

GUIDE TO THE CAMINO OLVIDADO

Susanna Scherman and Laurie Reynolds

October, 2014

This guide is a work in progress. It is based on a translation from the Spanish guide on the internet, <http://www.elcaminoolvidado.com/> and has been supplemented with other information from the internet and from our personal experiences walking the Camino Olvidado in 2014.

GPS tracks are available at wikiloc.com, look for tracks posted by Caminosusanna or peregrina2000.

Pictures from June-July 2014 can be seen here:

https://picasaweb.google.com/104105778729242194944/CaminoOlvidado?authkey=Gv1sRgCP7ajL249_qj4AE&noredirect=1#

Blog from 2014: <http://caminoolvidado.blogspot.com/>

Updates, suggestions, additions, criticisms, questions, etc, are all welcome. Please send to laurie.reynolds@gmail.com.

The Camino Olvidado starts in Bilbao and joins the Camino Frances in Columbrianos, just a few km west of Ponferrada. It totals approximately 450 km. Accommodation is limited, and planning is essential. Basic stages are listed below, though some alternatives are available and will be noted throughout this guide.

Recommended Stages on the Camino Olvidado (recommended by the Spanish blog)

1. Bilbao-Güeñes (22,6 km)
2. Güeñes-Nava de Ordunte (19,4 km)
(no accommodation, but hotels are in Villasana de Mena, 10 km away – taxi available)
3. Nava de Ordunte-Espinosa de los Monteros (31,5 km)
4. Espinosa de los Monteros-Pedrosa de Valdeporres (27,5 km)
5. Pedrosa de Valdeporres-Arija (26 km)
6. Arija-Olea (31,2 km)
7. Olea-Aguilar de Campoo (22,7 km)
8. Aguilar de Campoo-Cervera de Pisuerga (30,3 km)
9. Cervera de Pisuerga-Guardo (36,3 km)
10. Guardo-Puente Almuhey (13,3 km)
11. Puente Almuhey-Cistierna (23,7 km)
12. Cistierna-Boñar (25,3 km)
13. Boñar-La Robla (29,8 km)
14. La Robla-Pandorado (32 km)
15. Pandorado-Fasgar (25 km)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| 16. Fasgar-Igüeña | (19 km) |
| 17. Igüeña-Congosto | (34,4 km) |
| 18. Congosto-Villafranca del Bierzo | (32,3 km) |

Possible stages with known accommodation

1. Bilbao - Balmaseda (35,1 km) Hotel San Roque, pilgrim price, 35€
2. Balmaseda - Villasana (17,2 to hotel with walks out and back to Romanesque churches); Hotel Don Pablo (55€ double with free transportation out and back to Nava de Ordunte)
3. Nava de Ordunte - Espinosa (31,5 km). Hostal Sancho García (45€ double)
4. Espinosa - Pedrosa de Valdeporres (27,5 km) CTR La Engana Pedrosa (double 55 €)
5. Pedrosa - Arijá (26 km) (Casa Rural La Piedra, 33€ with breakfast)
6. Arijá - Olea (31,2 km) (Casa Miguel, 20€ each)
7. Olea - Aguilar de Campoo (22,7 km) (several choices)
8. Aguilar de Campoo - Cervera de Pisuerga (30,3 km) (several choices)
9. Cervera – Guardo (36,3 km) (several choices)
10. (Stage 9 of 40 km can be broken up at several places in between, such as Castrejón de la Peña, Tarilonte de la Peña, etc. Several casas rurales. Bar in Santibáñez De La Peña reported to have rooms).
11. Guardo - Velilla sanctuary (24,1 km) (32€ per person, including dinner and breakfast)
12. Velilla - Cistierna (12,9 km) (albergue de peregrinos and private choices)
13. Cistierna - Boñar (25,3 km) (private choices)
14. Boñar - La Robla (29,8 km) (albergue de peregrinos and private choices)
15. La Robla to either Riello or Pandorado (29,2 or 32 km) Casa rural in both places (about 30€ - 60€ each)
16. Pandorado - Colinas del Campo (37,1 km) (Casas rurales open in season)
17. Colinas - Losada (30,4) (Hostal Rural, 25€ each)
18. Losada - Columbrianos (25,3) (albergue de peregrinos and private choices in Ponferrada)

Public transportation along the route.

There is one bus a day in each direction between Bilbao and La Robla. Leaves Bilbao 8 a.m., arrives in La Robla at 3 pm. The other leaves La Robla at 11:30 am, arrives in Bilbao at 6:30 pm. The bus roughly tracks the Camino Olvidado.

Between Bilbao and Bercedo (approximately the first 60 kms), there are about 5 buses a day in each direction. Unfortunately, the bus does not follow the Camino exactly. In Balmaseda, it detours off and goes down to Villasana de Mena. It then stays west on the CL 629, joining up with the Camino again in Irús. Then it stays on the camino through Bercedo to Villasante, but that is only another 7 kms. From there, the bus heads south, ultimately ending in Burgos.

There is also a train that runs between Bilbao and León, which means that it covers the Camino Olvidado between Bilbao and La Robla, just like the one daily bus. There are two trains a day in each direction, one in the late morning and the other in afternoon.

Albergues on the Camino Olvidado

A number of towns along the route have albergues, including Güeñes, Espinosa, Soncillo, Cervera, Arija, and Arroyo (2). These are all albergues juveniles (youth hostels) and during summer months, they will be filled with youth groups. If space is available, they may accept pilgrims, but this will depend on the contract they have with the youth group. Some groups insist on renting the entire facility, others rent only the beds necessary for their group. In either case, you can be fairly certain to find youth groups in most of these facilities.

There are two pilgrim-specific albergues, one in Cistierna (where the Olvidado crosses the Vadiniense) and La Robla (where the Olvidado crosses the Salvador).

BASIC WALKING INSTRUCTIONS

Stage 1: Bilbao-Güeñes 22,6 km

This first day from Bilbao goes through a few medium sized towns with all sorts of services along the way. Almost the entire way to Balmaseda (35 km) is on pavement.

Start in the Plaza of Santiago. Next to the cathedral, at the Calle Tendería, is the first blue and yellow shell waymark on the road (the way out of Bilbao city is marked with these). Walk straight down on the Calle Tendería towards the river. When at Calle Erribera, turn left, and continue along it, through the arches. Cross the road at the church of San Antón, and continue walking on the pavement. Just after it, at the corner, is another waymark where you turn right and cross the bridge over the river.

When on the other side you turn right, and just continue forwards, following the shells. After a little while you come to the Calle San Francisco, a long road on which you will be walking, first over the tracks, and then until you reach a big traffic circle. Continue to walk straight forward. The name of the road is now Calle de la Autonomía, and you will walk it for about 1,5 km towards Basurto. When the road turns slightly right it will again change its name, now to Montevideo Etorbidea. After about 100 meters, there is a shell waymarking on the road which says that you shall cross the road on the zebra crossing. After that, you turn right and continue on the pavement, now following yellow arrows. On your side of the road is the Basurto train station, and on the other side is the Basurto Hospital. Here you must pay attention to the arrows, as you will soon turn left and walk under the highway (please note, there appear to be a second option, past the albergue). Continue to walk through the last part of the city: after just a short while you

will come to a smaller road , which takes you up a hill. In this area there is an albergue. When on top of the hill you take right in front of a small house (a yellow arrow on that) and then you continue on a dirt path towards Castrejana.

When you are down the hill again, you cross the river Cadagua on the Puente del Diablo (bridge of the Devil). There is a shell waymarking on the bridge, just where it starts. After the bridge, you pass a few houses, then to the left, and after a moment you come to the place where the Camino Olvidado splits from the Camino Norte (which goes along the coast). The Norte goes to the right, but we will continue forward on the right side of the river, to start with. The camino follows the river, sometimes on the right side of it, and sometimes to the left.

9,2 km to Alonsótegi

Here is the church of San Bartolomé (located in town, on a little hill) and three chapels – one to San Martín de Tours, the patron of the pilgrims; one to San Antolín, which has a statue of Santiago and his cross painted on some benches nearby; and the third is dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Guía (Our Lady of the Guide), which is something we will see a lot of on this Camino.

Continuing alongside the Cadagua River, we will pass in front of the Torre de la Cuadra (a tower) and the church of San Pedro. Continue on a pretty path along the side of the river. It is an old railroad track.

On the left we will pass an old train station of La Robla (This reference appears several times in the document, and it refers to a train line that goes to and from the town of La Robla, which is on the Camino Olvidado). The next town we come to is Sodupe.

7,5 km to Sodupe (many services).

Sodupe is a fairly big town where there are many kinds of services, shops and restaurants. The rest of the walk to Güeñes is well marked.

5,9 km to Güeñes (albergue, hotel, restaurant, etc):

Güeñes is also a nice little town where there are many services, a few shops etc, and a farmacia. The Albergue is located about 2 km before Güeñes city, in the countryside, near the highway. If you are staying in the albergue, it might be good to shop for food etc. before arriving to it. The hotel here on the accommodation list has a restaurant, too and it is a bit nearer to town, (but still in the outskirts), about a km from the albergue.

Accommodation:

Albergue de Santxosolo (94 669 03 16) – Lots of information on the web:

<http://www.enkargune.com/> . http://www.guenes.net/es-ES/Servicios/Deportes/Documents/santxosolo_aterpetxea.pdf Reservations essential.

Hotel Erreka Gueñes (946 69 03 30 OR 944 99 34 20) (price starts with 40 euro for a single room) <http://www.restauranteserreka.com/hotelguenes.htm>

Stage 2: Güeñes-Nava de Ordunte 23,2 km

Leaving Güeñes: If you have slept in the albergue, when walking towards town you will see the Church of San Martín de Iturriaga, on the right side of the road. Then cross the river Cadagua on a medieval bridge, and continue on the right bank of the river, following the yellow arrows. You will pass the Torre de Renovales, and further on, the center of Güeñes. Standouts in the town are the magnificent Ayuntamiento (town hall) and the gothic church of Santa María, which was built on the foundation of another, romanesque church. Keep walking on the sidewalk, which is taking us to Aranguren and then to Zalla (On the map it is also called El Corillo. The area around the walk a bit further on is also called Zalla).

3,9 km to Zalla, (bar, restaurant, hotels, shops).

Zalla is another little town with lots of services. Zalla´s church is dedicated to San Miguel the Archangel. There is also the chapel of San Pedro Zariquete, with a crucifix outside, and a pilgrim fountain in the shade of a big oak tree.

Accommodation:

Hotel Ibarra Zalla (94 639 17 01). Double room with breakfast, 35€ (price for pilgrims with credential). <http://www.hotelibarrazalla.com/index.php>

Hotel Chicote Zalla (94 639 01 78) (25€ single room)

Cross the tracks and continue on the pavement going under the bridge, then onto a paved road with no traffic. There is a nice place to stop on the way – Bolunburu, a recreational area with remains of an old iron forge, the chapel of Santa Ana and Casa Torre. This shows that at one point Bolunburu was an important nucleus, and there is even a pre-romanesque hill fort found nearby. (Here you again cross the river, from the left side to the right)

Continue walking on the side of a canal, and go under the railway tracks. You will come out on to the highway next to a factory (on our left side, some kind of metal factory); 100 m further on take a turn-off to the right, which brings us to the church of Santa Isabel. On the left you can see the old school, which has been converted into a wool museum.

Other monuments to see along the way are the Torre de Terreros, the palace of Urrutia, and the chapel of San Antonio de la Mella. 100 meters further on, there is a small very old bridge on the right, Puente C. Real La Mella. This is where the Roman road Pisorica Flaviobriga went, and this was the turn-off to Castro Urdiales (a town on the Camino del Norte on the coast).

8,6 km to Balmaseda, (all services).

We continue walking on the right side of the river till Balmaseda, entering the town in the neighbourhood of La Magdalena. This is a big town with many interesting things to see. All services, bar, farmacia, hotels, restaurants, shops, a tourist office etc. In the plaza of San Severino, there is an iron figure of a pilgrim. The plaza is next to the flamboyant gothic church

of San Severino, built in the 15th century. The ayuntamiento (town hall) is here as well, named the “Basque Mosque” because of the columns that surround its doorway.

Markings in the pavement and small arrows on the curbs take us down the street of Pio Bermejillo (also called the Calle del Medio). On the left there is a newly constructed home, which preserves the original archway at the door. This used to be the pilgrims hospital. Further on in the Plaza de San Juan del Moral, there is a church, converted into the town museum. A pair of iron pilgrims is on the left, right before arriving at the old bridge. This is the most photographed spot in town.

Accommodation:

Hotel Convento San Roque Balmaseda (946 10 22 68). 54€ double, pilgrim discount M-Th, 35€. <http://www.hotelsanroque.es/>

Hostal Begoña Balmaseda, Plaza San Severino, 12. (946 10 23 26) – closed for retirement

Hostal Mendía, Calle Martín Mendía, 6. Tel.: 946 102 258

Leaving Balmaseda: Cross the medieval bridge and walk through the passage of San Lorenzo, then we reach the Calle del Cristo, where a yellow arrow points right. Continue on the sidewalk, cross another bridge over the river, and we will arrive at the general highway. A marking (a big sign with a pilgrim and a shell) will indicate that we should continue on the highway, which means we go to the right, and walk up a small hill, then on the pavement. One km further on we come to a museum: Boinas La Encartada Museo. This used to be a factory of boinas (typical Basque hat). Pass the museum (which is on our left side) continue on the highway and a little further on, turn right, and cross a bridge, which will take us to an industrial park. Be careful not to take a left too soon, as there is a confusing arrow that leads to a dead end road, where there was an angry dog running loose. Next turn to the right again, pass the industry buildings, and after a short while we will be back again on the left shore of the river, with the tracks of La Robla railway on our left side.

On this path we arrive at the bridge of las Oleas, half in Vizcaya and half in Burgos. The origins of this bridge are possibly Roman.

4,6 km to El Berrón. In this little village there is another Roman bridge, like the one we just passed on the way. Continue walking underneath the tracks and in front of the church Nuestra Señora de Montserrat. In the crossroads, we will turn left to arrive at the center of the town Santecilla, and its church of Santa Cecilia. Pass it on the right and head towards the industrial park. Cross through it and then cross the highway. Take a road that brings us to Gijano.

1,9 km to Gijano, whose patron saint is Santiago (Note that we did not enter this town, but it was on our left). Pass a tower on the right and cross the bridge over the tracks. This comes out onto the highway; continue 50 meters, then take a path on the right that once again crosses the track at street grade on a path without gates. The homestead to the right is called “The Hospital”, and it appears that it is on the site of an old pilgrim hospital.

Continue walking on the edge of some fields and the tracks, paying attention to the marking and be careful because the path is slightly uneven, where the old road was. This place is San Román, where another old chapel existed. In fact they found a Roman mile marker here dedicated to the Emperor. Once we are through the fields, we come to the cemetery of Nava de Ordunte. Pass it on the right as you enter town.

(The marked route from Gijano to Nava may not correspond with the text above, because we did not pass by the cemetery of Nava de Ordunte. But we had no trouble finding our way by following the arrows.)

4,2 km to Nava de Ordunte (bar)

This is a small town with no facilities but a bar, as it seems. It starts to look hilly around where we walk. There are no hotels or places to sleep in Nava, but in **Villasana de Mena**, 9 or 10 km from Nava but off the Camino, there are several accommodation possibilities.

If you are going to detour to Villasana de Mena, take the following route. In Nava de Ordunte, walk out of town towards first Cereceda, and then Ungo. Here you take right down a little road, which crosses the river. After ca 150 m you will see the canal, and a path on the left side of it. Here you can walk almost all the way to Villasana, but be careful, as it's sometimes very narrow. After a while you arrive to a bridge over a river, here you can continue on the right side of the road, after a short while take left and from there go back to the path along the canal, which will take you all the way to Mercadillo.

