness. This quality is exciting but it can also be really hard. For me the first stage held all the moments of my greatest struggles on the Camino, as well as my most intensely beautiful moments. The highest highs and the lowest lows were within the space of these first 13 days as I was acclimatizing to the Camino. In this section I’m going to try to draw the threads of each of these days together into a coherent story and pull out the big picture as well as the important details. Behind every experience I had was always the environment, whether it was a quiet country trail or a highway shoulder. At the end of each section I’ll return once again to the environment which was the context for my experiences as well as frequently a major influence on them.

Wellbeing

The first walk, climbing up and over the mountain is so physically extreme in comparison to any other single day that it nearly stands apart on that point alone. It is also a day that is almost entirely about acclimatization. Everything is new and the intensity of the experiences on that day became the standard against which other days were measured, whether intentionally or not. My wellbeing that day was erratic and it began a pattern which tied all those first 13 days together. My wellbeing changes more from high to low, above average to below it, during Stage 1: Body than it does in either of the following stages. As I was adjusting to life on the Camino my experiences all felt more intense and more variable and I recorded them as such.

Topography and terrain is also much more variable during the first stage than the following stage and it might appear that there is a strong relationship there. Indeed, we will see in the next stage my wellbeing will seem to level out as the landscape does. However, once returning to the mountains in the final stage, my wellbeing record does not return to an erratic pattern or one which seems to track with terrain change, it remains relatively level. So, while topography may be playing a large role during the first stage, when my body is physically adjusting to the level of activity, it isn’t the only factor or necessarily the most important.
Environment

I began in the Pyrenees Mountains and forested hillsides of Navarre. Climbing to one of the highest points on the Camino within the first day and then starting a long descent. The landscape continues to be rolling with occasional peaks until just before reaching Burgos. A network of rivers cut through this landscape and, occasionally, framed the edge of the Camino. In between hills and mountain ranges are wide fertile valleys where farms are cultivating grains and straw. The open fields are broken up with vineyards and orchards of olive trees, almonds and figs. The forests that remain in patches are not wild, often appearing to be grazed with little under story vegetation. The patches are mostly made up of oaks, beeches and pockets of evergreens. The trees provided shade and a green backdrop to the landscape even after the fields were harvested and undergoing draught, as they were when I walked. The forests had the ability to frame views, and add visual interest by hiding and revealing the larger picture as I moved through them. Topography as well served a similar role, to shorten or lengthen the visual field whether I was climbing up toward, or looking off a peak. When the fields did open up the view was most often of wide, rolling valleys framed by higher hills and mountains to the north. Valleys were a mosaic of bronze toned straw fields, red soil, bright green vineyards and drab olive orchards. Wind turbines often lined the ridges like a surreal avenue of white tree trunks, branches slowly turning in the wind.

The Camino itself winds through these elements, heading southwest from St. Jean Pied-de-Port and gradually curving to eventually point primarily west. The changes in direction the trail took meant that the view, whether wide or narrow, was constantly changing as new landscapes presented themselves. When the trail straightened for any length of time it often signaled nearness, if not adjacency, to a road or highway. Brierley (2011) has estimated that close to 83km (32%) of the 260km to Burgos are on or adjacent to roads. This proximity often translates to a hard surface underfoot and the sounds and smells of traffic and exhaust as company. I eventually came to see roads, particularly highways, as the enemies of a positive experience. The noise and haste that they constantly represented were in such contrast to the quiet and slow pace of walking that to me they hindered my sinking into the experience and made me feel hurried and anxious.
The rural landscapes were, to me, picturesque. They were calm and quiet and conducive to contemplation. Although, as my wellbeing and my physical, emotional and spiritual soundness fluctuated I didn’t always appreciate them for what they offered. The first few days walking were so physically and emotionally challenging that I often found it difficult to pay detailed attention to the environment. When I was at my worst moments I tended to take fewer pictures, keep my nose to the grindstone and my eyes on the trail immediately underneath me. In remembering and reflecting on the environment of those first few days I had to draw from all my resources; maps, journals, voice recordings, wellbeing and photographs to piece it together. There are moments and views that stand out to me, both scenic and not. I remember standing near the top of the climb on the first day and admiring the wind through all the different alpine grasses and perennials with no one else in sight. I remember walking along an empty riverside park on the Rio Arga and noticing the litter blowing around from overstuffed garbage bins. A beautiful, peaceful moment walking under a canopy of beeches with dappled sunlight streaming through stands out, as does walking down a crowded city street feeling strange and out of place wearing a heavy pack and dirty, sweaty trail clothes. It was not my intention starting out to polarize the experiences between rural and urban environments but the further along I made it on the Camino the more that juxtaposition was apparent and made sense to me.

Small towns sometimes consisting of little more than a few homes were also frequent on the Camino from the beginning. Passing through one after another of these towns they began to barely register, they fit into the environment with ease from my perspective. Eventually, with so many kilometres under my belt, the small towns were just as transitory as anything else on the trail. Some towns passed within minutes of entering them, and had very little impact on me unless something stood out. Those things which tended to stand out to me were clearly modern, indicative of increased development, things like major roads. Many stopping points at the end of the day were in small to medium sized towns frequently with populations between 500 and 2,000. These towns both supported and relied upon the Camino and the tides of pilgrims. Locals and transient hostel volunteers, or Hospitaleros, both were very welcoming, and the towns felt welcoming accordingly. I personally never experienced any hostility from locals and I have rarely come across accounts of anything like that. Exploring these towns at the end of the day’s walk was a joy, looking at the varying styles of architecture, sampling the local products and sometimes visiting the churches. Church visits for some pilgrims are an essential component of
every day and I embraced such opportunities when they arose, but they were not often experiences I sought out. For me churches were another component of the built environment and I considered them as such.

Then there were the larger towns and cities with populations ranging from 2,000 to 15,000 or up to 145,000 - 190,000 in Pamplona, Logroño and Burgos. With cities came all the trappings of modern development. Most of these larger towns and cities had a centre which sometimes dated back as far as the Camino itself, where the streets were narrow and winding and the character preserved. To reach the centre though, pilgrims had to pass through the modern edges, the suburbs, the collector highways, industrial areas, retail strips, and sometimes dumps or sewage processing plants. The Camino, to be a continuous trail, had to navigate these modern landscapes, where others were probably expected to drive. As a tourist, I might have enjoyed these cities much more. They had a lot of fascinating cultural elements to offer, but as a pilgrim; with little time for sightseeing, unable or unwilling to shop, and choosing to cultivate a more spiritual lifestyle the cities were… inconsistent with that choice.

Over the days, what started out feeling like important details, gradually blended into the backdrop of an increasingly broad picture of landscape. With each passing day I felt as though my image of the environment was zooming out into something like an aerial map. In lieu of this changing scope it was difficult to decide at what level of detail to record the environment. The maps were invaluable for providing a relatively consistent scale within which to record my experience and the environment. Photographs help to fill in details and my journal and voice recordings narrated the experience as I moved through the rural landscapes, towns and cities.

Themes

To briefly reiterate, the themes are drawn directly out of my journal and voice recordings. After returning from the Camino I began to read through and type up all the journal entries I had taken and in doing so I identified 4 major themes that I nearly always mentioned. These four themes are; social, physical, emotional and mental, and spiritual. In section one I’ve outlined in point form the themes that emerged in each day’s journal and here I will also deal with each of them separately, but in a narrative form instead. The narrative form will pull together the themes.
as I experienced them over the first 13 days and tie them together, always relating them each back to the environmental context again.

Social

For much of the first five days walking I was on my own. I arrived in St. Jean Pied-de-Port not knowing any other pilgrims and it was several days before I began to come out of my shell enough to meet people. I had brief exchanges consisting of little more than an exchange of nationalities in these beginning days, but I encountered few other solitary pilgrims, and fewer still who spoke English or even Spanish which I could at least basically communicate in. In Pamplona within the confines of the pilgrim hostel I began to get a sense of the Community among pilgrims and groups gathered and chatted with each other, and people reached out to one another. It almost seemed that within the city, where the larger community outside weren’t pilgrims, there was a tendency for pilgrims to define themselves in opposition to locals or tourists and in so doing, were more likely to congregate. Strength in numbers or something…

Reaching Pamplona for most pilgrims on foot meant having walked for 3 or 4 days now. In that time people were becoming more familiar, I was beginning to recognize the same people. By wishing each other a Buen Camino in passing and walking the same trail, a body of shared experience was building which was the foundation of a community.

Beyond Pamplona, pilgrims were settling into their individual paces and familiarity with one another was building. It was the 7th day of walking for me before I actually walked with another person. Until then my social interactions had been reserved to brief exchanges on the trail and chatting in the afternoons and evenings. While I enjoyed the experience of walking with company, I found that I did prefer walking on my own. I found conversation on the trail did help to open me up in some ways; it seemed that in being more extroverted I was also more likely to be open to other experiences. But, it was also a distraction to talk at length with people and I had poorer recollections of the environment on the days when I was with another.

It is hard to say how the environment influenced the experience on a social level; it seems actually that the opposite was true. On the days when I was most social while walking I was far less influenced by the environment around me. Particularly noticeable during walks through less scenic areas, like the approach to Burgos, those times were easier to get through for having
someone to share the experience with. I suggest that the social interactions and communities that develop on the Camino are in a sense a part of the environment, and like development and infrastructure, a part of the environment that is growing as more and more people walk the Camino to Santiago.

Physical

During the first stage, the physical aspect of making the Camino was the predominant experience for me. I had heard other pilgrims mention the idea that the first third of the Camino is associated with the body, and my experiences resonated with that. Over the course of these 13 days my body began to adjust and with that adjustment the frequency of times I mentioned physical aspects of the Camino decreased. Physically the beginning stage is very much about adjusting. My entire awareness at times seemed to focus on only my body, it was largely my sense of responsibility to the research which drew me out and forced me to notice what else was going on.

The first 4 days were certainly the most physically intense. My body was overwhelmed by the topographical challenge of the first day and it took the next 3 days to even begin to recover from it. Aches, pains, blisters and sore muscles were normal and common ailments among all pilgrims I spoke to, with a few outliers who seemed to experience no physical discomfort whatsoever… somehow. With 27 or so years of experience I considered myself a pretty expert walker, and a seasoned hiker to boot. Nevertheless, my walking skill and very well worn in hiking shoes were no match for repeated 20-30km days. My blisters defied moleskin and bandages and demanded a great deal of my attention. I also somehow injured my hip on the first day which left me unable to lift my left leg for the following two days; I pretty much dragged it along with me.

Like any of my experiences on the Camino there were high points as well. The first stage was not all physically grueling and painful. I had days, like day 5, where I felt I was walking on clouds. Some days just seemed easy, almost inexplicably, but as time went on I began to see patterns in what was making days easier or harder. The environment had a huge influence on my physical experience, from topography, to scenery, to trail surface.

One of the reasons the first stage has been grouped together environmentally is the
topography. Beginning in the Pyrenees Mountains and gradually descending toward the Meseta, the Camino in this stage is topographically diverse. Topography has a direct effect on the physical experience, climbing is tiring; descending is hard on the knees and feet. But topography is also engaging and dynamic, it requires you to move your body in different ways and adjust your weight continually thereby spreading the impact out over more of your body. Even though I sometimes found climbing to be more immediately exhausting, long days of walking straight and flat sections often left me more tired at the end of the day.

The quality of scenery around me, admittedly subjective, may not have had as direct an impact on my physical experience as topography but it did affect my body by providing escapes from it. There were a few occasions in which the setting I found myself in gave me such pause that I lost myself in the moment, whatever physical sensations I had been having briefly forgotten. Chenoweth and Gobster (1990) described such moments as “aesthetic experiences”.

The more I walked on roads or paved trails the more I realized just how much harder they were on the feet. This is something I believe most people know, hard surfaces impact your feet harder, earth is softer, its common sense. In my ‘normal’ day to day life, off the Camino, I walk around mostly on hard surfaces, because I live in an urban environment and I’m used to that. But in that normal life, I don’t spend 8 to 10 hours a day walking and walking for that length of time is really straining to feet. Hard surfaces seemed like an unnecessary evil outside of urban areas and with so much land why the Camino had to be on a road so often was a source of great consternation to me and a subject we’ll return to.

**Emotional and Mental**

Like the physical theme, my emotional and mental experiences are mentioned in my journals more often in the first stage than the following two. There appears to be a general trend toward all four themes coming more into alignment over the course of the entire pilgrimage. The frequency of these mentions is also, like the physical, erratic. My emotional and mental state was fluctuating in a way very closely related to my physical wellness. My emotions in particular were strongly influenced by how my body felt. Soreness, fatigue, pain and nausea most often brought about a negative emotional response after prolonged sensations, which is to say it made me feel sad, doubtful or inadequate. On occasion, if I was feeling physically challenged, even in pain, it
would bring out an attitude of resolve and determination but I could only sustain that for a short
time if I was really suffering physically. Individuals all have their own thresholds of what pain or
discomfort is tolerable so it is difficult to describe this relationship in a relative way but I hope
that it’s clear they are related. The opposite was also true for me, when my body felt strong and
capable then my mental or emotional response was positive. When I felt physically strong I was
happy, when I felt physically weak I was most often unhappy. Although, the further along I went
on the Camino, the less intense were my emotional reactions to the physical challenges or
rewards. I’d also say that the more familiar I became with the Camino, the less any one thing
influenced my overall experience.

The environment also had a direct influence upon my emotional and mental state. During
the first few days, approaching any noticeable hill brought up a whole host of difficult emotions
largely in anticipation of the physical difficulty. I was daunted by hills after my experience of the
first 3 days, when they were physically painful. But, once I did begin to adjust I began to
appreciate the views and variety that hills and mountain offered. Walking through fields or
woods I enjoyed equally, but it wasn’t ever blistering hot when I walked, in which case I might
have preferred the trees. Each of these settings offered different scenic value to me and both
were familiar environments. Having myself grown up in a largely agricultural landscape matrix,
I was familiar with the patch structure of fields and woods. While I understood too, the habitat
fragmentation that results from patch landscapes, having grown up in them my emotional
reaction to them is more endeared. And then there were roads and cities very which quickly
came to make me unhappy when I had to walk along or through them. In general, quiet
countryside trails made my experience a pleasure when I was along them for the most part.

**Spiritual**

There is not a stage of the Camino which seemed to be more or less spiritual than any
other. Unlike mention of the some of the other themes which seem to generally decrease in
frequency of mention over time (fig. 1) spiritual references remain relatively constant. The
occurrences of spiritual experiences were erratic and unpredictable for the most part often having
to due with ephemeral events like misty mornings or particularly dramatic sunrises. Other
experiences were prompted by social interactions and particular conversations, from feelings of
gratitude, by dreams, or by churches.

On a few occasions while I was alone I was brought to stillness at the sight of a landscape. Seeing mist pour over a rock outcrop in the early morning on day 8, feeling “embraced” by the sun and wind while I sat and sketched on day 10, or looking down the isles of a grove of poplars that disappeared into an early morning fog on day 13 were such times of stillness or pause. Ephemeral events like these which I described above as giving me pause, and having the effect of making me forget myself in the moment I described as “aesthetic experiences” (Chenoweth and Gobster, 1990). These types of experiences I also recorded as spiritual because my own sense of spirituality is largely rooted in feelings of connection to nature. Forgetting myself in the face of nature makes me feel more connected and that connection is meaningful for me in a spiritual sense. I use the term nature here to denote unbuilt environments; it was only ever natural landscape features such as trees, mountains, mist or sunlight which produced experiences like this for me. These kinds of spiritual experiences are most overtly related to the environment, as it is environmental occurrences which directly provoke them.

When spiritual experiences were prompted by conversations it was always because the topic brought about a feeling on synchronicity which I felt as spiritual. Synchronicity itself is a concept developed by C.G. Jung (1960) to explain what he called “meaningful coincidences” occurring simultaneously or closely related in time. Jung used synchronicity to describe strings of events which seemed to be meaningfully connected, but which had no discernible causal relationship. There were times on the Camino in which a person would strike up a conversation with me which would echo thoughts I was having at the time, and then later in the same day similar or identical topics would come up again. When events like this occurred I found the coincidence to be spiritually meaningful to me and so I borrow Jung’s term. Something else for which Jung was known was the study of dreams and their symbolism. Whilst I walked the Camino I recorded in my journal any dreams which I remembered and there were a few that stuck with me and provoked such thought that they were likely to also bring about feeling of synchronicity if anyone mentioned topics which were thematically related.

During the first stage there were also two occasions on which a spiritual experience was related directly to a church. On day 5 when I had stepped into the church in Puente la Reina to write my journal for the day was the first time I had a spiritual experience on the Camino. While
I sat in the cool, quiet church writing, pilgrims and other visitors came and went, nobody stopping very long so I was largely alone in there. I had sat down in a pew near the back of the church away from the door, there was enough light to see by but it was quite dim the only sunlight coming down in a beam from a window very high up on the wall opposite me. As I sat and wrote, the light from that window moved across the room until it came to rest directly on me, illuminating the white pages of my notebook. Sitting there in the beam of sunlight I was nearly moved to tears, feeling blessed with a warm, contented feeling in my centre and a tingling sensation on my skin. I was fortunate at the time to be writing so I could record the experience in detail as it happened, I even managed to take a photograph of myself in the light because prior to sitting in the church I had been photographing the town and had my camera with me. This experience was all the more meaningful to me for occurring within a church named for Santiago, it also happened to have been the first church I had entered while on the Camino. The experience itself was brought on by the sunlight, an environmental catalyst, but the light was focused into a beam by the architecture the two elements; environmental and structural working in concert to create the scene.

On a separate occasion, also within a church and also relating to a beam of light I had a similar, though less personal experience. On day 12 in the church at San Juan de Ortega I stood among a large crowd of people gathered to witness a “miracle” as the sunlight focused a beam to illuminate a particular and unique relief carving only about a square foot in size depicted a group of pilgrims and the Virgin Mary. This “miracle” was a biannual event coinciding with the equinoxes. I wasn’t aware of it prior to arriving in the town, nor was I really even aware that it was the equinox having somewhat lost track of the days but when I realized what was happening I felt very fortunate to be in that town on that day, and while I watched and photographed the sunlight’s progression toward the carving, I felt overwhelmingly grateful. Gratitude was a feeling I came to associate with spiritual experiences because the object of my gratitude was somewhat unknown to me. I directed my gratitude at the sky even though I have no particular belief in a heavenly dwelling God, but the sense of gratitude toward a benevolent entity, regardless of its identity or reality, was spiritual in nature. At other times I found myself grateful for my bodies endurance, for all the people who helped me get to where I was or for finding blackberries along the trail to eat. Gratitude was an expansive feeling; feelings of expansion beyond the normal boundaries of my body or my self are experiences that I consider spiritually meaningful.
In summation, it was a beginning. In the first 13 days I began to understand the scope of what I had undertaken socially, physically, emotionally and mentally, spiritually and also academically. It was empowering at times, and humbling at others. I felt uplifted and downtrodden, capable and overwhelmed. I began to see the ways in which the environment was influencing my experiences and to distinguish between supportive and distracting environments. Within my journals, voice recordings, photographs and annotated maps was recorded a wealth of experience to draw from, so much material that the process of going through it and pulling out meaningful detail has seemed more of a challenge than walking 900 kilometres in 37 days.

STAGE 2: MIND

DAY 14: BURGOS - HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO

Today was primarily about transition. The boundary between city and rural countryside was also the boundary between the first and second stages. There could almost have been a line drawn in the earth at Tarjados because as soon as I walked out of that town the shift was immediate. The landscape went from the sprawling surroundings of Burgos with its network of highways and interchanges into a stark and simple landscape of straw fields with an earth path winding through it. I was happy to leave behind the city for the quiet of the Meseta, even the town I ended up in at the end of the day was representative of the change. Hornillos del Camino was an old pilgrimage town, built during the medieval heyday of the Camino, and it retained a character of quiet calm.
Wellbeing

- Wellbeing at the day’s start was hovering at average and steadily improving through the day as I moved further away from the city and further into the Meseta
- The greater improvement in my wellbeing came after passing Villabilla and really leaving Burgos behind

Environment

- First several hours were spent getting away from the feel of the city; the haste and noise and smell of industry
- Dramatic transition from city, urban edge and road networks to empty Meseta in Tarjados
- Abrupt transition from sidewalk to meadow at the edge of Burgos as well
- Meseta was a completely different environment, no more rolling hills and vineyards or orchards, now just flat, rocky fields of straw interrupted by drumlin like hills
• Overall a day of transitions: City to country, mountains to *Meseta* and modern road networks to country trail

**Themes**

**Social**
• All references to social themes today were about leaving people behind or losing the group I had begun to enter
• Walked alone all day and stopped in a town where most other’s I knew continued on further

**Physical**
• Few references to physical themes today comparatively, thus far this day was the least physical in terms of times mentioned in my journals
• Easy day physically, not very long, mostly level, and once outside the city all on natural pathways
• Several times I picked up stones and turned them in my hand before replacing them to the trail
• Mentioned that my body pains were *mostly transcended*, meaning they were not at the forefront of my attention any longer

**Emotional and Mental**
• Happy to leave city and looking forward to the *Meseta*, described by others as *sublime*
• Enjoyed the sparse scenery of the *Meseta*, it reminded me of the Colorado prairie
• My attention did draw inward more once again and I found myself rehearsing old arguments and dwelling on past events
• Feeling both, relief over separating from group because of the distraction they presented, but also sadness at losing new friends. Keeping to my own pace is a *hard lesson to learn*
• Relatively relaxed afternoon after a short day’s walk enjoyed the chance to pause and reflect

**Spiritual**

• Only once referenced anything spiritual and it was before dawn, feeling confused and disoriented in the city looking for literal signs pointing the way I found myself *asking the heavens for a sign*
DAY 14: BURGOS - HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO
DAY 15: HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO - ITERO DE LA VEGA

My first full day out on the *Meseta* and it was one of my best days yet. I was up and walking early so I could see the stars and it meant that I was alone for the first several hours. The morning was misty so the stars were not as clear as I had hoped but the atmosphere of twilight fog more than made up for it. In the early morning I crossed over two drumlin-like hills the tops of which were rocky and windblown, small stacks of hay bales here and there were barely recognizable in the fog and instead appeared as strange silhouettes. This was another occasion in which the scene made me pause in my tracks to just take it in. It became quite a long day as I had started so early and made it to my intended destination too early to stop. The place where I ended up staying though was so beautiful that the long trek was well worth the effort.

