

A Guide to the Camino de Invierno (January, 2019)

The Camino de Invierno received official recognition from the Galician government, the Xunta, in 2016. From Ponferrada to Santiago, it goes along riverbanks, climbs mountains, and passes through wilderness, farmlands, and small towns of the Bierzo region of León and all four of Galicia's provinces. It merges with the Camino Sanabrés in A Laxe, about 50 km away from Santiago. In total, the Invierno adds up to roughly 260 km, in comparison to about 210 to Santiago from Ponferrada on the Francés. This Camino has a fair amount of ups and downs, particularly between Ponferrada and Las Médulas, between Quiroga and Monforte de Lemos, and between the church at Diomondi and Chantada. Elevation profiles can be found at <http://www.mundiCamino.com/los-Caminos/66/Camino-de-invierno/> (under each stage, click on Trazado/Perfil).

Getting to the start of the Camino is not difficult. Daily buses and trains travel to Ponferrada and Monforte de Lemos from Madrid, Hendaya/Irún, Sarria, and Barcelona. The RENFE afternoon Arco from Hendaya to Vigo stops at Ponferrada, O Barco de Valdeorras, A Rúa, Quiroga, and Monforte de Lemos, all of which are on the Invierno. If you are a pilgrim on the Camino Francés and are looking for an alternative to the mad rush into Santiago, the Invierno is a perfect alternative. Just turn left down the first street after the municipal albergue in Ponferrada and you will be on your way.

Monforte de Lemos, 130 km from Santiago, is the earliest accepted starting point for walking pilgrims determined to earn a Compostela. Proponents of the Invierno say this medieval route became "The Winter Way" during the Camino heyday, offering an alternative to the snowy winter weather of O Cebreiro and dangerous floods on the Río Valcarce. Church documents from the Middle Ages refer to pilgrim hospitals, churches and other pilgrim-related sites along this Way, yet the Invierno's historical authenticity had been the subject of debate for years. The 2015 scholarly translation of a 17th century Camino chronicle seems to put that to rest. In 1610, Diego Guzmán walked the Camino on behalf of King Felipe III. He walked the Francés to Santiago, but on the way home reports going through Chantada, Monforte, and Quiroga. He wrote that he took that route upon the advice of people in Santiago who told him there was less risk of snow – just as the proponents of the route have always said!

Although the Xunta was slow to grant official recognition, the Archbishop of Santiago has for years authorized the Pilgrims' Office to grant Compostelas to pilgrims who complete the Camino de Invierno. The number of pilgrims recorded as "Invierno pilgrims" for purposes of Compostelas is still very small – a total of about 500 in 2017 (that's more than a 60% increase from 2016!). The official tally is probably lower than the reality, however. For one thing, anyone who starts on the Francés and then "veers off" at Ponferrada will be tallied as of their starting point. And for another, it is likely that most Invierno walkers are Camino veterans and may not feel the urge to get yet another Compostela. In any event, the Camino de Invierno is still a very solitary walk. You are unlikely to run into more than a handful of other pilgrims, unless the official recognition sparks a big increase.

The marking on this Camino has improved dramatically since I first walked in 2010. In 2017, official mojones (granite waymarkers) were installed all across the Camino. Note that the new practice seems to be that the shell is always pointing in the same way and is no longer used for directional purposes. It is there as a Camino symbol. The arrows below the shell point you in the right direction.

The Camino de Invierno nowadays is a misnomer. Without the medieval monasteries and inns that made travel feasible 700 years ago, this “winter Camino” is currently more difficult than the Camino Francés option it originally sought to bypass. Mud, snow, wind, fog, altitude, and isolation of some stretches should not be taken lightly when planning a journey through this area between November and April. And in summer it can be very hot!

Other observations are in order: The Invierno is not a Camino for beginners or for hikers looking for a cheap-and-easy holiday. A good level of Spanish would be helpful, but one 2015 summer pilgrim told me he was fine with only rudimentary knowledge of Spanish. You should not expect to find the same frequency of fountains as on the Camino Francés; carry at least a liter of water with you. People along the way will gladly fill your bottles, but there are stretches of 10-15 km without houses or any services.

Loose Dogs on the Camino de Invierno: Loose, barking, and occasionally aggressive dogs have caused problems for some pilgrims. In fact, one pilgrim aborted her Camino de Invierno after A Rúa because she just couldn't take the dogs anymore. We have been reporting the occurrences to the local Associations and hope that as Camino traffic increases, the practices of dog owners will change. Loose dogs used to be a huge problem on the Camino Francés, and now they are a rarity. But please, do not panic. I am a dog-phobe, yet I walked alone and things did not get out of control; it really is all about keeping the proper perspective.

For anyone walking in the next few years, encounters with loose dogs are likely to be a part of the experience. Here is how one pilgrim from 2015 handled it:

I encountered so many loose dogs and very nearly gave up due to a fear that was becoming irrational. I finally, on day 3, talked myself through the facts: these dogs are here to guard cows/sheep/property. If I am not threatening the cows/sheep/property, then they will not attack me. No farmer would let a human-killer dog run free. So I started to talk to each dog and told them what a good job they were doing protecting their cows/sheep/property and my fear left me. By the end I felt like the dog whisperer. I read on the forum that someone gave up several days in because of the dogs. It isn't necessary. They are intimidating, but they are not trained to attack innocent people walking down the road.

Other pilgrims offer more specific advice – be prepared to use your walking sticks to warn the dog, or bend down to pretend to pick up a rock and start the throwing motion. Both have been reported as successful techniques.

Phone service: Residents report that Movistar has the best coverage, and Orange's is the worst.

GPS tracks: Many GPS maps of the route are available at wikiloc.com. The author of the best tracks I have seen is MYFAIR.

Invierno Associations: There are two Friends of the Camino de Invierno Associations with good websites. Each has published its own guidebook. One group is located in the Monforte-Chantada area. Its name is the Asociación Caminos a Santiago de la Ribeira Sacra, www.Caminodeinvierno.com. In 2017, an English version of the group's guidebook was published. <http://www.Caminodeinvierno.com/content/detailed-guide-winter-route-santiago-aida-men%C3%A9ndez-lorenzo>

The other association is located in O Barco de Valdeorras, <http://Caminodeinvierno.es/>. This group is called Asociación Amigos do Camino de Santiago por Valdeorras. Its guidebook is described on the main page of its website. As of this date, their guide is available only in Spanish, but an English version has been promised, thanks to the translation efforts of a forum member. The president of the Valdeorras organization is Asún, the owner of the albergue in A Rúa. She can be reached via email at asociacionvaldeorras@hotmail.com. Tel. 616 124 521.

There is a third group that promotes the Camino de Invierno, and that is the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago del Bierzo. <http://www.amigosCaminobierzo.org/> Although their activities focus primarily on the Camino Francés, they are beginning to work more with the Camino de Invierno. The group has an information hut in Ponferrada, down a short distance from the municipal albergue, at the spot where the Invierno splits from the Francés. Avenida del Castillo, 106 (Caseta de Madera). Tel. 987 419 283. The president of the organization, Roger Morán de la Cruz, is a very nice and helpful person. Unfortunately the hut has irregular hours, so you should not count on getting necessary information there.

An Invierno pilgrim from early 2017 urged me to let pilgrims know that the Facebook group “Camino de Santiago de Invierno por el Bierzo” is extremely helpful. The administrator of that site, Manuel Ángel Raimundez, even helped when the January pilgrim lost his gloves along the way!
<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Camino%20de%20santiago%20de%20invierno%20por%20el%20bierzo>

As interest about the Camino de Invierno grows, so too grows the amount of information available on the internet. One particularly complete Spanish language site lists stages and accommodation, has GPS tracks, and pictures of the route.
<http://www.independenttrip.com/Camino-de-santiago/Camino-de-invierno/etapa-1-ponferrada-santalla>

Accommodation: Although we have tried to provide full and current information on available options, we may have missed something. Helpful websites include www.infohostal.com and www.turgalicia.com. Some have found personnel in local tourist offices to be very helpful, so don't forget about them in a pinch.

Albergues: Albergues are sorely lacking, with youth hostels in Vilamartín and Quiroga and three pilgrim albergues (one in Villavieja, one in Xagoaza, and one in the house of Asún in A Rúa).

The local polideportivo (sports hall) may be available to pilgrims in Pobra de Brollón, Monforte de Lemos, Rodeiro, and Lalín. You should not assume you will be able to sleep in the polideportivo; some advance contact is advised. Be aware, also, that the polideportivo usually has showers, but may not have heat, and will likely only have yoga mats for you to sleep on.