Accommodation in Villasana:

Hotel Don Pablo, tel. 947 141 205; double rooms, 55€. Hotel is located on the outskirts of Villasana. In theory, they will pick you up in Nava de Ordunte and return you there the next day for no additional charge. Be sure to arrange this ahead of time, because they may not be able to provide transportation on short notice. Equally problematic is the fact that they are unwilling to provide a ride back to Nava before 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. Nor is breakfast served at an early hour, but they will leave some food out for you the night before. A taxi back to Nava is about 10 €. TAXI Luismi, tel. 617 291 135

Other lodging options in Villasana include:

Hostería Foramontanos (947 12 64 84 OR 607 948 286, single room from 30€). Check booking.com for rates

Hotel Cadagua, Tel. 947 12 61 25 (60€ double)

Casa de la Torre, 947 126 522

La Ringlera – closed in winter

Possible short side trip if you stay in Villasana:

Near Villasana de Mena, there are two beautiful romanesque churches. San Lorenzo in Vallejo and Santa María de Siones in Siones were built by the Knights of Jerusalem (who used to protect pilgrims). These two churches have carvings, both inside and outside, of lots of Jacobean figures. These towns are on another old Camino de Santiago -- one that came from Alava and continued through the Valley of Mena, and which passed through Magdalena al Valle de Losa, Medina de Pomar, El Almiñé, Dobro and the Valle of Valderredible to reach Aguilar de Campóo. It had a few alternative routes through la Lora, Amaya and Sedano. San Lorenzo de Vallejo is 2.5 km from Villasana, and Santa María de Siones is another 2.5 further on. These churches are very much worth a visit. There is a pleasant and well-marked off-road path to the churches; maps and information available at the very helpful tourist office in Villasana.

To visit the churches, call the neighbors who have the keys:
San Lorenzo de Vallejo: Miguel Ángel: 947 126 427 OR 660 23 37 98
Santa María de Siones: Angelines, 947 126 132

TAXI in Villasana, useful for a trip to the churches if you don't feel like walking or for transportation to and from Nava de Ordunte. TAXI Luisimi, tel. 617 291 135.

One possible way to avoid vehicular transportation and also be able to visit the churches is to consider the following possibility: Sleep in Balmaseda. The next day walk to Nava de Ordunte and then 6 more to Villasana. From Villasana out and back to the two churches would add 10 kms.

Back to the Camino

Stage 3 Nava de Ordunte-Espinosa de los Monteros 31,5 km

Leaving Nava de Ordunte, the Camino goes through a number of very small villages, with few services. The first bar is in Bercedo: 22 km from Nava. Better prepare for a picnic day.

The arrows between Nava and Bercedo have suffered repeated vandalism. No one understands exactly why, but someone has tried to cover up the arrows. But if you keep an eye out for blotches of paint, you'll immediately see where the arrows are and where you should be going.

Leave Nava crossing the bridge over the Cadagua River, following the road until a little bit after the turn-off for Ordunte. We take the turn to the left in the direction of Partearroyo.

1,2 km to Partearroyo, passing in front of its Church of Our Lady. Leaving the town, you will see the shield of Santiago in stone on the facade of a building. Leave it on your left before going out onto the highway. Continue on the highway and soon you will see the Chapel of San Bartolomé de los Montes.

At that spot, just after the chapel, we leave the highway, by taking right and continue on the path. There is a small yellow arrow on the wall which surrounds the chapel, just before the fence. Here we follow that small path which goes along the edge of a large farm until we reach the reservoir of Ordunte (Embalse de Ordunte). The old road is buried under the water and when there is a drought you can see a bridge named Romer's Bridge. 300 meters further on, a turn-off to the left goes to Ribota.

(A possible detour to Ribota (500 m) where there may be a restaurant. Santiago the Pilgrim is the patron saint of that town.)

If we don't want to visit Ribota, then we continue straight on between the water and the mountain until we cross the Ordunte River over a green bridge. A little further on in the intersection, turn to the left and if we pay attention we can see two little bridges. There is another turn-off to the left that goes to Hornes, but we continue forward (westwards) in direction of Burceña.

5,9 km to Burceña, a small town that has been in existence since Roman times. It had three churches, but the only one still standing is the one dedicated to San Román. When we arrive at the cemetery of Burceña, turn to the left, and pay attention to the marking, which is somewhat sparse at this point.

**** This is a spot where local property owners have tried to keep pilgrims off their land, so pay attention to the directions. The arrows may be painted over or may be painted in the wrong direction. ****

After 40 meters, and after you passed through a barbed wire fence that may be open or closed, we have to pass through another fence on the right to cross a field. Pay attention to the trajectory of the road and pass through several fences for cattle. Even if they are closed, don't worry because this is a public camino. Finally, when we are finished walking through the fields, we will see another small old bridge and the beginning of a paved path that we can continue on for about 500 meters.

We are now going up the hill on the left hand side of the barbed wire. When we get to the top, follow the markings until arriving at more fields, following the camino on the left until arriving at the road. The arrow then takes us to the left. 200 meters further on, a turnoff to the right is the continuation of the path, but if it's rainy, don't take it. A little further on, you will find the road to Arceo.

4,8 km to Arceo. Going up a little hill, we arrive at the very small town Arceo. The church here, San Pedro, is romanesque. We leave it on our right, and we take a path down a hill (very muddy in rainy season). Going between the meadows and the mountain, we arrive at the shore of the Rio Hijueta, which is on our left. There are some pretty waterfalls, and lots of trees, it's a magical landscape. Stay on the path to the next town.

2,6 km to Irús. When walking through Irús, we will pass a Pantheon chapel in the cemetery. Then we come to the church of San Millán and the first road of the town, which we take to the left in order to come out on the old highway. Then to the right and we begin the ascent to the pass of Cabrio. We will see the town of Leciñana below and a little further up, the town of Laya, of which only two houses remain.

When we pass the second house, turn to the right, going up a path for about 300 meters. The path follows close to a high tension electricity wire. A small detour to the left, and we walk parallel to the highway, and we arrive at a meadow gate.

The gate is of stone and to pass it we have a little “zig zag” door. We keep straight ahead following the arrows and the curve of the land. Another little door with an old gate lets us out of the meadow. This is a good place to find setas (wild mushrooms). Following along the outside of the field, we arrive at the high point of Cabrio. There is a gravel path, which we will follow to the cemetery of Bercedo.

There are parts of the stage from Burceña to Bercedo where markings are scarce, particularly shortly after Burceña and toward the end near Bercedo. GPS would be very helpful.

6,2 km to Bercedo (panadería and bar)

A little further on, we come to the romanesque church of San Miguel, in Bercedo. The bar’s specialty is called a “tronco,” which is chorizo-stuffed bread. Very tasty. The bar is next to the plaza, where there is a fountain, too.

Passing over the bridge over the river Cerneja, we curve to the right. A few meters further on, there is a turn-off to the left, where we find another highway, the one that goes from Logroño to Laredo. Cross the highway (if you are hungry, 200 m off to the left there is a service station named San Miguel), and then cross another local highway.

2,8 km to Villasante, where we arrive at an area with huge oak trees, a great place for a picnic. The patron of the town is San Roque. Following the camino on a path of rocks, we arrive at the arroyo of San Vicente, which is the source of water for some neighboring towns.

2,3 km to Loma de Montija. We arrive at the first house of this town, and will there cross the highway, and then cross the bridge over the Trueba River, going up a little hill. The church of Santa María is on your right. We take a road to the right to leave town, and with the river on our right, we descend a bit after about a km.

We arrive at a local road, and we follow it to the right, cross the Trueba River again and a little further ahead you will see the albergue of Espinosa de los Monteros.

5,7 km to Espinosa de los Monteros (all services)

The town has mansions, castles, churches, and several towers. Worth seeing is also the palace of Chiloheches, the lovely plaza Sancho Garcia, and next to it the church of Santa Cecilia, and the town hall. On the way out of town you will see the chapel of San Nicolás and the palace of the Marqueses de Velasco. The building has a chapel dedicated to St. James Peregrino, and you can see his statue on the facade.

Accommodation:

Albergue: 947 120 449 (82 beds, price from 8.5 euros), Monte Edilla, s/n

<http://www.campamentoscaracuel.com/instalaciones-albergue-espínosa.html>

Email: info@campamentoscaracuel.com Pilgrims welcome but these albergues are typically filled with youth groups during summer months. Reserve ahead.

Hostal Sancho Garcia, tel. 947 120 042. 45€ double. <http://www.hostalsancho Garcia.eu/>

Stage 4, Espínosa de los Monteros-Pedrosa de Valdeporres 27,5 km

The next recommended stage, from Espínosa to Pedrosa de Valdeporres is 27,5 km. There are several bars on the way, making it an easier stage than the previous one.

To leave Espínosa: start at the right side of the palace of the Marqueses de Velasco, and continue to the Trueba River. Walk along it (on Calle Pena), and after a while you come to a blue metal bridge, where you can cross. (It looks like you can walk the Paseo Castellana, too, and cross the river on the large bridge).

Cross the bridge, and then go up some rustic stairs. At a gate with an enclosure with a wooden gate on the left, you'll see the 14th century Torre (tower) de los Velasco, now in ruins. Around here there are many hiking markings, in addition to the yellow arrows, so be careful not to get on another trail.

1,3 km to Santa Olalla. A paved road takes us to Santa Olalla. The town's romanesque church is dedicated to Santa Eulalia, which has the following legend carved into the rock of its sacristy: "in 1160, this church was consecrated, on the Ides of March. Gonzalo, being the presbytery and a pilgrim, asked Miguel, Bishop of Tarazona to consecrate the church." We don't know what this bishop was doing so far from his diocese, but we imagine he was a pilgrim.

Now take a slight descent towards the tracks and then on the right, follow a stone camino that brings us to Para.

1,9 km to Para. No facilities here. We are now walking towards west.

2,6 km to Redondo, the next town: pass next to the church of Santiago pilgrim, then enter a woods of oak trees. Cross several ditches and go through a gate, making sure to close it after you. The path, which can carry car traffic, ends at a house, but we continue on the trail going down. It is rocky and it brings us Quintanilla de Rebollar.

2 km to Quintanilla de Rebollar, (Fountain, Casa rural).

The first thing we see upon entering is the fountain, constructed in the 1800s. The church is San Clemente, and in the old school building you will find an Interpretation Center about the “Natural Space of Ojo Guareña”.

Accommodation:

Posada Real El Prado, 947 13 886 89. 8 rooms, pilgrim price M-F, 60€ double.

<http://www.pradomayor.com/>

Cross the parking lot, and next to the cut-off trunk of a large oak, enter an oak woods on a path. The path does a lot of zig zagging here, so pay attention to the arrows. There is an arrow in the forest on a rock on the left side of the path. The arrow is almost a half circle, showing that you should turn around to your left. It’s a fairly sharp turn, and at that point, you begin to descend. We pass small ditches, sometimes with old bridges over them. If you get lost or if one of the ditches is difficult to cross because of too much water, just go down to the left, cross the track, and you will come out on the road which you can take to your right. But it’s best to stay up on the hill until we have to come down and enter Quisicedo.

4,4 km to Quisicedo, (Bar)

Passing next to a “humilladero” (cross or pillory) on the right. Continue on a rocky path, cross the highway again and go up some stairs to arrive at the church of Santiago Apostle, who is the patron saint of this town. It’s romanesque. (There is also a chapel in town called Ermita Arranal) Through a metallic door, you can get into the plaza of the town. If the door is locked, you will have to go back down the stairs and come up the other way. This town also has a medieval tower, named Tower of the Velasco, and some pretty fountains as well. There is a bar.

When you’re ready to leave town, go to the bar, and turn right, walking on the left side of the bar as it faces you (there is an information board there, at the end of the plaza), passing by a very old chestnut tree, and you will enter another oak woods. The path takes us to Villabascones de Sotoscueva, entering on the street Calle del Medio. Leaving the town, you’ll come to another gate and another path that indicates “Senda del Valle.” (Path of the valley). Take it, though oak trees, it goes to a high point where a sign explains that there are various anthropomorphic graves in the rocks. They may be from the time of the Vascones. The graves are a short walk from the Camino, follow the signs.

The Camino takes you into Quintanilla de Sotoscueva and then to Vallejo de Sotoscueva.

3,3 km to Vallejo de Sotoscueva, (two bars, maybe Casa rural).

Here, cross the tracks, go out to the highway (C-6318), and there are two bars (there a gas station too). The path in front of you leads to the “Karstic Complex of Ojo Guareña” (see explanation here – it is a natural site, with a huge underground cave system.

<http://www.turismocastillayleon.com/cm/turcyl/tkContent?idContent=1331>)

The Cave of San Bernabé is here. There are hundreds of underground caves, some with cave paintings from prehistoric times. If you are interested in visiting this site, you should ask about opening time in Quintanilla del Rebollar in the Interpretative Center when you pass through.

Accommodation:

Centro de Turismo Rural Ojo Guareña, 947 13 87 70. (We know of pilgrims who stayed here in 2012, for 22 € single room, but we were unable to make contact). Emails to reservas@casaruralojoguarena.com were returned as undeliverable.

1,3 km to Entrambosríos, (bar)

Taking the sidewalk to the right, and soon enter Entrambosríos. Pass by its church of San Vicente (appears to be not along C-6318, but out in the fields, just as we enter Entrambosríos), leaving it to your left. A little further on there is a pretty fountain and a gully that crosses the town, and which we will walk by on the other side. Going up to the highway, we cross it and begin an ascent. We pass one house on the left, and in front of us we have a fence and indications that livestock is inside. Enter and begin the walk known as “El Collado”. In about 600 m, we will find a small refugio with some inscriptions in a rock on the ground. A little further up there is a water tow and something that looks like construction of a big stone chair. We are arriving at the high point of la Varga. We can see to the right on the top of the hill a tower for searching for fires, and on our left there is a large cross.

Begin the descent passing by an old mountain hut/refugio. This descent is named the “Camino de San Román.” To the left of the hut you can see a wide unpaved road (sometimes as wide as 7 meters), which descends at a gentle grade and with very wide curves. No one knows if it is Roman or posterior. Get on that road, even if it looks like you will be going in the wrong direction. Though it may not look like it at some points, it definitely goes down to the river.

When we arrive at the bottom, we get onto the forest track and continue until we arrive at the Engaña River and a rest area. You can see the ruins of what was the failed railroad project of the Santander Mediterranean line. Pass by ruins of houses and even what was a chapel de la Engaña. We take the new “Via Verde” that follows the old tracks. After we pass a quarry, leave the Via Verde – go to the right where you see a medieval bridge. Cross it and enter the (very small) town of Rozas.

8,4 km to Rozas, whose church is in ruins. On the right we will see the hermitage of La Ribera, a little further on we cross the river and the Via Verde in order to arrive at the next town:

0,9 km to San Martín de Porres. Go to the right of the Via to arrive at Pedrosa de Valdeporres, and enter it passing the train station of La Robla (the train which goes to La Robla, I guess).

1,4 km to Pedrosa de Valdeporres, (All services).

Nice views over the mountain from this town. Pedrosa was a very prosperous place in the 1940s and 50s with the (failed) plan for the train line from Santander south to the Mediterranean. In

1941, work began to connect the Valley of Valdeporres with the Valle of Pas, through a 7 km tunnel. Hundreds of workers, including some prisoners. The project was abandoned in 1959.

Accommodation:

As you arrive in Pedrosa, there are several bars along the side of the road. One of them is connected with the Casa Rural, and you can ask about availability there if you haven't made reservations.

Casa Rural La Serna Pedrosa 947 138 189

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Casa-rural-la-Serna/100240076744392>

Centro de turismo rural La Engaña Pedrosa, 947 138 073; mobile 652.25.82.20

<http://www.laengana.com/paginase/Visitar%20la%20casaE.htm> Double room 55€, meager breakfast was provided. This place is an English language “camp” of sorts in the summer, and though the owners are very nice, the price is out of proportion with other places on the Camino. I would try the casa rural first; it was full when we arrived.

Control de Reservas de Turismo Rural 947 130 140

Stage 5: Pedrosa de Valdeporres-Arija 26 km

To leave Pedrosa, cross the railway tracks and the bridge over the Engaña River, which will soon join with the Nela River. Do not continue into Santelices (it is just a half km down the road after you cross the train tracks, where there are bars and restaurants) but follow the sign to take you up onto the Via Verde and continue on it. This sign is almost directly across the street from the panadería. The old station and warehouse are on the right once you get up on the Via Verde. In front of us there is a magnificent viaduct, which was never used by the train, but we walk across it. Here is where the Via Verde ends, but we continue straight ahead until we come to a part that still has the rails placed and is flooded. Be careful here, we just continued through the flooded grasses and got very wet. There is a turn-off to the left, to arrive at the road that goes up to San Martín de la Ollas. At that road, turn right and ascend. Even if you have missed the turn-off, the swampy path will take you out to the same road, so when you arrive at a paved road, turn right and you will be back on the Camino. The camino then goes up the hill towards the town.