![Graph showing elevation and wellbeing over distance](image)

**Figure 15: Record of wellbeing day 15.**

**Wellbeing**

- Starting out above average in the morning my sense of wellbeing climbed quickly in the pre-dawn and remained steady only beginning to decline slightly toward Castrojeriz
- There was a dip in my wellbeing as I climbed up the third hill of the day reflecting my tiredness and some associated self doubt as well as internal arguments I was having
• The day finished off with my wellbeing above average but had the graph reflected my experience hours after the walk finished instead of just the walking, it might have been higher still

**Environment**

• Out walking by 6am so I could see the stars from the remote *Meseta* countryside, though the sky was thinly clouded, the stars did shine through in places
• *Eerie* at the early hour, alone and feeling exposed
• First two drumlin-like hills I crossed in the dark and in the pre-dawn twilight the flat top of the second hill was lovely, misty and quiet with shadowy shapes of trees and hay bales in the distance. Sounds were dampened in the mist and I paused in wonder several times to admire this setting
• Arrived in Hontanas as the sun was rising, a beautiful medieval town, the Camino trail seamlessly transitioned in the main road
• Trail wound through a misty river valley outside Hontanas that was beautiful glowing in the early morning light
• From the ruins of a convent at San Antón, all the way into Castrojeriz the Camino merged with the road but it was quiet and tree lined mostly, not as disruptive as some of the highways
• Castrojeriz a *cool* town but I arrived too early to stay there and continued on up a third (and the tallest yet) hill in the afternoon heat, the trail lined with shimmering selenite crystals in the clay earth
• Stayed at a tiny pilgrim hostel run by an Italian pilgrim association outside of Itero de la Vega. The stars here were amazing as the hostel had no power or lights, and I could finally see the Milky Way clearly, the supposed celestial mirror of the Camino’s path

**Themes**

*Social*

• Social mentions climbed today again as I mentioned feelings of not loneliness as much as a desire to share these experiences particularly with family
• Suspected some of my sense of hurry came from wanting to keep up with familiar faces, though some people I met seemed overly concerned with keeping a group together and this made me want to strike out on my own more. I am averse to clinging in people
• Chatted with a couple of people on the trail but walked alone mostly
• Met up with a few familiars in the hostel and by then had reconciled myself with company so long as I could walk alone

*Physical*
• Noticed a tendency to walk quickly even though my body seems to suggest to me that I should slow down
• Third climb of the day was quite tiring and I had to rest at the top of the hill and make myself a sandwich, there was a shade shelter at the top of the hill for pilgrims
• Last 10km physically difficult, feet and legs hurting
• Hostel offered a meal, vegetarian even! AND breakfast the next morning

*Emotional and Mental*
• Emotional mentions had been climbing the past four days and peaked today as I made several references to thoughts concerning the desire for both company and solitude
• Skittish alone in the dark in the morning, managed to psych myself out a bit
• My emotional experience seems subtle, but I’ve never felt I was very *in touch* with my feelings
• *Driven* to move quickly
• Feeling both detached from people, wanting to be alone at the same time as wanting to share the experience
• Pretty happy today overall, despite some internal arguing which led me to resolving not to *carry* with me annoyances
Spiritual

- A spiritual peak today in terms on journal mentions, not the highest thus far but there were several mentions today of actual experiences rather than mentions of only thinking about spirituality
- A sense of pause on the second hill in the early morning twilight, several times I stopped to just absorb the scene and found it very difficult to describe my inner reaction
- The way the Camino trail transitioned into Hontanas felt like the town was opening its arms to pilgrims
- The hostel outside Itero de la Vega held a small pilgrim blessing ceremony which was touching and beautiful
- The hostel, in an old church with no power, was all so perfect with an atmosphere of antiquity
DAY 16: ITERO DE LA VEGA - VILLALCÁZAR DE SIRGA

Once again today I was fortunate to have an “aesthetic experience” brought on by the ephemeral morning mist just as the sunlight was beginning to stream into it. Only two days into it and I already felt the Meseta was as sublime as some other pilgrims had described it to me. On the whole I was quite sensitive during this day, emotionally and mentally, physically, socially and spiritually. Places today seemed to me to have feelings of their own that I was only perceiving and I was at times quite overwhelmed by them swinging between inexplicable sadness and joy. As the day wore on and I continued further than my body wanted to my wellbeing overall dropped largely due to physical wear and tear and a return to the roadside.

Figure 16: Record of wellbeing day 16.

Wellbeing

- Starting out content and feeling well in the morning my experience climbed through the morning to a high peak when I experienced an incredibly beautiful and sublime scene
- My wellbeing declined nearly as quickly as it had climbed as I continued along the day very tired and sore from the previous day’s exertion
- Really didn’t like Frómista and my wellbeing reflected it by dipping below average and continuing to decline as I walked an exhaustingly long day
Environment

- Early morning beautiful along misty river edge, taking lots of photographs
- Environmental, emotional and spiritual climax on the low hills looking toward Boadilla del Camino where the sun was just breaking through the mist covering the valley and the scene was *sublime, surreal* and *awe* inspiring
- Virtually no topography except these low hills. No more drumlin-like hills for the remainder of the *Meseta*
- Walking along canal into Frómista I stopped to watch a shepherd with a flock in the shade of the poplars lining the trail here
- After crossing the canal into Frómista walking through the city was right on busy roads, all concrete and not nice so I opted to continue on
- Section to Población de Campos was along a *senda*, a standardized trail placed right alongside the road, hot and unsightly
- Followed the alternate trail along the river the remainder of the way to Villalcazár de Sirga, which although shaded on the river itself, the trail was outside the shade, quieter and more scenic except for last leg walking on the road into town

Themes

Social

- Walked alone about half the time today, I had company for the last half hour into Frómista, and then again from Población de Campos to Villalcazár de Sirga
- Several times I stopped today to socialize with familiar people from the previous night’s hostel
- Deciding to continue further from Frómista meant I was choosing to leave some people behind and this was a difficult choice
- Having company in the afternoon helped keep my spirit and motivation up, on what became a very long day

Physical

- Physical mentions spiked today in my journal, was having pain in my feet and knee toward the afternoon and the day was long again, around 30km
• Intent upon taking it easier today I ended up walking for 10 hours, it was tiring
• Slept later and started walking as the sky was growing light, which meant walking late into the afternoon I walked through the hottest part of the day, with no shade
• Last 6km were especially difficult and physically painful, feet bruised and knee swollen

*Emotional and Mental*

• Walking along the river in the morning I was inexplicably near tears thinking of family and my childhood
• Emotionally awestruck by the view into the valley looking toward Boadilla del Camino, and for sometimes thereafter I was joyful, even singing to myself on the trail, time seemed to pass pleasantly slower
• Enjoyed watching the shepherd and flock, I have always romanticized shepherding as an occupation
• Felt a really bad “vibe” in Frómista, difficult to explain but I really disliked the town, it felt unfriendly which partly motivated me to leave
• Difficult deciding to leave some familiar people behind and I felt very dissatisfied with the decision until meeting up with other people
• Spirits were flagging the last 6km into Villalcázár de Sirga, tired and sore and growing impatient to rest

*Spiritual*

• A spiritual “aesthetic” experience looking into the misty valley from above in the early morning
DAY 17: VILLALCÁZAR DE SIRGA - CALDADILLA DE LA CUEZA

A day of resolve. By now, well into the Meseta I was beginning to see the ways in which it challenged me differently than other landscapes. I found that even though the level terrain was perhaps technically “easier” than crossing mountains, I was tending to push myself to go much farther and was thus ending up more exhausted at the end of the day. The Meseta forced me to face my limitations physically which was for me a very emotional and mental process of accepting as well. As I was adjusting anew to the Meseta as a different aspect of the Camino my wellbeing was leveling off to match the terrain. The days walking on the Meseta were more about endurance and resolve and with that realization I was coming to appreciate companionship in the afternoons to distract me from the physical wear.

Figure 17: Record of wellbeing day 17.

Wellbeing

- Wellbeing started out above average and stayed level through Carrión de los Condes only dipping a bit while having to walk on a road
- Improved overall wellbeing once the Camino turned back into a natural trail and took advantage of the old Roman road

Environment

- My attention was distracted today I suppose, because my mention of anything was reduced in my journal entry
The morning pre-dawn walk into Carrión de los Condes was along a *senda* following a road but traffic was pretty minimal at the early hour. Off to both sides were typical straw fields.

The city was much nicer, prettier, than I expected somehow, the Camino seemed to do a good job of staying within the historic districts and as such it didn’t feel as modernized and characterless as some other cities.

After crossing over the N-120 (a highway) the Camino merged with a small road for about 5km and there was no road shoulder to walk on so it meant having to stop and step out of the way of traffic when it came by, this section was edged with scrubby brush.

Once the Camino left the road and headed out into uninterrupted fields for the remainder of the day there was occasional lines of poplars on the left side of the road but mostly no shade.

I stopped briefly at a shaded fountain area though the fountain was dry and noticed how much garbage was strewn about.

The landscape was flat with virtually no topography apart from shallow dips by streams or irrigation canals.

Caldadilla de la Cueza was situated in a slight dip in the landscape and was not visible until just outside it.

**Themes**

**Social**

- Walked alone until late afternoon where a friend caught up to me at the rest shelter.
- Find that it is a more pleasurable experience walking on the *Meseta* in the afternoons if I have company.
- Talking to other pilgrims on the road daily renews my own commitment to my research, as others sometimes talk of recommitting daily to their own personal pursuits.
Physical

- Hard going on feet to walk along the road for so long in the morning
- Began bandaging my swollen knee today so support it
- Have found the Meseta, although less overtly challenging without large climbs, to be more difficult in some ways. Because I’m not being exhausted by climbing I will tend to push myself even more thinking it’s easier. It is forcing me to face my limitations because my feet and knees are being challenged and I’m trying to stay conscious of the remaining distance
- Stopped to rest and dry feet at a dry, trashy fountain
- Afternoon hot and dry, by the time I reached the hostel I was very tired, but they had a swimming pool there unexpectedly which was nice just to soak my feet in

Emotional and Mental

- Spent time today contemplating the emotional experience of being on the Meseta, thinking of solitude and family
- Road section not enjoyable because of traffic and a feeling that pilgrims were an afterthought
- Was saddened and disgusted with the amount of garbage at the fountain, it wasn’t the first time I’d seen so much litter but I just marvel at the amount of disrespect that to me is inherent in littering on a pilgrimage route
- Facing my physical limitations is also a very emotional and mental process. I have to learn a different kind of patience and compassion toward myself
- Days on the Meseta feel like they take longer without company on the trail

Spiritual

- A sense of frustration that doing a good job of my research means sacrificing some of my personal interests on the Camino including my interest in the spiritual dimension. Observing means not fully participating somehow, the ultimate dilemma of the anthropologist conducting participant observation
DAY 18: CALDADILLA DE LA CUEZA - CALZADA DE COTO

On this day I passed the halfway point, and it was with some surprise that I realized how far I had come. The day wasn’t particularly remarkable in relation to any other day beyond that point. There was some quiet countryside and there were some busy roads, a little bit of a city and also sleepy towns. My wellbeing didn’t fluctuate at all through the day; I suppose there was enough interest to keep it above average, but not quite enough to send it higher. At halfway through the Camino, the day was sort of routine

![Figure 18: Record of wellbeing day 18.](image)

**Wellbeing**
- Remained level through the day, above average to the same extant that it was yesterday

**Environment**
- The early morning in the dark was beautiful under a starry sky. I accidentally followed the roadside route instead of the recommended, more naturalized trail, but in the dark it would have appeared little different
- Outside Ledigos the Camino crossed the highway and moved into the ubiquitous straw fields, far enough away from the highway to ignore it
- Had been really looking forward to Terradillos de los Templarios on account of the name which roughly translates as “Land of the Templars”. But the town was a
half decaying farm village and I was a little disappointed having expected something more like Hornillos del Camino or Hontanas, a medieval stone village. No cafe

- Continued on through more fields with occasional stream side poplar stands but mostly open trail
- Trail moved to the roadside just outside reaching Sahagún and I crossed the road to come into the city via the Virgen del Puente ("Virgin of the Bridge") chapel which was sadly totally overgrown and unmaintained. The walk into the city was uninspiring moving through empty lots behind light industrial buildings, but the city was small and we moved through it quickly
- Sahagún marks roughly the halfway point to Santiago from St. Jean Pied-de-Port
- Walk out of Sahagún was through a shady, tree lined, linear park along the highway but set off enough to not feel like we were right on the road
- Day ended with crossing multiple highway traffic circles to get into Calzada de Coto, a very sleepy little town, where the hostel wasn’t even tended by a person. Staying in Calzada de Coto meant choosing the more remote of two trail options tomorrow. A friend and I opted to follow the old Roman road, which was the recommended route in my guidebook, rather than following the highway all day along a *senda*

**Themes**

**Social**

- Walked morning half of day alone, with a friend the rest of the day and for an hour or so the two of us had three other’s in a group
- No others along the way until the evening where there were a couple others we had dinner with near the hostel

**Physical**

- Few mentions of the physical aspect today beyond hunger. Had to walk close to 12km before finding a breakfast place
- Checked on my feet and knee a couple of times during the day
• Fell asleep immediately on arriving at the hostel and napped half an hour, was very tired
• One man at the hostel, a retired sailor walking the Camino his third time, he was offering foot massages which we gratefully accepted. The massage seemed to help my knee, but my legs ached through the night and kept me awake

**Emotional and Mental**

• Disappointed by Terradillos de los Templarios
• Thinking that when walking along roads the traffic noise makes my attention withdraw in an attempt to ignore the noise
• Only other mention of emotions or thoughts was of having a very disturbing dream after this day’s walk which continued to bother me through the next day of a woman in her car falling into an abyssal sinkhole next to me on the Camino while I was powerless to help

**Spiritual**

• Gratitude toward all who helped me get to Spain, and toward my body for carrying me so far
• I have marked all mentioned of feeling “gratitude” in my journal as spiritual and I did so without question at the time. I believe this might be because when I feel gratitude like what I was feeling then, it is a very expansive feeling of opening up my heart. That opening and expansion is what I consider to be the spiritual experience
DAY 19: CALZADA DE COTO - MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS

Perhaps the longest single distance covered in a day, this day was quite long. It was long, quiet and empty. I walked with a friend all day for which I was grateful because we saw almost no one else all day. We were out on the Calzada Romana, the old Roman road one of the most remote stretches of the Camino with a length of close to 20 kilometres between towns. Apparently most other pilgrims decided to take the road more travelled when given the option which surprised me as the other route was senda, what Brierley (2011) calls a pilgrim highway, all day. I greatly preferred the quiet and empty expanse, though had I been totally alone I imagine I’d have found it unnerving. As it was though, the long day had me feeling on the edge of collapse by the end, and finding a large group of old Camino friends in Mansilla de las Mulas was reviving.

![Figure 19: Record of wellbeing day 19.](image)

**Wellbeing**

- My overall wellbeing was below average in the morning on account of feeling disturbed and anxious about the dream I’d had the previous night, fearing that it could come true
- After witnessing an amazing sunrise and having breakfast my wellbeing improved substantially only decreasing again toward the end of a very long day
Environment

- Overall a very empty and quiet landscape today, beautiful in a simple, scant way
- Started a bit late on account of not being able to find the arrows in the morning even though we had been ready to walk at 6am
- First short stretch along a farm access road and then a bridge over the rail line, all of this passed in the dark
- Between Calzada de Coto and Calzadilla de los Hermanillos was beautiful stretch of natural trail with shrubby fields to either side which although dark and harder to make out, didn’t appear to be farmed land
- Sunrise while approaching Calzadilla de los Hermanillos among the most beautiful I had seen in a long time
- A few kilometres on an empty road and then the remainder of the day was along the Roman road, through empty fields, some farmed. I loved the remoteness and the emptiness, because there was little change in the landscape to distract I felt free to explore inwardly my experiences
- The weather was fortunately overcast and breezy because it was a long day and in greater heat and sun, could have been dangerous actually
- Final stretch from near Reliegos to Mansilla de las Mulas was more monotonous to me with the roads closer and it felt much longer than it was. Mansilla de las Mulas was visible in the distance for over two hours and seemed never to draw nearer
- Once walking along the road into town it was clear that this route was not kept up because the signs were in many places pointing toward walls or down roads which no longer existed. There was also a short piece of trail along side the road instead of on it but it was completely overgrown with thistle and knapweed

Themes

Social

- Walked all day with a friend, happily so because I would have felt exposed out on the Roman road alone
• Saw one other person in Calzadilla de los Hermanillos where we had breakfast together but out on the road we saw nobody else all day. It must be that most people follow the other trail option along the road which is shorter and has more frequent places to stop
• In Mansilla de las Mulas there were many familiar faces and a large communal dinner was prepared

Physical
• Knee seemed improved today which was good because this was perhaps the longest day of the Camino, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 37 to 40 kilometres
• Walking was easy, no topography, but such a long walk that I was extremely tired by the times we reached the end of the day. We must have looked it too because the volunteer hospitalero looked at us like we were about to collapse and quickly ushered us off to lower bunks (normally reserved for older pilgrims)
• Showering, icing my knee and resting for a while and I was physically fine again by dinner

Emotional and Mental
• Had been looking forward to this day specifically because the guidebook describes it as so remote
• Preoccupied by disturbing dream all morning, glad to have company today
• Quiet and peace of environment very conducive to reflection and contemplation, my inner experience; emotionally and mentally was quiet and peaceful today as well
• Have heard other pilgrims refer to the Meseta environment as tedious and boring, many pilgrims I saw wore headphones and listened to music to pass the time. Personally I loved it and wouldn’t have wanted distractions like music
• The end of the day where the Camino was not kept up and signs were not redirected to an actual route was dispiriting in that it felt as though it had been abandoned
Spiritual

- No overt mention of spiritual experiences today, which I am surprised by because I had looked forward to the remoteness for so long
- Days like this though, which are quiet and conducive to contemplation do provide (I believe) an environment for spiritual experiences and growth
DAY 20: MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS - LEÓN

Stopping at a roadside cafe in the morning called Casa Blanca I found myself revelling in the multicultural experience of drinking an Americano style coffee at a cafe blaring Beethoven’s 9th symphony that was named after a town in Morocco while watching the red Spanish sun rise dramatically over the rushing highway and its symbol of globalization. This was the height of my day’s walk, which otherwise followed this same highway from Mansilla de las Mulas all the way into León. It was not much of a height as I enjoyed the experience mostly in a sardonic way. The contrast from yesterday’s remoteness was pretty extreme. Once inside the old city walls of León there was some sanctuary from modernity to be found in the narrow winding streets and impressive cathedral.

Figure 20: Record of wellbeing day 20

Wellbeing

- Another largely stable day in terms of wellbeing
- Remained above average all day, but began dipping in the morning when it became apparent that the entire day would be alongside the highway
- A dramatic sunrise, and slight detour from the highway for a time brought my declining wellbeing back up to the starting level and it remained about at that level through the day
Environment

- Entirely different from yesterday, this walk was along the roadside, or very close to it, all day moving from one small town to the next. The towns weren’t really separated or distinct as there was development, even if only a group of houses, along the road the whole way into León.
- Even before dawn, the highway was busy and loud with a smell of exhaust.
- Sunrise was dramatic, from where I sat it aligned with a butte behind me so that it wasn’t just rising over highway and buildings.
- A short section where the Camino merged with the highway and I had to walk on the road shoulder. This was actually pretty scary, the trucks were flying by so fast I had to hold my hat on and the air off of them actually pushed me.
- A little relief from the traffic between Villarente and Valdelafuente, but even here the Camino was no more than 100 metres off the highway and just in back of developed lots.
- Walk into the city not nearly as ugly as the walk into Burgos had been, and much quicker. Once inside the medieval city walls, it was quite beautiful.
- I enjoyed wandering around the twisting narrow streets and getting nearly lost a couple of times.
- León Cathedral was very impressive, if not beautiful exactly, I would say it was magnificent before beautiful. Unfortunately it was undergoing some restoration at the time and there was scaffolding obscuring some of the stained glass windows and construction noises.

Themes

Social

- Walked alone until breakfast, then with my friend who I will call M.
- In León, I encountered many friends, some who I though I had lost track of, and the evening was very social. By now, even people I may have only known a week or two, seem to be old friends and relating to them is easy and relaxing.
Physical

- Distance wise this day was *thankfully* much shorter, and actually it was very easy going
- No mention of my body in journal today, physical references are only to food

Emotional and Mental

- Found myself simplifying my research into a matter of preference for walking along the Bruce trail (nature trail) versus the 401 (4 lane highway). While neither comparison is exactly a parallel, it has come to feel like the Camino is either natural or it’s a busy road. The sections of road don’t even feel like the Camino to me, they are places that must simply be crossed to get back to the Camino
- Inside León I felt good, I felt quite happy and energetic here surrounded by friends
- Unlike Pamplona or Burgos, wandering the streets here felt less like a disorienting experience and more like an exploration

Spiritual

- On my voice recorder I was musing about the possible necessity for solitude on the Camino in order to experience certain things. I felt that physical solitude was necessary in order to realize spiritual companionship, a sense of *walking with the divine*
- While inside the Cathedral of León, I was wandering around running my hand along the stone pillars thinking about all the hands which had touched them in the past. In one place my hand suddenly started to feel tingly and I remained there a few minutes taking in the peaceful atmosphere of the church. Afterwards I held my hand to my heart for some time feeling gratitude for the experience
DAY 20: MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS - LEÓN

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DAY 21: LEÓN - VILLAR DE MAZARIFE

As I had by now come to expect, the day was a contrast between the city and the countryside outside it. The walk out of León was not as dispiriting as some other cities, largely because I was distracted by the company I began with in the morning. León had been quite a social town, as a lot of familiar people all arrived there on the same day, some of those people I set out with the morning and ended up staying with all day. We reached the edge of the city in Virgen del Camino by mid-morning and the scenery as well as the experience improved measurably from there on. The Camino wonderfully moved away from the roads and highways leading into the city and struck out into an oak grassland for the remainder of the day. The peace and quiet of the afternoon walk was restorative after the hectic bustle of the city.