Bars and cafés: This guide notes the location of many bars and cafés along the route. But you should be aware that all of them are likely to be closed one day a week, and many of them do not open early in the morning (particularly on the weekends). Thus, outside of the bigger towns, it is better to carry what you want to consume rather than rely on places being open. As an example, we list 7 or 8 bars between Ponferrada and Las Médulas (the typical first day's stage, about 27 km). Several Invierno pilgrims who left Ponferrada in early morning reported that they found all of them closed, making it essential to carry some food and drink. Water is not such a problem because people in the villages are friendly and have filled my bottle many times.

Note on the guide's recommendations: Many Invierno pilgrims have offered opinions on the quality of food and lodging, and these are included here. I realize that a bad review of a restaurant may just mean that someone had a bad day in the kitchen, or the server woke up on the wrong side of the bed. So, please read these reviews with that in mind. I note instances where people have given positive reviews, especially those places where we have unanimous rave reviews. I also note the uniformly bad reviews. Those that are "mixed" are also noted. For instance, if Pilgrim number 1 goes to a restaurant and has a great meal, I will put it in the guidebook. If Pilgrim number 2, following our recommendation, goes to the same place and doesn't like it, I will change the review to note that there are mixed opinions. So please keep those reviews coming!

A note about distances: If you have walked other Caminos, you may be familiar with the Gronze website, which is a treasure trove of good information. They have an online guide to the Invierno, in Spanish, but a lot of its information is self-explanatory. After a multi-year headache trying to find the correct distances to use between towns in this guide, we decided to use Gronze's estimates. Your GPS or other websites may vary, but we concluded that Gronze was the most consistently reliable source. There are, however, three stages for which a heads up might be appreciated. Note that all distances used in this guide are in kilometers rather than miles.

1. Ponferrada to Las Médulas. Gronze reports 27.2 km; the range of GPS tracks on the web and from forum members goes from 27-31. If you are uncomfortable with 30+ days, this is one you may want to break up into two (easy to do with a stop in Borrenes). This stage includes two ascents – one of about 300 m elevation gain, and the second of 250 m – and the opportunity to take a break from walking to visit the Cornatel Castle, which is, IMO, worth a visit.
2. Quiroga to Monforte de Lemos. Gronze reports 35.4; GPS tracks run as high as 38, even 40.
3. Chantada to Rodeiro. Gronze reports 25.8 km; GPS tracks go up to 30. Much of the discrepancy comes from whether or not the pilgrim decided to detour off to visit the

chapel at Monte Faro. There is no obvious intermediate stop with lodging possibilities. Many of the small towns in the vicinity have casas rurales, though, so careful planning might come up with a good mid-point stopping point (with an owner willing to pick you up). Another option would be to have a taxi pick-up from Chantada (Taxi Rogelio Vazques, tel. 982 440 512 or Taxi Carlos Nova, tel. 619 44 51 13) or Rodeiro (Taxi Fabián Calvo, tel. 986 790 137) at a point agreed upon ahead of time; the most obvious one would be up on the Monte Faro. Although Rodeiro is closer to the Monte Faro, you might prefer to spend extra time in Chantada over Rodeiro, just because it's a bigger place with a little more going on.

This guide is assembled from materials provided by two Spanish amigos associations, trail notes from Invierno pilgrims, web searches, and personal experiences. The foundation and bones of this guide comes from Rebekah Scott, the author of the first edition. Like the trail itself, this is a work in progress and a labor of love. Updates rely on the contributions of people who walk the route. The Invierno now is a solitary and charming journey through some of Spain's most spectacular scenery and authentic rural territory. Pilgrims here are still seen as something special. The Invierno is now what the Camino Francés was for centuries: a challenge for flexible, determined pilgrims.

POSSIBLE STAGES ON THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

Some possible stages follow below. There are other ways to divide the days, but you are more limited than on other Caminos because of the supply of accommodation.

In spring and summer of 2018, several veteran peregrinos walked the Invierno and were surprised to find the 10-stage walk to be arduous. If you can, be flexible and have a few days extra in your pocket, especially if you want to visit Las Médulas, Monforte, etc. Those veterans all arrived in Las Médulas too tired to see the sights and had to continue on the next day.

Pilgrims who speak Spanish have found this website to be extremely helpful with the stage-planning-process: <http://www.caminodesantiago.gal/es/planifica/las-rutas/camino-de-inverno>

9 day walk

Day 1 Ponferrada to Puente de Domingo Flórez (35.3 km)

Day 2 to A Rúa (32.5 km)

Day 3 to Quiroga (26.3 km)

Day 4 to Monforte (35.4 km)

Day 5 to Chantada (29.7 km)

Day 6 to Rodeiro (25.8 km)

Day 7 to A Laxe (27.2 km)

Day 8 to Outeiro (34.1 km)

Day 9 to Santiago (16.7 km)

9 day walk

(Another 9-day option, which spaces the first three days somewhat differently)

Day 1 Ponferrada to Las Médulas (27.2)

Day 2 Las Médulas to Vilamartín (35 km)
Day 3 Vilamartín to Quitoga (32.5 km)
Day 4-9 as above

10 day walk

Day 1 to Las Médulas (27.2 km)
Day 2 to O Barco de Valdeorras (26.4 km)
Day 3 to A Rúa (14.2 km)
Day 4 to Quiroga (26.3 km)
Day 5 to Monforte de Lemos (35.4 km)
Day 6 to Chantada (29.7 km)
Day 7 to Rodeiro (25.8 km)
Day 8 to A Laxe (27.2 km)
Day 9 to Outeiro (34.1 km)
Day 10 to Santiago (16.7 km)

12 day walk

Day 1 to Las Médulas (27.2 km)
Day 2 to O Barco de Valdeorras (26.4 km)
Day 3 to Montefurado (24 km) (with a train back to A Rúa to sleep)
Day 4 to Quiroga (26.3 km) (with the morning train from A Rúa to Montefurado to continue)
Day 5 to A Pobra de Brollón (22.9 km) (lodging uncertainties as of spring 2018 may cause problems here)
Day 6 to one of two Casas Rurales beyond Monforte, either 20 or 24 km
Day 7 to Chantada (either 19 or 15km, depending on previous night)
Day 8 to Rodeiro (25.8 km)
Day 9 to Lalín (21.3 km)
Day 10 to Silleda (15.6 km)
Day 11 to Ponte Ulla (19.9 km)
Day 12 to Santiago (19.8 km)

14 day walk

Day 1 -- Ponferrada to Borrenes (20.3 km). This day will bring you past the Castillo de Cornatel, which you may be lucky enough to visit if opening hours coincide with your arrival (they have been reduced because of budget cuts).

Day 2 -- Borrenes to Puente de Domingo Flórez (15 km). Las Médulas is in the middle of this day, 6 km from Borrenes and 9 from Puente de Domingo Flórez. Well worth a long visit. If you're really not rushed for time, stay here and spend the whole afternoon at Las Médulas, there is plenty to see.

Day 3 -- Puente to O Barco de Valdeorras (18.3km)

Day 4 – O Barco to A Rúa (14.2 km) OR Montefurado (24 km)

One possible way of dealing with the two stages from O Barco to Quiroga (one very short, the

other quite long, gives you a night in A Rua. You would arrive from O Barco in late morning, and then take a rest, drop off your stuff, etc. Walk the 10 km to Montefurado in the afternoon. There is a train back to A Rúa at 18.08, arriving at 18.17. The morning after, you can then get up slightly later, have a leisurely breakfast, and catch the 10.03 train from A Rúa, get off at Montefurado at 10.12, and continue from there onto Quiroga. No ‘cheating’ involved!

Day 5 -- Montefurado to Quiroga (16.5).

[NEW AS OF 2016 – A STOPPING PLACE IN BETWEEN A RÚA AND QUIROGA.

As of this year, you can split the stage between A Rúa and Quiroga without a train ride, by staying in Soldón, about 19 km from A Rúa. Information on the Apartamentos El Molino is provided later in the guide.]

Day 6 -- Quiroga to A Pobra de Brollón (22.9 km)

Day 7 – A Pobra de Brollón to one of five options, all of which make for a mid-20 km day. Castrotañe, Torre Vilariño, Rectoral, or Escairón. This option means that you would not spend a night in Monforte de Lemos, which is a nice place with a centro histórico and has all services. Monforte is about 12.5 km from A Pobra.