2,9 km to San Martín de la Ollas. Pass on the right the romanesque church of San Vicente Mártir.

We stayed on the highway to Argomedo, but there is a marked, off-road option:

Continue through the town of San Martín, ascending until we come out on the highway, next to the spot where the town's garbage cans are located. Very close on the left is a camino that begins going down. Go through an old gate, and a few meters further down, there is a small ditch that is almost always dry. Cross it on a curious little rock bridge and right after that, to the right, we start to ascend the hill going parallel to the electricity line. Follow the arrows, they go turning towards the left and after a little steep slope, the arrows turn to the right.

Keep going up, passing old remnants of construction and old fields surrounded by stone fences. Arrive at a path that is called “Los Italianos”. Take it past an old fountain. The pilgrim church used to be here, with an albergue, which was under the protection of Santiago.

2,9 km (on the road) to Argomedo (bar).

In fact, in the church of Argomedo, there is still a carving of Santiago, which we will pass by as we go through Argomedo. There is a bar here in town, and a fuente. Now we have to walk alongside the road (C-6318). There are not many cars, and after 3 kms we will arrive at Soncillo.

2, 7 km to Soncillo (all services – farmacia, bar, hotel, store)

Here is a center of touristic information about the Valleys of Zamanzas and Manzanedo. You can get information about all of the romanesque churches and other sights in both valleys.

Accommodation:

Albergue Soncillo, 947 57 19 75; 629 18 75 11

<http://www.campamentoscaracuel.com/instalaciones-soncillo.html>

Hotel el Capricho de Clemente 947 15 31 20

Leave Soncillo to your left and continue on the road between Logroño and Santander (N-232), in the direction of Puerto del Escudo. Walk on the right side of the road outside the barriers.

Shortly after leaving Soncillo, you will come to a turn-off pointing to the left and marked for the town of Cilleruelo de Bezana. This is probably the most direct road route, but the camino (and the yellow arrows) continue straight. The Camino then goes through Quintanaentello and Virtus, and in Virtus you take a left to get you to the entrance into Cilleruel, onto the road that you would be on if you had taken the left turn after Soncillo.

2,4 km to Quintanaentello (fountain, bar/resturant/hostal).

In this little town there is a small church, a fuente and a combo restaurant/hotel.

Accommodation:

[Hotel Rural La Pradera](#). Carretera Santander, 8, 09572 Quintanaentello, Tel. 34 947 57 12 02 (48€ double).

The camino to Virtus goes in front of the Hotel Rural. It veers to the right to come out in front of the town’s bus stop. If you come out to the highway and don’t see the bus stop, turn R and you will come to it.

2,5 km to Virtus. On the left you pass the church of Santa María la Mayor, which is romanesque, and the castle. We leave the town at the top. Next to the last house of Virtus, there is another old humilladero, and a little further on a church in ruins. Then we see Cilleruelo de Bezana.

2 km to Cilleruelo de Bezana (bar restaurants, hostals, a shop).

Here there is an important intersection with some services, a shop, and several restaurants, and two hostals. The hostals are in the center, along the highway, at each side of the church Santa Juliana.

Accommodation:

Hostal Mónica 947 15 43 15; 947 15 42 74. 13 rooms, double 40€, including breakfast.

Continue almost 3,5 km on the road and be careful for heavy truck traffic. The arrows eventually indicate a turn-off on the right, to get on a dirt road parallel to the road. You will see the houses of Herbosa in front of you.

5 km to Herbosa. It is a small town, no services, but there is a romanesque chapel dedicated to San Valentín and its church is of Santiago, who is pictured on a horse. Cross the town, in descent, and when we come to the fountain, we turn right, past another chapel, and enter the countryside. When the path turns to the right and we cross the highway, we will be in front of Our Lady of Carmen, a little church, also romanesque. Continue on the side of the road. Soon we come to a turn-off on the right, following the yellow arrow and soon we arrive at Arija.

5, 6 km to Arija (albergue, casa rural, several bars, small grocery).

There is a reservoir with a beach here. This is the Reservoir of the Ebro, a very big construction project. It was begun between 1910 and 1930 and was finished in the 1940s. 400 houses, a huge glass factory, 8 churches and 2 chapels (all romanesque), were flooded.

All accommodation in Arija is in the “lower” part of town, next to the reservoir. To get there, do not cross the bridge over the finger of the reservoir, but rather turn R before the bridge and continue on the road. The albergue and the casa rural are very near. There are also several bars (with irregular opening hours) and a small shop in the lower town.

In Arija there is the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, a pretty romanesque town hall, and some old palaces.

Accommodation:

Albergue Arija 665 823 232 (the Albergue is close to the reservoir, next to the rail way bridge). 15€ bed and breakfast; reservation essential in summer.

<http://www.arijaaventura.com/index.php/alberguedearija.html>

email: info@arijaaventura.com

Casa Turismo Rural La Piedra: 942 77 30 66 OR 942 77 33 16 (16 beds, 33€ with breakfast).

Apartamentos Turísticos de Arija (little wooden cabins, for two people, 50€ per night).

<http://apartamentodearija.weebly.com/> Located right on the shore of the reservoir.

For many kms after Arijá, there are not many bars or shops near. The first bar seems to be in Arroyo, 13 km from Arijá. The first 18 km of this stage are on the side of the (asphalt) road, until Villafría.

Stage 6: Arijá-Olea 31,2 km

Leaving Arijá, when stepping out from the albergue go left, and walk along the reservoir, which is the right. Almost immediately pass under the railway track and come to the highway. Continue on the highway, which crosses over a small branch of the reservoir. Further on, pass the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, which is in the plateresque style. You are now in the upper part of Arijá, where the ayuntamiento is also located.

Out of Arijá, until Villafría, there will be a lot of asphalt, but usually with few cars. We leave the province of Burgos, enter Cantabria.

2 km to Bimón. At the entrance of this town we will pass an old humilladero. A bit further on we go over the tracks with an elevated bridge of recent construction.

1,6 km to Llano, the next town which is flat, and has a small church of the Renaissance style, named Santa Juliana. Just after the bridge is the chapel del Avellanal, located right next to a rest area. In this stage we will have wonderful views.

Continue along the highway and cross another branch of the reservoir.

2,3 km to Renedo. Next to the water is the church of Renedo, but of this town only 4 houses remain. There are many high quality homes that have been abandoned in this area, because of the flooding of the glass factory, which had employed 1000 people.

On the way from here we will pass one of the most representative sights of the Reservoir of the Ebro. It is a view of the sunken church of Villanueva de las Rozas, whose octagonal tower sticks out of the water.

2,2 km to Las Rozas de Valdearroyo, which we will pass through. The romanesque church is named Santa María. Continue on the road, there is a wide curve where there is a small dam. At the end of the dam, a small plaque notes the details of its construction.

3,1 km to Arroyo, (a bar, Albergue).

Go through the next town of Arroyo, with its recently restored church. There is a bar in the center, one of the few on this stage.

Accommodation:

Posada la Lobera, 942 77 31 64 OR 615 864 221 (9 rooms, price around 50 €)

Albergue Ornitológico Arroyo, 942 77 32 83 OR 625 345 033 (price from 12 - 29 €)

Albergue Rumbo Ebro, alberguedearroyo@hotmail.com, tel: 619 16 14 56,
<http://www.alberguerumboebro.com/>

Leaving Arroyo: we now start to walk near a hill covered with oak trees (on our left), with the reservoir on our right. After about 2 kms, there is an option to leave the asphalt on the left and take a dirt road that ends in the reservoir, but we can easily return from there to the asphalt (it is marked). We did not see this turn-off and simply stayed on the highway. If we continue to walk the asphalt road CA-730 along the reservoir, we will come to Villafría.

7,2 km to Villafría, (bar).

When you arrive in Villafría, you turn left and walk up to Juliobriga. Pass in front of Villafría's (tiny) romanesque church (Santa Barbara), and going up a little hill we will begin to see on the right the first ruins of Juliobriga (which was the Roman capital of Cantabria). In the Interpretation Center, we can learn more about these ruins. You can use their bathroom facilities if necessary. There is only one bar in the town and it may be closed. A casa rural was mentioned in the Spanish guide, but we couldn't find it.

In Juliobriga, the Camino Olvidado intersects with another minor Camino, the Camino de Besaya, which connects the Camino del Norte with the Camino Francés. One of the sections of this Camino goes from Reinosa to Arija, and it crosses the Camino Olvidado at Juliobriga. Leaving Juliobriga, the two Caminos are on the same path, but they split soon after the cemetery.

No more asphalt for a while now. From the church, go through the hamlet of Retortillo and leave on a dirt road that goes through wide open fields, it may appear as if you are going in the wrong direction, but soon it turns right. Walk down the hill, and pass the cemetery on your right (it is quite far from the village). Stay on the path that will take you to the very visible pine forest up and ahead of you.

Soon after entering the pine forest, there is a turn to the left, where the ascent begins. Here is the beginning of a part of the Roman Road (of which only the edges remains), this will take us to the end of the pines and to a field where an information plaque notes that this is Peña Cutral, a summer place and the grazing fields for the horses in Roman times. There is also a good view of the Cantabrian mountains and the Pico Tres Mares, which is usually covered with snow for 8 months of the year.

The arrows take you without difficulty up to the Peña Cutral, but from there to Cervatos, we had to use the GPS. The town of Cervatos is essentially over the peak in front of you when you emerge into the field, and down to the left. You follow the dirt track which is covered by sticky reddish clay, and after a while there is a little arrow telling us to cross the field. We eventually found the arrows again on a wide earthen paths (which is on the other side of the hill, which you can see when you start going down the slope) that leads into town. The big town you see below you and to the right is Reinosa, but the Camino does not pass through it.

The earthen path descends gently and zig zags around until you reach the outskirts of Cervatos. Cross under the train tracks and you will come out onto the highway between Aguilar and Santander (N-611), and turn left. There are Camino de Santiago road signs (at least yellow arrows). Walk for a short while, and then turn right to Cervatos.

7,2 km to Cervatos, (bar, but not open regularly)

In Cervatos, there is a magnificent church, San Pedro de Cervatos, a jewel of the romanesque, a national monument. Its iconography is rich – animals, erotic carvings, monsters, plants. This must have been a very important place, with a lot of traffic, commerce and pilgrims (who arrived by sea, coming to shore in Portus Blendium (Suances), which is where the roman road leads to). Phone number on the door, you can visit at any reasonable hour that the señora is home.

After visiting the church, go up around its left side and we will see the new superhighway. We cross over it on the bridge and continue on for a while, with arrows, but the marking soon becomes very sparse. The internet guide in Spanish and the map it provides are also inconsistent. There are several references to power lines, but unfortunately, we could see at least three or four different power lines. We did reach the road CA-284, and from there we also found our way up to the high point of Alto del Bardal, with its covered bus stop. We have left the language from the internet site in tact below, and we did in fact reach the Alto del Bardal, but we were never sure about whether we were on the Camino until we reached the top.

This is what the Spanish site says about the way up to Alto de Bardal: We are now in the area where the now disappeared town Las Quintanillucas de Cervatos used to be. We see old walls and the “caja de la calzada” (the original imprint of the Roman Road). We continue on it, going up through a beech forest, and soon the calzada disappears and we continue in the direction of the electric line through an open space, going up until we cross the road (CA-284) between Reinosa (a big town further north) and Valdeolea. We will emerge again later on that road, as soon as we arrive at the high point of Alto del Bardal, where you will see a covered bus stop. On the left higher up you can see the silhouette of the Torre de San Martín de Hoyos.

An informative panel explains some of the history of this monumental Valley of Valdeolea, which is where we have arrived. On the right hand shoulder of the road, a few meters further down, we will turn off to the right, following the earthen track to the entrance into Olea. (Olea is located south-west from Cervatos). This path was closed off with a threatening barbed wire fence about 5 or 10 minutes’ walk from where it turned off the road, and we had to return to the paved road into town.

5,6 km to Olea, (a bar, Casa Rural).

Its church is dedicated to Santa María la Real, gothic construction with some romanesque traces. If you can go in, the stone crucifix is a standout. In this town there is also a chapel, San Miguel. If you need supplies, the bar sells some, as well as good home-made bread.

Accommodatios:

Casa Miguel Olea, 942 74 55 69 OR 653 92 30 36 (Casa Miguel's website lists different numbers: 942 75 55 11 OR 657 49 13 21). Website here: <http://casamiguelolea.blogspot.com/> This is a family run business, a set of rustic apartments in an old stone complex, very high standards of quality and cleanliness. The owners are very kind and eager to help pilgrims. They charged us 20€ each for a very nice two bedroom apartment with separate baths, washer and dryer, and full kitchen. It may be full in summer, so call ahead.

If you stay in Casa Miguel, buy food in the little store, which is at the top of the town. Casa Miguel is another km or two downhill.

Stage 7: Olea-Aguilar de Campoo 22,7 km

Leaving Olea, there are two options. The first option, which we took, is off road to Casasola; the second goes through a couple of villages and passes more of the megalithic menhirs (standing stones).

OPTION ONE:

If you have stayed in Casa Miguel or another spot in the “lower town,” ask for directions about how to go directly to the bridge of Argañal without returning to the chapel at the top of the village. Here are the directions from the upper part of town.

Leave Olea from the top of the town, to the left, passing the chapel of San Miguel. Follow the camino down until the intersection with another path. Continue straight ahead until you reach the bridge of the Argañal, a very small bridge with one solo arc over the little stream of the same name. After this bridge, when the gravel road curves R, go straight. There is a closed gate about 50 m in front, and there is an arrow on it. Go through the gate, and then cross the fields in order to get down to the gravel road. You can see the gravel road below, there is a big white and red livestock trailer on the side of the road.

When you are at the bottom of the hill, you will have to cross an arroyo and then continue to the right on the gravel road. There are several good places to cross it – look for cars parked next to the arroyo, because the chances are that the person who parked the car has crossed the arroyo to get up on the hill. Once you are down on the road, a turn-off soon goes to the Puente de Casasola (bridge), which is large with five arches, of Roman origin.

Come out onto the general highway (CA-284), where you will see the Mesón Casasola, where you can eat or drink.

4,9 km ca to Casasola, (bar/restaurant).

Leaving the mesón, the Camino goes to the left along the side of the road.

OPTION TWO:

Start at the church in Olea, up in the “high part” of town. Go towards the cemetery, and continue straight until you see the town of Santa Olalla below. Its church of Santa Eulalia is Romanesque and has magnificent murals inside (including a picture of Santiago the Moorslayer). There is a telephone number on the door if you wish to visit. Also, in Santa Olalla, we pass the old mill, which has been recently restored; it’s from the 16th or 17th century.

Continue on the gravel road that goes up slightly, and when you get to the top, turning to the left about 100 meters away you can see the Menhir of Pañahincada, which is the first of six that you can see on this stage.

Continue on the paved road, going over the bridge of Reinosilla, which crosses the Camesa River. It’s also of Roman origin, reconstructed in medieval times, and from there, a little further on straight ahead, you can see two standing stones, which at one time formed part of a Dolmen. The Camino arrives at Reinosilla, passing through the center of town, with its Romanesque church. There is also a building with an old tower, the Torre de los Cossio, and it has a large coat of arms with an old single arch door. This town has many storks.

Continue on the road, and it arrives in Casasola. Pay attention to a poster that indicates Menhires. 50 meters on you will see two, named “La Matorra I and II.” On one of them an artist has painted the cross of the order of Santiago and the other has three bullet holes.

This option joins up with the earlier option at the Mesón de Casasola, from there continue on road CA-284.

To the right, there is a turn-off to a path that goes through an oak forest. It is somewhat dirty and littered, but you can get through. If you stay on this path you will arrive in a small field where one of two “Augustus Terminals” is located. They are big blocks of stone engraved on top, just like a Roman milestone, and they date back to 13-16 B.C. They were constructed during the reign of Octavio Augusto (in fact, in the town of Valdeolea there are 16 of these old stones, which were used to mark the border between military and civilian zones). Continue on the path through the forest, and there is a very old fountain when we arrive at the hamlet of La Cuadra.