![Figure 21: Record of wellbeing day 21.](image)

**Wellbeing**

- In terms of my overall wellbeing the day began just above average and remained just above average until reaching Virgen del Camino at the edge of León.
- After Virgen del Camino the trail struck out into the countryside and away from the noise and bustle and my wellbeing jumped up quickly then climbed gradually through the day to finish well above average.
Environment

- About a third of the day’s hours were taken up in walking out of León to Virgen del Camino where the city ended. The walk out of León was more industrial than the walk in had been and was largely right alongside a major roadway.
- We (I started with company) walked out early and were halfway out of the city already before the sun rose and in Fresno del Camino by 9am.
- It was in Fresno that we left behind the major highways and development and headed out into quiet countryside again.
- Beyond Fresno, the trail turns to a natural dirt path once again and goes into a grassland dotted with stands of oaks, this was actually quite beautiful and parts of it appeared to be natural grassland instead of the ubiquitous worked fields of straw.
- After Chozas de Abajo, the Camino returned to an asphalt road for the remainder of the walk into Villar de Mazarife. This road was very quiet and the scenery on either side was still beautiful oak savannah for half the way followed by small farm fields.
- The actual town of Villar de Mazarife was quite nice, small with narrow, winding roads. The hostel we stayed in here was small and very clean and luxurious compared to most pilgrim accommodations.

Themes

Social

- Walked with company all day. Started in León with two others, after Fresno one of them pulled ahead for a while, and then we met up again in Chozas as well as picked up a few others for the remainder of the walk to Villar de Mazarife.
- Had more conversation through this day than most others. Walking with others doesn’t always mean there is a lot of conversation, but there was today as I walked with people I’d spent evenings with before but never walked with.
- Generally during the day even though there may be several hundred pilgrims walking between two points, people seem to spread out enough that the trail hasn’t felt very crowded to me.
Physical

- Of the 6 times I highlighted something as a physical reference today in my journal, 4 of those mentions refer to comfort and relaxation! (The other two refer to breakfast and lunch)
- This was a very relaxing day, walking with others I walked much slower than I would on my own and the pace was easy. I barely felt tired even at the end of the day

Emotional and Mental

- I heard from someone today a history of the Meseta speaking to how during the reign of Franco many inhabitants were forced to relocate and he put in place laws preventing more population growth within the area so that the Meseta could be converted to factory farming. Judging by the state of many of the towns decaying and largely empty as well as the massive scale of the agricultural fields, I’d say Franco’s campaign was a success
- Both the mentions in this theme from my journal today referenced this history of the Meseta and were remarks upon how many of the landscapes and towns in the Meseta feel abandoned and neglected. It feels sad sometimes, the Meseta

Spiritual

- No Spiritual mention in this day’s journal
DAY 22: VILLAR DE MAZARIFE - LEÓN

In reverse of yesterday I started out in the countryside and moved back toward the roads and highways connecting León to Astorga. By midday I was crossing over the network of connections in Hospital de Orbigo and thankfully headed back out in the countryside again before coming into Astorga, which was a much smaller city. For the most part the scenery I walked through today was supportive of a positive experience with the exception of sewage processing. For once I even felt I had the time and a setting appropriate to sitting in quiet contemplation for a while. Even though the Meseta had technically come to an end in León, Astorga marks the end of my second stage because leaving Astorga the Camino begins once again to climb.

Figure 22: Record of wellbeing day 22.

Wellbeing
- Day started out not as good as the last day began, but higher above average than the last few preceding days have been. Wellbeing stayed level until dipping briefly around Hospital de Orbigo (on account of a truly awful smelling sewage plant)
- After leaving the stench behind, my wellbeing improved through the day, even into the city of Astorga
Environment

- Setting out in the dark, the first 5 kilometres or so were on an asphalt access road past tall cornfields with deep irrigation ditches to either side.
- The corn fields ended once I crossed the small road and headed slightly downward into a series of smaller farms leading into and out of Villavante broken up by small poplar groves.
- The trees here were just beginning to turn to fall colours with a tinge of gold.
- Outside Villavante the Camino went right up to and then circled around a large sewage treatment plant which smelled so terrible it made me gag. Around the back of it I climbed up to the road and turned to head over the highway into Hospital de Orbigo.
- Between Hospital de Orbigo and Santibañez de Valdeiglesia the Camino wove through small farms and villages on a mixture of dirt trail and asphalt road. Farms here were growing corn, some straw, and even a few vineyards again, the environment changing quite quickly from the Meseta.
- Out of Santibañez de Valdeiglesia the Camino turned away from the small towns and headed up into some vineyards before reaching more remote meadows and then moving into a scrubby oak forest. The soil was changing to red sand with red sandstone boulders and cliffs here and there.
- In the forest I was well away from roads and the trail, though wide enough for tractors and likely used by them on occasion, was a rocky earth path. It was quiet and peaceful in the trees and I rested in their shade for some time, writing.
- Out of the forest the trail returned to rocky meadows with occasional straw fields and dipped into a valley briefly before climbing up again to where the cross monument stood.
- The trail steeply descended from the cross, now on a paved track into San Justo de la Vega and Astorga.
- Astorga was, compared to other cities, pleasant to approach and, though touristy, animated and beautiful to explore within.
Themes

Social

- Returned to walking alone today. In the early morning I found I missed the company, but out into the quieter areas especially the forest in the afternoon I was happy to be on my own schedule
- Time passes quicker with company, which when the scenery is uninteresting or unpleasant is a welcome occurrence
- Found my walking friend M after sitting in the woods and walked the final stretch into Astorga with her, spending the rest of the afternoon and evening exploring Astorga with her, some new people, and some “old” friends as well

Physical

- Twice mentioned the nice break and rest while stopping to sit in the trees, this is not something I’ve done much of on the Camino
- Have a tendency to get into a rhythm walking during the day and don’t want to stop and break it much. Most days, apart from the first few, I stop only to get breakfast at some point and perhaps to dry my feet if I’m not wearing my sandals

Emotional and Mental

- One of the few times I’d taken time for quiet, solitary contemplation on the Camino and I was feeling a bit regretful of not making that more of a priority
- Was thinking about how part of the drive to go quickly is from a fear of losing track of the familiar people. Even while taking the time to stop and meditate in the oak forest, the more people who walked by, the more anxious I became to continue
- In the morning I was beginning to feel uninterested and that the walking had become sort of routine, but by the end of the day with some really nice scenery in the afternoon especially I was feeling really good overall, I characterized the day by the end as really nice, and having felt really good
Spiritual

- Nothing mentioned, although I did meditate for once during the day, albeit briefly
STAGE 2: MIND: BURGOS - ASTORGA

The Meseta: The extensive high plain and so-called “bread basket” of Spain. Contrary to pop culture creed, I did not find that the rain in Spain fell mainly on the plain. In fact it was drier than usual when I walked across it, experiencing a prolonged drought. The Meseta made up the bulk of stage two of my Camino, consisting of grain and straw fields stretching from Burgos to León. Beyond León the environment was beginning to change and the crops differed though the terrain remained largely level until passing Astorga.

As I crossed this new landscape I found myself dealing with new challenges and having new kinds of experiences. My attention was shifting away from the physical aspects as primary and beginning to balance out more between all the themes. My wellbeing too was leveling out like the terrain as I continued walking. While I continued to have my struggles in different areas I was adjusting to life on the Camino.

Wellbeing

During this second stage of the Camino there were a couple of peaking or descending days in the first few days, but overall my wellbeing seemed to level and stabilize during the Meseta. On the whole it tends to stay above average with climbs and peaks corresponding to “aesthetic experiences” or scenic views, impressive sunrises, and leaving behind cities. Dips or decreases in the quality of my wellbeing correspond to times walking along roads or highways or with extended afternoons. Those days, in which I walked more than 30km in the day, I was growing very tired by the afternoons and my wellbeing would start to crash with my energy levels.

There is an observable correlation between the variability of my wellbeing and the variability of the terrain, during the Meseta as the ground levels out so does my wellbeing. However, within that time there are also highs and lows within my wellbeing that do not correspond to any terrain and so it is not only the terrain which is affecting wellbeing. By the time my wellbeing stabilizes, around day 17, I have been walking for two and a half weeks and have grown accustomed to the Camino physically, as well as emotionally and mentally. To a certain extent by this time I knew better what to expect, and so my wellbeing is not as variant.
Environment

The second stage is almost entirely made up of the Spanish Meseta, a high plain given over almost entirely to grain farming. The most productive region of the Meseta stretches between the rivers Pisuerga in the east and Cea in the west, this being known as the Tierra de Campos, literally the ‘land of fields’ (Melczer, 1993). The Meseta seems to be a landscape of some infamy among pilgrims dreaded as boring, blistering or psychologically daunting. Coming out of the forested mountains and rolling vineyards of the previous stage it was a major transition to suddenly find myself in a flat, empty expanse. The horizon is wide and the destination at the end of the day seems to draw no nearer as you plod along. In the days leading up to Burgos and the start of the Meseta I spoke to pilgrims who warned of the Meseta some thought of skipping it entirely, as well as those who were enamoured of the stark landscapes and looked forward to it. I had no thoughts of skipping any part of the Camino and having heard both sides I approached it with some trepidation.

The first view I had of the Meseta was from atop the last mountain which leads down into Burgos. Reaching that point the sky opened up from the hilly country I had been walking in for two weeks and I could see what seemed like hundreds of kilometres ahead. That first view was a little daunting, just taking in all at once so much land knowing that I would have to cross it. But once I left Burgos behind and approached the Meseta from eye level I dropped all my hesitation and immediately loved it.

During the first two days walking in the Meseta there are these mesa-like long hills running north-south which resemble the glacial drumlins in Ontario, steep edged and flat on top. These hills are the only notable topography until passing Astorga. Soon after leaving behind Burgos and all sense of the city, I climbed the first one of these hills and fell in love with the uniformly cropped straw fields broken only by the occasional bale of hay or hardy shrub. The nearest equivalent landscape in my experience were the prairies and deserts of the south western United States. Having lived in the Southwest for 13 years I had come to know and appreciate the scale of places like this. Something I loved about stark landscapes was that they encouraged a depth of examination. A desert only looks desolate to those who take the broad view of it, once you inhabit it and really look at the detail the wealth of beauty in it opens up. I’ve always found stark landscapes conducive to contemplation, because the process of drawing your gaze to the
smallest details mirrors that of drawing your focus inward. And then of course, the quiet doesn’t hurt either!

Naturally the Meseta wasn’t all emptiness and romantic expanses, the march of progress criss-crossed its way across these landscapes as well. In comparison to the first stage with 32 percent of the Camino on or alongside roads, in the Meseta roughly 31 percent of the trails were as such (Brierley, 2011). However, more often than during the first stage there were options of trails to take. Four out of nine days in the second stage the Camino was split into two or more choices of which path to follow. In all of these cases, the optional trails that I did not follow were senda and would have taken me along more roads increasing that percentage considerably. I was grateful for the option but consistently surprised that more pilgrims did not make the same choice as I. I can’t say whether one or the other option was more popular having not conducted a survey, but I was surprised that anyone would choose to walk along the road at all given the option, and it was clear that many people did. Usually however, the senda routes were shorter and had more stopping places along them that is likely one reason pilgrims choose those routes. There were plenty of times when I didn’t have the option and had to follow the senda or the Camino was just nearby to roads and highways. Particularly the last three days in and around León and Astorga there were many roads. As much as I disliked walking near roads in the first stage, it was worse in the Meseta because there was no escape from them. In the plains there were rarely trees or shrubs to buffer the noise or shield from the view of traffic, and there was little else to look at.

There was scant variety on the Meseta, which in some ways emphasized the transitions between countryside and urban areas, or quiet trail and roadside. The distinction between quiet and slow paced country trail and loud, fast paced roads or cities was obvious because it made apparent change which was otherwise slow to present itself in the landscape. The landscape itself was largely flat, occasionally crossed by small rivers, streams or irrigation canals. The view in all directions was of grain and straw fields. During late September when I was there, the fields had all been harvested already so the landscape palette was shades of brown and tan from the cropped fields and earth. Sometimes the most interesting things to look at where the pebbles in the road and it was during the Meseta that I began collecting pebbles after spending so much time looking down at them. There were days when there might be a line of poplars by the side of the trail or along a canal, but if they offered any shade it was only brief and somewhat
superficial. The days were long, the mornings cool and often misty, and the afternoons hot and dry.

In a landscape that changed little over the course of a week and a half, the most memorable and powerful moments were ephemeral. Twice I had “aesthetic experiences” which I considered spiritual as a result of fleeting images created by the mist in the early mornings, and another two occasions I had strong impressions of the dramatic sunrises. In most cases the experiences took place in natural settings with a degree of solitude or remoteness. Solitude was easy to come by on the Meseta as it seemed there were many pilgrims who had “disappeared” perhaps following their own feelings of trepidation to the bus station and skipping the challenging landscape altogether.

Themes

Social

The second stage of the Camino in terms of the social seemed to be almost unanimously about reconciling myself with the fluid nature of the social setting. During the first few days of stage two I was struggling with accepting that sticking to my own pace and my own experience might mean having to lose track of certain people I’d met on the Camino by either falling behind, or getting ahead. I found that I had a tendency to try and stick with the group of people I’d begun to make friends with, but I also recognized that clinging to a certain group had the potential to hugely impact my experience. More than any other themes within my pilgrimage I struggled with letting go of the impulse to control my social experience. In the beginning of the Meseta this concern was largely about planning to meet up with my forming social group at the end of the day because I was still primarily walking on my own during the day.

In the beginning of stage two I somewhat stubbornly stuck to walking alone as a means of avoiding clinging, but I really struggled with it. At times I found myself thinking a lot about the desire to share experiences I was having, and then questioning the impulse that was making me pull away from forming bonds with other pilgrims. As I got further into the Meseta I began walking with a new friend, M, in the afternoons even though I would start each day on my own. Walking with company in the afternoons I began to see the benefits of company during the walk
each day and by the end of the Meseta I had accepted the social aspect of the Camino much more.

Like the environment I walked through, there were aspects of the Camino culture and social setting which I could not control. I could refuse to walk with people but ultimately that became too forced and I felt that I was denying myself a large part of the experience on the Camino. There were things I preferred about walking on my own, but I came to also enjoy company during the day for other reasons. By the time I reached Astorga I was able to allow the social setting to shift naturally from day to day without worrying so much about how it was affecting my experience or my ability to conduct my research.

Physical

At the very beginning of the Meseta, leaving Burgos, I had a sense of having transcended the painful physical challenges of the Camino. What I meant by that was that my body had adjusted to the challenge of walking long distances all day over a variety of terrains and my focus was no longer exclusive to my physical experience. However, as a result of feeling this way and also no longer being as directly challenged by dynamic geography, I began to push myself harder. Without really even intending to I started to walk farther each day, even some days going farther than the guidebooks recommended distance for the day. Ultimately by pushing myself to go farther and move quicker I made the days on the Meseta even more exhausting than shorter days in more mountainous terrain. I developed new blisters, made my feet even sorer and started to develop a problem with inflammation in one of my knees. All I accomplished was to bring my focus back to my body and as my focus returned to my physical experience I was forced to deal with my own physical limitations.

The physical experience in the second stage was intimately connected with the emotional and mental experience. Particularly when it came down to facing my physical limitations, there was a lot of emotional and mental frustration tied up with that. It was personally difficult to accept the demands of my body when they did not fit the demands of my mind. I’ve never been able to easily accept limitations of any kind in my life, I am stubborn, and I am especially likely to challenge any limitations I perceive coming from myself. I’ll push until I reach a breaking point. However, on the Meseta faced with long flat days where the destinations sometimes
seemed to draw no nearer, I became more and more conscious of how much farther I had to go. Realizing that if I pushed myself to breaking it may mean I wouldn’t be able to finish the Camino at all, understanding this I was able to find ways of taking it easier.

The social experience also impacted me physically. As I was struggling with the competing impulses to keep pace with my fellow pilgrims or get ahead of them and stay on my own my pace would quicken from anxiety. At the same time as I was coming to accept more social interaction during the day I was accepting my physical limitations and they were mutually beneficial. When I was walking with other people I would almost invariably slow my natural pace to match theirs. The only people I encountered as walking companions who pushed me to walk faster I had met in stage one and they had by now gone ahead of me.

And of course the environment played its part. The physical challenge of the Meseta did not come from steep climbs or difficult topography but from endurance on the long days. The climate was also different, with little shade to be found most days and higher temperatures on the plain, the Meseta and the second stage was every bit as physically demanding as the first stage, but in different ways.

*Emotional and Mental*

I’ve mentioned already how the emotional and mental experience was interrelated with the social and physical experiences. The struggles that I was having in coming to terms with the social Camino was challenging to me emotionally and mentally, often feeling torn two ways about socializing on the Camino. A lot of what I mention in my journals as emotional and mental has to do with competing desires for solitude and community. I wanted to both have my own experience, and to share it. The challenges of the physical aspect of the Meseta took similar emotional and mental tolls as during the first stage. Long days which carried with them physical fatigue and soreness also tended to impact me emotionally and my mood would flag toward the ends of these days.

In the second stage the environment had quite a strong and direct influence on my emotional and mental state. Over the course of this stage I recorded having several aesthetic experiences brought about by ephemeral elements within the landscape. These experiences had quite dramatic impacts on me emotionally and mentally making me feel elated. Besides these
few moments the rural environments of the *Meseta* in general were aesthetically pleasing to me. There was a familiarity in the landscape that I found reassuring and beautiful. I mentioned earlier that the *Meseta* reminded me of the plains and deserts of the south western United States and those are landscapes that I love. The simplicity and often times starkness of the *Meseta* was beautiful to me.

I would have been perfectly happy to walk through nothing but the rural countryside of the *Meseta* for those 9 days but of course the roads and highways and urban edges were just as much a part of the experience in the second stage as the first. Indeed as I already mentioned, if not for the alternate routes available on some days, there would have been a lot more road and highways. In the provinces of Palencia and León, new trails have been installed right alongside roads known as *sendas*, which Brierley (2011) refers to as “soulless tracks” and “pilgrim autopistas [highways]”. While I was a pilgrim on the Camino I was unable to understand what had motivated these provinces to place the Camino right along roads, unless it was for convenience sake alone. While I did encounter people who opted to follow those routes when given an option because they were always the shorter distance between towns, I never did meet anyone who expressed a preference for them. The *senda* seemed to be regarded as a necessary evil, personally I question how necessary they really are, but we will return to this discussion later.

*Spiritual*

Similar to the first stage spiritual experiences were unpredictable and scattered throughout the days. I’ve mentioned above the “aesthetic experiences” which were brought on by ephemeral elements in the landscape and those are the primary mentions of actual spiritual experience during the second stage. The first of these experiences was in the early morning of day 15 while out alone on one the early mesa-like hills of the *Meseta*. The morning had been foggy and the fog thickened as dawn approached such that in the pre-dawn blue twilight the fields around me were visible but shrubs or hay bales in them were only discernible as dim, blurred silhouettes. The quiet and stillness that accompanied this cool morning fog made all my senses seem dampened and I stood there for some time contemplating the moment neither hearing nor seeing anyone else. In my journal I again described the sense of *pause* that came
with this, and I identified this as a moment of spiritual connection with the environment and the Camino. The morning that followed continued to be beautiful as the sun broke into the fog casting a sort of dusty glow on the landscape. The first town I came to that morning, Hontanas, I described as appearing to *open its arms to the Camino*.

On the following day, the morning was once again foggy, and as I climbed a slight hill overlooking the beginning of the *Tierra de Campos* the view that opened up in front of me provoked another similar experience of being awestruck. This was a little later in the morning, the sun was already breaking into the fog and in the valley ahead and slightly below where I stood the mist appeared to be receding in wide bands from the long rays of sunlight. On the horizon, the mist ahead almost appeared to form the shapes of mountains or forests in negative. Continuing along the trail and descending into this surreal and beautiful scene was a joyful experience. I started singing Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” spontaneously. There had been a couple of pilgrim’s ahead of me but I was mostly alone. A few minutes later I was surprised by a white pickup truck coming down the trail behind me. The truck was so foreign to my image and experience of the scene I had just witnessed that I was amused by it, until it kicked up dust around me and then I was annoyed by it. Both of these experiences were directly landscape related and both, once again were set in quiet countryside’s well away from roads or modern infrastructure.

Other experiences I recorded as spiritual during the second stage were in reference to expansive feelings of gratitude similar to ones I described in stage one. I had one particularly strong experience in León, while strolling quietly around the inside of the Cathedral. I had been running my hand along the stone pillars feeling the texture of the old masonry and imagining the pilgrims before me who had touched those stones when I stopped at a particular spot. As I recall I was facing the large rosette stained glass window at the entrance to the Cathedral and to the right of the altar but what stopped me was a sensation of tingling in my hand as it rested on one pillar. I couldn’t explain the sensation beyond that and I made no attempt to explain it at the time, I just stood and enjoyed it for a few moments, feeling as though there was some kind of energy contained within that place. In the case of this experience I recorded it as spiritual because it filled me with gratitude, because it took place within a church, and because I couldn’t explain the origin of the sensation. Afterwards I held that hand to my heart for some time. The moment may have been fleeting like the ephemeral mists but the setting certainly was not, the
Gothic Cathedral of Leon, the *Pulchra Leonina*, has stood on that site since it began construction in the 13th century.