Day 8 -- Casa Rural to Chantada (about 15 or 16). This day is one to really savor -- first stop, romanese beauty of a church at Diomondi, then the lovely (though hard on the knees) descent to the Miño River, then back up the other side through vineyards to Chantada. Absolutely a five star walk.

Day 9 -- Chantada to Rodeiro (25.8 km)

Day 10 -- Rodeiro to Lalín (21.3 km)

Day 11 -- Lalín to Silleda (15.6 km)

Day 12 -- Silleda to Ponte Ulla (19.9 km)

Day 13 -- Ponte Ulla to Santiago (19.8 km)

16 day walk—Keeping it under 20 km a day

Day 1 to Villavieja (16 km) **16KM**

Day 2 to Las Médulas (16 km if you take the alternative to Orellán described later in the guide; 12 km if you stick with the official camino).

Day 3 to Puente de Domingo Flórez (8.1 km)

Day 4 to O Barco de Valdeorras (18.3 km)

Day 5 to A Rúa (14.2 km)

Day 6 to Quiroga (20 km) (N.B.: To keep this to 20 km entails getting a taxi or ride for the first 7 km on the road; otherwise the total stage would be 27 km)

Day 7 to Labrada/Barxa de Lor (Hostal Pacita, 3500 m off Camino) (15.4 km)

Day 8 to Monforte (20 km)

Day 9 to Vilariño (Casa Rural Torre Vilariño is a couple hundred meters off Camino) (14 km)
Day 10 to Chantada (16 km)
Day 11 to Penasillás (Casa Rural As Casas in San Pedro de Viana will provide transfer from Penasillas, <http://turismoruralascasas.es/>) (9 km)
Day 12 to Rodeiro (17 km)
Day 13 to Lalín (21.3 km)
Day 14 to Silleda (15.6 km)
Day 15 to Ponte Ulla (20 km)
Day 16 to Santiago (21.2 km)

WALKING THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

Ponferrada, the starting point.

Ponferrada is a city of about 67,000 people and a very busy stop on the Camino Francés. Because cyclists must start no closer than 200 km from Santiago to receive the Compostela, Ponferrada (about 210 from Santiago) is a popular starting point. The city's most prominent landmark is its impressive and completely restored Templar castle.

Pilgrims can begin the Invierno trail at the Albergue de Peregrinos San Nicolás de Flüe in Ponferrada, where credentials and a very basic map are available, but often little encouragement from hospitaleros. Tel. 987 413 381. Do not worry: this Camino is well-marked.

Two private albergues have also opened in Ponferrada:

Albergue Alea,. Calle Teleno, 33. 18 beds, 4 rooms, 10€, meals available. Highly recommended. Tel. 987 40 41 33 OR 660 416 251. email: info@alberguealea.com.

Albergue Guiana is on the main street, Avenida del Castillo, very close to the Invierno turn-off. Also recommended. 90 beds, 12 €. Tel. 987 40 93 27; email info@alberguiguiana.com. Open till midnight, if you want to party. Their website seems to be trying to attract the cyclist pilgrim, but walkers have stayed here and enjoyed it.

If Albergues are not your cup of tea, Hotel el Castillo near the castle, is reported very pilgrim friendly.

For eating, though there are many options, EureKa Restaurant and Bar, across from the municipal albergue, has been recommended by several pilgrims.

To begin, walk along the Camino Francés 200 meters beyond the municipal albergue until you reach the first traffic circle. Turn left here, and you will find the first official mojón (granite waymarker) indicating Camino de Invierno. Go down the hill, cross the 16th-century Puente Boeza (bridge), and turn right. Ponferrada will be across the river to your right. Just past the Embutidos Pajariel factory on the left, the asphalt road goes to dirt. Do not be tempted by a trail marked with white arrows that goes off to the right. After the first three km along the Río Boeza, the ascent starts. Keep to the left road, and soon familiar scallop-shell mojones will reappear. Nice views over Ponferrada.

5.8km Toral de Merayo

Pharmacy, nice stone bridge, and a friendly Café Bar Nogal, located in the plaza. Bar opens around 9 and is reported to have weak wifi. There is also a post office, a shop just before bridge, and a bakery. Bar El Puente is just before the river (closed on Sunday), and Bar Valduera and Mesón Alondra are on the way out of town. These bars, and many others on the Invierno, have irregular opening hours, particularly on the weekends. A 2018 pilgrim reported that the Nogal was the only place open in town at 9:30 a.m.

There is a Casa Rural, the Miralmonte, in town. Calle Merayo, 33. Tel. 987 41 94 75 OR 619 723 561. It may be that individual rooms are not available, just the entire house.

When leaving Toral de Merayo, pass the church. The marked path leaves the asphalt fairly quickly, bearing right and gently rising through fruit and nut orchards until the crest before Villalibre. Soon you will arrive at:

2.6km Villalibre de la Jurisdicción

Fountain. Bar la Estrella is along the highway, but the Camino passes through the middle of town and does not pass that bar. Bar Ruta 98 is a short walk from the center of town on the way to the main road.

1.5 km Priaranza del Bierzo

Fountain, Farmacia, Bar in town with pharmacy on the right and another one along the road leaving town with small shop adjoining. (Bar Taberna “El Sitio de mi Recreo” nice patio and recommended as “cozy” but does not open till late).

The Bar Taberna is actually in the village itself, if you turn right after Centro Social and keep straight on. On the way to the bar is also one fuente. From the bar proceed straight, out of the village and ascend on the dirt track. This is a nicer route than going along the edge of town on the national road.

In Priaranza del Bierzo, the camino leaves the N-536 and goes through town. Leaving town, there is a turn-off that may be hard to see (one 2018 pilgrim said that a mojón may be hidden behind bushes, so look carefully). The path rejoins the highway before the Mirador de Santalla, a well known scenic overlook. The views over the Bierzo valley and the craggy cliffs across the river, known as “Las Barrancas de Santalla,” make for a nice place to rest for a while.

2.0 km Santalla del Bierzo

Bar on the highway is closed with a “for rent” sign in the window. Another (Café Bar Ronda) is on the right end of the village. If it appears closed, the owner – who lives upstairs – will (and is happy to) open for you. Tables on the terrace have lovely views. To return to the camino, go down the steps at the side of the bar. You will pass the Ermita de la Virgen de Carmen de Rio Ferreiros and then climb up to the N-536.

There is also a grocery store in town center.

Casa Rural Las Barrancas (tel. 987 454 650 OR 987 428 550 OR 650 478 550)

Be careful of your footing when the weather is wet, as part of the road is in shade most of the day, and sometimes is icy or slippery. From here, the Camino takes you off the highway and begins the ascent to the Castle of Cornatel, passing through the hamlet of Villavieja (described below). You can, however, stay on the road, bypass the castle, and go directly on the road to Borrenes. If you take the road, you will have another option later to take a road ascent to the castle, but the Camino route through Villavieja is far preferable.

If you take the climb, you will have a great view of the castle and arrive in:

3.7 km Villavieja

Spring-fed fountain, Church of Santiago. This pretty little hamlet was once home to the serfs who worked for the inhabitants of the castle up above. Other than the albergue, there are no services of any kind, so if you plan to stay here, you must carry your food and provisions with you.

In 2018, a 16-bed municipal albergue opened in the old school. Kitchen, bath, and living room downstairs; bedrooms upstairs. Advance notification is essential. Call 682-591-483 or 606-898-140. 10 € per person.

The hamlet also has a Casa Rural (advance booking required). <http://casaruralcornatel.es/>

Halfway through Villavieja, there's a paved road to the right. If you take that road, you will bypass the castle. On the left is a large, very nicely renovated old house, and the Camino to the castle goes by the left side of that house. It is a light gravel path through chestnut trees.

Villavieja is the one place where pilgrims repeatedly reported having been scared by a very large mastiff, loose and barking loudly. For years, the owner had refused to do anything. It seems that the dog is now confined (but not chained) in a large yard. There were no reports of biting, but its barking had scared a lot of pilgrims (and children staying in the casa rural).

1km Castillo de Cornatel

Visiting hours have been reduced and change frequently. It is a good idea to call ahead to get current hours. You can call the town hall of Priaranza del Bierzo at 987 420 806 or call 606 898 140. In November 2018, a pilgrim reported that the castle was open Wednesday through Sunday, 11:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. Closed in winter, opens in March. 2 € entrance fee, 1 € for those over 65.