In 2014, we did not see that turnoff. We stayed on the road past La Cuadra, took a short detour to the left to see the large menhir, and then continued into Las Quintanillas.

1,7 km to La Cuadra. This is a very small village with just two houses. Here there is a very unusual and old fountain. Passing between the two houses, go out on to the road. From here we can see three more menhirs, “La Llaneda”, “La Puentequilla” and “El Cabezudo”. This last one is the tallest, 3.85 meters high, and is found before entering the town of Las Quintanillas. For some reason, we only passed the last one, which is off to the left before entering Las Quintanillas.

1,4 km to Las Quintanillas. We get to this town by going up a hill, and from the road we can see a big house with coats of arms and its own romanesque church, dedicated to San Vicente Mártir.

Leave the town on the left, following the Calzada Romana, which has traces of livestock footprints. We will see huge blocks of stone on the sides. The track is in some parts rather overgrown, and can be muddy and flooded. You can return to the road if necessary, because the road will also take you to La Quintana.

1 km to La Quintana. Right before the entrance to the small town, there is an extremely well preserved section of the Roman Road and an information panel about its construction. Go through town and then stay on the road until Las Henestrosas de la Quintanillas.

1,1 km to Las Henestrosas de la Quintanillas (fountain).

A few very nice buildings to see here. The Palace of la Corralada, made up of various buildings has a facade with two entrances formed by horseshoe arches, a huge coat of arms and the chapel of Santa Ana.

Leave the town by the lower part, following a camino. The road goes towards the south, and soon we come to the church of Santa María, on a little hill. It is perhaps the most important romanesque construction of the entire valley, built in the 12th century with many carvings and paintings.

Continue south on the road (a narrow driving road) until arriving at the next town:

1,6 km to Bercedo. No facilities here. Continue on the same road and soon you will arrive at the next town, Cuenca.

2 km to Cuenca. A little stream runs through town. Its church, Santa María, is located in the highest part of town and is romanesque. On a gravel trail with easy ascents and descents, cross the tracks of the train from Bilbao to La Robla. We have now entered the province of Palencia. We will pass other unused tracks, but these are wide. On the sides of the path we can see remains of the Calzada before arriving in the next town.

Just outside of the next town (Nestar) is a center of interpretation for the Roman Road in Valdeola. To continue on the Camino, do not go into the town of Nestar, but rather take a left on the road after the Roman information boards. Very shortly a paved bike path (hard green asphalt) begins on the left side of the road, and it takes you into Aguilar. If you want to stay in Nestar, there are two possible places.

3,6 km to Nestar, (Casa rural).

Accommodation:

Casa Rural La Galana. <http://www.laganacasarural.com/> Tel. 979 125 643. Email: lagalanacasarural@yahoo.es Double room 50€.

Villa Esperanza. Email: info@villaesperanza.es. Tel: 979 123 942 or 638 049 738 or 697 318 329. Owner will be happy to help and said she was sure she could find something even if her house was full.

The church in Nestar is San Martín de Tours (patron of pilgrims) and you can see the ruins of the chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Calzada on the right side before crossing the bridge of La Perdiz. It's of roman origin but has been rebuilt.

As we get close to Aguilar (still on the bike path), where several pilgrim paths used to converge, we will see on the right on top of a hill the remains of a castle. A little below that is the Ermita de Santa Cecilia, a magnificent romanesque building, one of the best in Palencia.

5,4 km to Aguilar de Campoo, (all services).

Arriving in town, one of the first sites to catch the eye is the large industrial facility that is being torn down. This is an old cookie factory.

This monumental town used to be walled in with seven entrances. The Camino enters on the Avenida de Barruelo. There are many houses with coats of arms and covered streets. The Puerta del Portazgo, one of the entrances into town, is highly decorated and probably the prettiest of them all. Next to the puerta is the church of San Miguel, gothic and romanesque.

In the Plaza de España, there are many cafés with outdoor seating. The tourism office has recently relocated to a spot along the river walk.

Accommodation:

Posada Sta. María La Real: Tel. 979 12 20 00

Apartamentos Iglesias: Tel. 979 12 23 45

Hostal S.XX (*): Tel. 979 12 29 00

Pensión Baldavia: Tel. 979 12 29 00

Camping Monte Royal 979 18 10 07

Hotel Villa de Aguilar (**): Tel. 979 12 22 25-6 (single 25€)

Hotel Valentín (***): Tel. 979 12 21 25. Price from 39 € (double room 58)

Casa rural Casa Peñas: Tel 979 12 60 26

Casa rural La Casa del Escribano: Tel. 979 18 13 31

Casa rural Mayorazgo: Tel. 979 18 10 31

Casa rural San Antonio: Tel. 979 18 12 63 / 979 18 14 13

HR Cortes Poza, Calle El Puente, 39. Tel.: 979 123 055 (40€ double, recommended)

Stage 8: Aguilar de Campoo-Cervera de Pisuerga 30,3 kms

Leaving Aguilar, follow Calle Puente which goes along the river, and a bit further on, follow Paseo El Monasterio to the gates of the Monastery of Santa Real.

1 km to Monastery of Santa Maria Real. (*the monastery is actually at the end of town, but it is 1 km from the center, down a long pedestrian path*) Turn right to reach CL-626, and there turn left (yellow arrow on the rocks on the other side of the road). Pass the monastery and cross the CL-636/P-212, and take right up a no-exit street past some houses. The street becomes a gravel path, you cross a small bridge, then over the CL-626 for an ascent on a paved road in the direction of the reservoir, the Embalse de Aguilar. There is a short climb to the top. Walk above the Embalse, then take right and ascend. When you see two large pots, you take left up and past Mesón El Chili (a restaurant). After a long straight descent on a paved road with pine trees on both sides, the road bends left and starts ascending. Turn right up a gravel road at the end of the woods, finally you arrive at a roundabout. Cross the highway and continue on a smaller road to the village of Corvio, which is just in front of you. It is well-marked all the way.

4,5 km to Corvio.

Here there is a 13th c romanesque church: Santa Juliana. Follow the main road up through the village and after the last house, turn left onto a gravel road signposted *Necropolis rupestre*. In ca 200 m, the 8C Necropolis of Santiuste is a few meters away. There are various tombs, all of which are oriented with their feet pointing towards sunrise. There is also a ruined cave chapel.

Continue on the main dirt road and then take left soon after necropolis. The road bends left and after a long descent, bends left again into a valley.

Continue on the road to an intersection just before the entrance to the village of Quintanilla de Corvio. Do not enter town, but turn right just before it. There are yellow arrows there and a big red sign telling you not to enter town. (ignore the options to go right before you see this) This track (a wide dirt road) leads to Matamorisca. Before reaching the village, turn left to go up past the church of San Juan Bautista. Inside this church are beautiful wall paintings from the 14C and an ancient baptismal font. Descend the rock-cut stairs, cross the arroyo Mamellar on a small bridge, and continue between houses to CL-626.

5 km to Matamorisca.

Cross the highway (CL-626), ascend to the main part of the village and follow the yellow arrows through it. At the end of town, the street turns in to a dirt road which you follow until you come to the crossroads, and here you join an asphalt road with little traffic which takes you to Renedo de Zalima. The town has a casa rural and its church is romanesque, San Román. The next town is San Mames de Zalima. In the 16th century there was a monastery here named Sancti Michael. Today, the romanesque church is called San Miguel Arcangel. The town also has a beautiful house with coat of arms, which is now dedicated to rural tourism. The Camino doesn't enter either of these towns, but it would be easy to hop off the Camino and take a look.

7,5 km to Salinas de Pisuerga (lots of services).

This town is at the other (north west) side of the Embalse de Aguilar. There is a small store here. And there are also nice things to see, various houses with coats of arms and huge doors. Some of the houses, on the edge of the river, have their own docks. San Pelayo is the patron saint of the town, and his statue is in the plateresque doorway of the gothic church.

Accommodation: HR Centro de Turismo Rural el Molino. Rooms beginning at 50€ (web information here: <http://www.directoriorural.com/casa-rural/el-molino-de-salinas-salinas-de-pisuerga-ref1718>)

Leaving Salinas: Follow the arrows: Turn left after church, cross the 16C bridge with nine arches across the Pisuerga River. Turn right to a gravel road along the river. This is the Senda de los Pescadores (Path of the Fishermen). From here, we have a view of the mountain Curavacas, 2524 m. Pass under the railway at the fountain in Barcenilla. Turn right and follow road through the village.

3,2 km to Barcenilla del Pisuerga, (fountain).

This little town is next to the river. We pass by fishermen´s cabin before arriving at the church of the Asunción, which has a few romanesque details remaining. Take the road that goes to Quintanluengos.

1,3 km to Quintanaluengos.

Here there is a gothic church, also with some romanesque details, and some beautiful homes, and a monumental baroque palace.

Accommodation: Turismo Rural La Acena, 35€, tel. 979 870 264 OR 628 134 154.

Pass in front of the church, turn to the left to leave town (the arrows takes you past a bar here). And continue past a small recreational area with benches and a fountain.

You will join Ruta 1 BTT (this is a marked bicycle trail), and walk parallel to the the river, after many km without yellow arrows you will reach an information board at the bridge.

3,3 km to Liguerezana.

To enter town, cross the bridge. Here there are also houses with huge coats of arms, and the gothic church is San Andrés. There is also a cave here named De Allende, in which there is an internal lake. It is not necessary to enter the town, but if you do, you will have to return to this point. **Accommodation:** TR Casa Mediavilla, tel. 979 877 636.

To continue on the Camino, do not cross the bridge to Liguerezana, but turn left before the river to a gravel road. It goes parallell to the river, but not always next to it, and eventually it leads to the next town Vado.

2,4 km to Vado, (fountain).

Vado is a little town with old houses. Here is also a nice little church: San Sebastián, which we

pass. From the (very small) fountain, go straight ahead and walk through town on the main road. At the start of a bend to the left, leave the road and turn right and continue over a bridge. This road will take you all the way to Cervera de Pisuerga.

To visit the riverside cave church of San Vicente there is an earlier turn-off into a wooded area and over a different bridge. Walk 600 meters, and when you see yet another bridge, you can turn to the left to visit the cave church of San Vicente. There is also a burial ground from the 8th and 9th centuries. Some plaques describe the history and importance of these early Christian burial places. After that detour, continue along the Pisuerga River, arriving at Cervera de Pisuerga.

2,1 km to Cervera de Pisuerga (all services)

Continue straight ahead and take a right onto the long street through the city center, where the hotels and shops are.

Services: supermarkets, pastry stores, tobacco shop, pharmacy, ATM, tourist office. There is a nice plaza here with many cafes and bars, most of which have wifi.

Cervera has two ethnographic museums, the chapel of La Cruz, ruins of a castle and a church.

Accommodation:

Albergue Juvenil*: Tel. 979 870 174. Email: info@campamentoscaracuel.com

Hostal el Resbalón (50 €, double with breakfast), Plaza LaFuente 2, tel: 979 870 612;

<http://www.hostalelresbalon.es>

Hostal Restaurante Pineda, paseo Valdegares 1, tel: 979 870 390 (singles 25-30, doubles 35-40).

Web information: <http://www.cerveradepisuerga.eu/directorio-detalle.php?idDirectorio=46&idServicio=3>

Hostal Restaurante La Galería, Plaza Mayor 16, tel: 979 870 234 (singles 30, doubles 50)

Casa Rural Goyetes (6 rooms 30 €), 6 km out of town. Calle Valle 4, 979 870 568.

Turismo Rural Molino de Valdegares (doubles 65-80 €)

Hostal Pacho, Calle Fraile de la Hoz, no. 2. Tel: 979 874 434; email reservas@hrpacho.es (double 40 €)

Hostal Pineda, Paseo de Valdegares, 1. Tel.: 979 870 030 (25 € single)

* For the albergue juvenil, which is 2.6 km out of town, turn right at Calle Sotelo, where the tourist information office is and pharmacy. Cross arcaded Plaza Mayor with Hostal Galería on the right. Continue on Calle Barrio y Mier, then Calle Labradores, which joins with Calle San Roque. Pass bridge, then cross Pisuerga River on a curved iron footbridge. Turn left and follow river, through a grove then across meadows. Join a gravel road on the left that leads to albergue.

Stage 9: Cervera de Pisuerga-Guardo 36,3 km

Leave Cervera on Paseo Valdegares, which changes to CL-626 (the highway to Guardo). Cross the bridge Puente de Valdegares across the Rivera River, pass Cruz Roja (Red Cross, a modern building) and the chapel of San Cristobal (that's a tiny stone chapel on the left side). From here

1.4 km on the main road, and after passing under the electricity lines, there are yellow arrows telling us to take right. Continue on a gravel track 300 m.

The path is well marked here, there may or may not be a wire gate to open, veer left steeply up a dirt track to reach a cement/gravel track, Camino de Cantoral which was the access to an old mine. Turn right, continue to walk up the valley for about 2 km, where you may find some standing water on the path (some stepping stones here). This takes you to the abandoned coal mine where the road ends. Getting to the abandoned mine is direct, well-marked and easy. When you leave the coal mine, the markings get less frequent, and the path is more overgrown.

Take right to a path, cross a wooden gate, the path widens and runs inside the forest edge. Reaching an open meadow, take right to a small path along the (oak) forest edge. (At this point, it may look like you should walk straight forward, but pay attention to faded arrows, because there is a right turn).

4,6 km to The crossroads to Tejada de Tosande – this is a trail, NOT a town.

When you come to a crossroad where there is a kind of concrete arrangement, with what may be a water trough behind it, you are at the starting point for the trail, the Tejada de Tosande. That trail goes to the right, behind that concrete thing. The Camino does not take the trail, but rather goes to the left, up a little stony path.

The path ascends to a ridge, bends right up this ridge through oak forest (muddy in rain). Go right up across a cattle gate and through a metal gate to an intersection under electricity lines. Turn right up a dirt road on a shallow ridge, then down to a T intersection. Turn left down, cross the railway. After that there is a place called Campus Toralis, an old battlefield. Then turn right on a dirt road which leads to the next town. The next three km, into Cantoral de la Peña, are not well marked, taking you on a dirt path through forest and meadows.

3,4 km to Cantoral de la Peña (fountain, Casa rural).

This is a very small town with a church of Santa Ana.

Accommodation: Casa rural Valle Tosande (4 rooms, call ahead). Tel: 600 579 746 OR 607 797 338 (double room 40€); <http://www.valletosande.com>

In Cantoral we take left past church Santa Ana (yellow arrows here, then right past an ingenious roadside abrevadero (fountain/watering trough) and, before first house, take right down a dirt road (yellow arrows). In an intersection, turn left to a dirt track cross fields between CL-626 and the railway. Turn left in a T intersection and enter the next town.

1,7 km to Cubillo de Castrejón. Here we arrive at the romanesque church of San Vicente. From here, we walk on the highway, with quite a lot of fast traffic, to the next town.

2,6 km to Castrejón de la Peña (lots of services).

[12.7 km from Cervera de la Pisuerga]. Pass the Santa Agueda, a gothic church, to fuente and bar. Store (10-14 and 17-20) and panaderia. Both hidden between houses. Pharmacy.

Accommodation in the surrounding:

Casa Rural Uncar at the end of village on the right. 55 €double; Tel. 609 812 148/ 619 755 027<http://www.eluncarrural.es> Email: ana_acb@hotmail.com

La Casona del Clérigo: Tel. 979 87 70 43.19 beds. Price from 30€ (double room 45€)

Casa rural Tarabas, www.montanapalencia.com : Tel. 979 87 71 55 (owner, Manuel Narganes, willing to discuss special pilgrim prices)

Casa rural Valle de Tosande: Tel. 607 797 338

Casa rural Cavadilla: Tel. 979 87 70 50

Casa rural Peña Redonda: Tel. 639 778 762

The location of some of these casas rurales is unclear. For instance, the Posada La Dirección is listed as being in Villaverde de la Peña, but the map shows it right in Santibáñez. Highly recommended that you call wherever you plan to stay to determine exact location.

To leave Castrejón, turn right at sign (or the yellow arrow) for Traspesa and Villanueva and follow this minor road left out of village. Continue straight ahead on a gravel road to a T crossroad. Turn left to paved road, and continue on this to the next town.