To bring this section to a close let me summarize: In the second stage my wellbeing started to stabilize, and the frequency of times I mentioned each of the four themes moved toward the same. There were of course outlying experiences which didn’t fit the trend, but there did appear to be a trend nevertheless. Socially my experiences responded to the sense of community which had begun to form in the first stage and I struggled to reconcile to social Camino with the personal Camino. Physically my body was adjusting but I started to push myself to go further and ended up having something of a physical relapse. Attention on my physical experience peaked once again about midway through the *Meseta*. The social and physical struggles I faced during the second stage had a large impact on my emotional and mental experience during this time. My emotional and mental experience was otherwise strongly influenced by the environment and the scenic quality to my eye, quiet countryside having a pleasant calming effect and roads making me feel irritable and hurried. Lastly, my spiritual experience continued in a similar way to the first stage. Spiritual experiences were scattered but mostly brought about by quiet, solitary moments in aesthetically pleasing landscapes. Particularly ephemeral elements like mist in the landscape carried with them spiritual experiences.

**STAGE 3: SPIRIT**

**DAY 23: ASTORGA - RABANAL DEL CAMINO**

In general it was a very pleasant and relaxing day as I headed into the final stage of the Camino. The environment changed very suddenly as I came to the end of the level plains and had mountains before me again. The change in scenery was nice, as much as I had liked the *Meseta*; I looked forward to the surprises and views that came with climbing again. The walk itself was relaxed and unhurried and then the afternoon was especially calm in one of the nicest pilgrim towns I visited.
Figure 23: Record of wellbeing day 23.

Wellbeing

- Unlike the first stage of my pilgrimage where my wellbeing seemed to have an inverse relationship with the topography, today as the Camino began to climb once again so did my wellbeing. Even though Astorga was nicer than some of the other large cities, it was quite scenic as cities go, it was still nice to get out of the urban environment and back into the rural landscape. My wellbeing progressively improved throughout the day.

Environment

- Slightly confusing in the darkness of early morning, it was nevertheless quick getting out of the city.
- Environment changed dramatically as the Camino climbed away from Astorga, hillsides in the distance were once again wooded.
- Fields were tall grasses and shrubs instead of cropped grains.
- Camino followed a road much of the day, but it was very quiet, and lined with low stone walls, surprisingly picturesque.
- Moving through the trees later in the day actually made the quiet road fade from view, even though it was nearby.
- Rabanal del Camino a beautiful small town, so relaxing I couldn’t bring myself to leave even though I had the energy to.
Themes

Social

- Walked with someone all day who wanted to have a politically charged conversation, we ranged all over the map with topics but the change of conversational pace was interesting
- Relaxing afternoon in Rabanal with a few of my friends but not the whole big group
- The hostel we stayed was run by a British pilgrim association and they made us afternoon tea and biscuits in their back garden
- Cooked a communal dinner

Physical

- Camino began climbing again but gradually, the change was nice and the walking pretty relaxed all day
- Took it easy, several breaks with my walking companion

Emotional and Mental

- Everything seemed relaxing today! It was a pleasure and I felt good, I felt strong and content
- Enjoyed having company
- Enjoyed the scenery and the towns
- Saw a fox! It made me feel happy and excited like a kid

Spiritual

- No spiritual mention
DAY 24: RABANAL DEL CAMINO - MOLINASECA

A stunning day in terms of scenery, the tiring climb up to the *Cruz de Ferro*, was rewarded with a beautiful sunrise looking back toward Astorga. The *Cruz de Ferro* itself was impressive in the way that pilgrims had been leaving small stones at its base for centuries which had built up a large mound. The most memorable aspect of the day for me was not the milestone of the cross, but the beautiful bright sunny walk across the mountain tops looking down into the valleys. The only view I did not enjoy was that over Ponferrada which from above looked polluted and sprawling.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 24: Record of wellbeing day 24.**

**Wellbeing**

- My wellbeing climbed up again as the Camino climbed and hung for much of the day at a plateau well above average
- Toward the end of the day when the Camino was descending steeply toward Molinaseca and overlooking the industrial Ponferrada my wellbeing did begin descending but ended up still above average

**Environment**

- Rivaling the Pyrenees for scenic views the hike up the mountain toward the Iron Cross was beautiful. My journal entry for the day is nearly all references to the environment
• Light sandy path was just bright enough in the sliver of moonlight to make my way up in the early morning
• Described the morning walk as like a *tapestry of senses*, my attention was intently focused on the light, colour, smell, texture and temperature of the environment around me
• Beautiful sunrise from halfway up the mountain looking back toward Astorga
• Landscape and flora had an arid character, with sandy soils, junipers, spiked shrubs and grasses across the mountainside. Occasionally the trees and grasses would break open to expose loose shale-like rock areas
• The anticipated *Cruz de Ferro*, Iron Cross sits at the highpoint of the Camino, in a large clearing surrounded by evergreens. Around the base of cross pilgrims pile small stones and rocks, some collected nearby, some brought from far corners of the globe, many with messages or names written on them. The rocks have accumulated over centuries to form a large hill around the cross
• Towns on the eastern side of the mountain, Foncebadón and Manjarin were largely abandoned; the only remaining occupants were operating pilgrim hostels
• Stunning views from the top of the mountain and along the ridge. The road was nearby all day but often hidden behind trees or up to 20 metres different in elevation from the Camino. Not a busy road. Most bike pilgrims followed the road also which made walking easier on the narrow track
• View over the industrial city of Ponferrada was not pleasant; smoke stacks and grey clouds of pollution mired the view
• Towns on the western side of the mountain were lively by comparison to the eastern slope, well cared for and much more affluent. The architecture was different as well, beginning to shift toward a more Galician style with slate tiled roofs instead of the red Spanish clay tiles
• Descent into Molinaseca passed through some groves of ancient chestnuts with enormous girths, as well as a lovely autumnal valley in shades of red and gold
Themes

Social
- Walked alone most of the day
- Stopped at the Iron Cross for a while and met up with friends there
- Found some familiar people in the later afternoon while descending whom I walked with for the last hour or so

Physical
- Climb up was steep and tiring in some places, but the change in topography was refreshing after such a long plain
- Started out with breakfast at the hostel rather than having to walk 8-10km before breakfast like most days, which gave me a lot more energy for the climb
- The descent was steep and quite treacherous in places on loose rocks, especially in the sandals I wore

Emotional and Mental
- Made virtually no reference in my journal to my emotional or mental state but to say that my happy spirit remained intact
- Though I didn’t make it explicit in my journal, the beautiful scenery had a very positive impact on my mood and I was content and energetic all day

Spiritual
- Reference to my happy spirit was also the only mention of anything spiritual all day
- I however neglected to write about my time at the Iron Cross. A place of prayer, I did pray there on behalf of someone else, and while I had no experiences which I would consider personally spiritual, it was a spiritual time if not, in fact, religious
DAY 24: RABANAL DEL CAMINO - MOLINASECA
DAY 25: MOLINASECA - VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO

I had been out with Camino friends at dinner and the usual bottle of wine which accompanies every meal, whether requested or not, had turned into several bottles of wine and the following morning I was accordingly groggy. My tiredness lasted through the day and I had found a tired companion to walk with so our joint progress toward Villafranca de Bierzo was slow. Almost the whole day was on the road trudging from one small town to the next, after it had taken all morning just to get into and out of Ponferrada. The late afternoon was hot but beautiful walking through hilly vineyards which had I been more awake I’m certain I would have really loved.

Figure 25: Record of wellbeing day 25.

Wellbeing

- Not a super nice day, my wellbeing hung around average in the morning because I was very tired as I followed the road into Ponferrada
- Having seen Ponferrada from above, I wasn’t particularly looking forward to walking through it and my wellbeing dipped below average while I was moving through the city which took some time
- Away from the city my wellbeing improved some, climbing back up to about average and remaining there for the rest of the long day
**Environment**

- The recommended route into Ponferrada follows the river and then goes up into some forested hills. However, my headlamp died and it was too dark for me to follow that trail (I tried). So I followed the road, which on account of my headlamp, I was grateful for this one time.

- By the time it was light I was in a suburb on the outskirts of Ponferrada. The suburb was followed by an industrial area, then retail. In the center of the city there was unexpectedly a massive Knights Templar Castle which I had coffee across from so that I could appreciate it and then the rest of the way out of the city was pretty much standard modern city fare… retail, light industry, strip malls and roads, roads, roads…

- The edge of Ponferrada was a series of now connected small towns. Each town marked by a new church. The string eventually gave way to farm fields and occasional small woodlots spanning the short distance between the many more small towns along the road to Villafranca del Bierzo.

- After crossing the river Cúa the crops turned to primarily vineyards once again.

- After Valtuille de Arriba the Camino finally left the road for the final couple of hours into Villafranca del Bierzo walking through large vineyards.

**Themes**

*Social*

- Starting out I was on my own until I passed by the hostel in Ponferrada where I found a friend who I hadn’t seen in a while. Chatted a bit, but continued on my own until I stopped for coffee.

- Walked remainder of the day with M, stopping every so often to chat with other friends along the road.

- Almost the entire cast of characters I’d met on the pilgrimage was in Villafranca del Bierzo at the end of the day, had dinner with probably close to 20 people.
Physical

- Very tired and groggy through the day and dragging my feet. Stopped for coffee breaks fairly frequently
- M and I evenly paced at the slow end, both of us plodding along with determination
- Last 7km felt like 10 or 11 in the afternoon heat
- Long, hard day at over 30km

Emotional and Mental

- Despite tiredness I wasn’t unhappy, M and I both did get a bit whiny and disgruntled at the end of the day but neither of us took it very seriously. It was helpful to have company for that reason, it kept things light-hearted

Spiritual

- Nothing spiritual, a pretty mundane day overall
Day 25: Molinaseca - Villafranca del Bierzo

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DAY 26: VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO - LA FABA

A day of surprises to me, I had opted to follow the middle way, the options to the left and right both making dramatic climbs before descending to leave you at the base of the ultimate dramatic climb up O’Cebreiro. While not as tall as the mountain climbed on the first day, O’Cebreiro was still a 700m elevation gain over the course of about 7 km. Even while I followed the path up the valley that was shared by two highways, I found the day very peaceful and surprisingly beautiful. There was a strong familiarity in the landscape, like a mixing together of elements from places I had lived or travelled in the past. Ended up stopping halfway up the mountain in La Faba, to leave the last climb for the morning in hopes of catching the sunrise from its peak.

![Graph showing elevation and wellbeing over distance]

Figure 26: Record of wellbeing day 26.

Wellbeing

- Today my wellbeing climbed in a series of stages eventually finishing off well above average having begun close to average

Environment

- A glance at the map and it seems I am suddenly in a wooded wilderness compared to the past month the Camino winds up the valley between two mountains and toward O’Cebreiro, a somewhat daunting mountain at the end of the day’s walk
- Also winding up the same narrow valley are two highways, one elevated which made surreal appearances hanging hundreds of feet above the ground. From it’s height at least the sound of traffic was negligible from the larger highway.
- The sound of the river and the birds were audible above the highway sound for which I was grateful.
- Environment very different in the valley, humid and verdant after so many weeks of dry air and dry fields.
- Eucalyptus plantations and chestnut, oak and ask forests.
- Forest fires in past years had left their mark on the surrounding mountain sides.
- Smell of smoke in the morning from what appeared to be a controlled burn.
- In clearings along the valley there were white stucco farmhouses situated in bright green pastures that were reminiscent of Ireland as I neared the province of Galicia.
- Last stretch up to La Faba was a steep climb through green, mossy forest on a rocky dirt trail.
- La Faba a small town with the hostel beautifully situated on a wooded lot at the edge of town overlooking the valley, a small chapel associated with the German association run hostel.

**Themes**

**Social**
- Walked alone all day, enjoying the solitude.
- Did meet up with a few people during the day for coffee breaks and such.
- Most of my friend group ended up in the same hostel at the end of the day and we cooked a big dinner together before attending a pilgrim blessing and small, sweet church service.
- Another large group travelling together were also at the hostel and they were quite loud and somewhat inconsiderate.

**Physical**
- Had considered taking one of the alternate mountain routes in the morning but ultimately wasn’t feeling up to it.
• Kept a steady pace as I wound up the valley, slowing a little later because I didn’t want to feel I was hurrying
• Steep final climb was exhausting, but the hostel has a fountain to soak feet in that was so refreshing
• My body is feeling ready to finish the Camino, but I also don’t want it to end

Emotional and Mental
• Was worried about walking amid the highways but the valley turned out to be beautiful and peaceful despite them, and I was enjoying the scenery greatly
• Feeling really good, comfortable and at ease all day
• At time through the day my emotions were waxing between happiness and sadness which were inexplicable to me and seemed to come from something outside myself. I found myself feeling like they were memories somehow held in the landscape
• A growing trepidation about the nearing end of the Camino

Spiritual
• Gusting wind in the morning seemed to be ushering in something new
• The familiar Celtic landscape brought up a host of memories many of which were of past spiritual experiences, the sense I had of emotional memories held in the landscape seemed to me like ancestral memories
• I was reminded by the landscape of images from a past life regression I had experienced several years before and these memories caused me to be quite sensitive through the day
• The church service in the evening was led by a local Franciscan Friar and was a simple, beautiful ceremony where he passed around a candle asking everyone to either speak or hold their prayers while they held the candle. While the candle was slowly moving through the crowd I experienced a kind of vision/ daydream:
I was in a grove of tall, airy trees dappled sunlight streaming in. I wore a simple white gown and walked forward toward a small circle of hooded-druidic figures. Opposite me as I entered the circle was a man who I walked up to and held the hands of, facing him. We were being joined in a hand fasting ceremony. I looked into the eyes of the man and the words “I will know by the eyes” came into my mind.

The Friar began speaking again right after I heard these words
DAY 26: VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO - LA FABA
DAY 27: LA FABA - TRIACASETELLA

In the morning I was torn between wanting to be able to see the woods I walked through and wanting to reach the peak for sunrise. I ended up somewhere in between, watching the sunrise from just below the peak which was perhaps better in the end. When I walked afterwards into the town of O’Cebreiro at the peak, the viewing places facing the sunrise were crowded with pilgrims, I was glad for my quiet sunrise. The remainder of the day my legs were tired from climbing so I took things easy which was easy enough with so many beautiful views to capture my attention and arrest my progress.

Figure 27: Record of wellbeing day 27.

Wellbeing
- A good day, my wellbeing climbed up even higher above average than the previous day and remained high
- Dipped down a little on the descent toward Triacastella but finished still above yesterday’s peak
- Wellbeing high largely on account of beautiful scenery

Environment
- Early hours tricky navigating in the dark with my headlamp still dead, climbed up to the peak of O’Cebreiro in the dark
- Sky bright with stars once out from under trees: Orion overhead, the Big Dipper pouring it’s celestial contents into the mountains north of me and directly ahead, leading the way, Venus bright above the horizon
- Some sections of trail sunken with steep banks to either side making it feel like a tunnel
- Stunning sunrise from the peak looking back down the valley I’d climbed up. The morning was clear and unusually warm
- Somehow got off the trail and followed a random road into the birch woods, delicious blackberries and funny mushrooms everywhere before I found my way back to the actual Camino trail
- Walk most of the day along the ridge of mountains looking down into green valleys with gold tinged birch forests. Trail lined with moss covered dry stone walls wound through pastures and small woods
- Followed close to the road much of the day but it was quiet and not bothersome
- Small farming towns along the way were run down, half in ruins and unkempt. A strong sour odour of cow manure accompanied most of the villages
- Trails on the descent into Triacastella were often half sunken and so framed in by overhanging trees as to appear tunnel-like

**Themes**

*Social*

- Walked on my own much of the day, only for short stretches with company
- In Triacastella, there was a long afternoon of relaxing at a street cafe with the group gradually growing into the evening

*Physical*

- A cool day, the weather was perfect for walking and I kept a steady but relaxed pace
- Early morning climb tiring and my legs were tired through the day
- The rank smell in the villages did put me off my appetite a bit and I didn’t linger long anywhere until much later in the day, in Bideudo
Relaxed afternoon-evening
Weather cooled considerably in the evening and the hostel gave no blankets, I was very cold through night and didn’t sleep waking the next morning with a sore throat and cold

Emotional and Mental
Feeling a little lost in the morning without my light
Part of what I enjoy about the pre-dawn walking is the sense of risk, the Camino seems a little more wild and exciting in the dark
Immensely enjoyable day, tired but happy

Spiritual
Sort of magical feeling from the tunnel-like pathways
DAY 28: TRIACASTELLA - BARBADELLO

More familiarity in the landscape today, the sense was so deep at times as to feel almost ancestral. Walking between green pastures, dark hardwoods and light birches all tied together with a network of old stone walls it was like being in a mythic story. My imagination was fired up by this landscape as the Camino wove into valleys and around hills, constantly changing the view.

![Wellbeing Graph]

**Figure 28: Record of wellbeing day 28.**

**Wellbeing**
- Wellbeing stayed well above average through the day not really climbing or falling overall but wavering as the scenery shifted through the day from fields, to woods, to villages and so on

**Environment**
- Early morning walking was a series of short steep climbs and descents as the Camino wound confusingly between them. There were enough small trails and roads heading different directions that is was a little challenging to choose the correct route
- Dark forest creaky and eerie but exciting too and enjoyable
- Woods fluctuated between dense hardwood stands and airy, feathery birch forests
● Landscapes were so well integrated with stone walls emerging from the woods to frame open, green pastures. Even the villages seemed to emerge organically from the earth. The Camino path itself was more like a stream than a trail, with a hard stone base worn smooth by the constant foot traffic and sunken below earth embankments and stone walls

● Villages, though smelly, were charming and so well situated. Really enjoyed the Galician architectural style with it’s massive stone construction and fine slate roofs

● Again near the road much of the day but again it’s presence was often negligible, quiet and hidden from view by walls or trees

Themes
  Social
  ● Walked alone again, meeting up with M and another friend in Sarria where I purchased a warmer sleeping bag. Walked with them the remaining hour to Barbadello
  ● Smaller group this evening at the hostel, but a nice intimate setting

  Physical
  ● Kept a constant pace and didn’t stop for a break until Furala where I remained some time enjoying the atmosphere of the quirky cafe and the comings and goings of other pilgrims

  Emotional and Mental
  ● Really enjoyed hearing cow bells again, had missed the sound of them since the first week
  ● Loved the birch forests that were such a fine texture against the stone walls which framed everything in the landscape
  ● Familiar feelings again from the landscape, feeling as though immersed in memories which weren’t my own (this was also spiritual)
Spirit

- A sense of myth in the landscapes, and ancestral familiarity
- Surprised to see whole groves of birch trees which were so fine they seemed to whisper and looked as though they might just dissolved into the air. I felt compelled to walk off into the trees and dissolve with them into the air. The forest hush and golden hue was something of a prolonged, gentle “aesthetic experience”
DAY 28: TRIACASTELA - BARBADELO
DAY 29: BARBADELLO - HOSPITAL DE LA CRUZ

The morning was much like the previous few days of beautiful, somewhat mystical landscapes to my eye. The days were growing long as I drew nearer to Santiago and this afternoon dragged on a bit. The landscape after Portomarín was also just not quite as interesting as it returned for a while to tan coloured cropped fields though the view climbing away from Portomarín was nice. At the point I was not sticking to the recommended stopping points and they were likely recommended for good reason, the town we stayed in was pretty lifeless.

![Wellbeing graph]

**Figure 29: Record of wellbeing day 29.**

**Wellbeing**
- Wellbeing arced slightly upward through the day and then back down slightly ending just above average

**Environment**
- The walk between Barbadello and Portomarín was much like the previous two days. The Camino winding over rolling hills, between woods and wall lined fields and pastures. These landscapes I was totally enamoured of
- The early morning, rocky woodland trails present many tripping hazards but are quiet, peaceful and well worth the risk
• The water level was so low in the *Embalse de Belesar* outside Portomarín that the old town which had been flooded when the river was damned was clearly visible in the water below the bridge

• From Portomarín to Hospital the Camino climbed gradually up a ridge line with views out to either side. The earth was a little drier here, and there were some vineyards and other crops interspersed with woodlots

• Villages along here were small and pretty lifeless, nothing there except spare pilgrim accommodations

**Themes**

*Social*

• Started out with company today, M and another pilgrim. The three of us stopped for coffee early and somehow the rest of our group got ahead so that we came up behind them not long after so that there was a whole group of us together when we came upon the 100km marker (100km to go until Santiago) where we had a bit of a photo-op

• After walking in a group though I was eager for the peace and quiet of my own company and struck off on my own for a while

• Met up with people again and picnicked in Portomarín before those of us continuing further on set off together. I remained with the group for the rest of the walk

*Physical*

• Another long day at over 31km which wore on me and my body was beginning to feel tired deep within

• My pace has slowed down even when I am not with company now, feeling somewhat lethargic and anxious to reach Santiago even as I am not eager for the experience to be over

• Really pleased with my sleeping bag purchase, so much warmer
Emotional and Mental

- Happy about warmth of sleeping bag
- Starting to feel I am just writing repetitive journal entries
- Anxiousness about reaching Santiago
- Eager for time on my own to reflect

Spiritual

- Galician landscapes evoke a rich mystique for me. The aesthetic of old mossy forests, crumbling stone walls and sunken paths... consistently brings up expansive feelings of mystery and spirituality. They make me want to be a hermit in the wild. The Van Morrison lyric “Haunts of Ancient Peace” comes to mind
DAY 29: BARBADELO - HOSPITAL
DAY 30: HOSPITAL DE LA CRUZ - MELIDE

Landscapes varied between fields, eucalyptus and oak forests. It was in the morning that we, I was with a whole group at the time, passed the milestone marking 100km remaining to Santiago. Apart from the distance this also signalled an increase in pilgrims on the road. We saw taxi’s drop people off at the marker so they could make their pilgrimage to Santiago 100km, the distance which was required by the Cathedral in order to issue the Compostela certificate.