The scholarly debate on the castle is ongoing, but here is one respected version of its history. It seems that the castle may have been the site of the Roman Castelo de Ulver, built to defend the gold operations at As Médulas. Later 9th century traces have also been identified. It is likely that the castle was rebuilt in the 13th century by the Knights Templar after Alfonso IX of León donated it to them in 1211. When the order disappeared in 1312, the castle passed to Alfonso XI of Castilla. The castle's name can be traced to 1378, and for the next century it was taken, retaken, nearly destroyed, and finally given by the Reyes Católicos (Ferdinand and Isabel) in 1486 to the newly created Marqués de Villafranca del Bierzo. In 1900, the heirs to the castle donated it to the hamlet of Villavieja, which used it for years to shelter flocks of sheep.

Government restoration began in 2002, and the castle now contains a small museum. It is the site of an annual medieval musical festival, held the last weekend in August.

You can see pictures, to help you decide whether it's worth a visit, here:
http://www.rottodigital.com/vistas_cornatel.html

A 2018 pilgrim shared pictures of the spectacular view from a nearby bench (banco). Look for signs near the castle pointing you to “el banco más bonito del Bierzo” (the prettiest bench in the Bierzo region).

Once you have finished your visit, continue along the downhill road. Turn right (following the arrows) at the first intersection and a left at the one that follows. From here you will arrive shortly in:

3.7 km Borrenes

Quiet village with a fountain in main square. It has a pharmacy and small shop of the typical “lights off but we carry everything” variety. The shop is closed on Sunday. Bar Casa Marisol does full meals and has a wifi signal. Prices are a bit steep, but maybe they are “special pilgrim prices.” 1.80€ for a coke is high. This establishment doesn't open till 12:30.

Centro de Turismo Rural Cornatel, also run by Marisol (tel. 987 42 05 68 OR 686 055 938), offers meals and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. <http://www.escapadarural.com/casa-rural/leon/ctr-cornatel-medulas>. 45€ double room, breakfast, 3€ each, evening meal, 10€. Some reports of very indifferent treatment; others found her to be helpful and friendly.

Also, Casa Rural San Vicente (may rent out rooms), tel. 615 555 116.

Polideportivo may or may not be available for pilgrims. Information would be appreciated. Possible phone number is 987 460 181.

The church of San Vicente in Borrenes has a wooden virgin from the 12th century. An abbot from Villafranca visited the church in 1701 and left instructions that the pilgrim hospital should be re-opened and a space for poor pilgrims provided. In the 18th century, records show that some ill pilgrims died here and were buried in the hospital cemetery – a pilgrim from France, a poor German pilgrim, and an injured soldier who had made the pilgrimage because of his disability.

Continue out of town, and resist the temptation to take a small, manicured fitness trail on the left. Just stay on the road and walk around the bend. A dirt track will appear up and to your left; a short climb later the trail will descend again. The first road you see takes you to Carucedo, which is not on the Camino. There is however a hotel in Carucedo, Hotel Rural La Peregrina, <http://www.laperegrina.es/index.htm> 50€ individual room. Carucedo also has several bars/restaurants if you want to take a slight detour and then walk along the road up to Las Médulas.

Continue straight and turn left on the next road, which takes drivers to Las Médulas. A short distance along the road the Camino once again diverts into a more scenic landscape of chestnut groves. A short distance outside of Las Médulas, you will rejoin the road and enter town on it.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE FROM BORRENES TO LAS MÉDULAS

This off-road route takes you straight to the iconic Orellán lookout (Mirador de Orellán), the spot for the best views of Las Médulas. You will also pass the galleries (open for visits), the ancient tunnels that pushed the water through narrowing spaces at increasing speeds so it would blow up the hills and disgorge the gold. From the mirador, you can either go down to the village of Las Médulas, or bypass the village entirely by carrying on to Puente Domingo Flórez. The alternative is about 11 km with a total of 475 m elevation gain. GPS tracks are here:

<https://es.wikiloc.com/rutas-senderismo/borrenes-las-medulas-camino-de-invierno-26377291>

Saturno and Soledad (AKA Marisol) in the Centro de Turismo Rural Cornatel can give you plenty of information.

Amancio, the forum member who suggested this alternative, offers the following pros and one con of the alternative.

PROS:

1. You can see As Médulas BEFORE arriving at the village, leaving the post-walking time for relaxation, visiting the museum, etc, rather than another hike up to Orellán.
2. The route is pretty and varied
3. Marking is good. Most of the route has yellow arrows. Follow a trail to the village of Orellán, then take Senda de los Conventos and then Senda de las Valiñas, plenty of marking.
4. The Mirador de Orellán is the most iconic place in As Médulas

CONS:

1. More elevation gain. The alternative has 1100 m climb (this would make it roughly equivalent to the SJPP-Roncesvalles stage). The official route has only 850m of elevation. But note that the official route does not take you to the Mirador de Orellán, which will add some more elevation if you explore the site later in the day anyway. If you want to take this alternative, but it's too much for one day, consider spending the night in Borrenes. The next day, continue to Puente Domingo Flórez, which would be a total of about 19 km from Borrenes, about 24 if you stay in the albergue in Villavieja.

2. Longer distance. The alternative is 11 km from Borrenes to the town of As Médulas, The official camino from Borrenes to As Médulas is approximately 7 km.

END OF ALTERNATIVE FROM BORRENES TO LAS MÉDULAS

6.9 km Las Médulas

The Las Médulas cultural area has been named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It was at one time the most important gold mine of the Roman Empire, and a long stretch of the Camino Invierno follows a road built to transport minerals out of the region. Along the river you will still see remains of Roman mines alongside their modern counterparts. Las Médulas, an environmental holocaust two millennia ago, is now a spectacular, spooky assembly of deep-red cliffs and valleys, with wooded parkland and pathways threading in between. Essentially, the bare earth mounds and crags you see are the “innards” of what used to be hills. By channeling water through increasingly narrower tunnels, the water speed and force increased. Thus, the Romans were able to blow open the hills to extract the gold. Las Médulas is a popular summertime tourist attraction, with all the joyful merriment and price-fixing that goes with it.

A little linguistic/political debate: Contributors to the guide could not agree on whether to use the Galego “As Médulas” or the Castellano version, “Las Médulas.” Since the town and site are in Castilla y León, the “Las” may be more correct (though perhaps less “politically correct”), and that is what you see on the signs. Not wanting to wade into that debate, at the last minute I changed all of the occurrences of “As Médulas” to “Las Médulas. (Please note, this is my feeble attempt at humor, but it does serve the serious purpose of alerting you to the fact that this little debate over whether the article should be “las” or “as” serves as a proxy for a much more serious disagreement over regional identity). Pilgrims report that everyone in town uses the “As” rather than the “Las”.

Las Médulas has two tourist information centers (one at the entrance to the village on the right, and another in the village itself, close to the church), accommodation, cash machine, bars, grocery store at lavadero, and restaurants targeting weekenders hiking the many trails around the area. Its small museum is well worth a visit. One pilgrim reported that the man at the first interpretative center speaks English and gave a very good description of the history and technology of the mines.

You can also pick up a map describing various walks around the site. The absolute best place to go for a view is the Orellán lookout. There are several ways to get there. We unintentionally took the 6 km route, so be careful when following the map. The shortest way to Orellán is to go to the hotel complex Agoga, and take the road on the LEFT side of the complex. That will take you to the turn-off for the slightly steep but beautiful pedestrian path up through chestnut forests. When you are at the top, turn left, and you will soon come to the large lookout area. A little beyond the mirador Orellán, there is an entrance to one of the galleries and you can walk through the tunnel channels that water was pumped through. Kind of spooky fun!

<http://www.galeriaenlamedulas.com/> Whether you have time or interest for the gallery tour, do not miss the view from the Orellán overlook.

Eateries include Bar Reigo, Taberna Romana, O Camiño Real (described by one pilgrim as “bohemian but pilgrim-friendly”), and Restaurante Marif. Some of these may be closed out of tourist season. Of those eateries, O Camiño Real gets consistently high reviews. The owners, Javi and Marga, are very attentive. Their plans to open an albergue seem to have fallen victim to the Junta’s bureaucracy.

Hotel Medulio: Tel. 987 422 833; 987 422 889. <http://www.hotel-medulio.com/> Average roadside hotel, 30€ for singles. They also operate something like an albergue, for 25€, but not recommended.

Complejo Rural Agoga: <http://www.ruralagoga.com/index.html> (Touristy B&B, 40€ single, with breakfast made up ahead for early risers. Pilgrim-friendly.) Open all year, email:reservas@ruralagoga.com. Tel. 987 422 844 or 699 722 488.