[6 km from Castrejón, off the Camino, in Roscales de la Peña, there are 3 casas rurales, all owned and operated by the same person. La Tila, La Panera de la Tila, and La Cuadra de la Tila. www.latilacasarural.com Tel. 678 860 910 or 637 794 212]

2,6 km to Pisón de Castrejón (fountain)

Here you arrive at a crossroad, next to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción (Santiago on the entrance). Enter town if you want (yellow arrows point towards the church), but to continue on the Camino, just cross and turn right on CL-626 (left side) and follow it for 3 km, then cross the road and turn right to a gravel track, which crosses the railway. From this point, you can already see the next town, but by taking the dirt road you will escape the road for a while. When you again cross the CL626, you arrive in Tarilonte.

3,9 km to Tarilonte de la Peña (Bar, Casa rural)

Small town with the church of Santa Maria, which has an old crucifix.

Accommodation: Casa rural El Encinar: Tel. 979 86 63 91 or 666 846 866. Elena Gonzalez Cosgaya. Kitchen. Call ahead. 20€ per person

Leaving Tarilonte: Pass the church, then go past a big transformer of electricity, as you leave the town, then continue on a dirt track to the station of Villaverde Tarilonte.

Cross the railroad tracks, then immediately turn right and continue along the tracks for a short while. At the empty house in front of you, go on the wide path to the left and leave the railroad

tracks. Now you are on a wide agricultural road. (If you turn around, you will see the town of Villaverde Tarilonte behind you, on the other side of the station.)

Note that the Spanish guide indicates a different route. According to its map, you should stay next to the railroad tracks longer and then eventually take a left to get on the path into Avinante de la Peña. At the house where I took the left turn, though, a man on a tractor in the field told me to go that way and not to go towards Villaverde Tarilonte. If you choose to stay to the right along the tracks, you will probably reconnect with the route we took before entering Avinante de la Peña.

[About 2.5 km off the camino, in Villaverde de la Peña, there is accommodation: Posada La Dirección: Tel. 979 86 63 78 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Posada-de-la-Direcci%C3%B3n/176086059077133>]

4,1 km to Avinante de la Peña, (Fountain).

Follow the street left. Turn right to pass the fountain and church. Continue left past the church, on the Calle Central, a narrow concrete road. Yellow arrows further on. Before a left bend, take a left down to stay along the highway, CL-626. Follow the gravel track along the highway to a T intersection under electricity lines (past Santibáñez on the right). After a while the arrows takes you to the other side of the highway, just follow the road to next town.

3,5 km to Santibáñez De La Peña (shop)

This town stretches out along the highway. There is a romanesque church here; San Juan Bautista, and a horreo in front of it. On the outskirts of town are ruins of a monastery, San Román de Entrepeñas.

Two bars on the highway, I was told one of them has rooms. Try: Bar Vival, 979 860 024 OR Bar J.A.R. 979 860 300

Continue along the main road to Las Heras de la Peña, the next town, which is virtually adjacent to Santibáñez. Here the road is narrow and without a shoulder. There is a church there: Santa Eulalia, as well as a small chapel, but the route doesn't pass by it. We turn to the left and get on the path we were on before Santibáñez, on the left side of the highway, crossing the highway with an underground passage to enter in Villanueva de Arriba.

3,7 km to Villanueva de Arriba (Fountain, Bar, Casa rural)

Accommodation:

Casa La Majada Palentina: Tel. 636 179 397 <http://casaruralmajada.com/> Continue through the center of town towards the church of the Asunción and the old Chapel of San Roque, which is a bar today. Leaving it on our left, we take the Calle Real to leave town. On the right, pass a fountain marked with a “no potable” (do not drink) sign. Take a pedestrian path on the right side of the highway. This path is used for daily exercise by a lot of residents and goes straight to

Muñeca.

2 km to Muñeca.

Walk through town, then continue on the other side on the dirt road, straight forward. This brings us to Guardo. (The distance is to the Rio Carrion in Guardo)

4,2 km to Guardo (All services).

A big town, one of the most important in Palencia. Services: Supermarkets (El Arbol open till 9 pm); pharmacy, medical center, banks with ATMs. Church: San Juan with romanesque parts, and a Baroque ayuntamiento.

Guardo is not a compact town. The two best lodging options are Hotel don Edmundo (on the Camino on the way into town) and Real Hotel (on the Camino on the way out of town). The Pensión Garmar is definitely not recommended and is reported to be a brothel.

Accommodation:

Albergue Municipal de Guardo has 55 beds, tel. 653 608 166 or 691 327 018. email albergue@linumberco.com. B&B 15 €, half pension 21€ .

Hotel don Edmundo, Calle Iglesia 29. (40€ double) Tel. 979 85 22 67/ 979 86 10 10/ 979 86 10 98

Pension Garmar, Av. Asturias 17, tel. 979 850 960 (reported so-so) (20€)

HR El Tremazal, ctra Magdalena, tel. 979 850 769 (38-43 €)<http://www.hoteltrmazal.com/>

Real Hotel : Tel 979 85 26 51. Price from 30€ (double room 45€)

Hotel Montaña Palentina: Av. Asturias. Tel. 979 85 15 20. 12 rooms. Price from 50€ for a double room.

Hotel Jay: Tel. 979 85 01 94

Stage 10: Guardo-Puente Almuhey 13,3 km

Leave Guardo on the Avenida de Castilla and León, crossing the Carrión River on its medieval bridge. Immediately after, go under the tracks (you will pass two railway tracks on the way through town) and go up towards the tourist office (located in a romanesque chapel at the intersection of the Calle Carretera de la Magdalena and the Calle San Isidro). There is a big roundabout here. The Real Hotel is located on the left right before this intersection. Turn left on the highway, towards Cistierna, and walk along the side of the road.

Once you go through a very pronounced curve, you will see Guardo down in the hollow below, and the sidewalk on the left side ends. From here, 300 meters on there is a traffic sign indicating a 60 km limit and there is another one showing that you are coming to a dangerous curve. Here a path goes up between pine trees with the signage of the R-4 trail, (no yellow arrow) which brings us to the place where we find a small church of the Virgen of Carmen.

Unfortunately, there is now no other option than to stay on the highway (CL-626). All off-road

options add many kms to the stage. La Espina is the first town we come to, detouring off to the left.

7,1 km to La Espina (no services).

We leave the town at the other end, again on the highway. Pass the church on the left, up through village, join CL- 626 and stay on the road until you see a turn-off to the right to Cegoñal. Newly marked off-road path. It descends through forest and fields to Cegoñal, but you can stay on the road if you prefer. Please note that the road has a very narrow shoulder in some places.

3,1 km to Cegoñal

In Cegoñal, there is a turn up to the top of the village on the right side of the highway, and an off-road path all the way into Puente Almuey. The path is well marked, to begin with it is a good path, but after a while it turns into a walk through open land, and at the end it's rather steep down to the entrance to town.

3,1 km to Puente Almuey (all services).

Supermarket, pharmacy, banks with ATMs. Here is the romanesque chapel of Nuestra Señora de las Angustias. You can still see carved in its stones "Cruz de la Orden Hospitalaria de los Caballeros de Jerusalem", which is the name of a group that took care of pilgrims. There used to be a pilgrim's hospital here.

Accommodation:

CR la Muria, Travesia el Cine 6, 25 € per person, tel. 648 060 298 (email: casarurallamuria@hotmail.com)

HR Rio Cea, AV. Ferrero 55, tel: 987 703 521 or 639 179 694 or 639 179 386. Heat, laundry, double 48€. Pilgrim-friendly; pilgrim discount both on accommodation and in restaurant.

Stage 11: Puente Almuey-Cistierna 23,7 km

Leaving Puente Almuey: At the roundabout, where the bridge and the chapel is, turn right onto CV-131/14. The name of the road is Calle Taranilla. Follow the signs towards Santuario de La Velilla. Cross the railway and 200 m later, after a power station and a house, turn right to a dirt road along a small canal (well marked). It goes away from the highway (CV-131/14) for a short while and then makes a left bend and runs parallel to the highway. At an intersection with houses, turn left (a crossroad with a fountain is right on Calle Loma), and go straight ahead on Carretera de la Mata through Taranilla.

1, 9 to Taranilla (Casa rural).

Accommodation: Casa Rural Valle del Tuejar (48€), La Loma 42, tel: 987 716 060.

www.valledeltuejar.com (double 48-58). Email: valledetuejar@hotmail.com

In a crossroad at the end of the village, (first follow the carretera) turn left to Camino de las Eras.

Turn right after a big warehouse and then the path takes you to the church at San Martín. No need to go into the town of San Martín, the Camino turns left before the bridge (that is, stay on the side of the river that the church is on). The walk is on grass and through the cow fields. Beware of loose dogs.

2,6 km to San Martín de Valdetuejar (expensive hotel).

Magnificent Romanesque church, located before the bridge that goes into town.

Accommodation: Casa Lara I and I, tel. 626 002 400, or online at <http://www.casalara.es/en/> 12 beds, about 20 euros. You can reserve on the internet. (expensive, 90-150 € per room)

0,7 km to Renedo de Valdetuejar .

When entering Renedo we pass the church of San Arián. There are many ruins here, such as the remains of a palace and houses with coats of arms. At a fork next to a nice stone portal, take left down Calle Fuente, cross Tuejar River, and the arrows take you alongside the river through fields. When I walked, there were several options to cross the river, and there were arrows pointing across several bridges, but they had been crossed out. I didn't cross but stayed on the left side of the river till the end; don't worry there will be an arrow taking you across the river as far along as possible, to avoid road walking. Finally, when the arrow points you across, cross and emerge on LE-4714 at km 6, right before the town of El Otero de Valdetuejar.

3,2 km to El Otero de Valdetuejar (Casa rural, bar)

Turn left on CV131-14 and you will stay on the side of the road to La Velilla, 1.8 km away. At an intersection, follow sign to left to go up to sanctuary. Pass the CTR La Velilla just before reaching the church.

2, 4 km to Virgen de la Velilla Sanctuary (hotel).

This is not a town, but a cathedral and a monastery, with an impressive 15C Santiago on horseback. Centro de Turismo Rural La Velilla. Tel: 987 716 100 OR 608 999 494 <http://www.lavelilla.es/>. 38€ for bed, breakfast, dinner. Contact Pilar Alvarez at ctlavelilla@gmail.com.

Leaving: when on the asphalt road which goes up to the sanctuary, and the sanctuary is on your right side, turn left at a T intersection to a dirt road. There are still 13 kms left to Cistierna, but they will go quickly because this is a stretch of great beauty, with large boulders and ancient forests of beeches and oaks. Stay on this road through an impressive oak forest, ignoring all turn-offs. It ascends the right slope of a valley, crosses the Collada de las Vallejas (1323 m) and then sticks to the left slope of the mountain on the left. After a more pronounced side valley reach Collada de la Mata with a reservoir and a building. Do not take the way to the right on the Ruta de las Legiones because that will take you to the town of Fuentes de Peñacorada and will add many kms of asphalt walking to get back to Cistierna. Take left and straight ahead at a cattle shed, go around a ridge then descend to CV-105/14 across the Arroyo Fuentes. Turn left down to the main road.

The path emerges onto the road that goes between Cistierna and the town of Fuentes de Peñacorada in the valley. Turn left to a road parallel to then join CL626/N621, joining the Camino Vadiniense (which goes from Potes in the Picos de Europa to join the Frances in Leon). There may be quite a bit of traffic on that road. Keep straight ahead on a side road then straight past a roundabout and into Cistierna.

12,9 km to Cistierna (all services)

This is a rather big town. Services: Día and Árbol supermarkets, much commerce. Farmacia, banks with ATM. Good pastries in town.

Arriving in town, you will be on the main street. Continue to the church, turn left and go to the Ayuntamiento where you will get the key to the albergue. If the ayuntamiento is closed, go to the albergue, where you will find telephone numbers on the door. To get to the albergue, head into Calle Parque Infantil next to Tallero, the next plaza with the chapel San Guillermo. Cross it diagonally to the left, go up the Calle San Guillermo, which starts at the corner of the chapel, and the albergue is about 50 m further on on the right.

Accommodation:

Albergue de Peregrinos San Guillermo, Calle San Guillermo, phone numbers on the door
Hostal Moderno: <http://www.hostalmoderno.es> / 987 700 170 OR 6197257632 (restaurant on second floor has excellent menú del día). Hotel is also recommended.

Pensión Okendo Calle Rivas, tel. 987 700 080

HR Río Esla, C Esteban Coral 5, tel. 987 702 031

Hostal El Cruce, Av. Constitucion 43, tel. 987 700 041 <http://www.hostalelcrucecistierna.com/>
(double 40€)

Hotel Ibérico Calle Eras 23, tel. 987 700 624 (double 40€) (appeared closed in summer 2014).
http://www.atrapalo.com/hoteles/138972-0_hotel-hostal-iberico

Pensión Okendo, Calle Dr. Rivas, 10: 987 700646

Hotel Río Esla: 987 701 025

Stage 12: Cistierna-Boñar 25,3 km

From Cistierna, for the first few kms, the Olvidado and the Vadiniense are the same. It's well marked.

Walking on the main street in town, turn right onto Calle Eras. Go under railway (lots of graffiti here) turn left at Calle Polideportivo, continue to a gravel road that passes the Molino (mill) de Gaudalio and the Cruz del Molino. Walk along the river. Turn right at a T intersection, right on a tarmac road and cross the famous Puente del Mercadillo across the Esla River. Turn left on the road after crossing the bridge. Leave the Ruta Vadiniense at the signposts BTT1 Yugueros 4.9 km and Camino de la Montaña. These are mountain bike trails, and they are also the Camino at many different places in this area, and the marking is always quite good. For your information, BTT

means "bicicleta todo terreno" - all terrain bicycle – which in the US we call mountain bike. Here we take a dirt road through oak forests towards Yugueros (muddy on rainy days). Go under RR tracks and emerge in Yugueros.

8,1 km to Yugueros

There used to be a roman settlement in this town. The church here, Iglesia del Salvador, has some romanesque parts and a magnificent altarpiece.

Continue by walking on LE-4606 through the village towards La Ercina. We will pass Ermita (the chapel of) San Roque on the way. The asphalt road is narrow, but not much traffic.

3 km to La Ercina (Albergue, bars, Casa rural, restaurant).

The camino doesn't go through town, but passes the station. At the junction after the train station, a big informational board shows a BTT (mountain bike) route that goes to Boñar through a roundabout way. There is a yellow arrow pointing left on that informational board, which would put you on the bike path till about one km before Boñar. But there is also an arrow telling you to keep going straight ahead on the side of the road. Villagers insisted that the turn to the left was not the way to go. I am now certain that the left option would have been fine, but longer, and probably only marked with BTT signs and not camino signs. I stayed to the right, but shortly before entering Boñar, I saw where the BTT track merged with the camino I was on. So you can choose either way here.

If you want to enter La Ercina, there is also an ethnographic museum here.

Accommodation:

Casa Rural La Nogal, tel. 679 312 994 or 987 712 093. 15 beds, about 30€. For albergue turn right up Av. General, under the railroad, past Museo Etnografico, fork right up, turn left down to albergue.

Albergue Multiaventura. Calle Ayuntamiento 1, 987 805 314 (office in Trobajo del Camino). Mobile: 648 032 831, Tono, email: info@tesonserviciosdeportivos.com. Heat, showers, kitchen.

Continue on LE-4606, down to La Acisa. This means we start from the station, and walk on the road.

4 km to La Acisa de Las Arrimadas (fountain)

Continue on the road, pass the fountain, and leave the village. At the sign that indicates that there is a bumpy road ahead, go left to a grassy track, called the Camino Viejo de la Iglesia. Take right, back in the direction of the road, then more or less parallel the road up and down to Santa Marina church (which has some romanesque remnants). Descend a cement ramp right, turn left on CV130-6 and descend to a fork in Barillo.

2 km to Barillo de las Arrimadas (fountain)

(after this town no more LE-3153 walking)

Turn left, past the fountain, to the chapel Virgen de los Remedios. Behind the church, follow the

Cordel de la Varga, a part of the Transhumancia (ancient paths dedicated to livestock, for travel from summer to winter grazing fields). On this path, leave town, cross the highway and then immediately take right to a gravel track: Camino de los Rocines. (camino signs here say Camino de la Montaña). If you have walked on the lower main road through town, simply go right at the arrow. Cross the new bypass road and the railway, then to Calle Real in La Devesa.