![Wellbeing Graph]

Figure 30: Record of wellbeing day 30.

**Wellbeing**

- Mostly level, above average, rising slightly toward Palas de Rei and returning back to level by Melide
- These day’s leading up to Santiago are largely levelled out but still above average, I am by now so well adjusted to the various aspects of the experience that my wellbeing fluctuates very little now

**Environment**

- Walking in the dark just before dawn started to break
- Morning fog was beautiful on the hills and trees
- Less frequent directional signs in Galicia but bollards every 500m marking the distance remaining to Santiago
• Walked on the quiet country lanes most of the day, a few brief sections when it moved away from road, but road less of a bother now, almost no traffic anyway
• Landscapes varied from fields to eucalyptus to hardwood forest through the day keeping it interesting
• Just prior to reaching Melide there was an office park which purported to be a *Bosque del Peregrino* (Pilgrim Forest), the “forest” consisted of a 100m strip between the bland office buildings on one side and the highway on the other which was planted with an assortment of small trees and shrubs in varying degrees of unhealthy
• One last little bit of forest before reaching the town harboured hidden Amanita mushrooms
• The town of Furelos at the entry to Melide appeared to be very old, but beautifully kept, and on the contrary the town of Melide appeared to be almost entirely new developments and lacking in much character

Themes

*Social*

• Walked with M and another pilgrim all day, stopping for several breaks throughout the day
• Now within 100km of Santiago large new groups of pilgrims joined us on the road such that it became crowded at times. But with all their freshness they moved quite a bit quicker and it was easy enough to let then breeze by and enjoy the quiet on their heels. Hostels closer to Santiago now where very large to accommodate the increased crowds and there was little fear of not finding a place to stay
• Once again a larger group of friends met up in Melide at the end of day and went for dinner together. Melide was apparently known for its *Pulpo* (Octopus) and everyone (except me) wanted to eat that

*Physical*

• After three days of 30km plus walks and 30 days of walking... the days were growing long and tiring. Can’t get up quite as early any longer.
• Taking lot’s of breaks to rest and socialize
• It was Sunday, we walked like it was Sunday; slowly
• Had an uninspired salad for dinner at the seafood place everyone went to

*Emotional and Mental*

• Loud chatter from crowds of fresh pilgrims a little annoying, hard not to feel the common pangs of superiority knowing we had walked hundreds of kilometres to reach this place that others were just beginning from. I did try to keep it to myself
• After a long day, reaching Lobreiro and realizing we had yet another 9 or 10km to go was a little psychologically daunting… but we kept on like troupers
• Finding the fairy tale like toadstool revived my flagging spirit a bit, which I needed to carry me through the boring Melide

*Spiritual*

• Mentioned that being on the Camino often feels like being in another time, living at a slower pace. In light of this sense, modern towns such as Melide feel jarringly out of context
A third day of walking over 30km a day and it was wearing on me and the other’s in my group. Only days away from Santiago now, I had embraced walking with the group, conscious that these friends from all over the world I would not likely see again after we parted ways in Santiago. The community and social experience on the Camino had crept up to become the most prominent experience in this final stage. Much of my time was spent with the group of pilgrims who had come to be my friends and community on the Camino, though I did still strike out on my own when I needed time to myself.

Figure 31: Record of wellbeing day 31.

Wellbeing
- Similar to the recent trend my wellbeing remained fairly level above average, rising a bit more in the latter two-thirds of the day

Environment
- The closer I get to Santiago, I find the less the landscapes are standing out in my mind, in these final days it has become almost entirely a social experience.
- Walking alone means paying more attention to the environment, but it takes effort and some amount of force to stay alone as the trail becomes ever more crowded
• Moving from one place to another every day challenges you to constantly adapt and remain open to change. Clinging or trying to force things to remain static makes it very difficult… An interesting consequence of this challenge to remain unattached is that ‘place’ seems to become less and less important as it continues to shift
• Harder and harder to remember the names of the towns I pass through or that I stop in each day

Themes
Social
• Social experience is taking precedence now over other aspects of the Camino as I spend nearly all my time with my group of pilgrim friends conscious that Santiago is only a day or two away
• Have found some of the most poignant realizations and moments have come with conversation. However, “aesthetic experiences” have only occurred while on my own, or nearly alone. Each has value
• Set out alone this morning and overtook a friend on the road meeting up with him again later
• Found a whole group of friends having breakfast and walked with them for a while, eventually the group spread out and I ended up speaking to one woman for some time
• Overall the day was socially fluid as I ended up walking with a range of people

Physical
• Yet another long day, ended up walking even farther than intended
• Took several breaks again, largely as a result of the social group
• Camino was largely on earthen paths today which were a nice break from the roads (even though the roads were quiet and not bothering me much)
• Arco O Pino hostel, close to Santiago, was crowded, smelly and the dining in town was really awful
Emotional and Mental

- Pondering the changing conditions of the Camino and how it encourages non-attachment, I mentioned how the clinging to constancy that I witnessed in some people really frustrated me
- I love the adaptive nature of the Camino, the motion and change
- Happy walking through any forest, even the invasive Eucalyptus
- Anxiety turning to excitement as I draw near to Santiago

Spiritual

- Mystique I associated with the massive old oak trees that were here and there still standing amid the eucalyptus plantations
DAY 32: ARCO O PINO - MONTE DE GOZO

At last a shorter day. Those people I was with in the hostel last night were all tired and none of us were in a hurry to get started today, we got up late and relaxed over breakfast and coffee before going anywhere. We all planned on walking only as far as Monte de Gozo, even though we could have gone all the way to Santiago easily. But, speaking for myself, I wanted the opportunity to pause on the edge of Santiago, to reflect and prepare for arrival.

Figure 32: Record of wellbeing days 32 and 33.

Wellbeing

- Just above average in the morning, a very late start with the whole crew. Wellbeing remained above average, just, most of the day but dipped to at average, even a bit below average, as we neared the outskirts of Santiago and the pilgrim “barracks” at Monte de Gozo

Environment

- Started out in the trees and the light streaming into the trees with the birds singing was lulling me into a very peaceful state of mind when the Camino abruptly exited the forest and came right out onto the highway, crossing over it in a very jarring moment
• The trail headed back into the trees again and climbed a little ways until it wound widely around the Santiago airport. No amount of foliage could hide the airport and the noise associated with it
• Most of the day the trail seemed to wind in between quiet forest trails and busy highways or towns leading up to Santiago
• Climbing up the final stretch toward Monte do Gozo which overlooks Santiago (although the Cathedral is no longer visible from here behind new apartment buildings) was tiring and the view into Santiago sort of anti-climatic on account of being able to only see the suburbs and new development
• The massive pilgrim hostel in Monte de Gozo with space for 2000 plus pilgrims is all grey and standard and looks for all the world like a military barracks… It was bizarre, but the atmosphere celebratory nonetheless and the opportunity to reflect before the last short walk to the Cathedral was welcome and desirable
• Full moon

Themes

Social
• Rose late with three other bunk mates and didn’t both getting a move on quickly knowing we were only going a short distance today. So we had coffee and breakfast in Arco o Pino before setting out
• Started out with the group of three others, but quickly craved time to myself to contemplate the impending completion and struck out on my own by picking up my speed to outdistance them
• Was well ahead much of the day though I slowed down near the airport and M caught up with me, we walked together the remainder of the way to Monte de Gozo. I appreciated M’s company because she was very respectful of my own desire for quiet and we could walk together without having to talk the whole time. Her enthusiasm for the nearness of Santiago was also infectious
• The whole group eventually made their way to Monte de Gozo, or stopped in to say hello before continuing into Santiago and the atmosphere that night was celebratory
Physical
- Finally a shorter day after 3 very long days, but even though the walk was only 17km, we were so tired it felt much longer
- In the end it was only a three and a half hour walk
- Tiring last climb up to Monte de Gozo

Emotional and Mental
- Craving time to myself to reflect on the closing of the experience
- Torn between peaceful contemplation and feeling like I wasn’t finished yet
- Not feeling ready to stop walking, I did not feel personally changed by the experience yet and I felt like I should be
- Sense that walking is so natural, I was uneasy about getting on a bus or in a car for the first time
- The pilgrim “barracks” had a desolate and empty feeling with so much unused space
- Really wanted to soak in the community of my fellow pilgrims and was much more inclined to hang out and chat than contemplate alone

Spiritual
- Part of the motivation to stop in Monte de Gozo before the walk into Santiago was to have the opportunity to clean up as an ritual of purification before entering the shrine of St. James
DAY 33: MONTE DE GOZO - SANTIAGO

Arriving in Santiago was a swirl of mixed feelings, chaotic social plans, and moments of stillness. There were beautiful, profound moments of sharing our experiences with one another, and crazy moments as we all realized that this was it, the end, our last hurrah as a community of pilgrims. We moved like satellites around the Cathedral from one park, plaza, or cafe to another. We prayed and we danced. We arrived, and then we dispersed.

Wellbeing

- My wellbeing climbed up over the course of the very short walk into Santiago, only 5km, completely despite the environment and almost solely on account of the excitement of arriving

Environment

- Sadly the final approach into Santiago is all busy ugly roads, hard sidewalk, and modern, uninspiring development
- Only the last 15 minutes of the walk up to the Cathedral are within the historic district of the city, an area now protected by UNESCO cultural heritage designation
- Once within the historic core, you get a few glimpses of the Cathedral steeples while winding back and forth through the medieval streets, eventually coming up along the north side from behind
- As I approached the Cathedral, I was with a group of several friends, and we came around the corner into the large plaza in front just at the sun was rising and the Cathedral bells chimed for 9am
- Much of the amenities to accommodate pilgrims and religious tourists are within a 5 to 10 minute walk of the Cathedral plaza, a myriad of souvenir shops and cafe’s all enclosed within the tastefully preserved architectural character of the city
• The Cathedral itself is an awe inspiring structure, enormous and ornate. The altar within gilded as was typical in other Spanish churches and cathedral’s across the length of the Camino. The actual silver casket containing the relics of St. James was recessed within a small crypt below the altar. The huge incense burner, the Botafumeiro, hung in front of the altar
• A mass for pilgrims is held each day at noon
• Much of the environment of the day was made up of the area in and immediately around the Cathedral. The plaza in front was where everyone arrived to Santiago, and so everyone remained in the plaza for a day long celebration of congratulating each other and reconnecting with friends we might have lost track of

Themes

Social
• The culmination of a 33 day long walk to reach Santiago was primarily a celebration of community among pilgrims
• The body of shared experiences was 800km long and it tied us all together, just identifying each other as pilgrims was enough to build a friendship upon
• Before we visited the Cathedral we had breakfast together, and went to the pilgrim office to retain our Compostela, the certificate of completion. The pilgrim mass was attended as a group
• The entire day was spent among friends and fellow pilgrims sitting in various cafe’s, parks, plaza’s or hotels drinking, eating, singing, hugging and dancing
• We revolved around the plaza, always returning to that spot as a point to reconnect with each other, to see who else might be arriving

Physical
• There wasn’t much about the day physically; it was a 5km walk and then a lot of sitting around various points in Santiago
• What physical movement there was, was joyous and celebratory. There was a lot of dancing in the streets, though after 800km, the pilgrim dance was more like a shuffle
Emotional and Mental

- Arriving was a stirring moment, the sunrise, the bell chime, the culmination of an epic experience. That said, it was also anti-climatic to arrive. It is sudden, arriving, there is no processional walkway leading up to the Cathedral, you come up around the side and then, all of a sudden, you’re there
- Arriving with my community was lovely, but I did feel it might have been more impactful to arrive alone and allow myself the time to reflect and absorb
- I did not feel finished. Finisterre had always been my goal, my end point and while Santiago was a huge milestone, I have close to another 100km to walk to reach the sea
- The actual walk down into the city and through it is surprisingly uninspiring. I don’t know what I was expecting, but it seems that a city built to receive pilgrims would treat the arrival differently, with more of a consistent trail or even a park or dedicated pedestrian trail
- Within the Cathedral, there was a long line to get into the crypt and view the silver casket, it made me feel very hurried and I would have liked to take my time there. However, odd as it was to line up for the traditional closure of the Camino, it was moving to stand in the steps of so many past pilgrims. The tile floor below was so worn and cracked with time it was a tangible physical trace of that history and I found myself nearly moved to tears by the image of it
- I most enjoyed sitting among friends through the day and just appreciating the experience we had all just shared. I knew I was continuing on to Finisterre the following day and that I would likely not see many of the these friends again, most of my Camino companions were not even from North America
- There were also mad moments as might be expected while people unwound after such an experience. Someone proposed to me for example, which was completely out of nowhere
**Spiritual**

- The arrival, with the tolling of the bells and the sunrise, into a plaza filled with joyful people was moving, a little magical, serendipitous
- Over the course of the Camino I had been having a symbolic numerological experience, in frequently noticing the number 3. 3 was everywhere I looked, and on the day of arriving in Santiago after 33 days of walking, I went to the pilgrim office and received my *Compostella* from counter 3, the day I arrived was October the 12th (12 in numerology is reduced to 3 by theosophical addition.. 1+2), I had picked up 30 pebbles… and so on. It was meaningful to me
- Once again, the wear on the tile steps up to the altar impressed me with a feeling of deep devotion
- Before the casket of St. James, though I am not Catholic or even Christian, I knelt to pray. I gave thanks for my safe arrival and prayed for the wellbeing of my loved ones, and the bee’s. It was a powerful and sober moment
DAY 34: SANTIAGO - NEGREIRA

No rest for the weary pilgrim. Following a late night of celebrations, M and I rose as normal before the sun and set out on the last leg of our Camino, or the first leg of a new experience. The Camino to Finisterre was certainly a different experience altogether, without a religious shrine as its destination it might not even properly be called a pilgrimage. But the yellow arrows which had guided us to Santiago were pointing us further on to the coast and we followed them. There were some aimless moments, and we quickly discovered that not all roads lead to Finisterre as they do to Santiago, we got lost. But we found the way eventually and some of the scenery was very beautiful. The way was certainly quieter, as the vast majority of pilgrims considered Santiago the end of the road.

Wellbeing

- Up to Santiago I had a sheet of elevation profiles which I recorded my wellbeing on top of, but that sheet did not include the stages from Santiago to Finisterre and as such I did not record my wellbeing for the four final days walking to Finisterre
- That said, based on my journals I know that my overall wellbeing remained above average during the continued pilgrimage out to the coast, I believe based on my experience that my wellbeing would have remained similar to the past weeks trend; level and above average
- I will not continue this category from here on

Environment

- First thing, we got lost. Missing a crucial arrow in the dark we followed an incorrect trail for almost an hour before finally circling back to find the arrow we missed
- By the time we crossed the Sarela River and climbed the hill away from Santiago the sun was rising behind us and the Cathedral was silhouetted in the early morning light. The way out of Santiago was much nicer than the way in
- The morning walk went through a series of eucalyptus groves, wealthy suburban towns and strangely empty housing developments while climbing up and down
After a break in Alto do Vento we descended again only to have another long, gradual climb up through forested hills to Trasmonte. Trasmonte seemed a much older village similar to the Galician villages we’d passed through so many of leading up to Santiago. A couple of elderly women harvesting grapes saw us coming up the hill into their village and handed us bunches of grapes to eat, they were delicious

The next town we came to after descending from Trasmonte (full of grapes) was an absolutely lovely little, well kept mill town on the river, Ponte Maceira, named for the medieval bridge. This was perhaps my favourite town of all on the whole Camino

Climbing again we came to Chancela where an enormous manor house behind tall walls impressed us with its beautiful grounds visible through the gates. Just on the other side of the wall were some of the loveliest old oaks, pines and chestnut trees

Negreira was not a particularly interesting town, there were some nice parts, but I found myself musing on how many forgettable towns I’d passed through. Character is easy to miss unless you make an effort to look for it

Walking was on a mixture of earth paths through the forest and quiet roads

Themes
Social
- So different now that we’re headed away from Santiago, there were very few other pilgrims on the road
- I was walking now with just M, having said farewell to all the rest of my Camino friends in Santiago. M and I walked all the way to Finisterre together

Physical
- Long morning before we managed to find a cafe, there were signs leading to the cafe in Alto do Vento for more than 12km leading up to it but none gave the distance... Seemed like a wild goose chase
We kept a fast pace through the day and arrived in Negreira relatively early despite the long diversion in the morning trying to leave Santiago and a lengthy break at the cafe when we finally arrived at it.

I tripped and fell before climbing up toward Trasmonte, the weight of my pack pushing me right to the ground which could have been much worse than a bruised knee and scraped palm I escaped with.

Decided not to push ourselves to make it to Finisterre in three days but to take it easy and make the distance in four days.

**Emotional and Mental**

- I really enjoyed this day; it felt kind of perfect and cheerful (despite the long hike for a cup of coffee)
- Happy to be moving again
- Somehow my fall, tripping over nothing in particular, became a running joke about my backpack trying to kill me
- The women giving us grapes at the top of the long climb felt like a reward from the Universe for persevering

**Spiritual**

- Nothing in particular spiritual about the day, some beautiful scenery, but no “aesthetic experiences” perhaps because I had constant company now
DAY 35: NEGREIRA - MAROÑAS

The way to Finisterre was quiet indeed, M and I saw few others and I personally relished the peace taking it as a further opportunity to reflect on the past month. The route seemed to amble back and forth across the landscape with no clear direction. The country was mostly farmlands broken occasionally by patches of forest and herds of cattle. The highlight of my day was visiting the Dolman at the end of the day, an opportunity to visit the deeper past of the Camino landscape and connect with a history which predated the Christian pilgrimage.

Environment
- The Camino zigzagged through stands of oaks and eucalyptus in the morning, then fields and hot sun in the afternoon
- Trail seemed to go back and forth so often it was disorienting, could never figure out which way we were headed
- Had to step aside a couple of times for passing herds of cattle and their sour smell
- Much of the Camino was on the road today, not alongside it, but on it and the traffic does not slow for pilgrims. Worst walk was going up the highway out of Maroñas to see the Dolman (A Celtic standing stone monument) which was marked on my map
- The Dolman was beautiful and cool to visit, but not easy to find or reach and in the middle of a cow pasture which, fortunately, was not filled with cows at the time
- Nothing in Maroñas except a few bars on the side of the highway

Themes
Social
- Just me and M all day, saw almost nobody else
- A couple of familiar faces in Maroñas but they didn’t stay there in the tiny hostel with us
Physical

- Not a very long day, but the fields in the afternoon were hot and tiring to traverse
- Dinner was about three times as much food as I could possibly eat

Emotional and Mental

- Somehow I found no mention of my emotional or mental experience in my journal. However, I read most of my comments about the environment and other themes and generally seeming content
- A somewhat mundane day
- Looking forward to reaching the sea tomorrow

Spiritual

- Visiting the Dolman was of great interest to me. I brought along the stones I had collected on the Camino which I intended to make into a set of runes and meditated with them there. I did get a sense of some energy at the place but it did not feel welcoming at all, it seemed like a forgotten place
DAY 35: NEGREIRA - MAROÑAS

'TRAIL TODAY SEEMED TO MEANDER BIRD + FORK THROUGH FIeldS. YIANGABE - COULD NEVER TELL WHERE WE WERE HEADING

'VERY FEW OTHER PilGRIMS ON THE TRAIL COMPARED TO LEADERS INTO BANIRIO

'.ZERO OF TRUCKS TODAY.. WHICH HERDS IN THE ROAD WERE TUGG

'FOREST TRAILS VERY PRETTY & PEACEFUL IN EARLY MORNING LIGHT

'MADE A SPECIAL TRIP TO VISIT THE DOLMEN BUT HAD TO WALK RIGHT ON HIGHWAY THERE
DAY 36: MAROÑAS - CEE

There was a curious assortment of senses in the morning as we passed through invisible lines separating warm and cold air. After a climb, there was a view down over sheets of fog which seemed to be coming upon the same boundaries and hanging over a lake each on their own layer. There were far fewer places to stop on the way to Finisterre and we ended up walking the first two days over 12km each morning before finding a place to have coffee and breakfast. The mornings were long for that reason, but the coffee was really good. Today the afternoon was also long, with a stretch of land over 12km long that was unbroken by towns. There was a small chapel in that relative wildness which was like a sanctuary from the afternoon heat.