Casa Socorro in town, rooms in a private home with access to kitchen. Pilgrim opinions vary from very good to not so great. Call 987 422 858 (4 rooms, 30 € double, 20 € single). (To find the Casa Socorro, turn left from the lavadero, then right, then quick left; it is very close to the town church). Also open year round.

Leave Las Médulas on a tractor path on the western edge of town that leads to a beautiful morning walk through wooded hills. At the top of the first rise is a lovely view back to Las Médulas. There is the possibility of a short detour to the left (perhaps 500 meters) to a ‘mirador’ with good views back over Las Médulas and the Bierzo valley. This is not the Mirador de Orellán recommended in earlier paragraphs, however, and the views are not quite as spectacular. Though a sign at the top of the ascent tells you that Puente de Domingo Flórez is only 5.7 km away, don’t believe it. It’s actually 2 km more than that! The Camino descends along a mountain lane with views across the valley to distant mines and villages. The grade, the surface, and the views are very nice all the way.

The Camino goes into Puente de Domingo Flórez on the Calle Real. It takes you across the river, then along the river, and then back over the river and into the more central parts of town. This is an unnecessary loop, but it will get you through. You can avoid the loop by ignoring the arrows and taking a straight shot across town. As you are descending on the Calle Real, look for the Calle el Toral (on your right before you get all the way down to the river). Turning right here will take you to Café Bar Los Arcos before the square. There is a churrería in the main square. Keep walking straight, and you’ll come to Bar el Cruce (very pilgrim friendly) and will be back on the Camino and on Avenida de Orense. The Camino continues on Calle Chao de Marco, a left turn off Avenida de Orense.

8.1 km Puente de Domingo Flórez

Pharmacy, supermarkets, bars, ATM, a medical center, and one hostel. Internet is available at the town hall in the old town, set against the old bridge on the Río Cabrera and in the Hostal.

If you have taken the loop, the bridge into Puente de Domingo Flórez continues on the National Highway (N-536), called the Avenida de Orense in town. It swings to the left, with the Banco Pastor on your right and a pharmacy on the left.

Hostal Restaurante La Torre, is located further along the Avenida de Orense. Tel. 987 460 081. Email: info@hrlatorre.com <http://www.hrlatorre.com/> It has a rather run-down riverside garden. Pilgrims report varying prices, but it seems that singles are usually 18 € with shared bath, 20€ with private bath. A friendly smile may get you a private bath for 18. The menú del día in the restaurant (not the bar in front of it) is reported excellent. To continue on the Camino the next day from the Torre, simply go down the Calle Chao de Marco a few hundred meters until you reach the road to Quereño and turn right to cross the bridge.

Polideportivo confirmed in early 2018 as available to pilgrims. Call 987 460 181 M-F mornings to notify about arrival. Bar next to the Polideportivo also has keys.

Puente de Domingo Flórez to O Barco de Valdeorras (18.3 km)

In Puente de Domingo Flórez, the Camino markers take you over the bridge on the national Highway N-536. This road is called Avenida de Orense in town. At the intersection with Calle Chao de Marco, turn left. When Chao de Marco curves to the right, you should turn left at the Día supermarket (mojón will direct you) and onto Calle Acceso Quereño. You will know you have gone too far on Chao de Marco if you pass the Guardia Civil barracks and the Hostal La Torre. Calle Acceso Quereño takes you over the bridge and into Galicia. About 100 yards after going under the RR bridge, Bar Estanco (opposite Quereño RR station).

After crossing the bridge, the Camino makes a big looping upside down U. Pass the electricity pylons on your left, go under the railway bridge and you'll see three roads in front of you. Take the one in the middle and loop past some houses in the town of Quereño. As you come back close to the RR tracks (having completed the upside down U), you then will make a relatively sharp right turn to go up a hill to cross the tracks. At that spot, there is frequently a loud barking dog on a chain that takes him to the very edge of the owner's property (reported still there in Fall 2017) and if you are startled, you may continue straight rather than take the required sharp right turn. (Look closely as you ascend after the turn -- you should see what were faded arrows in summer 2015). The Camino weaves a bit, until you cross over the RR tracks (thus putting you between the tracks and the river), only to cross back over them about a km later.

From here, the Camino keeps to the right bank of the Río Sil, paralleling the RENFE railroad tracks. This is the Camino so favored in winter, with a riverine microclimate that offers sunny exposures and avoids freezing temperatures and ice.

At this point the Camino stays on the "land side" rather than the "river side" of the tracks, although in earlier years the Camino took you on the side closer to the river. You may see arrows on the other side of the tracks if you are looking closely, but you should ignore them.

4.9 km Pumares

A few well cared-for houses and maybe dozens of cats. Natural spring fountain, tasty and cold. No services.

On the way from Pumares into Sobradelo, you will be walking for quite a long time on a high path that has shale cliffs and wildflowers on the right side, and a very long way down to tree tops, railroad tracks, and the Río Sil on the left side. It is a wide path, though, and is not likely to cause anxiety to any but those with very extreme issues with heights.

4.5 km Sobradelo

The arrows may disappear coming into Sobradelo. Enter town on Camino Regueiros de Aguas. About five or ten minutes after entering town, you will come to the Centro Social Pontenova, whose bar is open to the public. Nice eating area out back, very good menu del día at 9 €. On the 10th of each month, coinciding with the big market day in town, the centro serves a special 12 € meal featuring pulpo.

Bar Mar is just a couple of buildings down from the Centro Social, on the other side of the road. At this point, the road's name changes to Estrada de Éntoma. The owner of the Bar Mar, Manuel Angel Martínez Ramos tel. 988 335 106, offers lodging for peregrinos. 8€. 12 beds in 4 rooms. Wifi available. Highly recommended as a place for a snack and coffee – pilgrims are often treated to a free pen.

Pilgrims have commented that they sense some rivalry between Bar Mar and the Centro Social, but it won't have any effect on you or the treatment you get. You might want to "share the wealth" by eating at the Centro and sleeping at Bar Mar.

At the three-way intersection in front of the Centro Social, both the road branching up and the road branching down have the name "Calle de Éntoma." Taking the "upper branch" will take you past the Ayuntamiento, where you can get a sello. Taking the "lower branch" will take you past an ATM, the train station, and to the 16th century 7-arched bridge over the River Sil. Both branches come together at the top of town at the exit onto the OU-0801.

If you go down to the river, you can cross over the bridge for a meal in a notably good restaurant, the Restaurante Museo. This is a little off the route, but several pilgrims have commented that the food is excellent, and the view of the bridge is quite nice.

Sobradelo is built on a fairly steep hill, with an ice cream kiosk, pharmacies, shops, train station, bars, banks, health center, and a swimming pool.

No matter which branch of the Calle de Éntoma you have taken, you will ascend and reach the OU-0801 road, which takes you out of Sobradelo. This road does go all the way to O Barco, but the Camino will take you off the highway onto more scenic trails through the forest.

After a few km on the side of the road, a Camino marker takes you off the road and then into:

3.2 km Éntoma

Wind your way through this pretty, but small, place (well-marked). There is a striking metal sculpture made out of agricultural hoes, which bids pilgrims a Buen Camino. Beautiful old

bridge, great for rest stop. The bar, Bar Martillo, has a terrace (reportedly opens at noon). It is closed on Monday.

On May 21, 1806, a woman of humble origin, from the town of Santa Marina del Rey (León province), gave birth in Éntoma. She was baptized in the local church and described as a pilgrim on her way home from Santiago

As you leave the hamlet, get on a dirt road that takes you up through a forest with pine trees, a few chestnut trees, some cherry trees, some vineyards. A woman in town told me in 2015 that when I got to an obviously untended and abandoned cherry orchard, I should feel free to enjoy the delicious fruit. And you can bet I did!

You soon arrive in O Barco's outskirts and back on the OU-0801. From here, it is at least a half hour into the center, with development stretched along the highway.

As you are coming into town, keep an eye out for a blue Camino sign indicating the narrow tunnel to your left, under the train tracks. After the tunnel, turn right at the slate mill, where you follow a gravel track. O Barco is near enough, up a sharp climb and over the top of another train tunnel.

5.7 km O Barco De Valdeorras (entering through Barrio Cortes)

All the services you could want are in this town, and the local wine is remarkably good! Those who wish to stay at the albergue of Xagoaza should stop in town to stock up on provisions, as the albergue is in a village 3 km outside O Barco and 1.4 km off the trail. It has no services, but the hospitalera may provide a meal.

O Barco is a long, narrow town, strung out along the river. Hostals and pensions are plentiful (turgalicia.com lists 11 of them).