2, 4 km to La Devesa de Boñar (fountain)

Turn left to the romanesque church Virgen del Rosario (fountain). Follow the arrows through town, which means you take left and join Calle Real, and then leave after hundred meters or so, by taking right down the road to La Losilla.

2, 1 km to La Losilla y San Adrián.

There is an old spa in this town, San Adrián, which reportedly has healing warm waters. Continue on Calle Real to the church at the entrance to town. Inside the church porch, there is a bench where you can sit down (not many of these on this day). Continue right between houses, pass fountain, join Calle Real, and at the last houses, take right on Calle Eras, not across the railway but parallel to it. You join a dirt road which goes parallel to the railroad tracks all the way to the outskirts of la Vega de Boñar. It later joins the main road into Boñar.

3, 7 km to Boñar (all services).

Commerce: Spar and Dia grocery stores, panadería, farmacia, ATM.

Boñar is an old town, dating to Roman times. Lots of typical regional products, both sweets (Nicanores) and salty (cecina and all sorts of sausages). Make sure to visit the 7-arch bridge about 1 km out of town, there is also a huge 16th or 17th century monastery abandoned and in ruins nearby.

Accommodation:

Hostal Inés (20€, recommended), Av. Constitucion 64, tel. 987 735 086. You may have to ask for the special pilgrim price.

HS Nisi, Calle Rodriguez 3, tel. 987 735 210

CR El Negrillón, Pl. Negrillón 12, tel. 987 735 164 or 639 104 366

CR Las Caldas de Boñar (25€), Calle San Mateo 6, tel. 696 700 959.

TR Pico Cueto (40 €), Calle Corredera 43, tel. 987 735 693 or 689 064 514

Albergue El Soto (90 beds, B&B 20€), calle Soto, tel. 987 735 474 or 671 201 316.

Hostería Spa Loft: Tel.987 11 33 10

Casa Rural Antaño: Tel. 987 73 41 41, Calle la Viliella, 42

Casa Rural La Loma: Tel. 987 74 16 17 - 638 045 647. 7 plazas. Price 18,57€

Stage 13: Boñar-La Robla 29,8 km

Leave Boñar on Calle El Soto. If you do not stop in Boñar, then follow the main road through town, and take left on this street. Walk towards the river on Polígono Parque Soto. There are yellow arrows on the way. Cross Río Porma, then turn left to a gravel track along the river (small

shell mark here). Continue on the path that goes down to the railway bridge. Before the railway, turn right up a path, which takes you back to Calle Soto. Continue up the road into Barrio.

1, 6 km to Barrio de las Ollas, (fountain).

12 C church of San Juan. Pass the church and the fountain, take right, then left up a stony road that zigzags up a slope to a concrete reservoir. This is also a BTT bike trail. Continue left on a dirt track. At next intersection turn left at T intersection. 50 m later turn right (confusing arrows and broken waymarks) and follow a dirt road up and down several times, to the end across the railway. Turn right afterwards to the old paved road (the remains of an old asphalt road, no longer in use) that goes back to the new CL-626. Turn right on it for 25m, then left down a paved bike road that becomes gravel. It leads to a T intersection. Turn right to a dirt road which in a while returns to CL-626. Turn left and follow it to Otero.

6 km to Otero de Curueño, (fountain).

To see in this town: a small romanesque church and a Renaissance palace with a tower and seven coats of arms: the 16C Palacio Alvarez Acevedo. Turn left down a dirt/muddy path, pass the fountain and after a while you come back to the CL-626. Turn right and continue on the road, cross Río Curueño and reach the main crossroads with 18C church in La Vecilla. (Distance to next town is to the railway station)

2,4 km to La Vecilla de Curueño (Albergue, bar, hostel and other services)

Here is an 18th c church a beautiful baroque altar piece. Panaderia, pharmacy, bar, ATM. Cafe near train station; bread van makes calls in the village. La Vecilla is a long town along CL-626, well more than a kilometer between the ends. The railway station is further on, at the north part.

Accommodation:

Albergue and camping Santa Catalina (.5 km) (25 beds, 9-22€). Tel. 987 741 212

Fonda Orejas, Calle Estación 6, tel. 987 741 397

Hostal las Hoces, Calle Estación 27, tel. 987 741 233.

(Option: that avoids some of the CL626. Go around the church and follow CV 130-3, towards Santa Colomba, past a plaza with fountain. Cross the Arroyo Aviados, and the road then goes left, ascending at the bend. On the left here are the cemetery and the albergue (.5 km behind). Opposite their access road, turn sharp right down a gravel road, signposted Campohermoso. It flanks the edge of a forest. Fork right into the fields, and when you come to a left bend, keep straight/right on a dirt/grassy track along the river. The track goes right across the Arroyo Aviados again and over the RR to ascend to CL626. Turn left through Campohermoso (2.1 km).)

If you don't take the above option, leave town by walking along the CL-626, then under the railway. (You will see a circular tower from afar. It is a medieval construction, later it served as a jail, and it is now the Ayuntamiento)

Continue until emerging onto the road into La Robla. Stay on CL-626, up and through next town.

1,3 km to Campohermoso. Nothing here.
Continue on the highway, the CL-636.

5 km to La Valcueva (Bar).

Pass below church and follow the road (not CL-626) down to next town.

0,6 km to Palazuelo. Nothing here. Pass its church, and then back again to CL-626 where we walk and continue to a turn-off left where a street goes across the bridge into Robles.

1,2 km to Robles de la Valcueva, (lots of services).

A bigger town. Árbol supermarket; café/restaurant; post office.

Continue walking on CL-626 through Robles de Valcueva and across the Río Torrio, over two railways, and the (name of street through town is Carretera la Magdalena/CL626) to a parking lot with an info board and fountain in Robledo.

(Off road option from Robles: turn left to take Travesía el Campo over a bridge. Before reaching its end at a wooden info board and benches, turn left then right to Calle Eras, then right to Calle Llana. Cross LE-311 for paved then gravel road, to the right following a sign to Ermita de Boinas (lovely 12 C romanesque church). Turn right before it to follow Torrio River to CL 626 and turn left across the river (2.2 km).)

2,3 km to Robledo de Fenar, (fountain).

Here we leave the highway for a short while. At the fountain, take left to a minor tarmac road, cross a stream, pass a picnic stop (fountain). Pass church of San Torcuato and walk on CL-626 to the entrance of next town.

0,8 km to Solana de Fenar .

Again, we must go back to the asphalt road: continue on CL-626.

1,4 km to Candanedo de Fenar (Bar, fountain, hostel).

When arriving in town the bar Dingo is on the right side (Bar Dingo is famous for patatas con congri). Hostel 1 km out of town, HR El Valle, Ctra Candanedo-Matallana, tel. 987 578 426 or 427. 11 rooms. Discount for pilgrims: <http://hostalelvallelarobla.com/>

Leaving Candanedo: the fountain is on the left side of the road, and just before it we turn left (yellow arrows) on Calle Real. We will follow the bicycle route from there, passing next to the Church of San Miguel, which has an interesting bell tower. Turn lightly to the right to leave the town on the Calle del Gallo, passing by the sports fields on our right. Once we go around the curve, in the next intersections, take the camino on the right. It is impossible to get confused from here to La Robla, because the camino is black, made of bits and pieces of coal left over from the mines. We walk near the FEVE tracks. Cross those tracks after about a km, continue on

the black path and after 800 meters, we will arrive at an intersection. The camino on the right goes to Rabanal, but we keep going straight until we arrive at a livestock farm and another intersection. Do not take the turn-off towards Brugos de Fenar unless you want to sleep there or need other services.

Another km more and a drinking trough is on the left as our point of reference. A few meters beyond, there is a bifurcation; we take the camino on the left. The one that continues straight ahead also goes to Brugos de Fenar. You can see the town on the right side of the road, you don't go down to the road and just go by it.

(Be careful with the big industrial site – you will see it in front of you, but you must skirt it around on the right, don't go into the site itself).

After about 1,2 kms and after passing a green shed, take the path that begins on the right hand side, and it will take you out to the highway next to the auto showroom Rafa. Turn left and you will be on the pavement.

After the traffic roundabout, continue on the pavement then take right towards Barrio Las Eras immediately before an overpass. As soon as you enter that area, you will find a park and an overhead pedestrian pathway that will take you into the center of La Robla. It is well marked.

7,2 km to La Robla (all services)

La Robla is a big town on the Camino del Salvador, which links Leon and Oviedo. La Robla is 28 km from Leon. All commerce and services. Buy food and other things you need in La Robla. If you are unlucky, you may not find an open shop again until Ponferrada; same with an ATM.

Accommodation:

The albergue is located at Calle Mayor 69, which is on the way out of town. Tel. 659 093 647 or call police at 659 093 647.

HS Ordonez de Celis, Calle Ramon y Cajal 5. (15 € individual room) Tel. 987 572 342.

Pensión Mundo, Calle Ordas 9, bajo. Tel. 987 570 733.

Stage 14: La Robla-Pandorado 32 km

NOTE: The next few days are tricky because of lack of accommodation and shops. Also, be sure to carry enough cash to get you to Ponferrada. There is an ATM in Riello, but I think it is inside a bank and only accessible during bank hours.

Recommended stages are La Robla to Pandorado (32 km) to Fasgar (23.8 km) to Iguena (19.7 km). Rosi in Fasgar will find you a place to stay, but you must email her ahead of time. Her email is listed further on in the guide. The other option is to sleep two nights in Casa Resthy in Pandorado. Resthy will drive you back and forth to and from Fasgar. But it will not be cheap. (Sleeping is 60 € a night (that's the price of the apartment, regardless of how many people sleep

there), plus 30€ for transport to and from Fasgar). Yet a third option is to go from Pandorado to Colinas de Campo Martin Moro (36.5 kms). There are reportedly some casas rurales in Colinas de Campo but they are only open seasonally, and you should not arrive there without confirmed reservations. You must also phone ahead for the Casa Rural in Igüeña, as the hostel is closed.

From La Robla to Pandorado is not hard but there is a lot of road walking.

To leave La Robla from the albergue, walk back into town and towards the Plaza Constitución (fountain), with the Ayuntamiento behind us. Cross the square and walk along the road in the direction of La Magdalena, until you reach a roundabout, then go over the N-630 on a yellow bridge. Continue straight on the CL-626 and follow Ruta El Fontana (there are big brown signs for that Ruta), which means walking on the pavement along Carretera la Magdalena/ CL-626. Cross the Río Bernesga, and follow CL-626 to next town. (there should be three roundabouts here, the first we go straight, the next right, the last one left)

1,6 km (from city centre) to Llanos de Alba (fountain, bar, restaurante, pharmacy)

On a hill next to this town is the Castillo de Alba, an old defensive fortress, built by Alfonso II.

Walk through this town on the main road (CL-626). Pass the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción (romanesque doorway, and a yellow arrow). Continue on the main road to next town. When you come to a roundabout, take left and enter Sorribos.

1,9 km to Sorribos de Alba.

Continue by walking through town on Calle de la Magdalena, and then back to CL-626, again. Stay on the road until a turn-off for Olleros and here take right. Cross Arroyo San Martino, you will now arrive in Olleros, and in the outskirts you can see the chapel of Entresierra. On the left you will see the bus stop.

2,9 km to Olleros de Alba, (fountain).

Walk through this town, by passing the church, and continue straight to end of town. Its uphill, and on top of the hill, you take left. This road descends to an agricultural pavillion, which we can see in front of us. We turn off right, where there is a closed field for livestock. Go through gate, and close it behind you. Continue on a path which goes up among oak trees. It takes us to a new road, and we continue on the right.

In two more kms, there is a sort of parking lot on the right. From there a paved road goes down towards **Santiago de las Villas**. This turn-off may not be well marked, so pay attention for the road. We take that road until we arrive at a merendero (picnic area). In front of us there is a camino that goes off to the left, and we stay on it unless we want to go into the town Santiago de Las Villas, which doesn't have anything special except for its name (Santiago) and in the church a statue of Saint James the Apostle. This road will take us to Carrocera.

3,9 km to Carrocera (fountain, Casa rural, shop)

Leaving Carrocera: Go into Plaza del Ayuntamiento and cross square. After the fountain, turn left to Calle Vega to leave town. Continue straight ahead until the next town, Otero. Impossible to get lost. When you get close to Otero, the camino twists around and through a warehouses to descend into town. Stay on the main street and pass the church.

3,3 km to Otero de las Dueñas (Lots of services: bar, hotel, shop) .

Accommodation: Casa Rural La Oca I y II: Tel.679 327 768. 20 Plazas. Prices start at 20€
<http://www.casarurallaoca.com/index.asp>

Here there is the 19th century church of Santa Maria Magdalena. (and a monastery?)

Accommodation: Hotel Santa Lucía: Tel. 987 58 14 37 - 630 079 737. 47 places. Double 50€
<http://www.hotelsantalucia.es/>

We pass the church, and walk through town. At the end of town, there is an arrow telling us to take right up a path along a stone wall.

Follow this road (which seems to go parallel to the highway, but far away from it) until it comes back to the highway, next to the industrial park.

The following paragraph describes an off-highway alternative from Otero de las Dueñas into La Magdalena. We never found this route, and wound up walking on the CL 626 most of the way from Otero into La Magdalena. Cross the highway (CL- 626,) continue on the other side, and walk past the industry buildings (should be the left side, I think), and the small path continues there (no arrows on right side of the buildings). Continue through a little tunnel under the AP-66 motorway, and we will arrive at the old highway (should be LE-429, but it's a detour. Funny). Stay on it to the right, and turn left after you pass a warehouse of construction materials (yellow arrows here, phew, and sign polideportivo, and centro). Walk that road (probably Paseo de la Vega de la Forca), it is long, but continue until you pass the polideportivo and health center. Turn right in front of the polideportivo, to come to La Magdalena.

2,1 km to La Magdalena, (lots of services, hotel).

Grocery store, bread store, butcher, pharmacy, health center, restaurant.

Accommodation: HsR El Crucero (double 30€), 20 rooms. Crta Leon-Caboalles 36, tel. 987 581 024.

Leaving town: Continue on CL- 626 (pavement all the way), pass the grocery store and church. Turn left on LE- 493 cross Río Luna on the bridge. Right at the bridge, there is a good café. When you cross the river, you will be in Canales. Government administration office on right. Tourist office is closed.

1,4 km to Canales (fountain).

In front of us will be the church of San Adriano. Leave town by walking straight through it on

the main road and continue on the highway. On the road, we will quickly arrive in Quintanilla.

3 km to Quintanilla, (fountain).

Continue through it and at the intersection take the camino to the left. In 600 meters we will come to the Royal Canal (or is it called "Cordel de las Marinas", an old sheep path?) and can follow it to Bobia.

1,2 to Bobia.

Once in the town, look for the Calle Camparín that will take us back to the highway. One km further on, the road on the right parallels the highway and will take us to Soto y Amio, still on asphalt.

2,4 km to Soto y Amio (casa rural).

Accommodation:

Casa rural La Rasa: Tel. 987 80 61 80 (must rent entire house).

Continue on the main road through town, and then on the highway. After a while the arrows tell you to take left, and then right onto a dirt road, which continues in the grass.

Stay on it and go around the fenced off ranch, until arriving at Oterico.

3,5 km to Oterico (small store).

There is a small store in the gas station here if you need food or drink. Continue on the highway until you enter **Riello**, which is on our right.

2 km to Riello, (Bar, grocery, bank with ATM, pharmacy)

Here is a Casa Rural, and some commerce (grocery store, located in a house on the left, before entering town center, and bar), along with pretty houses with coats of arms.

Accommodation:

CR La Panera del Conde, Calle 2 de Mayo 3, tel. 987 261 060 or 652 818 073 (will provide free transportation if you want pick up and drop off at Fasgar, but entire house must be rented, at 100-150€ per night)

CR El Trillo, tel. 909 292 682 (this phone may not be working).

Better buy food if you can here as there might not be any shop the following perhaps 30 km.