Environment

- A small climb first thing, up Monte Aro from where we had a view down toward a large lake in the early morning
- The climb up was periodically very cold, and then suddenly warm, then cold and warm again… Something going on micro-climatically but I could not figure out what caused the sudden temperature changes
- Looking down toward the lake there were sheets of mist hanging over it in flat panes that almost looked like lakes themselves save that they were floating in the air
- Up to Olveiroa, where we stopped for coffee, the landscape was mostly agricultural fields and pastures between hills and small sections of woods
- Climbed up onto a ridge outside Olveiroa which provided a view down a long, wooded river valley out toward the sea. Along the ridge itself were outcrops of massive boulders and wind turbines spinning quietly
- Landscape beginning to shift to drier, rockier moor land near to the coast
- Briefly stopped in Hospital but it was right under a large, ugly and smelly factory spewing some kind of acrid black smoke into the air so we didn’t linger. Just over the hill from there though we got our first view of the ocean on the horizon
• Between Hospital and Cee there was a long, empty expanse of grassland with occasional young plantations of pines and eucalyptus, with evidence of past burnt plantations. It was a beautiful stretch, but long and hot. Except for the winding trail and occasional tree shade it would have resembled the landscapes of the Meseta

• A little ways into the plain, there was a beautiful and peaceful chapel ringed with London Plane tree’s where we stopped to rest for a long time in the afternoon heat, a wonderful contemplative space

• Glimpses of the ocean now and then helped us stay motivated through the remainder of the lengthy and hot afternoon walk

• Despite the opportunities to make puns about seeing the sea in Cee, it was not a very nice town

Themes

Social
• Still saw few others apart from one new person we’d met in Maroñas
• Only one other person in the hostel in Cee as well

Physical
• Another long, 12km walk before we found breakfast and coffee, status quo on the Camino to Finisterre
• Afternoon heat was quite exhausting and it was a longer day again at around 30km with a couple of climbs and then a steep descent into Cee
• For dinner I accidentally ended up eating seafood and then had nightmares about it because I felt so guilty

Emotional and Mental
• Seeing the ocean for the first time was both exciting and disappointing because it was so far off, mostly exciting. I had also imagined reaching Finisterre and finally seeing the ocean there (even though I knew I’d be walking along the coast to reach Finisterre)
Nightmares over eating seafood

**Spiritual**

- The layers of fog hanging over the lake in the morning was as close to an “aesthetic experience” as anything although I didn’t describe is as such in my journal that day. Had I been walking alone I might have stopped longer to admire the view and then recorded it differently.
DAY 37: CEE - FINISTERRE

The end, for real this time. Santiago had been the end of a consecutive experience defined by the changing landscapes, community and the goal of a Cathedral. On the way to Finisterre, the goal was an edge in the landscape beyond which I would have to either start swimming or else cultivate my inner miracle worker in order to continue. I had come here foremost to investigate the landscapes of the Camino de Santiago and so I found it fitting to choose a landscapes destination as my official end. Apart from that I could not resist walking to the edge both physically and linguistically. The edge of land, at the westernmost point of Spain and the edge of what was once the known world in continental Europe, hence the name Finisterre, “end of earth”.

Environment

- There were few signs or arrows to direct us out of Cee, but figuring we were on a peninsula and couldn’t really get that lost we just headed for the tip
- Had to wind around the inlet we were in, Corcubión, opposite Cee, was the nicer town, cleaner and better kept
- Climbed up behind Corcubión through a short section of eucalyptus woods and then out onto the coast, following the road through Estorde and Sardiñero. This road was much busier and we had to walk right on the shoulder several times which was dangerous
- The view was of the sea, beautiful, with the tip of the peninsula and the lighthouse there just visible much of the walk leading up to it
- After Sardiñero, the trail headed across the back of the long beach along a boardwalk. There were some pines and various succulent like plants but mostly sand
- Reached Finisterre around 1pm and found a place to stay, bought some sandwiches and a bottle of wine for a picnic and headed out the final 3.5km to the lighthouse winding gradually up along a steep sided hill. I had hoped to walk straight into the sea at the lighthouse but it wouldn’t be possible, I’d have to jump off a cliff into rocky waters and I wasn’t feeling quite so dramatic as that
At last, we stood at the 0.00km marker under a sunny sky, the sun which had been our near constant companion for 37 straight days held out just long enough for us to arrive, fifteen minutes later, a thick bank of fog rolled in off the sea and shrouded us in mist. (The following day, it would start raining)

We settled ourselves onto a warm rock and stared out to sea, what we could see of it, with our picnic for several hours

The rocky slope just under the lighthouse is littered with little blackened spots where people burn their pilgrim clothes or notes or whatever as a closing ceremony. M and I burned something each in the main fire pit and then waited for the sunset

The sun set into the fog bank and we headed back into town for dinner

The end.

Themes

Social

Walked with M all day like the past three

In Finisterre there were quite a few other pilgrims and we did meet up with a few familiar faces

The following morning I went down in the fog alone to the beach to find a scallop shell and stick my feet in the ocean

The culmination of this shorter pilgrimage was not nearly as social as the arrival in Santiago, this was more of a personal journey, even though I went with a friend, it was mostly just the two of us

Physical

An easy day, only a few hours walking though much of it along the roadside

The next morning M and I had coffee with others and then boarded the bus back to Santiago. The bus ride, winding quickly along the coast, after 37 days of only walking, was awful. It smelled like sweaty pilgrims and moving that fast made me feel so sick I spent those few hours huddled in a ball on my seat. I’d never had motion sickness before in my life
Emotional and Mental

- Though this arrival afforded more personal time to sit and reflect without the chaos of social events, it still felt somehow unfinished. I had heard from many past pilgrims’ accounts that the Camino experience doesn’t end at the end of the walk, so I suppose I was feeling that truth. Technically I did still have to go home and spend the next 6 months writing a thesis about it.
- Emotionally and mentally it was a calm and quiet afternoon, looking out to sea I was lost in thoughts of what it had all meant to me, what had changed, what I would do next and so on. It was mostly an opportunity to reflect.

Spiritual

- Apart from giving thanks for the safe completion of my long walk, I felt little in a spiritual sense about this end.
- Later, while awaiting the sunset I kept getting the sense that someone was coming, and sure enough we shortly ran into four other familiar pilgrims we’d not expected to see. There was a little bit of synchronicity on that.
Wrote the Sun set into a fog covered sea

The sound of surf during the day. A new addition to the rich auditory camao... cow bells, chimes bells, crunching gravel, traffic, wind, birds, pilgrim voices...

The following morning I went to the beach to await dawn. I found scallop shells--the Pilgrim's souvenir.
**STAGE 3: SPIRIT: ASTORGA - SANTIAGO - FINISTERRE**

This third stage is almost two stages in one as it has two endings. The first which ends in Santiago is a much more dramatic culmination. Santiago is the end of the experience as a religious voyage to the shrine of St. James. As the majority of pilgrims finish their walk here is also the primary ending point of the community and social experience of the Camino. From Santiago the route continues to the sea for those who wish to either collect a scallop shell from the beach as a token or just to walk until there is no more land to continue walking on (unless you turn around). The second part of the walk, to Finisterre, was a much more personal journey after having said goodbye to most of my Camino companions. These two destinations are tied together by similar landscapes though and thus I treat them as a single stage.

*Wellbeing*

My wellbeing during the third stage was more similar to the second than the first. It seems that once I had adapted to the Camino as a way of life there were fewer surprises which could influence my wellbeing dramatically. The Camino was a way of life, rising early to spend the hours of the day walking to a new place, like migrating. I recorded my wellbeing as I had been doing since St. Jean Pied-de-Port up until Santiago but beyond that I no longer has the same reference sheet to record it on and although I had meant to, I didn’t make one.

During the final stage my wellbeing rose and fell very gently through the days and stayed mostly above average. The only time it dipped below average really was while passing through the city of Ponferrada because of the busy streets and city bustle. Little of Ponferrada had preserved a character of building which was in keeping with the historical character of the Camino.

*Environment*

Stage three began as I walked away from Astorga. The environment had begun to change from the flat, dry plain of the *Meseta* after León and now after Astorga the change was evident all around. The mountains were everywhere in my field of vision now, and directly ahead of me I
could see the Camino beginning to climb once again. The hills and mountains in the distance were once again wooded and green. Fields were not only cropped straw and grains. There were even a few vineyards here and there again. In some way the beginning of stage three was like returning to the familiar terrain at the beginning of the Camino, but as the trail continued toward Galicia the landscapes continued to change into something entirely new.

The first two days out of Astorga gradually, but noticeably climbed toward the high point of the Camino and with the heights came the views. Along the mountain up to and following the Iron Cross there were stunning views of forested and rocky mountains, autumnal valleys and beautiful small towns nestled into valleys. The bird’s eye view wasn’t all beautiful though, views down toward the city of Ponferrada left a lot to be desired. From above, Ponferrada appeared sprawling, industrial and polluted and, perhaps partly due to anticipating that, it appeared that way also while walking through it. Anticipation is a big part of the experience on the Camino, particularly in regards to the landscape. For example the anticipation of quiet country had a negative impact on my experience when I ended up walking along roads often, but eventually I became accustomed to walking on roads and the anticipation of them meant that they influenced me far less. By the third stage I had become so accustomed to walking on or near roads that their influence on my experience was felt far less negatively. In fact over the course of the third stage the Camino is more often on or adjacent to roads compared to either the first or second stage. According to Brierley’s (2011) estimation, the Camino is made up of roadways about 45% of the time between Astorga and Santiago, and yet they bothered me far less often during this stage.

Knowing what to expect was not the only factor that made roadways less negatively influential however. Stage three also contained, to me, the most aesthetically beautiful landscapes of the entire Camino. Returning to the mountains and valleys and woods also meant I returned to a landscape of framed views and vistas. As I mentioned during stage one, walking in varied topography and vegetation meant that the view was changing more often, sometimes the view grew longer and more open, other times is was closer and more enclosed. Variation added a large amount of visual interest and also a sense of mystery which was largely absent in the Meseta. Added to that, the landscapes leading up to and through Galicia were almost like an ideal. Approaching the mountain O'Cebreiro the fields and pastures suddenly turned green again, the forests grew thick around me and were made up of ancient oaks, chestnuts and beeches, light filled and airy birch groves or fragrant eucalyptus plantations with mossy, fern-filled
understories. Up to and beyond O'Cebreiro, into the region of Galicia, I noticed birds singing and couldn’t recall having heard them much if at all in the Meseta. Coupled with the landscape changes the architecture also changed to a style much more Celtic, typical of Galicia, of white stucco and field stone buildings with slate tiled roofs. Fields and pastures were lined with moss covered dry stone walls which served as a kind of transition between the built and unbuilt environment, integrating them. Towns seemed to emerge almost organically from the landscape at times they fit so well into their surroundings. In Galicia the Camino when it wound through fields and forest was often lined with stone walls, and so well-trodden that it seemed to have worn a tunnel into the earth in places. In this stage I had “aesthetic experiences” like during the other stages but I also found the landscape fired my imagination more often and supported the experience of spirituality on the Camino.

Although the Camino followed roads roughly 45% of the time to Santiago (44% of the time between Santiago and Finisterre), they were often so quiet that few if any cars came by. Traffic noise was not an issue commonly associated with roads in this stage except when nearer to cities or highways. Roads, when nearby, were also much more out of sight than in the Meseta, when there was nothing to hide them from view. In and leading up to Galicia, there were forests, bends in the trail and elevation changes which hid or directed the view away from roads. Even when walking on the quiet roads, though still hard underfoot, there was so much around to look at that the landscape was far more distracting than the road itself.

As I drew nearer to Santiago, the environment reflected the increased traffic from pilgrims, tourists and business alike. A full day’s walk out of Santiago, the quiet roads became busier roads and then highways. The pilgrim masses increased within 100km of Santiago and so did pilgrim infrastructure like hostel sizes. In the final hostel before entering Santiago, where many pilgrims stay so they can walk into Santiago in the early morning, there are over 2000 beds in an entire, enclosed village for pilgrims. This pilgrim hostel, government run, resembles a barracks more than anything and is sterile and lacking utterly in character. It seems here; on the edge of Santiago is the pinnacle of a growing number of “non-places” (Augé, 1995) on the Camino. This hostel, in Monte de Gozo, is up on a hill that looks down into Santiago. Modern high rises and developments have blocked the view of the Cathedral from up on the hill; instead all I could see was apartment buildings and roads. The last 5km to the Cathedral navigate busy highways and city streets before finally entering the preserved historical centre of Santiago.
was so surprised to find that this final stretch into Santiago, the culmination of a pilgrimage trail over 800 years old and 800 kilometres long, was so unremarkable. I didn’t realize that I had expected something more inspiring until it wasn’t there, but the bulk of the walk into Santiago was barely even marked or clearly distinguished as the Camino. It could have been almost any city up until the historic area. Once inside the centre, it was very touristy, every shop, restaurant and hotel was actively engaged in supporting and advertising the pilgrimage. The historic character has been preserved in the architecture within the centre which fortunately toned down the garishness of kitschy pilgrim memorabilia that flooded the side streets all around the Cathedral.

The Cathedral itself, and the wide plaza in front, was a sanctuary in more ways than one. Obviously the Cathedral served an important religious function but it also served simply as a quiet space maintained within a busy city. The main plaza where the Cathedral sits is a place of arrival and gathering for pilgrims and it is wonderfully free of distractions like shops and restaurants, though an expensive hotel frames one side. The plaza is like a stage on which the Cathedral sits in the spotlight with a commanding and impressive presence.

But the Camino didn’t end in Santiago for me. Santiago was one end, but the road continued onward a further four days for me and a friend to the coastal town of Finisterre. Environmentally these landscapes were similar to what I had seen the past week in Galicia. On the third day walking toward Finisterre, there was a change as we approached and reached the coast. Prior to reaching the actual coast the landscape changed to a more open, rocky moor. The change was exciting because it heralded the sea. And finally when we got a glimpse of the ocean in the distance and saw the peninsula stretch out before us that had Finisterre at its tip; we were excited and sad that the end was very near. Finisterre was to me a fitting place to end my pilgrimage as it was a landscape destination for my landscape focused research. Besides that it was more final to me, both because it was a definite edge of land, and because of the history within the name itself: Finisterre meaning literally, “End of the land”.

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Themes

Social

In many ways I felt that the social aspect became the dominant experience in the third stage of the Camino. The closer I came to Santiago the more pilgrims there were on the trail, particularly in the final 100km to Santiago. Not only were there more people but after three weeks or more of walking together fellow pilgrims had become my community that was close knit. The closer we all came to Santiago the closer the dissolution of that community came as well. As a result I found that toward the end the more I wanted to be around those people knowing that many of them I would never see again once we parted ways. Afternoons and evenings were often spent in large groups chatting and eating together. Though I still walked on my own during the day sometimes, I would often take longer breaks to chat on the way, or meet up with people and walk with them in the afternoons. Increasingly, some days I had company through the whole day. The social experience was quite fluid as groups met up and broke apart through the day, but everyone seemed to be closer together now and more likely to run into each other during the day.

The final few days into Santiago I had only very little time to myself. If I had wanted it, I could have found it, but I wanted to be with the community. As a result of spending so much time walking with groups the landscape could become more of a backdrop at times, though I have still images and memories of beautiful forests and tunnel-like winding pathways. Because I was often in the company of others, the landscape did not influence me as strongly on a personal level. I was likely to have “aesthetic experiences” only if I was on my own. But, there were also times when it was nice to appreciate the landscape and scenery as a shared experience. When a particularly beautiful view might have affected me deeply on my own, in company is might spark a conversation which would be meaningful on a different level. During this final stage I had some of the most poignant and memorable conversations as I moved between groups of pilgrims within my community.

The actual arrival in Santiago was incredibly social. As a community of pilgrims having just shared such a meaningful experience we arrived and celebrated our arrival together. The Cathedral was a quiet space for contemplation and personally meaningful experiences, while the
plaza outside was a meeting and gathering point. At any time during the day returning to the plaza was sure to reconnect me with someone I recognized or had come to know well over the past month. I don’t think I spent any time alone during the day; everything that happened was a communal event. As a community we revolved around the plaza, periodically returning there to find others, take group photographs in front of the Cathedral, attend the noon pilgrim mass, or dance in the streets to Galician music played by busker's and street bands.

The next day it all changed. Setting out the following morning to continue my pilgrimage to the Coast and Finisterre I left behind all but one of my Camino community. My friend and frequent walking companion M and I set out together and walked the entire length, another roughly 90km to Finisterre, together. In contrast to the few proceeding days of large groups and celebration this was like an entirely different experience. The Camino itself, now the Camino Finisterre with Santiago no longer being the goal, was quiet and not crowded. In fact most days M and I saw few if any other pilgrims until the day’s end and even then few. To put it in perspective; the last official hostel (a Galician Xunta) before reaching Santiago had space for more than 2000 pilgrims, the first Xunta after leaving Santiago had space for 20. Finisterre itself was busier; many pilgrims arriving in Santiago take the bus out to Finisterre to see it and some of the other beautiful coastal villages. But the arrivals by bus are often new faces; it is surprising how much the social group can change over the space of the few days it took to walk to Finisterre in comparison to the few hours to bus there. The arrival in Finisterre, I shared with my friend M, but it was quiet and subdued by comparison to Santiago. We sat with a picnic and a bottle of wine on the rocks and watched the sun set.

Physical

Physically the third stage is vastly different from the second. Almost immediately leaving Astorga the trail begins to climb again. The climbs are not exhausting like the first day, with the exception of O’Cebreiro which was utterly exhausting. Rather, in some ways the climbs are almost a relief. I found that on the straight, flat sections of the Meseta it was too easy to fall into a particular pace and posture while walking and I would end up far stiffer and sorer at the end of the day as a result. In contrast, climbing forced me to keep moving my body in different ways and spreading out the strain. This is not to say that climbing was easier, it was just as difficult,
but it was different and the change was a relief.

Uphill was easier than downhill though. The downhill sections of trail were often steeper, and the path littered with loose rock. Bicyclists presented much more of hazard on these sections as well, while they had to crawl up like everyone else on the downhill they could, and would, speed by kicking up loose rocks and dust in their wake. I was almost run over by a couple of bicyclists. Though, on the whole, they are polite and considerate toward walkers. I never actually saw any horseback riders on the Camino, though a week or so after I had finished the Camino while hitch hiking between Caracasonne and Montsegur, France I was picked up quite serendipitously by a man taking his horse to begin the Camino. The Camino goes on they say.

During this stage there were a series of days over 30km each day that became quite tiring. As I neared Santiago I found that my body was just growing weary and ready to finish. I talked to my feet telling them that the day was coming soon that they could rest and begin to heal. And yet at the same time, it had become so natural now to rise early and walk all day that I didn’t want that to stop. If I’d had time I might have turned around at the sea and started walking back, or walking somewhere new. Having become so used to walking, my physical experience was no longer a major focus of attention in my journals.

As I have mentioned above, there were a lot of roads in stage three, but they influenced me little. Walking through busy cities and near loud highways was however no more an enjoyable experience than during either of the other two stages. The influence of roads seemed to have a lot to do with how much noise they made because the noise had the ability to draw attention and distract from the environment. However the majority of roads I walked on in Galicia, though they were still harder underfoot than earth trails, were in such beautiful settings and so quiet that the landscape was far more distracting than the asphalt I walked on. Additionally, I had by now become so used to walking on roads that their impact had faded.

Aspects of the landscape and environment which most influenced the physical experience in the third stage were the topography and forest cover. Mountains presented their challenges, as discussed above, both uphill and down. And forest provided shade from hot afternoons. Galicia is one of the rainiest regions of Spain and in the guidebook it suggests that the forests provide a break from the constant rain. I imagine that would have been the case had it rained at all, but it was sunny the entire time I walked, the weather only beginning to change the day after I finished.
walking in Finisterre. The nights were much cooler in Galicia on the whole though, I had to buy a sleeping bag in Sarria because the one I had was no longer adequate.

*Emotional and Mental*

Emotionally and mentally the final stage was a mixture of excitement and happiness over the arrival and trepidation and sadness at the ending. I was excited with the anticipation of finally reaching Santiago after so many days and so much distance. The sense of accomplishment was very gratifying. But I was also sad that I would no longer be a part of the Camino community, that I would leave all these people I’d come to know behind and not see many of them again. Nor did I want the experience to end; I started rising later and walking slower trying to somehow prolong the experience of being on the Camino. I associated the whole experience with personal strength, accomplishment, freedom and sometimes even myth and mystery. The idea of returning home did feel a bit like having to return to a more mundane life.

Some of those changes were more gradual, softening the impact thankfully. The community ending I dealt with over the course of the four days walking to Finisterre, I spent a lot of that walk missing people I’d known on the Camino, and wishing they would be there at the next hostel. I think having to leave the community at the same time as stopping the walk would have been even harsher emotionally.

Actually arriving in Santiago and even later arriving in Finisterre there was a feeling of incompleteness to the experience. I had heard so many times from fellow pilgrims or accounts I had read about life changing experiences that there was an underlying expectation that the Camino would change me somehow, or that my path forward in life from there would be more illuminated. I spent quite a bit of time thinking about this… that is something the Camino allows a lot of; time to think. I had alternately come to feelings of despair as though I had somehow missed some crucial experience, and on the other hand believing that I was largely unchanged because I already knew myself and was on the right path. In the end I think I came to accept that my pilgrimage was different from others because I was also doing research. Even though I had experiences of spirituality while on the Camino, there was always a hesitation to fully engage with my personal experience because I had a responsibility to my research. I experienced firsthand a classical dilemma of the participant observer, how “native” can you really become.
and still be doing research? This was no less an issue with autoethnography because even though
what I observed was my own experience, there was a point at which I had to step back and
reflect in order to take notes. That stepping back meant momentarily stepping out of living the
experience to report on it and I think the distinction was critical.

Many pilgrims I met on the Camino had left aspects of their lives behind to begin the
Camino. Some had quit jobs, ended relationships or just wanted to use the time to remain open to
new opportunities coming along. In speaking to others I repeatedly heard a common theme of
leaving and beginning anew as a Camino motivation and experience. This is something that I
was never able to do. My research was a tie that constantly held me to my life before the
Camino, and what I’d be returning to. I eventually accepted this as the reality, but I did
experience a sense of disappointment that my Camino experience was in some way less “real”
than others. That said, I was no less immersed in the experience while I walked and my
observations were still honest and true to that experience. Having now spent months thinking
about and reliving these experiences I have had a second opportunity to draw personal meaning
from my experiences. The process of writing the pilgrimage has almost become the more “real”
pilgrimage for me.