One good place to stay is right off the Camino and the Calle Eulogio Fernández. Pensión do Lar, Calle de Peñas Forcadas, 26, tel. 988 320 980. Recommended, double room 35€, single 25€, both with bath. Good meal, 15€. Bar and bakery across the street opens very early for breakfast. Wifi reported weak in some, but not all, rooms.

Another good option is La Gran Tortuga, Avenida Conde Fenosa 34, tel. 988 347 044 or 608 573 480. Recently renovated, 20 € single room, balcony. Very centrally located.

<http://lagrantortuga.com/index.html#hostal>

Hostal Mayo, also on the Av. Eulogio Fernández, 70. Tel. 988 32 20 98. Reported basic, clean and cheap.

Pensión Aurum, Xirimil, 3 <http://www.aurumpension.com/>, tel. 988 108 416.

Wifi, restaurants, bakeries, and bars aplenty in the downtown area. O Barco is the center of the Valdeorras D.O. wine-producing region, and those with a taste for Spanish wine should sample

the up-and-coming local Mencia and Godello vintages, proudly poured at every bar in town at bargain prices.

Recommended places to eat: Casa Galaica, Av. Eulogio Fernández, has a great menú. Casa Paradelo (Rúa Xirimil, back street near the station) has a nice garden area out back. Asador Viloiira (pensión and restaurant across the first pedestrian bridge). Bar San Roque reported very pilgrim friendly by several pilgrims.

The town of O Barco has a much-loved riverside park. In the summer months, huge numbers of kids and teenagers go “tubing” through a little white water section of the river. Families and friends congregate there. The park is lined with cafés and playgrounds. In good weather, it is absolutely the best place to spend some time if you just want to chill out and enjoy the ambiente.

There are two options through O Barco. One is adjacent to the river all the way to Arcos. This is now the official route and is highly recommended. The other, which formerly was the official Camino, goes away from the water. If you plan to stay at the albergue at Xagoaza, which is a couple of kms outside of town, you must take Option 2.

OPTION 1. If you do not plan to stop in or visit O Barco, you should stay alongside the river. (And of course, even if you do stop in O Barco, it’s simple to pick up this route when you are ready to leave – just head back to the river). After you pass the cafés, parks, and playgrounds, you will come to a small wooden footbridge with two freshly painted arrows. This bridge does not take you across the river itself; it takes you over a small tributary emptying into the river. The path is wide and covered in gravel, so it is obviously a path used by townspeople. After about a km, take a sharp right turn, onto Camino Praia de Ouro, which leads to a roundabout. Take the road heading to the left (not the N-120, but a lesser traveled road that is slightly north of the N-120), which passes by the Gadis hypermarket, and you will soon merge back onto the Camino and enter the town of Arcos.

OPTION 2. This route was the actual Camino route until a couple of years ago, before the riverside route was marked. Take it only if you plan to spend the night at the very highly recommended albergue in Xagoaza. I am not sure if the route is still marked through the town of O Barco, but it is easy to get to. Make your way to the railroad underpass at the end of Calle Eulogio Fernández, where you will see a blue Camino sign pointing your way west. At the roundabout just past the Repsol gas station turn left onto Rúa Estrada. At the modern Church of San Tirso, turn right. Then keep straight, and go through a narrow tunnel. Up ahead there is a marker pointing up to the hamlet of Xagoaza, where there is an albergue. Pay attention, because a 2016 pilgrim reported that there are no arrows to indicate the turn. You will return to this spot to continue on the Camino. Kinky One’s GPS tracks are here:

. <http://www.wikiloc.com/wikiloc/view.do?id=8420979>

Albergue Xagoaza (Hospitalera, Gloria, tel. 639 921 679). This albergue is several km outside of Barco, and 1.4 km off the Camino. The hospitalera may provide meals if needed, but it is a good idea to bring your own food from O Barco, just in case. Reported quite nice by many pilgrims. Two rooms with 5 bunks each, large dining room with fireplace, two PCs and Wifi, completely furnished kitchen with stove, oven, fridge, and washing machine. Clean bathrooms and lots of outside space. 6€

Coming down from the Albergue you will join the camino at a point where it becomes an earthen path. This path may or may not be overgrown (pilgrims at different times of year had different reports), but you should continue straight ahead. You will arrive back on the road, having gone around a nicely renovated home.

When you come to a metal sign with the words “Asociación de Desenvolvemiento Valdeorras”, you have a choice. You can either go straight on the road or turn left. If you turn, you will soon come to a faint arrow on the ground, which turns off the road onto a dirt track. This is just before a gravel pit of some kind. When you get to the top of the pit, you will come into a clearing with a lot of grape vines. Turn left and keep on into Arcos, with the grape vines on your right.

If you have decided to go straight at the earlier mentioned metal sign (recommended), it takes you to a paved street, where the arrows take you right for several hundred meters (this option was described by some pilgrims as “easy but boring”). Either way you will arrive in:

5 km Arcos

Hotel Calzada is here, but it is not on the Camino. <http://hotelcalzada.es/> It is at the northwestern edge of town, on a road that takes you to the N-120.

Leave Arcos on the paved road. You can see the big Hotel Paladium complex on the hill above you. The arrows cross the highway and descend towards a red house with horses, a nice garden, and fields. Go under the highway and to the right. You will be walking in between and parallel to the railroad (on the left) and the N-120 on your right. Well marked, you cross the RR tracks before Vilamartín. Arrows may still point both ways, and either way will take you to Vilamartín.

There is a picnic area on the left near the river, but you may not be tempted to stop because of a fair amount of litter and disrepair. Stay next to the river, and the town is on your right. You don't actually go into town but will walk between the tracks and the river. You pass the soccer field, pool, and tennis courts.

Before Vilamartín, the Pensión Restaurante A Lastra is on the highway. Tel. 988 300 232. This place is not on the Camino – you would need to leave the nice river walk and get back on the N-120 to get to it.

3.3 km Vilamartín (outskirts near river)

Restaurants, hostals, and a municipal albergue. To reach the town turn right at the little bridge underpass at the entrance to the town. Bar el Castillo, reached by a short detour under the bridge, opens at 11 a.m.

Municipal albergue is straight ahead along the river. It may be hard to find the building, because there are no signs identifying it from the side the camino passes. It is the second to last building on the Sil waterfront, and is close to a small football field and open-air swimming pool.

Albergue de Vilamartín, tel. 698 143 942 OR 988 300 001. Open all year, 60 beds, near municipal swimming pool. Bar open in summer. No kitchen. 6€.

Pharmacy, food stores, health center, cash machine.

Hostal-Restaurant Marbella, Calle Cervantes 32. About 500 m from Camino in town. Tel. 988 300 025. Pilgrim prices reported at 15€ for single room.

Hostal Restaurante Pancho y Pilar, tel. 988 300 073. Located on main street in town, Rúa de Cervantes.

Recently re-opened cafetería El Castillo (100 yards off Camino, under the road bridge and to the right, before you get to the tree lined area by the river). Reported nice with great outside covered terrace.

From Vilamartín, the Camino continues along the riverside, past the dam and spillway of the Embalse de Santiago, with beautiful views over vineyards, bee boxes, quarries, and tree farms, and a skyful of circling birds of prey. At the dam, you cross over the railroad tracks and go left. Walk on the sparsely used N-536. At the intersection with N-120, sign points left into A Rúa.

Vilamartín also has a documented old Camino story. According to the parish archives, in 1712, a peregrina on her way to Santiago died and was buried underneath the “Puertas del Sol” at the church of San Jorge. The note indicates that because she was poor, there was no charge for burial. Though she said her name was Isabel, the author of the document wrote that he could not understand her last name, but that she was a resident of Navarra. (Source: Archivo Parroquial de Villamartín, Libro 2° de Bautizados, Difuntos y Matrimonios, 1676, fol. 118v).

Coming into A Rúa, there is an arrow to the right for the Camino if you don’t plan to stop in A Rúa. That right hand turn will also take you directly to the albergue. Going straight takes you into the town center, with its stores, bars, Casa de Cultura, etc. If you go into town and plan to continue walking, it is easy to get back on the Camino. Just turn right at the ayuntamiento, which is located on the main street.

It is a fair distance from the town entrance to the town center or to the albergue, about 20 minutes by most counts.

On that long slog from the hilltop to the center of town, one pilgrim reported a fantastic and very inexpensive breakfast in Panadería/Cafetería Peyma.

5.9 km A Rúa de Valdeorras

All services, including a tourist office with sello, often staffed by members of the local Camino Amigos group. In A Rúa are restaurants, markets, wineries, and accommodation. Be sure to stock up for the next day’s walk.