Leaving Riello: Stay on the road (LE-493), direction Villablino to the end of town, cross Rio Ariegos, and shortly after that there is a little agricultural shed (probably with a green door) which is the point where to take a road to the left. Lots of tractor tracks here. Although it may be a little bit hidden, there is the path we should take. It goes up and may be a bit difficult to follow, but it takes us through a beautiful woods full of oaks, a nice green tunnel. We come to an intersection with the bike route, turn to the right on it and it will take us straight to Pandorado.

Unfortunately, in 2014, when we took the turn-off at the shed upon leaving Riello, we got only as far as a large number of cultivated bee hives. From there we could not find the path to take us up the hill to Pandorado. We recommend that if you arrive at the bee hives and don't see the path, return to the road and take it up to Pandorado.

2,8 km to Pandorado (apartments to rent, bar-restaurant).

Pass on front of the Hotel Pandorado (closed). In front is the gas station and the restaurant, and the Casa rural Resthy.

Accommodation:

Casa Resthy, LE493, km 48. Tel. 987 580 722 or 615 256 708. Kitchen, serves meals. Provides transportation for pick up and drop off on stage to Fasgar. (entire apartment must be rented at 65€, transportation 15€ each trip).

Stage 15: Pandorado-Fasgar 25 km

Leaving Pandorado: At CR Resthy, take the turn off to the left, and small road descends to the hamlet of La Omanuela. Nice views.

1,8 to La Omanuela (casa rural on booking.com).

Accommodation:

CR Aguas Frias, Calle Real 12, 987 308 309 or 639 546 562. Call ahead.

Turn right, walk through the village and continue on a dirt track, flanked by a wall of ancient stones covered with moss. This is a lovely path along the river into Guisatecha. About 200 m before village, the path is overgrown, but push on to LE-493 and then into town.

2,1 km to Guisatecha.

Turn left on LE-493, stay on the road until end of town. Before the last houses of Guisatecha you can take left to a dirt track and follow a path down to the river, to escape the highway for a while, but it is poorly marked and the path may not be visible. So it may make more sense to just stay on the side of the road leaving Guisatecha.

1,9 km to El Castillo, (bar).

There is a castle of Benar here, on the high parts of the town: a tower and some walls remains. Here we pass below the castle; at the crossroads take left, cross the bridge, after that follow the arrows, which takes you past a sports field and onto a camino along the woods, maybe flooded in heavy rains. When we get close to Vegarienza, the camino turns right to enter the town. Continue on the LE-493 through Vegarienza.

2 km to Vegarienza, (bar).

Here, just follow the highway LE-493 to a crossroads in next town.

2 km to Aguasmestas de Omana. Continue on the road, and cross the Río Omana on the bridge (CV128-2) towards Fasgar and Cirujales. You will now walk this road or some parallel off-road options all the way to Fasgar. There might not be good water everywhere so its a good idea to fill your bottle when you can.

1,3 km to Cirujales, (bar, open erratically if at all).

Just when entering Cirujales we past the church of San Pedro. Walk through this town, which has some roman remains.

After passing by the sports fields, turn left, pass over the bridge, turn right, and in 300 meters there is a split. We take the right side. We will have to go around the wall of a large estate. After we come down from a small hill, we have to turn to the right, through another livestock fence. Continue on this path, which goes to the CV128-2 and into next little town.

2,2 km to Villaverde De Omana, (fountain).

Cross the bridge and come back to highway, which we again will follow to next town. Turn left and stay on CV128-2 to Marzan.

1 km to Marzán. This town is little bit bigger, but no services anyway.

Shortly after leaving Marzán, there are freshly painted arrows that take you off road to the left and down into a field. We were unable to find the way to continue through this field and returned to the highway.

We continue to walk on the highway, with views ahead, to the Ermita Santa Ana. (This is just a chapel, no town)

Option: After the Ermita Santa Ana, it might be possible to veer left down a grassy track, crossing the Rio Vallegordo (the bridge was destroyed summer 2012), ascending and crossing Rio Vallegordo again on Puente Romano.

4,7 km to Barrio de la Puente, (bar, open erratically if at all).

There is a church here and a medieval bridge, which we will cross. Keep on walking on CV128-2 until next town.

2,5 km to Posada de Omana, (fountain).

Pass through it on the main road, and continue to the stone puente romano at the beginning of the village of Vegapujin.

1,4 km to Vegapujín, (bar).

A very small town with some old interesting buildings, as a famous horreo (granary), and a Roman mill. A very good fuente here.

When you are standing in front of the fuente, take a left behind it to a little road (Senda de Rio Valle Gordo) between two stone walls. It becomes grassy and follows the river. Keep along the river to the second bridge, which takes you into next town. It goes parallel to the highway.

2,1 km to Fasgar (bar and fountain)

Last town before we cross the mountain. Better bring picnic food, but there should be fountains along the trail.

The bar (open only in July and August) is across the first bridge, and the municipal social club (located next to the doctor's office) is open year round. Bread van arrives around 3 pm (at 15 o'clock). In August 2014, a fancy restaurant opened, La Fasgarecha. According to its facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/www.lafasgarecha.es> its operating hours are 11 am to 10:30 pm. (22.30).

The road CV128-2 ends here.

Email Rosi in Fasgar for accommodation. Make sure to email her ahead of time; if you do, you can be assured of a place to stay. She and several other people in town are very pilgrim-friendly. 15-20 € per person. There is a casa rural where pilgrims can stay, and if it is full, other accommodations will be available. The casa rural is not heated, so be prepared if you walk in cold weather. Email: rosiferal@gmail.com

Stage 16: Fasgar-Igüeña 19 km

The approximately 12 kms from the village of Fasgar to the village of Colinas del Campo Martín Moro are completely off-road and go over a mountain pass. Both Fasgar and Colinas are at the end of their respective roads. To get from one village to the other by car requires a circuitous drive of 80 kms. Going over the mountain is the shorter, more direct route, but it is inaccessible to cars. In good weather, it is a beautiful walk with great views. If it is raining, it can be difficult and dangerous.

Leaving Fasgar: Start at the left side of the river, keep straight ahead on Calle Fuente, then continue left up on Calle Santiago, and pass a small chapel. At first, the path is first of concrete but later become a dirt track. The path to the Ermita de Santiago is suitable for trucks or all terrain vehicles, but after the church, the path is narrow, rocky, and may be very difficult and dangerous in the rain or bad weather.

Start the walk on a wide path, well packed earth, and we go up for 3 kms. After several hundred meters, the path divides in two. Go to the left. Next to the water tower you can see a panel informing us of the glaciers of the area. In 700 meters, we come to a bifurcation. Take the left branch (be careful because sometimes people turn around the rock that has the arrow on it, and this would be a big mistake). One way to make sure you are going in the right direction is to look for the fountain of Abedul, which you should pass on your left. It has three spouts and some

poetry inscribed.

Soon we arrive at the top of the hill, 1641 m high, and the field you see below you is the Campo Santiago. The view is fantastic, surrounded by taller mountains that are more than 2000 m tall. The highest is the Tombarón, 2102 m high.

Now you start a sharp descent on a wide path that is sometimes a bit rocky. After walking 3 more kms, we arrive at the chapel situated at 1487 m of altitude. This is the chapel of Santiago (Ermita de Santiago). In the 10th century there was a great battle here between Ramiro II of León and the forces of Almanzor. Although they were outnumbered, the Christians won with the help of Santiago, reputed to have returned from the dead to fight the Moors. There is a lengthy poem about this battle. Whether it is legend or fact, it doesn't matter to the pilgrim, who will feel happiness and peace at this incredible spot, unless you have the misfortune to be surrounded by grazing livestock.

Continue on the Camino in the direction of a narrow pass (if you go to the front door of the chapel and face it, the Camino goes off to the right). There is an arrow on the rocks, and you walk along the mountain, not over the field. The Camino crosses over a few streams that combine to make the Boeza River. The path is narrow, and if there has been a lot of rain, it can be treacherous. Things can become even more difficult if cattle appear. Though villagers will repeatedly tell you that all you need to do is to swing your walking stick up and down to make the cattle move away from you, this option will not be satisfactory if you are on the narrow trail when you meet them. If you meet cattle in the open fields, it is easy to go around them, but things get complicated if you meet them on the narrow rocky paths after the Ermita. It may require scrambling up or down through brush to find a way around them.

In bad weather, this part of the path can be very slippery, covered with mud and cow dung. One of us had a very bad experience on this segment, describing it as a "near death" experience. For her, having the gps trails was essential. The other had good weather, paths in good condition (though rocky at times), terrific views, and no gps. So your experience will very likely be determined by the weather and the creatures you encounter.

We begin the descent going through a narrow glen. There are six kms down, with the river on your right. Shortly after beginning the descent, a sign says "Corral de las Yeguas." From here you can see on the other side of the river a cabin and on our side of the river the ruins of what once was a pilgrim hospital, the Villa Armenia. We pass through the small woods of Paleiro, which are made up of yews and holly trees. We keep going down and will cross a rustic bridge made out of a tree trunk. They call it the Pontón de Salgueiron, and a little further down we cross another one, this one called Las Palombas (half rotten).

Pass by the fountain of Oscar and continue going down. Sometimes we will be walking in a tunnel formed by the trees overhead. Almost at the end you will find the fountain of San Juliano. They say it has the best water of the entire area. Soon after, the first houses of Colinas del Campo

Martín Moro Toledano can be seen. This town is the town in Spain with the longest name.

12,1 km to Colinas del Campo Martín Moro (casa rural)

This town has been designated by UNESCO as a place of Cultural Interest and it is well worth a leisurely stroll to enjoy its rich architecture. This is a very small village with tourist traffic in the summer. It has bars, restaurants, stores, and places to sleep, but they are only open in very high summer. One of us walked in July, and nothing was yet open. The other walked in September, and everything had apparently already closed. However, the owners of several casas rurales are pilgrim friendly and will try to help you out.

Accommodation:

CR La Corte, Calle Rio. Tel. 987 519 759 or 677 256 950. Carlos is helpful to pilgrims; tell him Adolfo from the Bilbao association sent you.

CRs La Trallera and La Gortina. Call Charo Campallo, 987 693 254 or 897 519 566 or 676 45 797. Email casa trallera@hotmail.com CR El Pardo, Tel. 987 286 034 or 606 049 858

Leaving Colinas: go past the last house in town, and take the wide track on the right (there is a yellow arrow saying we take right in front of a house) Stay with it, with the river on your right. The path is very pleasant, about 6 kms or so, suitable for bikes, and it takes you out to the highway right before the entrance into Igüeña.

6,9 km to Igüeña (Bar, fountain, restaurant, Casa rural, shop).

A small town with some services and mostly rather modern buildings, it seems.

(Bar-Restaurante La Playa: Tel. 689 894 997) along with a casa rural. Small store, open M-Sat 10-14 and 15-20.

Accommodation:

Casa Rural Begoña (across the river, left up the first cement street, it is the big yellow house ahead. 25-30€. Calle Campanillo 9B. Tel. 666 662 750 OR 615 553 288. The owner of this Casa Rural is very pilgrim friendly.

Stage 17: Igüeña-Congosto 34,4 km

Leaving Igüeña: Start at Ayuntamiento. Do not cross the river. Continue on LE- 461 along the river, following a BTT(bicycle) route. Go through several intersections, but after about one km, there is a well-marked turn-off on the right, which goes onto a dirt path, well-marked. This is a place called Cercenada, and according to tradition, there was a famous cross here that indicated the place where several pilgrimage paths intersected (apparently the Cruz de Hierro on the Camino Francés was an imitation of this cross). Here we take a path with a pronounced incline, which will take us to another forest path, from which we'll see the town of Quintanas below. After going down a little bit, we will turn off on a path, which passes by the schools as we enter Quintana, goes over the small bridge next to the mill, and then takes us into Quintana de Fuseros.

7,3 km to Quintana de Fuseros (fountain, bar, casa rural, store).

There are several famous fountains in this town and a lot of history involving the original Asturian people and their fights against the romas invaders. There are also bars, and a grocery store. The store is beyond the bars, if you walk on the street with one bar on your right and one on your left and keep going straight you will find it on the right hand side of the street another 50-100 m further on.

Accommodation:

Casa Rural El Caruzal, Tel. 616 956 626, kitchen, open all year. Though the house is typically rented as a single unit, the owner will rent individual rooms to pilgrims. Make sure to agree on the price beforehand to avoid surprises. Other options may be available in town; ask at one of the bars.

Leaving town, continue on the road on which you entered town (that is, the road that goes past the mill, the school, the athletic complex). Keep straight ahead and leave town. Shortly you will see a well marked turn-off to the left. It is a path that starts level and then ascends through the monte, very clear and wide. It ascends gently, arriving at a hilltop named Campo de la Mora. Here the path gets wider, because it also serves as a fire break.

There is one intersection where many paths converge. It is well marked and the Camino essentially continues straight ahead at this point. We follow the first one on the left, then quickly to the right. On this path we pass by an old mining operation, and from here we have magnificent views of the fertile are of the Bierzo.

Soon the path becomes a rural road. Stay on it, going down and enter Labaniego.

11,8 km to Labaniego (expensive casa rural)

Here there used to be a monastery and pilgrims hospital on the 9th century, now in ruins. All fountains were dry in 2012.

Accommodation:

Casa Rural El Sardon I and II, Calle S Fructuoso, 650 785 815 (80€ for two)

CR Dora, Calle Cristo, Tel. 987 512 756 or 605 959 612, kitchen, open all year. Entire house must be rented.

There may also be an option to stay in the Casa del Pueblo, with just a floor and no showers. If interested, ask to speak to Clemente when you arrive at Lebaniego.

The arrows take you down through the town, and leaving town you are at first on a muddy grassy path. It may be unkempt and filled with garbage. Then it joins a nice wooded track, with many cherry trees, and takes you into Arlanza.

Leaving Arlanza, stay on highway for a short while, then an arrow takes you through fields to the right and then back to the road, which takes you into Losada.

4,4 km to Losada, (bar, hotel).

Accommodation: HR Las Eras, Calle Era 1, Tel. 638 85 54 25 (25 €). (In 2014, hotel was reportedly open, but we were unable to make contact).

Enter Losada on the Calle La Cuesta, which turns to the left to go through the park and passes in front of a fountain. Continue down the street La Era and pass next to the Iglesia de Cristo and the athletic area. Nice bar at the athletic fields and municipal pool. Accommodation reportedly available if you ask in the bar.

The way from Losada to Rodanillo is on the highway, going south.

2,6 km to Rodanillo, (fountain).

We enter Rodanillo and follow the arrows through town, on the main street. Keep right and follow Calle Río del Pueblo, pass the fountain and the church of San Benito.

At the end of the town you will come to an “Y” intersection, go left to come out on the highway. Cross the highway and straight ahead there is a camino that leads to a little bridge that goes over a gully. Pay no attention to the caminos that come in from the right and left before that little bridge.

As the ascent begins, the camino branches into three. We take the central branch. A little further ahead there is another bifurcation. Go to the right, and keep straight on, ignoring the other caminos that merge into this path. After going up a steep incline, the camino turns to the left passing by the dump. (At this point, in summer 2014, I remember walking for a long time without arrows. Arriving at the dump was a most welcome moment!). Keep going straight and you will arrive in Cobrana.

5 km to Cobrana.

A small town. This area have lots of oak forests and some hiking trails around them.

Entering the Plaza de la Constitución and continuing on the Calle del Cipres. In front of the church, you can see an ancient granite cylinder, perhaps a Roman mile-marker but without any inscription. At the end of the road turn left onto Los Nogales, which will take us to the highway in direction towards Congosto.

3,3 km to Congosto (Bar, Casa rural, restaurants, store).

We enter into the area of “La Colmena”. Keep going straight, passing the Chapel of Santo Cristo on the side. From here there is a beautiful view of the Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Peña, which crowns the hill. She is the patron of the “Bierzo Alto” her fiestas are the last Sunday in May.

There is a hotel complex up at the sanctuary, and a magnificent lookout over the Bierzo and the reservoir of Barcena, which holds the waters of the Sil River.

Accommodation:

CR Alvaro de Mendaña, Calle Era 7, tel. 987 404 963 or 657 036 817 or 645 970 751 (20 euros)
Pilgrim friendly, very nice.

The meson next to the Casa Rural has a good menú del día. Staff speaks English.