Regarding the environment and returning to the third stage of the actual Camino, I drew a
huge amount of satisfaction and happiness from the landscapes of Galicia. I felt content and
uplifted by the return to the mountains and forests. Galicia seemed so often familiar in a deeper
sense. The Meseta had been familiar in the sense that it reminded me of living in the south
western United States, but Galicia was familiar in a way that I could never seem to pin down.
Aspects of it reminded me concretely of travelling in England and Ireland and perhaps the
various elements were reminiscent of places I had been before or seen in pictures that just were
all present in this place. Sometimes I was so emotionally impacted by these landscapes that I was
nearly moved to tears or laughter by them. At one point I felt that the feelings I was experiencing
were not my own, but more like memories somehow held in the landscape itself, or ancestral
memories brought out by the land. My emotional and mental experience of the landscapes of
Galicia was interwoven with a spiritual experience of place.
My spiritual experience of the third stage was a little different than the others. In this stage there were specifically religious monuments and destinations which inspired in me, an irreligious person, prayer. I did still have specific “aesthetic experiences” brought about similarly by landscape elements, but there was also a spirituality which seemed to me embedded in the landscape. This latter aspect of the landscape was more diffuse in a way than powerful momentary experiences but it was also nearly ever present. At one point in my journal I remarked that I thought it was hardly possible for there to be landscape more suited to inspiring a spiritual experience than those of Galicia. The mountains, dark hardwood forests, airy birch groves, old stone walls and tiny, often crumbling towns combined into an almost mythological landscape which spoke to me through my emotional self, my subconscious self. To me Galicia was idyllic as an image. Certainly there were things which intruded into this picture perfect representation and brought me back to reality. Many of the towns were for instance quite rank smelling from the livestock and sometimes a taxi would drive up and drop off new pilgrims other times I would realize that I was romanticizing the deteriorating state of the towns which were more likely representative of difficult economic conditions. But overall there was an idealism present in the landscapes of Galicia which captured me making it easy to wander off into a dreamlike state there, or a trance wherein I felt like I was inhabiting a place of spiritual power.

Then there were also monuments like the Iron Cross, or Cruz de Ferro. Having read about the Cruz de Ferro prior to making my own way across the continent I was aware that there was a tradition of leaving stones at the base of the cross and of making prayers here. Prayer was not a big part of my life but before I left for Spain I had asked friends and family who had helped me make the trip a reality if there were any prayers that I could carry with me and make on their behalf. Only one person had responded to this offer, my teacher, mentor and friend in Colorado and she had asked me to pray for the bees. So while I lingered at the cross and left my stone which I had found on the Camino a couple weeks earlier, I prayed for the bees; prayers that I directed, out of respect for my friend, to God. I would not call myself an atheist nor a pious adherent to any one faith, when it comes to God as an idea or a being I would have to describe myself most properly as agnostic. In my own state of uncertainty I have no objection to
respecting the dominant faith of the Camino and even adopting prayer as a part of my own experience.

Finally, the Cathedral itself presented opportunities for spiritual experience even to those who do not consider themselves religious. As I’ve mentioned the Cathedral, though often busy, is nevertheless quiet. There were people in robes just walking up and down the aisles shushing over excited visitors every so often. The quiet and calm it offered in contrast to the hectic social plaza created a space for more personal experiences. Pilgrim rituals also offered opportunities to reflect on the spiritual meaning of the Camino experience. There was a tradition of walking up to a statue of St. James and hugging it to give thanks for safe arrival following which you could enter the crypt below and view the silver casket which held his remains. At the time I went to do this, there was a half hour long line-up but while waiting and looking at the worn down floor tiles where so many have stood before me I had a very moving experience. Entering the crypt was also powerful and there I was able to kneel for a moment and linger giving thanks rather than having to shuffle along to allow the next person in. I had hoped to return to this spot later, when it was quieter and take the opportunity to give thanks without the crowds, but time got away from me and I didn’t find the opportunity. After all this I felt that I would return one day and walk the Camino again.

The final four days to Finisterre were more about taking the time to process the experience rather than immediately getting on a plane and returning home. There was one more occasion where I would in hindsight describe the moment as an “aesthetic experience”, coming up over a hill to see sheets of fog hanging over a lake below. And then there was also moments for considering my own spirituality meditating on top of a pre-Christian Dolman, and sitting on the rocks at Finisterre watching the sun set into the sea.

I find this third and final stage harder to sum up perhaps because in describing the ending(s) I feel I am summing up the entirety of the experience. I have travelled quite a lot in my life, and most trips are easier to relate in brief anecdotes than the Camino has been. I think of it like this: Many trips or vacations involve travelling to a series of destinations; the ordering of these destinations is normally based on convenience. Trips like this are linear in time but the locations travelled to are not necessarily linked in a linear sequence for any specific reason. These trips are then like short stories; collections of trips that fall under a similar heading. The
Camino however, is a linear sequence of events leading to a single destination, Santiago. Each day draws meaning from the days that have preceded it and as such it is more like a novel length experience instead of short stories. When trying to then summarize it as a whole, or relate it to people who have questions, I end up hesitating, unsure where to begin or how much patience they have to listen to my story. Text suits me well; these words have infinite patience for my rambling tale. But, in the end I do not have infinite time to relate this experience, nor can I demand the same patience of my readers as the inanimate words that are reconstructing it. I must summarize.

The highlights of stage three, the final stage were; a beautiful environment, a strong sense of community, a roller coaster of emotions and a diffuse spiritual experience. The environments of Galicia, which was the predominant region of this stage, were idyllic to me. There was a harmony achieved here between natural, rural landscapes and towns that seemed to emerge from them like any other natural element. The forests and mountains here tugged at my heartstrings a little, the way wilderness sometimes does and beckoned me to disappear into them. The landscape affected me most strongly when I was alone in it, but I was also often with friends and fellow pilgrims. Arguably the social experience during this stage dominated the environmental experience, although perhaps dominated is not the right word it is too aggressive. My social experience took precedence, shall we say, as the community of pilgrims that had formed over the entire 33 days (to Santiago) knit themselves together even more strongly in the final days. Conscious of the coming conclusion, pilgrims were soaking each other in, having meaningful conversations and sharing their experiences and insights. And then, on a more personal, emotional and mental level it was a tumultuous time. I waxed between excitement and trepidation over the coming end. On top of emotions arising from my own experience I was feeling things I could not explain that seemed to originate outside myself or at least outside my conscious experience. The sensitivity that I felt was heightened by the idealism of the landscapes and these things combined to bring out a sense of constant spiritual experience emerging from the environment around me. Within that diffuse, as I’ve called it, spiritual experience I also had “aesthetic experiences” similar to the other stages, as well as moments of prayer and reflection. And then I had another pilgrimage, a further four days to make my way to coast as an opportunity to process the pilgrimage to Santiago before I left it.
My experience of Galicia definitely supported the idea that this final stage of the Camino is associated with the spirit; the landscapes and places I walked through seemed to house a spirit of their own which communicated with me when there was enough quiet. Highways and modern development, with all their noise, make hearing this voice so much harder. It was surprising to me that the area around Santiago seemed to respect that quiet so little. However, for all its noise and bustle, the modern world had not yet totally invaded Santiago because within the thick stone walls of the Cathedral there was a peace preserved by the traditions of the Catholic Church. Whatever issues I might have personally with the Church as an institution, I appreciated this peace.
CHAPTER FOUR

Pilgrimage may be thought of as extroverted mysticism, just as mysticism is introverted pilgrimage. The pilgrim physically traverses a mystical way.

- Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Environment

Having set out to investigate the influence of the landscapes on the experience of pilgrimage I will first outline its general role in my experience. Following this wider overview I’ll break it down, as in other chapters, into the individual themes that ran throughout my experience, and how each influenced and was in turn influenced by the Camino environments. The environments of the Camino can also be considered on a variety of scales ranging from minute detail and moments in time to something more removed from specific spaces or times that is more general, more regional. To discuss the observations that emerged from my experiences I’d like to start with a broader scale view concerning landscape types and their influence and gradually move toward a much smaller, more individual scale.

Urban and rural space

One thing immediately comes to mind when I think back on the ways in which landscape influenced my experience: The continual juxtaposition of modern urban and rural environments along the entire length of the Camino had a profound organizing influence upon me and my experience. I eventually had to struggle against dichotomizing the entire Camino and all of my momentary experiences along it as either rural or urban in their context. The distinction is useful as a general organizing principle, not as an absolute rule.
By rural environments I mean largely un-built land used primarily for agriculture or livestock. Natural areas, which are both un-built and not being used for some kind of human engineered production, were rare and how “natural” they really were was questionable. Because the landscapes and environments of northern Spain, in particular those surrounding the medieval pilgrimage routes of the Camino, have been inhabited and used for more than a millennium, there are no remaining landscapes which could really be considered “unspoilt” or “wilderness” in any sense of those words. For this reason I will group patches of non-plantation forest and grasslands in with the rural landscapes. This is both for simplicity sake and also because there was not a perceivable difference between them in the way they influenced my experience. Even when I felt I was in an area that was more remote, I never felt like I was in the wild. The presence of humans in the landscape was always evident even if only overtly displayed by the trail under my feet. But these rural landscapes were nevertheless peaceful and quiet in comparison to their urban counterparts. Because of this relative quiet I conceived of rural landscapes are far more conducive to contemplation and potentially spiritual experience than urban areas. This belief is confirmed by my own “aesthetic” and spiritual experiences that I’ll discuss in more detail below.

Rural landscapes were more conducive to contemplation owing to their relative quiet and less distracting qualities when compared to urban areas. In rural areas there was also more freedom to experience the unexpected. Rural areas were less structured environments, both literally having fewer structures in them, and figuratively in the sense that there were fewer restrictions on my behaviour or experience. While walking in a rural environment there was an abundance of open space surrounding me within which I could move. Though I stayed on a trail, a structuring element, it was by choice and there were few elements in the environment to direct my movement. An urban environment, in contrast presents physical barriers to freedom of movement in nearly every direction. Stepping off the sidewalk, the designated area for walking, in an urban area presents hazards like walking into traffic or walls. On a subtler level, cities and urban environments direct our attention as well. Businesses vie for our money, signs direct us where to go, and the predominant culture subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, suggest there is a right way to act, to dress, to speak and to look. Not to say that cities are centres of control and conformity but it takes effort and attention to recognize the elements that do control. In contrast, rural areas with far fewer such elements offered more freedom to define my own experience.
Because of that, my experiences while in rural environments were far more likely to surprise me than in urban areas and all experiences I had which I considered to be spiritual were surprises.

It was simpler to maintain a sense of place in a rural area. Many scholars have tackled the concepts of space and place and I cannot possibly survey all of them here, but I hope that a few perspectives will suffice to give an idea. Mircea Eliade (1957) suggests that for those who have a “religious experience” locations which reveal themselves as sacred are imbued with meaning and become defined places different from the homogeneous contextual space that surrounds them. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 6) describes the creation of defined places as such; “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995, p. 42) states that places are defined by, “inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points… but who also detect in it the traces of… celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate its private geography”. All of these definitions have in common the essential idea that ‘space’, which is undefined and unbounded, is given meaning, form and identity by human experience and in the process becomes ‘place’. The same is true with the Camino. The anthropologist Nancy Frey (1998: 178) says; “In the case of the Camino, the ‘source of power’ is not the sacred place (Santiago) per se but how the pilgrim relates to the landscapes of the Camino and the meanings that emerge as a result of this process.” In other words, the landscapes themselves do not have meaning until the experience of pilgrim’s places meaning upon them.

Urban centres which consisted of the oldest and most historic buildings, areas that are called in Spanish the, casco antiguo (Quesada-Embid, 2008) did a good job of preserving their character and sense of place, likely because many historic buildings and areas were specifically protected as heritage features. However, the pressure to develop quickly that exists in growing urban areas makes it much more likely that insensitive development will occur around these centres. By insensitive I mean development which is not in keeping with the historic, natural, or cultural context of the region or the Camino itself. Examples of insensitive developments were abundant: new highways built right alongside the Camino, strip malls, high-rise apartment complexes, landfills and sewage treatment facilities. Developments like these within sight or earshot of the Camino all had one quality in common; a lack of character or sense of place. The regions of northern Spain that the Camino passes through all have easily identifiable visual characteristics from major agricultural products and landforms to architecture and building
materials. When modern developments do not keep with these clear characteristics the results are obviously out of context. These types of developments are what French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) would call “non-places”.

*Aesthetic experiences and place*

Some of the most powerful and personally meaningful experiences I had in response to the landscape were akin to what Chenoweth and Gobster (1990) describe as “aesthetic experiences”. Due to the nature of aesthetic experience, these moments too can become quite meaningful and relevant to the perceiver even long after the event (Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990). Yi-Fu Tuan (1974: 94) describes that during an aesthetic experience; “Beauty is felt as the sudden contact with an aspect of reality that one has not known before”. It could perhaps be said that “aesthetic experience” is sufficiently broad a term to encompass another, more defined type of psychological experiences such as a “peak” experience (Maslow, 1964). The kind of experiences that Maslow describes are also generally perceived as meaningful and memorable events. This kind of experience, like the experiences I had which I have described as aesthetic experiences have the capacity to imbue meaning into a space or a landscape thereby transforming it into a “place”.

In all instances of aesthetic experience what I felt was a sense of *pause*, or “arrest” if you will, in response to a scene which I came upon. Most often I experienced these sensations because of ephemeral events like morning mists, sunrises, or a certain quality of light streaming through trees. I had these experiences when; I was alone, or with few others nearby; when the environment was quiet; and always in natural, rural settings with few hallmarks of modernity present. All of these partial catalysts for aesthetic experience are in keeping with what Chenoweth and Gobster (1990) described in their study; “such experiences were more likely to occur outside of a normal routine and more likely to occur when the perceiver was alone or not surrounded by my other people.” Certainly there is little that is routine about undertaking a pilgrimage. For the purposes of this study I refer to my examples of “aesthetic experiences” as broadly defined and I do not attempt to categorize them further. Instead, I merely want to suggest that they are meaningful and memorable experiences intrinsically related to the concept of place by helping to imbue meaning into the landscape.
However, the type of modern developments which create what I have described as non-places are in conflict with experiences like these. For me, ephemeral events were frequently major catalysts for aesthetic experience, but much of the development I witnessed occurring around the Camino was actively transforming the landscape into a static state. Pavement hardens the earth so that the subtle movement and changes are not visible any longer, buildings can block views and modern roadways rarely consider the natural topography in their alignment. Traffic obscures the sound of wind rustling through the leaves or grass, if there are even any trees or meadows remaining, the smell of exhaust overpowers the subtler scent of wild roses. In other words, much of the modern development occurring is actively reducing the possibility of witnessing ephemeral events by transforming the landscape into something unchanging.

_Pace and connectivity_

Speaking of the social influence of modern road-centric developments like strip malls, Hough (1990: 92) notes: “The streets are full of cars but empty of people.” In locations like this, such as the outskirts of Burgos, there are in fact some people on these streets but they are all pilgrims. Here the only pedestrians are the pilgrims who for lack of options, are forced to walk through environments that are not intended to be traversed on foot. In landscapes like this; “Life becomes a series of isolated events, nodes of activity between home, shopping, recreation, and work, made accessible by a no-man’s-land environment of highways.” (Hough, 1990:93). The Camino also serves in this case as a means of accessing such nodes. The Camino remains a continuous trail that is intended to be walked in its entirety, though many hint of “skipping” sections that are “ugly”, “noisy” or in other ways inauthentic to the desired Camino experience. What Hough (1990) refers to as a “no-man’s-land”, Augé (1995) might call a “non-place” and what they describe is not what pilgrims expect to encounter on the Camino. But by their presence on the landscape they interrupt and sever what is intended to be a consecutive experience connected by layers of landscape, history, culture and belief. Strip malls are not congruent with any of these layers.

All of the environments and landscapes I moved through as I crossed Spain on foot were connected by lines of transit. Two kinds of transit corridors wove through the urban and the rural landscapes which connected them structurally, if not always functionally: The Camino itself, and
roads. Roads were perhaps the single most significant environmental features which negatively influenced my experience. The Camino was not always near roads, but it was far more often near them then I had expected. According to Brieley’s (2011) guidebook of the Camino the trail was either on or alongside a road roughly 37% of the time between St. Jean Pied-de-Port and Santiago. They could either fit right into the landscape as though they belonged there, or they could stick out like sore thumbs declaring the primacy of a more modern and developed lifestyle than the slow pace of the Camino supported. Those roads which were congruent with the landscape were always narrow, worn with age and mostly untraveled and thus quiet. It was the traffic on the busier roads that bothered me, more than the roads themselves. Traffic created the smell of exhaust, the constant din of tires on asphalt and engines firing but more than anything it continuously and aggressively represented a different pace of life.

Pilgrims who have written their experiences walking the Camino, pilgrims I spoke to as I walked myself and my own experiences all suggest the importance of the pace on the Camino (Frey, 1998; Slavin, 2003; Boers, 2007). Whether you’re walking, horseback riding or bike riding, the pace you set is much, much slower than the pace of a motor vehicle. Many people, myself included, relish the opportunity to slow down and observe what’s going on around them as well as within. I found that the rush of traffic was an impediment to accepting and appreciating the walking pace. Frey (1998: 81) echoes this sentiment, “Often a sense of disorientation is experienced as the lonely dirt path gives way to the din and speed of the paved streets of the impersonal city.” Traffic sounds, smells and speeds made me feel hurried and eager to get away from the traffic itself. The speed of traffic was a constant reminder of the pace of life, prior to beginning the Camino and what awaited the pilgrim upon returning home. Slavin (2003), argues that the walking pace is important for experiencing the Camino spiritually, and that is partly why walking pilgrims dispute the pilgrim status of those on bicycles and in cars. By representing the other pace of life it also represented the other life in general and made it that much more difficult to commit fully to the Camino as a separate and different kind of experience, “distance from the everyday was created through and active avoidance or rejection of certain things associated with modern life such as commercialism, industrial landscapes, highways and noise” (Slavin, 2003: 13). This separation from the other life is a quality of the Camino that is often spoken of and valued (Turner & Turner, 1974; Frey, 1998; Slavin, 2003).
Even while roads represented the interconnection of modern life by being the arteries of human movement across the globe, they did not serve to connect experience on the Camino. Instead their presence was disruptive and as they dissected the landscapes they moved through, they also dissected the Camino experience. What would otherwise have been a continuous and consecutive trail was broken into pieces by roads that had to be crossed. Sometimes road crossings made the trail confusing to follow as well, the yellow arrows which marked out the route were often difficult to find and more than once I got separated from the actual trail by following a road and had to double back. “The dismay at the encroachment of what appears to be thoughtless modernity imposing its crude development on the sacred medieval Camino is common,” (Frey, 1998: 150).

The challenge that non-places represent is something that, unlike physical difficulties, cannot be overcome with bodily strength alone. Non-places are more representative of a challenge on a societal or cultural level, not a personal struggle. It was only through engaging with community that I was able to still have a positive experience in non-places, spaces that seemed antithetical to an authentic kind of Camino landscape. This expectation for an “authentic” experience of quiet footpaths and rural landscapes is something which Murray & Graham (1997: 516) say is representative of the Camino’s transformation into a tourist commodity. Considerable expanses of what is represented (in guidebooks, travel websites, pilgrim narratives) as a historic route are actually trails that were created since the 1980’s to fill the gaps between existing footpaths, preserved Roman roads, country lanes and in some places larger highways.

Something I heard a fellow pilgrim say one day while crossing a medieval bridge was that you could only really know that you stood in the footsteps of ancient pilgrims while on these old bridges. What she meant was that the paths could shift over time, be moved around, or buried under new roads and development, but the bridges remained in place. Recreating an “authentic” pilgrimage route in this case is somewhat like connecting the dots from one bridge to the next and establishing continuity. As Christopher Tilley (1994: 30) say’s, “points linked by a clear path have achieved a degree of structural homology and hence a positive cultural identity”. Without the continuity between the bridges, without that ‘clear path’, the very identity of the pilgrimage route is challenged. My friend’s statement has a deeper implication; the bridges are considered heritage features of the route, and are protected by its UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.
but beyond their direct association with the route itself, are not considered to be spiritual or religious monuments. The reality that it is these non-religious, heritage monuments which has helped re-create the pilgrimage route to Santiago is, I think, indicative of its shared role as both a cultural route (considered as such by UNESCO) and a religious pilgrimage, not one or the other.

It is not my intention to argue one side or the other, as a ‘pilgrim’ myself, I am not certain how my own identity would emerge from such a discussion. But if I may I’d like to, as others have done (Salvin, 2003), ‘sidestep’ the arguments over whether pilgrimage is a religious or a cultural phenomenon (Murray & Graham, 1997; Slavin, 2003; Olsen & Timothy, 2006) or whether its ultimate goal is ‘communitas’ (Turner & Turner, 1978), or ‘contestation’ (Eade & Sallnow, 1991) and instead focus on personal experiences. My approach is as such phenomenological.

**Social**

**Community environment**

Much has been said of the importance of community within Pilgrimage. Texts from within the anthropological study of Christian pilgrimage all refer to community as an important component of pilgrimage that supports the individual journey (Quesada-Embid, 2008; Frey, 1998; Turner & Turner, 1978). The Community among pilgrims is what connects them to each other and forms a network of support, a sort of “we’re all in it together” mentality. The pilgrimage itself is the common ground in a network of people made up of a broad spectrum of ages, nationalities, religions or beliefs, and motivations (La Peregrinación a Santiago, 2012). When I was having a difficult time emotionally, mentally or physically, conversation and socializing provided a distraction from myself that was uplifting and very welcome. Sometimes speaking to other pilgrims was the only thing that could draw me out if I was feeling really tired or unhappy by refocusing my attention external to myself and my own experience.

The friendships made are also an immensely valuable part of the experience. Sometimes meeting a new person on the Camino had a kind of synchronicity associated with it (Frey, 1998). More often then not when meeting a new person they would mention interests which were aligned with my own or with something I had just been thinking of. This happened often enough
to seem like a string of unexplained coincidences rather than isolated events, and hence began to feel like synchronicity (Jung, 1960). Friendships on the Camino could be quite fluid even fleeting as not all people walked at the same pace or stayed in the same hostels. This only added to the sense of synchronicity; a person might appear and engage me in a conversation for an hour or less and never be seen again, and yet that conversation would stay with me because it had been exactly what I needed to hear or say at the time.