At the point you enter the urbanized area of A Rúa, you are still about 20 minutes away from the albergue. The albergue is at the far end of town. It is also easy to find the albergue from the center of town: at the town hall (Casa Consistorial), turn right off the main street and you will head up the hill past the Church of Our Lady of Fátima. The albergue is behind the church, you will see markings on the ground, consisting of a painted little yellow house and arrow.

Albergue Privado: Casa da Solaina. Rúa de Fonte. Lovingly restored historic house in the oldest part of town, run by Camino supporters full of tales from local lore. Asún and her mother (well into her 90s) treat pilgrims very well. Asún is a naturapathic/homeopathic therapist; many jars of colored oils line the walls of her therapy room. People come from long distances for treatment. Reserve a bed in the albergue at sulma.arias@gmail.com or phone 988 311 614 or 616 124 521. Beds 11€, meals extra. Horses, donkeys, and bicycles also accommodated.

News flash: In 2018, we learned that the Association is working to get government permits to renovate an old school for an in-town albergue to replace Asún's home. No dates given.

Municipal sports center (polideportivo) is no longer available for pilgrims.

A Rúa has a riverside park and walk. It is about a 5 minute walk from the train station. If you're there on a weekend, you will probably find pulpo being cooked in big vats outside the bars. Highly recommended as a nice spot to relax. Bar O Refuxio recommended for its BBQ.

Hostal Niza, Dr. Vila, 30. Tel. 988 310 807 Central, near train station. Prices reported between 18 and 25€ single. The price difference may reflect whether you have a private or shared bath. Recommended.

Hotel Espada (not recommended);

Hostal Taxi, Calle Dr. Vila, 10. Tel. 988 31 14 73; (phone may be 988 31 04 11)

Pensión Fabio, Rúa Progreso, 201. Tel. 636 897 217; 626 876 691. Reported excellent and modern, but its reservation system seems haphazard. It is located in an ideal spot for carrying on to Montefurado.

Casa Rural Pacio do Sil, <http://www.paciodosil.es/paginas/Historia.html>, is actually outside of the main part of town, on Calle Xestal 33. Tel. 988 311 346. Highly recommended. To get there, as you are getting close to A Rúa, watch out for the sign that points to the right for the Camino and the albergue, and points straight ahead for going into the town of A Rúa. Stay on the Camino. Continue past the San Estevo church and head up Rua San Esteban O Bouzo. Where the Camino swings left down the Rua Vilela, leave the Camino and cross the N-120 on a pedestrian bridge. Walk another few minutes and you will see the Casa Rural in front of you. A little pricey, but several have reported it is well worth it. The owner, however, is not eager to transport pilgrims to Montefurado for those who have walked on, then taken the train back to sleep in A Rúa, and plan to resume walking from Montefurado the next day.

Very close to Asún's home/albergue is the small hotel and restaurant O Pillabán. Praza Enriqueta Casanova, 11. Pilgrims have been pleased with both the accommodations and the food. It is one of the most highly rated restaurants in A Rúa.

Other places for good meals include Mesón O Toño, located in the center (possibly closed?). Bar Taxi is also recommended, as is Restaurante A Lareira. Rúa do Progreso, 85. Bar Pepa, near ayuntamiento, is highly recommended but may not open till late in the day. Across the street, the "O 4" bar also gets good reviews from a 2019 pilgrim. O Retorno, a bar at the bottom of the road from the albergue reported to have excellent tapas and high Camino friendliness.

On Sundays, and on the 7th of each month, Amalia sets up her pulpo stall outside Bar Bravo, located on the same street as Hostal Niza and Bar Taxi. A huge portion of pulpo, potatoes, bread and wine (enough for 2 or 3) cost €9.20.

A Rúa to Quiroga (26.3 km)

From A Rúa to Quiroga there are not many services. Carry extra water and food. Fountains have been reported in three spots: one just past Alberedos; one at Montefurado, and another at Bendilló, at the entrance to the village below a left hand curve.

Leave A Rúa by climbing up Calle Currelada to the church of Our Lady of Fátima (look for the slate-roofed twin towers. Contrary to local tales, the church was not designed by Gaudi!) and head for the N-120 road. If you are leaving from Casa Asún, you have a short walk to the church and the arrows. Arrows take you to the right and lead beneath the highway. Upon leaving the tunnel, make an immediate left (arrows were reported faint, but seem to have been much improved). Some pilgrims have missed this turn – one writes that if you come to the Maderas La Cigara lumberyard, you have gone too far. So, once you see the lumberyard on the horizon, start looking for the tunnel on the right.

There are now 7 km of asphalt walking on the OU-933 (the name of the road changes to LU-933 as you cross from the province of Ourense to Lugo), but there is practically no traffic. It is a walk of exceptional beauty above the Río Sil, if you are lucky enough to walk on a clear day.

6.9 km Alvaredos

Small town just beyond the provincial border of Ourense and Lugo. Keep a sharp lookout for the waymarks, they lead back to the LU-933. The Lugo line is where the Ribeira Sacra, or Holy River Bank, region begins. Some say the holiness came from the many monasteries along the riverbanks; Ramón Pérez cites others who believe the oak trees so abundant here were sacred to Celtic tribes, and later speakers confused “roble” (oak) with “ribeira” (river bank).

Lovers of Galician rural culture and panoramic vistas will enjoy the long, switchback ascent on a medieval cart track that commences about 2 km beyond Alvaredos and then descends to the ancient gristmill at the valley bottom. There an arroyo meets the railroad track and the Sil. Here, in a grange called El Molino, an octogenarian called Casimiro lives. He is a spinner of tales and purveyor of homemade orujo – a true Camino character.

Follow along the river, keeping an eye out for the many bee-keeping complexes that have populated this valley for two millennia. Around a bend in the road the Camino enters:

2.9 km Montefurado

Twenty people live here now, but the monumental 18th century Iglesia de San Michael was built for hundreds. Montefurado is a testament to glories long past, when this town was a crossroads for carters carrying ore, honey, wine, and vines from here to all parts of Spain. Evidence of even older importance can be seen farther along the river valley, where a smaller set of exposed mountain innards and a hole blown through a riverside rock-face are remnants of more 2nd-century Roman ingenuity: the miners shifted the course of the Sil in their search for gold. The village is built atop a maze of ancient tunnels, now used for storing wine and cheese.

Fountain next to church. A 2018 pilgrim reports that there is a Centro Social near the church. If it is open, you can probably get a drink here.

Montefurado has a train station. One train a day, in the morning, runs between A Rúa and Quiroga. It has a stop in Montefurado. Similarly, there is a daily train between Quiroga and A Rúa, but it runs in the late afternoon.

[Using the Train to Create Short Stages. If your intention is to divide the 41 km between O Barco and Quiroga, and if you also want to stop in A Rúa (a mere 14 km from O Barco, here is one way to divide the two stages more evenly:

Day 1: walk from O Barco to A Rúa (14 km). Stay with Asún in her albergue or in one of the hostals in town. After lunch, and a rest, walk on to Montefurado and then catch the 18.14 train back to A Rúa (just 10 minutes). Train back to a Rúa leaves from the middle platform, but one peregrina on the wrong platform reported that the train patiently waited for her to get to the right track.

Day 2: As you walked to Montefurado the day before, now catch the 10.03 train from A Rúa, get off at Montefurado (just 9 minutes), and continue on to Quiroga.

These two stages would be roughly the same distance.

Now that the apartments in Soldón are available, it would also make sense to walk from O Barco or A Rúa to Soldón in one day, although the next day's stage from Soldón to Quiroga would be pretty short.]

A waymarked trail leads out of Montefurado along a green path upward. This path may or may not be overgrown (conflicting information) and would be difficult to cross in rainy weather. If necessary, find the car access from Montefurado to the LU-933, which also takes you uphill to the village of Hermidón. From there it's a slog on asphalt, although one with stunning views, to:

7.6 km Bendilló

As you enter Bendilló, you will see an old mill and a small shrine, community olive-press, and the Ermita das Farrapas. More spectacular views. Turn right here and go up through Bendilló. Go through town and then on a dirt track towards the national highway N-120. Cross the highway – the access road takes you into Soldón.

2.0 km Soldón

Descend to the edge of the river town of Soldón. Arrows will take you through and out of town and past a riverside café (seasonal hours), which is located under the elevated national highway. If you walk in high season, the café will be open into the night. Great place for a snack, cold drink, and a swim.