CR Calzada Rural. Will rent individual rooms if available, Tel: 678 76 28 75

Stage 18: Congosto - Villafranca del Bierzo 32,3 km

Leaving Congosto: start walking at the church, and continue on that road which further on goes parallel to the reservoir. The camino is well marked from here. In 2.5 kms, we will pass the road to the Nautical Club which goes to the right. We keep going straight, up a steep hill, a km or two, until an intersection. Turn right here, and continue where the sign points to Presa de Barcena (that sign is about 100 m to the right) Keep on for about 1-5 km and you will arrive at the presa (dam). Cross it. Go through the little tunnel and continue on more than a km until the highway ends (we are now going in the "wrong" direction). Just in front of us there is a dirt camino, which we follow, to get off the asphalt for a while.

It's a well preserved path, not used much. We go uphill by some ranches with houses, gardens or orchards. At the end of the ascent we will have walked 500 m and the route branches into three. We go to the left (a small sign points to Columbrianos). Continue straight ahead and go through some clearances. About 250 m, there is another intersection and we keep going straight. This path is marked with vehicle ruts. We pass by a shed, and we see a green industrial shed and a greenhouse. Soon after that shed, there is a crucial intersection that was not marked in summer 2014. As you go past the shed you enter some pine trees. When you emerge, in front of you is a grey concrete (ugly) building. There is a lot of overgrown grass. Go LEFT on the path even though there is no arrow. You will see arrows soon again.

From that unmarked intersection, the Camino is well marked. After a short while, you will come to an aqueduct, then turn left to enter San Andrés de Montejos on the Calle del Pozo.

12,6 km to San Andrés de Montejos.

A small town.

On Calle del Pozo, turn left and go in front of the church of San Andrés. This street continues and turns into Calle de la Cabrita, and reaches the highway next to the bus stop. A few meters to the left there is a pedestrian walkway, turning to the left and immediately after that to the right.

This brings us to the Camino de Trubiqueros, which we will follow to the left. In about 600 meters we connect with the highway LE-711. Take it to the left towards Columbrianos and Ponferrada. Pass by the recreational area and in the plaza we can see a pretty sculpture made out of the trunk of an elm tree. A few meters further on we will come to the chapel of San Blas and San Roque.

1,8 km to Columbianos (bars, a shop, pharmacy).

This town is only a few km from the much bigger city of Ponferrada.

This is the point at which the Camino Olvidado ends and merges with the Camino Francés. It's 5 kms to Camponaraya, 11 to Cacabelos, and 18 to Villafranca del Bierzo.

If you choose to backtrack to go to Ponferrada, you will walk "the wrong way" on the Camino Francés into town. It's about 4 km. In Ponferrada, there are two albergues (one private, one public) and several hotels and pensiones.

From Ponferrada, there is a gorgeous three day walk through the Valley of Silence that you might want to add on to this Camino. The directions and a description of the walk are attached here.

The Valley of Silence

If you are on the Camino Francés and looking for a break from the crowds, the mountains of Leon Province's El Bierzo district offer quiet, woodsy alternative paths that take you back in history without carrying you too far off the Way.

The high point of this two- or three-day walk is Peñalba de Santiago, a remote mountain shrine sacred to local Christians for more than a thousand years.

The mountains around Ponferrada are criss-crossed with trails, firebreaks, and drovers' roads, and hikers and mountain-bikers have waymarked routes that take full advantage of the scenic possibilities. This guide outlines a two-day walk from El Acebo to Peñalba and on to Ponferrada, or a three-day circle from Ponferrada. It is mountain walking in all its glory, with Roman, Visigothic, Mozarabic, and Romanesque attractions.

The Camino doesn't get more spectacular than this. The Valley of Silence and the Trail of the Monks offer many opportunities to shout for joy at the amazing beauty all around you. Trails are very well marked despite what many of the "locals" say, but injured or exhausted pilgrims should think twice about taking it on. This is a high-altitude mountain expedition, quite challenging in places. Mobile telephone service is not reliable. Do not attempt this trail in bad weather, nor in winter. Use a hiking staff and stout footwear.

Daily etapas are about 20 to 25 km., with some serious climbing and descending included (one grade was 25%!)

GPS tracks are available at wikiloc.com, posted by peregrina2000.

DAY ONE: Las Puentes de Malpaso

Start from either Ponferrada or Molinaseca, on a the trail called "Las Puentes del Malpaso." This is a well-known local pathway, the directions are easy and tourist offices often have maps.

FROM PONFERRADA:

From San Nicolas de Flúe albergue, head down the camino toward the castle. At the first intersection (with a tourist information hut on the right) take a left. Cross over the Puente Boeza (the medieval bridge that also marks the start of the Camino Invierno). Go LEFT after the bridge, following a two-lane country road marked "Los Barrios."

Walk along this country road (keep right at the fork) about 4 km to the town of Lombillo. (Bar, fuente – fill up your water bottle.) Keep left through town, past the fuente. About 10 minutes outside town, just before a curve at the hilltop, a wide path goes off to the right.

Head up this ancient road, through forests of pine, Holm oak and chestnut trees. It is long and winding and sometimes a bit overgrown, and after a long descent it reaches a deep, leafy valley.

Here, two medieval stone bridges span creeks that form the Río Meruelo. The valley is cool and dark, a bower of waterfalls and greenery. In the 1930s and 40s these remote valleys were haunted by “Maquis,” guerrilla fighters who continued the struggle against Franco for years after the Spanish Civil War ended. In a cave near the second bridge the Maqui hero Manuel Girón, “the Lion of Salas,” was tracked down and killed in 1951, after 15 years of resistance – or banditry, depending on your views.

The climb up to Riego de Ambros is steep and rocky, full of switchbacks. The path makes a sharp right at the top and leads onto a side street of Riego de Ambros (bar, albergue, restaurants, NO shop.) In Riego simply follow the Camino Frances “backwards,” over the hill to El Acebo.

FROM MOLINASECA: Join the Puentes de Malpaso trail in front of the church of San Nicolás de Bari in Molinaseca. (Waymarked in yellow as PR LE42). After 3 kilometers it joins up with the trail described above, much nearer the bridges. Some sources say this is the medieval Camino de Santiago between Riego de Ambros and Molinaseca; the bridges are of Roman origin.

Pilgrims travelling the Camino Francés and not wishing to take the detour to Peñalba can follow the trail to the Puentes de Malpaso, and then on to Molinaseca or Ponferrada, from Riego de Ambros. Go to the central plaza, and at the fuente simply ask a resident which street leads to the Puentes trail head.

DAY 2: El Acebo to Peñalba

Jaime at the B&B La Trucha de Arco Iris in El Acebo has lots of good information, and the trail leaves from in front of his place, going down to the river and meeting a tarmac road. Take a left when you meet the road, and at the creekside follow the turn-off for La Herrería, a reconstructed 7th-century hydraulic forge declared a historic monument and since 1969 locked up and left to moulder. There’s still plenty to see here. It is a marvel of clever engineering, with helpful explanatory signs.

A large map at the trail-head shows several ways to Peñalba.

One follows the Rio Boeza straight up the valley past the town of Compludo and on to tiny Boeza. From there a waymarked cart-track takes a dizzying 24% grade upward to La Morredero, a spectacular mountaintop vista, then an equally steep downward plunge into Peñalba. It is a “black trail,” rated “very difficult” by the mountaineering clubs. Not for us.

The next alternative is one I (Rebekah) chose when I walked in 2010, supposedly a road used for centuries for the local “romería” pilgrimage up to the mountain shrine. The trail commences from the town of Compludo, another 2 km up the valley from the Herreria turnoff (If memory serves, these two km are on the side of a quiet country road). This path follows what is now a

shadeless switchback logging road along the zig-zagging face of a mountain, up to the town of Espinosa de Compludo.

Compludo is our first meeting with saints Fructuoso and Ganadio. Fructuoso was a Visigothic hermit who founded tiny monastic communities in these valleys in the sixth century, organizing the cave-dwelling ascetics into primitive Christian communities. The Muslim invasion put an end to them, but many of the towns survived. In the 11th century, once the Muslims retreated, a Christian bishop of Astorga named Ganadio set aside his mitre and headed for the silence of these mountains, seeking a hermit's life. He did not leave behind his gift for leadership, however – he re-founded many of the monasteries of San Fructuoso, including those in Compludo and Peñalba de Santiago.

We took the Third option, and simply followed a blazed track from the forge along a wooded pathway west and north. It was up and down, up and down, to Espinosa de Compludo and then San Cristóbal de Valdeuza. Markings are good. Follow the painted “MT” blazes. (We do not know what “MT” signifies; Laurie decided it means “Mujeres Tontas:” Foolish Women.)

Up here, you know a town is near from the centuries-old chestnut trees that stand along the pathway. They provided wood for building and nuts for food to generations of mountain people. Chestnuts still figure into many dishes in the local cuisine; individual trees were passed down from parents to children. Today they are sculptures of gnarled black wood. Their roots hold up the mountainsides.

In Espinosa del Compludo is **Albergue ArtedeAmarte**. Bunks are 12€, reasonable meals available. Free wifi, meditation room. It books up with groups in high summer, so be sure to call ahead for availability: 987 057 933.

Taberna de Espinoso is a tapas place with a Templar theme. It is not always open early in the day, but if you are in need you can bang on the door and try your luck – a technique much in evidence in this area.

San Cristobal de Valdeuza is home to Hotel Morredero, a smart lodging with a restaurant: 50€ for a single with breakfast. 987 05 79 20.

Dining options include Mesón La Rueda, and the down-home Casa Pili on the narrow LE-192 road out of town. Menú del Día is homemade and good value; seating is sometimes family-style, rubbing shoulders with the road crew and the mayor.

Espinosa and San Cristóbal are prettified little mountain towns; both have good fountains.

Follow the tarmac uphill out of San Cristóbal, make a right at the second turning (well-marked) onto a relatively level but relentlessly sunny (and long) logging road around the side of the mountain. It eventually snakes its way to the upper reaches of the Valley of Silence, and Peñalba.

Peñalba de Santiago is the end of the road. It perches on a mountain-face, the watershed of the Rio Oza and heart of “The Thebes of Leon,” hostile home to generations of monks whose models of austerity were the Desert Fathers of Egypt. Today, Peñalba is an exceptional gathering of rural folk architecture, its much-restored slate-roofed houses stark against a background of almost year-round snow. The “white peak” that gives Peña-Alba its name is visible from downtown Ponferrada, some 20 kilometers down the steep valley. The Church of Santiago stands in the center, a thousand-year-old jewel of Mozarabic craftsmanship.

The monks are long gone. Stones and slates that made up their 11th-century monastery are now part of the homes that cling to the mountainside. Arriving here on foot feels appropriate somehow – the people who drive up from Ponferrada complain endlessly about the terrifying road trip! Still, in summer they come by the busload, and the twee little town now survives on the tourist trade. For motor vehicles there is one way in and one way out. It is a perfect tourist trap. The few hostelrys that exist here have avoided the worst of the mass-market souvenir tat, but expect prices in proportion to the altitude.

The houses in Peñalba de Santiago keep to the characteristic stone cubes with wooden balconies and slate roofs. Livestock once lived in the ground floors, while the humans above enjoyed the bovine body-heat rising through the floor-boards.

The town of Peñalba grew up around the religious community. Ganadio built his church on the site of a Visigothic oratory that was left to ruins after the Moors moved north in the 8th Century. The Moors were gone by the time Ganadio came to these mountains, but their influence on local architecture was strong indeed. The church we know now in Peñalba has many of the hallmarks of a Moorish mosque – the horseshoe shaped arches over the entrance doors, the side chapel inside with an entry much like the “mihrab” where the Koran is proclaimed. This is not the church you’d expect to find on a mountain in Leon... but here it is. The little church is a simple stone structure, a landmark visible from trails and peaks for miles around. A guide is on hand Wednesday through Sunday; on Monday and Tuesday the keys can be found at La Cantina, across the street.

From the church you can follow the well-marked woodland trail 2 kilometers to the Cave of San Ganadio, where it is said the saint often escaped the hubbub of the mountain monastery for moments of peace. Legend says even here he couldn’t find silence – the roaring of the river below disturbed his prayers. The saint shouted at the creek to be quiet, and at a point below the cave the river dives underground. The river appears and disappears all along the “Valley of Silence,” and the cave, with its simple statue and altar, is a place of prayer and contemplation for anyone who cares to climb the cliffs.

The Peñalba **pilgrim albergue** and historical interpretation center opened in July 2014, funded by a private hospital foundation in Ponferrada. Early reports say it is an award-winning

architectural reform of a typical mountain home, and it offers eight beds. Information will be added as it is found.

We stayed at **Albergue La Masera**, a luxury lodging for up to seven people. 20 € each includes breakfast from the albergue's well stocked kitchen and use of an ample collection of maps and trail guides. Reservations are recommended; the albergue is open only “in season.”

Most of the town is converted to B&B or Casa Rural accommodation available only to families or groups of three or more. The town's website, www.peñalbadesantiago.com, has details.

Restaurant **Aromas de Onza** is upscale and quite good, but you must place your order early: 617 176 528.

La Cantina serves a la carte items at tourist prices, but the view from the terrace is breathtaking as the sun goes down. Rooms are available on a nightly basis upstairs.

Day 3: Peñalba to Ponferrada. A long, lovely day. Bring food and drink.

Leave town along the trail past the cemetery marked “Montes.” You will follow in the footsteps of centuries of hardy holy men. Don't be deterred by overgrown trails, especially once you climb above the tree-line. In a high mountain meadow is a labyrinth of white stones, a great place for a breather. A little further on is a cruel descent, a path cut in the rock by Roman slaves to service an elaborate system of water channels. These are part of a 1,800 year old gold-mine engineering marvel that gathered water from these mountains into reservoirs 30 kilometers downstream.

Maps and historians indicate a prehistoric hill-fort existed here, but hikers are too busy keeping upright to scan the scenery for signs of ancient cultures. The country is rugged, but the hand of man is visible in the terraces and water-channels cut into the stones.

The tiny town of Montes de Valdeuza is visible from the trail above, with the great ruined Monastery of San Pedro dominating the view. If you're lucky you will find the side door open and a guide there, ready to show you through the fascinating ruin; the 2 euro admission is well worth the price, especially if you understand Spanish. This is another San Fructuoso foundation (in 635 AD) re-founded by Ganadio in 895 – the first Benedictine monastery in Spain. It peaked in the 12th century, with a school, clinic, and minor seminary drawing from the valleys round about. Enough remains of the building to appreciate its sophisticated plumbing and heating system, dormitories for monks and students, warehouses and food storage, even a pool of running water where eels were raised for food and leeches kept for medical treatments.

The tall, dark church is still intact, home to an annual “romería” homecoming festival. Many of the treasures that accumulated there were spirited away in 1997, when a fast-talking “Swiss friar” charmed the church keys from workmen repairing the roof. He left behind two beloved Blessed Virgin images once kept in mountaintop hermitages. In a corner of the chapel is the

ossuary, where the bones of the men who spent their lives singing in this church now lie in a pile, grinning in the dark.

Cantina de Montes, known also as Bar Sara, is open only at the owners' whim. A good fountain is right by the church door.

From Montes take the trail known either as Mirada Circular or Ruta de los Monjes Aquilianos. Leave town through the monastery parking lot, and keep left past the red house, staying at more or less at the same altitude. The road loops away from the path, so you will not hear or see cars for a while. Stay on the path, even though signposts point to alternatives. In particular, while you are walking parallel to the river (but high above it) after about 20-30 minutes from Montes, you will see some buildings down on the river. A path branches right and down towards them. Don't take it! The road loops along the mountain-face, with the river flowing down below. Stay on this path, even though signposts point to alternatives. This ancient cart track, complete with ruts worn into the stone pavement, was until quite recently the only way up this side of the valley.

It eventually descends to join the asphalt road and pathways adjacent to the river. There is one somewhat confusing spot along the stream, but simply keep the river on your right and you'll find your way. The road links the towns of San Clemente, Val de Figueros, and finally San Esteban, where there is a very nice mesón/bar. (The first of the stage, so bring food and drink.)

It's a long uphill climb past the church and through a shadeless field to the town of San Lorenzo, a Ponferrada suburb where you can hop on a municipal bus into the center. Likewise, you can stay on the sidewalk and walk the last few kilometers back into town, making a complete circle when you get to the medieval Puente Boeza.