However, there were also times when social activities were too much and seemed to be getting in the way of having potentially positive experiences on my own, an experience also spoken of by Frey (1998). Certainly when it came to having “aesthetic experiences” there was always a feeling of solitude which accompanied and facilitated them. I never experienced anything quite the same when I was walking with people because the act of engaging with others focused my attention outward and particularly on the people not the environment.

I would go so far as to suggest that there are two primary environments interacting on the Camino: The social environment and the physical environment. Social interactions had the power to dramatically influence how I felt about and experienced the physical environment, unlike the other themes. This was especially noticeable in physical environments that I would characterize as non-places (major highways, strip malls, industrial areas etc…). When I walked on my own through non-places I experienced them very negatively; they would drain my energy, resolve and happiness and often leave me feeling impatient to get away, stressed out or depressed. However, having walking companions could change that experience by directing my attention away from what I perceived as ugly and lacking character to the topic of conversation. In effect, non-places were easier to ignore with company which may actually have unfortunate consequences. If non-places aren’t experienced on a personal level but are instead overlooked then it seems unlikely there will be impetus to change development and management practises to prevent their proliferation.

**Carrying capacity**

There is an apparent conflict here: One the one hand, more people walking might mean more opportunity to make personal connections with other pilgrims which could positively influence the pilgrimage experience. On the other hand, many of the positive experiences I had
on the Camino were associated with isolation that becomes more and more scarce as the number of pilgrims grows. This conflict suggests that there is a balance to be achieved; enough social interaction to experience the pilgrimage community without reducing opportunities for personal experiences. Such a balance is what Shelby & Heberlain (1986) refer to as “optimum carrying capacity”. Drawing comparisons between pilgrimage routes and recreational trails in terms of user experience (pilgrim experience) suggests that, like a recreational trail, a pilgrimage route might have a similar kind of social carrying capacity (Shelby & Heberlain, 1986). In discussing social carrying capacity Shelby & Heberlain (1986) make explicit the importance of user expectations for determining the quality of their experiences. Using the term “rationalizing” to explain the tendency to look for and possibly even create the desired experience. In the case of the Camino, there is a possibility that pilgrims experiencing the positive aspects of community and social connections might overlook the negative impacts of development, this was certainly true at times in my experience.

Experiences along the Camino shift in focus back and forth from more personal and internal to more social and external. For myself, there was a trend toward more social/external experiences over time owing largely to the development of pilgrimage community. The further along on the Camino I went, the more people I met and got to know. Add to that the reality that there are bigger crowds of pilgrims the nearer Santiago becomes because many people start closer in order to walk within a specific period of time. By the time I had reached the final stretch of my Camino, after passing Astorga, I had become friends with many of the people I would see at the end of each day, some of whom I would occasionally walk with during the day. The nearer we came to Santiago the more I began to realize that my time with these new friends was drawing shorter and the more time, then, that I wanted to spend with them, “It is commonly said that many people start alone but always end accompanied by others,” (Frey, 1998:91). As I consciously made the choice to spend more time with other pilgrims I also implicitly accepted the consequences of increased numbers of pilgrims.

**Physical**

There can be no doubt the experience of walking 900km across Northern Spain is a physical feat to almost anyone. Certainly the most physically challenging endeavour I’d ever
undertaken, and so it was also the most physically rewarding. The challenge of the distance to be travelled and all the varied environment and geographic features to traverse, present the opportunity of embodying the experience of the Camino, (Slavin, 2003; Quesada-Embí, 2008; Murray & Graham, 1997, Frey, 1997). Embodying such a meaningful experience provides an external framework for understanding and processing the internal experiences.

Presence and embodied experience

There are many ways that the physical aspects of the Camino influence the pilgrimage experience, facilitated by the varying environments and landscapes. Difficulty is an important component; it tests the pilgrim and makes the experience all that much more meaningful and valuable when that challenge is met and overcome. Over the course of such a challenge there are moments of: suffering and the sense of sacrificing physical wellbeing; transcendence, when the pilgrim is able to rise above physical pain or difficulty to see the greater meaning; and balancing the effort of challenge with the restoration gained from moments of relative ease. Referring to her work with pilgrims on the Camino Frey (1997: 72) finds; “When pilgrims begin to walk several things usually begin to happen to their perceptions of the world which continue over the course of the journey: they develop a changing sense of time, a heightening of their senses, and a new awareness of the bodies and the landscape.”

Slavin (2003: 2), relates the physical experience of the Camino to the spiritual experience by arguing that walking is a spiritual practise on the Camino. He suggests that the limitations of the body, the physical difficulties, “seem to invite the pursuit of transcendence”. I found myself using the same word, ‘transcendence’, to describe the feeling of expanded awareness that came when I was able to finally perceive more than the immediate sensations of my body. Those sensations had taken up a large portion of my waking hours for the better part of the first 10 days walking. I believe this experience of the physical which is strikingly felt, often painfully, during the first couple of weeks while the body adjusts is one reason the pilgrimage process is often described as a sequence: body, mind and spirit. In my experience, the body was in the forefront of my awareness during the beginning stage.

One outcome of the physical experience being so prominent during this period is a sense of presence in the moment, while the awareness is attending so fully to immediate sensations. Sean
Slavin (2003) proposes that a meditative state arises through the combination of effort and surrender; the conscious effort of walking and the surrender to a rhythmic pace. Within this space, is when the pain and difficulty that the body experiences can be ‘transcended’. Additionally, remaining present in the moment, which is achieved by embodying the experience aids in the production of strong memories and associations with place, (Slavin, 2003: 16).

Pilgrim identity and the physical experience

Pilgrim identity is partly defined by the physical mode of pilgrimage. Many authors of Camino experience speak to the authenticity of pilgrim experience that is reaffirmed by pilgrims themselves as well as the Santiago Cathedral offices by excluding people who use mechanized transport from being considered ‘real’ pilgrims (Slavin, 2003; Frey, 1998; Boers, 2007; Quesada-Embid, 2008; Graham & Murrey, 1997). The “true” pilgrim (as implied by other pilgrims) is the one who undergoes the physical challenge of the walk (Murray & Graham, 1997: 518). For Slavin (2003: 5) the body is a “nexus, between environment and self”, as pilgrims walk they embody the experience and in so doing shape and solidify their identity as pilgrims.

The physical experience is prominent. For me, especially in the beginning (stage 1) my body demanded a great deal of my attention. By the time I reached Santiago and went to the pilgrim offices myself, I felt as though my pilgrimage had been as real and “authentic” as anyone else’s regardless of my motivations and intentions. For me it was all about the opportunities to connect with places along the way, opportunities I know I would not have had from within the confines of a car or bus. This is not a comment on the authenticity of the experience of other’s, only my own.

Emotional and Mental

The most internal of experiences, my emotional and mental state was strongly influenced by the social, physical and spiritual experiences and of course by the environment. Socially; the company of others could please or irritate, more frequently the former so long as I did not feel constrained by their presence. Physically; prolonged fatigue and soreness would nearly always eventually bring my emotional and mental state down, make me feel helpless or frustrated or
even despairing. At best, prolonged physical stress would become an emotional and mental challenge as well as a physical one. Spiritually; those moments of transcendence or expansive sensations, aesthetic experiences or experiences of synchronicity would, in addition to being felt on a spiritual level, bring about a profound sense of contentment and wellbeing. I will speak to this more in the next section. Underlying all of these experiences which influenced my emotional and mental being was the environment. It was the environment which presented the physical challenges, the social environment which brought me together or apart from fellow pilgrims, and it was the ephemeral beauty of the natural environment which most often gave me the experience of spirituality on the Camino. The emotional and mental experience, by warrant of being felt so internally, are the most difficult to describe and relate.

Mountains and forests

Highly aesthetically pleasing environments had the potential to dramatically improve my emotional and mental experience. Feeling physically exhausted from climbing kilometre after kilometre; turning around to a magnificent view back over the Pyrenees was uplifting. One of the many wonderful benefits of climbing mountains is being able to turn around and sweep your gaze over the landscape. The accomplishment of reaching the top, is felt physically, emotionally and mentally as a deep satisfaction. Aesthetic experiences, of which I’ve spoken about some and will further elaborate on in the next section, were certainly the most dramatic examples of emotional and mental mood changes resulting from the environment. The potential for an aesthetic experience to affect mood positively is something which Chenoweth & Gobster (1990) found in their study, and which I can affirm from personal experience as well.

When I walk in natural environments, and I have a particular fondness for mountains and forests, I am often hoping to experience a sense of connection with the environment. Walking in quiet and listening to the birds, or wind and sensing the air on my skin and the humidity are extremely calming and soothing experiences. I feel that my goals and interests are far more clarified when I am in a situation like this. The environmental psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 36) calls the sensation of an ordered consciousness that is aligned with personal goals to be a state of “flow”. Flow, is the opposite of ‘psychic entropy’; when the mind or consciousness is distracted and derailed by intrusive and unwanted thoughts causing a feeling
of mental disorder. The contented state of mind I described above, a mind that I achieved often on the Camino while surrounded by aesthetically beautiful environments could be described as flow. While an aesthetic experience (Chenoweth & Gobster, 1990) is described as a moment in time with words like “arrest” and “pause”, the optimal experience of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) is much more of an experience of movement through time. There is an opposition of metaphors here and as such they cannot be equated, however, the flow that Csikszentmihalyi describes is similar to the change in my emotional and mental state affected by an aesthetic experience.

Meseta

The Meseta feels like an empty plain at times, there is a kind of forlorn sense of abandonment and neglect. Pilgrims approaching or traversing the Meseta seems to either love it, or dread it. One Camino author says of the Meseta, “This vast plain spreads westward from Burgos… Some pilgrims lament being bored here, if not worse. They suggest the unrelenting sameness, the scarcity of trees and the daunting hugeness of the sky plays tricks with minds and undermines moral” (Boers, 2007: 154). Conversations I had with fellow pilgrims either echoed this sentiment, or refuted it completely. Some seemed to love the open space and silence, myself included. In the Meseta were some of the longest, uninterrupted stretches of trail, this landscape felt more like ‘wilderness’ to me than what Boers (2007) suggests. While I was walking through these portions I was reminded of other desert-like landscapes I had known and loved. The sense of familiarity I felt here was both reassuring and exciting. My experience seems to be more in line with what Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) equates with an ‘ascetic’ preference. Tuan (1974: 51) in describing an ascetic attitude asserts that “A preference for the stark environment, bare as the desert or the monk’s cell, is contrary to the normal human desire for ease and abundance”. But then, “Ascetic practice can be perceived as will, the lordship of spirit over matter, and the desert the austere stage for epiphany.”

As much as I did enjoy the openness and quiet, not least because there were less people walking here, there was still that feeling of loneliness that seemed almost embedded in the landscape. The Meseta has considerably emptied of people since 1947 following the end of restrictions on movement that had been in place since the Spanish Civil War (Richardson, 2002).
As Spain, like much of the world, transitions to an increasingly urbanized landscape rural areas like the Meseta feel more and more empty. Emotional and mental experiences of this range from relief; for those who are seeking to escape urban areas in favour of quiet and open landscapes, to being overwhelmed by the lack of features.

Quesada-Embid (2008) suggests that the connection between walking, dwelling and serving the landscape is the most broken here and as such the land enjoys the least amount of what she calls ‘organic preservation’. On the Meseta, advertisements for busses and taxi’s are everywhere encouraging many to skip over it. The towns are run down and emptying resulting in less places for pilgrims to stay the night. She asserts that the feeling of emptiness and lack of preservation results because of less interaction between dwellers and walkers, and they as one group decreases, so does the other. Conventional preservation, often involving the removal of all people, would not result in acceptable preservation here in what was a traditionally peopled landscape. The Meseta, then, is in a kind of “limbo” between a state of ‘organic preservation’ similar to what Quesada-Embid (2008) claims exists in the other two stages, and neglect. It also in my own experience was caught between a positive emotional and mental experience and a negative one.

The city

Just as aesthetically pleasing environments had the power to improve my mood, the opposite is also true; unpleasant environments could easily have an adverse effect. The placement of this statement under the heading ‘The city’ is not intended to imply that cities were universally unpleasant. However, the greatest predominance of non-places existed in the area surrounding urban centres. Non-places affected me immensely, emotionally and mentally, making me often feel; disoriented, confused, impatient, panicked, morose, dispirited or disgruntled. All of these feelings are consistent with what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes as psychic entropy. Non-places were not at all congruent with my personal interests or goals on the Camino (except insofar as I was interested in them as a researcher).
**Spiritual**

Spirituality was a part of my pilgrimage experience because I consider myself a spiritual person. I’m not Catholic, and the Camino is technically a Catholic pilgrimage route, but religious affiliation is not always as common a trait among pilgrims on the Camino (Frey, 1997; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Murray & Graham, 1997; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The Camino as a trail is open to anyone with the ability and the motivation to walk, bike or horseback ride it. The pilgrim office in Santiago which gives out the Compostella (a sort of certificate of completion) has no religious requirement, they ask only for proof that you covered the distance in an appropriate way (on foot, bike or horseback). At the pilgrim office they do ask about motivation, each pilgrim must identify themselves as; religious, religious and other, or other. Choosing ‘other’ will result in the pilgrim being given a smaller certificate which is not in Latin (Frey, 1997). I didn’t feel that my personal spiritual motivation was particularly well represented by these options, but in the end I felt spiritual interests were more similar to ‘religious’ than to ‘other’ and I marked myself as ‘religious’. It wasn’t until later when reflecting on the day that I thought I should more properly have marked myself as ‘other’, due to my research motivation, or at least ‘religious and other’. But like other pilgrims, I did not feel my motivations diminished my efforts as a pilgrim and warranted a “lesser” certificate.

Spirituality is by far the most difficult of these themes to address. Spiritual experiences for me were at once intensely personal, and yet dealing with a relationship between myself and something external to myself. When I mention spirituality in my journals it wasn’t always in reference to an actual spiritual experience but sometimes to simply thinking about spirituality and its place on the Camino. That said, I did have some experiences which I would call spiritual, but which someone else might not if they were not in the habit, like I am, of using spirituality as a framework for understanding certain experience. For more on my perspective on spirituality please see the prologue.

**Aesthetic experience**

What I have described above already as aesthetic experiences, were multi-layered, multi-sensory experiences. They had the power to influence my internal experience profoundly on an
emotional and mental level and also a spiritual one. Chenoweth & Gobster (1990) have described aesthetic experiences as moments of “arrested” attention, and I have related their description to other similarly described experiences such as Maslow’s (1964) ‘peak’. These accounts have all relayed the personally meaningful nature of the described experience but stopped short of relating it to spirituality. Spirituality is, as I have described my own, a very personal system for understanding and drawing meaning from experiences. My own instances of aesthetic experience while on the Camino were events which I felt as spiritual. Mircea Eliade (1957: 11) defined ‘heirophany’ as; “the act of manifestation of the sacred” (italics original). To him, for those who have a “religious experience” places are revealed as sacred and imbued with meaning to become different, more defined, than the contextual space surrounding them. Here, the meaningful experience of place (aesthetic experience) is described as the “manifestation of the sacred”. To someone who has a clear distinction between the experience of nature and the experience of sacred, these might not be equated but for me they are similar in both cause and effect.

**Ephemeral events**

Those experiences which I will most readily describe as aesthetic and also spiritual were always triggered by an ephemeral event. Morning mists, dramatic sunrises, the play of light and shadow or the pleasant combination of scents, textures and colours were all qualities which at some point on the Camino brought about an aesthetic experience. I had several such experiences, all meaningful, memorable, multi-sensory, solitary and transient. The transience of the experience had the effect of making it all the more meaningful. There was a sense of having been in the right place and right time to perceive the event; the full drama of a sunrise, or the first ray of sunlight breaking into an early morning mist.

**Metaphorical journeys and synchronicity**

Another type of experience which I referenced in my journals and which I associated with the spiritual aspects of the Camino was ‘synchronicity’. Carl Jung (1960) defined the term synchronicity to describe a string of “meaningful coincidences” of which the apparent connections could not be explained. Regardless of the cause, the effect of such a feeling of
meaningful connection is a sense that events are unfolding as they are meant to, a sense of congruence with one’s own path. The idea of congruence is once again similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) definition of the ‘flow’ experience. Perhaps in these instances as well ‘flow’ is the resulting emotional and mental state change from the spiritual experience. Or rather, ‘flow’ is how I experience spirituality.

The idea of movement that ‘flow’ evokes, of travelling along in the ‘right’ direction, is an appropriate metaphor for pilgrimage. The ideal pilgrimage which Neil Smelser (2009) depicts as an ‘odyssey experience’ also involves elements of ‘special’ states, ‘transformation’ and ‘personal betterment’ all of which recall spiritual change or growth.

*Communitas*

One final aspect of the spiritual experience I would like to address is its connection to the social. Referring way back to Figure 1 the line which depicted times I mentioned ‘spiritual’ in my journal seemed to track very closely with mentions of ‘social’ and I have a theory about that. My sense is that social experiences tended to draw my awareness outside of my self and dwelling upon the internal aspects of my experience, in this way social interactions had an element of expansiveness. I believe that the externalizing of my own experience as a result of the social experience and community opened me up to spiritual experiences which were at once personal in their influence upon me, but external in their object and focus. Because my attention was drawn outward, I was more receptive to external stimuli such as ephemeral events and thus spiritual experience that involved feelings of connection and relation to something outside my self.

What Victor and Edith Turner (1978) describe as ‘communitas’ is a community of pilgrims experiencing a “commonness of feeling”, a kind of group experience which serves to unite and equalize pilgrims even while it uplifts them. This potentially empowering experience led the Turners to conclude that Pilgrimage was anti-structure, because; “manifestations of communitas… are potentially subversive,” (Turner & Turner, 1978: 32). This notion has been much criticized, most notably by Eade & Sallnow (1991). Part of the criticism is the Turner’s contention that achieving ‘communitas’ is a motivation of all pilgrims which I would also dispute. However, the idea has some traction within my own experience and potentially others and should not be written off as a possible motivation for some. In my own case, having found that pilgrim community and social interactions helped to open me up to some of the most
valuable and profound spiritual experiences I would argue that ‘communitas’ can be a part of the pilgrimage experience. I connect the experience of community with the experience of spirituality such that ‘communitas’ seems to fit the situation. However, I reject the notion that simply because the experience may be empowering and unifying for pilgrims, it must also be subversive to existing power structures.

Conclusions

Perhaps the Camino serves an important role in exposing the reality of modern development and urbanization. As a continuous route which passes through all manner of landscapes and landscape treatments from the culturally historic pastures and vineyards to the globalized and sterilized industrial urban outskirts, the Camino shows pilgrims the whole range of what the modern world has to offer and it showcases them to a population which has the time to look and actually see. Unlike the highways which criss-cross our world and show these same things but at speeds too great to appreciate and absorb, pilgrims see the landscape slowly and that is important. And yet, if the pace of change continues to undermine what pilgrims want to see then there is a risk that they will simply stop walking in those areas that are hostile to pedestrians. Once there are no longer any eyes on the landscape, and only eyes on the road, then roads is all we will expect to see. Without the expectation of cultural landscape preservation, it will not happen.

What the Camino offers of aesthetically pleasing environments is not extraordinary in the world. There are some breathtaking views to be sure and variety of landscape types, but they are not so unique as either ecosystems or ideals so as to be of vital importance to preserving the worlds visual diversity. The more natural areas of the Camino are rural landscapes which are fairly typical of Spain and similar landscapes exist away from the Camino as well. What draws these places together and gives them a greater meaning and value than the sum of its parts is the Camino and the experiences of those pilgrims that traverse it. As pilgrims have crossed this landscape at human powered speeds, as they have been doing since the middle ages if not longer, they have been open to the experiences that any beautiful scene can offer to those who take the time to look. Walking, opening themselves, and experiencing the richness of the Camino over
the centuries; pilgrims have also inscribed their stories upon the land and there they remain to be re-experienced or written over.

In the landscapes of the Camino, an almost alchemical process has occurred over time to transmute a series of settings and scenes into a series of places and backdrops for an array of potentially meaningful, memorable and profound experiences. Elements of: History, religion, philosophy, seeking, community, landscape, cultivation, movement, habitation, service and far more have combined to create the deeply cultural landscapes that exist today. The landscapes of the Camino are an expression of all that has occurred in them over the course of history and pre-history and they will continue to receive and be transformed by the actions of the future. Preserving them by attempting to freeze them in their current state would be to show a lack of respect for all that may come. We can, and should, however take care to ensure that those changes that do occur are thoughtful and considerate of the deeply meaningful past, present and potential future of the Camino landscapes and the pilgrims who cross them.
**EPILOGUE**

I have defended this thesis and by the good graces of my advisors and the Chair of my examination I passed. That milestone sits behind me, but I find that just as Santiago was not quite the end of the journey, I had a further 100km to go to Finisterre, neither was the defense quite the finish line. Even when I hand in this completed document and have it printed and bound in my hands I am certain I will not feel as though I have finished. Many pilgrims have spoken of how the *Camino* continues for them long after they reach the physical end of their walk. Having spent the 6 months following my own walk writing about that walk, I’ve had a lot of time to think about just how much that was true for me. Previously I’ve mentioned how the *Camino* is sometimes split into three sections with each section corresponding to a geographical stretch of the road as well as a focus; body, mind and spirit. I found that segmentation helpful while writing and I find it helpful once again. The 37 days I spent walking was certainly a physical manifestation of pilgrimage and the following 6 months I spent thinking and writing about those days occupied my mind quite completely. So now, as I come to the end of the mental pilgrimage and I cannot help but wonder what follows when I am freed to a certain extent from the responsibility to my thesis. There were times walking the *Camino* that I felt a little regretful that I could not cut loose from the responsibility to my research and completely lose myself in the experience, I wonder how different it might have been or whether it might have been a more spiritually transformative experience. But now I feel as though the spiritual aspect is everything that *might* come next, it’s the mystery and the possibility of what may come.
REFERENCES CITED