A peregrina in early 2019 had trouble finding the arrows through town. If that happens to you, as you emerge from under the bridge, just go to the right and into the narrow alleyway between the houses and you'll see the next arrow. Also, remember that the Camino will cross the river under the elevated highway, which you should be able to find.

The owner of the tourist apartments El Molino de Soldón now offers lodging to pilgrims. 40€ for two (price is the same for one) with towels, sheets, and breakfast. Fully equipped kitchen. Additional pilgrim 15 €. Tel. 679-455-126. Email address: apsoldon@gmail.com More info on their blog: <http://apartamentosmolinosoldon.blogspot.com/>. The owners also report that with one day's notice, they will do grocery shopping for you and have it waiting in the apartment. Nice service! The village is essentially deserted, so it may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Cross the bridge over the river, then turn left and keep straight on.

At the next fork, go right and up to the highway (going left will take you down to the river and the railroad tracks). This road takes you to the N-120, where you will walk on the left grassy shoulder for a short while.

A marker takes you off towards Sequeiros to the left. At the next fork, stay up and right (do not go left and down to the river unless you want to see the center of the little town, which is mainly deserted with a few fixer uppers). Soon after the first house you pass as you enter the outskirts of Sequeiros, you will go right under the N-120 in a tunnel. (You will miss this turn if you have gone down to the river and walked through town, so backtracking may be needed). The Camino is paralleling the N-120 at this point.

In a short distance, you will go over a bridge with a metal rail on the left. At the fork, stay up and right (do not go left and down). Go up to the plaza of the castle of Torrenovas. The Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem built it and ran several pilgrim hospitals in the 14th century, probably attracted by the strategic lookout over the Río Sil. In the plaza with the castle in front of you and the ermita behind you, turn right. This turn is counter-intuitive because you can see Quiroga in front of you.

When you turn right, there will be old houses on your right. Before that row of houses ends, a Camino sign will take you left onto a grass path. It is a lovely walk on grass down and around a small stream, through green thickets. Turn left on a logging path, and then, when you reach the paved road, go left again.

Keep going straight through several intersections. This takes you through the hamlet of Caspedro. At the end of the hamlet, go to the right of the little church, then straight through another group of houses. Finally, you will emerge on the LU-933 and go straight into town.

[DETOUR BEFORE QUIROGA TO VISIT THE PILGRIM HOSPITAL. In the hamlet of Caspedro, a turn off will take you to the “monumental complex” of Quiroga’s pilgrim hospital, which looks to be within a km or two from the Camino. What follows is a rough translation of Gronze’s description: In Caspedro, just before reaching Quiroga, the old pilgrimage path went to the important Romanesque church of San Salvador. Other monuments at the site include the House of the Knights, a sixteenth century manor house; and the Tower House Hospital, also from the sixteenth century.

If you take this detour, please report back! A schematic map is available on the gronze website: <http://www.gronze.com/guia-del-Camino-invierno/etapas/etapa-4-rua-valdeorras-quiroya>

END OF DETOUR TO PILGRIM HOSPITAL]

6.9 km Quiroga

Quiroga is located in a beautiful valley of vineyards and orchards. All services.

As you enter Quiroga, Dino’s is the first bar on the right. They serve meals, but only if you call ahead. The restaurant Casa Chapakuña is nearby (not all pilgrims give this place a good recommendation, however). Bar A Taverna is recommended by one pilgrim for dinner. The one Quiroga eatery that receives consistently high praise is the Restaurante Aroza. It is off the main street and near the Plaza Mayor. Their menu del día at 10 € with good wine included is a bargain. Their tapas are also excellent. Closed on Sunday evenings.

Bar chapakuña, on Calle Río Lor, is open every day and gets good reviews.

For breakfast, the Panadería Marisa opposite the albergue opens at 8 am.

Sello also available at Casa de Cultura, with free wifi as well.

There is an albergue (a former school) on the main street. (Tel. 629 323 208). The albergue is not pilgrim-specific, but they have a stamp, pilgrim prices and large rooms with wonderful hot baths. Beware large school groups that may keep you awake all night. Email: info@alberguedequiroga.com; contact person is Eduardo Nuñez.

Other places to stay include:

Hostal Quiper: Calle Real, 62. Tel. 982 428 978 (20€ single, clean.) (access to the hostel available at the adjacent bar, run by the same family). You can also WhatsApp their mobile at 676 110 961.

Hostal Dimar, Calle Camilo José Cela, 14. Tel. 982 428 978 or 625 490 573. Note that the bar and restaurant are closed, but hostel door is to the right.

Hostal Marcos. Calle Secide. Tel. 982 428 452

Hotel Remansiño, Calle Ricobao, 900 m beyond town, virtually on Camino. 10 rooms, Tel. 982 43 51 68. Mixed reports; one negative and one describing the place as “bohemian” .

Hotel Restaurante Las Vegas, Rúa do Ferrocarril, 1. Tel. 982 42 82 83 OR 982 43 51 12. Bar opens very early; nice shady garden with tables. This place is actually on the other side of the river in the village of San Clodio, where Quiroga’s train station is located. It gets good reviews and is directly on the Camino. Its bar opens very early. A 2018 pilgrim paid 22 € for a big room with private bath.

For the next day’s walk, your choice is to go from Quiroga to A Pobra do Brollón (23 km) or to Monforte de Lemos (35 km).

Bring water. There are two fountains before A Pobra, one in Carballo do Lor, and the other in Castroncelos, which is practically in A Pobra do Brollón. The trail from Quiroga to Monforte de Lemos is long, and services are short along the way.

Leave Quiroga following the waymarks westward along the main street. Cross under the N-120 and follow the country lane (LU-933) paralleling the river. The arrows take you across the river on a bridge (keep going straight if you don’t want to go through the little village of San Clodio with its bar that opens very early). If you cross the bridge, you go through San Clodio, where Quiroga’s train station is located, and through its small commercial area. You then go back over the river on another bridge and continue on the right side of the river.

Continue along the N-120 for several km. Cross the highway near a derelict roadside nightclub.

The path rises over the little town of Noceda, and an ambivalent mojón points to the road down into town. **Do not take it.** Continue hiking up. You will be on a grassy shoulder along the LU-933.

After an ascent from Noceda, an arrow takes you off onto a dirt track, to the right. It is well marked and easy to follow. When you come out of the forest, cross a paved road (arrows and signs point you this way) and keep straight. Ignore several forks, just keep straight. You merge with the PR-G141, a local hiking trail that is marked with yellow and white signs. This emerges at a stop sign on the paved road. Turn left at the stop sign then a quick left off the highway and down. Walk through old growth forest along pretty streams.

At the intersection of about five dirt roads, you see a chapel straight ahead. The Camino mojón and PR trail markers go past the Capela dos Remedios (Chapel of the Remedies). Soon after, the PR trail diverges from the Camino. PR goes to the left, while the Camino keeps going straight.

There is a sign and also an arrow. Keep straight down to a small hamlet, Carballo do Lor. A sign points off-Camino to a fountain/lavadoiro (a lavadoiro is an old outdoor clothes-washing place) about 30 meters to the right before you start going down. At the end of the hamlet, the Camino sign takes you right, on a gravel road, then left, then right. This is all well marked.

The Camino now coincides with another hiking trail, the GR-8, which is well marked with red and white blazes. Turn left at signs pointing to Trampillo, which for some reason take you into the town of Barxa do Lor (and not Trampillo) with a bridge (Roman? Medieval?) over the river. Good Camino marking. This is the end of the first ascent and descent of the day.

The Bridge at Barxa do Lor is mentioned in a document from 1566, which again seems to confirm the route's Camino bona fides. It involves a discussion by the village residents about the cost of repairing the bridge. The letter explains that the bridge's arch had fallen and was causing harm to the pilgrims passing through. It also notes that pilgrims are exempt from the toll to cross the bridge. The document also mentions the importance of the route as an alternative to Santiago during the winter time when snow covers the mountains of O Cebreiro. Just as the Invierno defenders have always asserted!!

For food, drink, or a bed, the Pensión Pacita is a short walk off the Camino. Casa Pacita, tel. 982 430 008. It is located on the LU-933. To get there, turn left turn after crossing the bridge in Barxa and follow the river. Retrace your steps to the bridge to continue. Highly recommended by pilgrims. Singles 20€, doubles 30€; meals also served.

The second ascent of this stage now begins. After the first hamlet, the red wooden sign for another trail goes off the paved road to the right. Ignore that and keep climbing on the paved road (you will see an arrow on the street soon). The road curves around a large fenced off house complex. You arrive at a fork with a cell tower in the middle, go up and right, and a mojón then takes you quickly left, so the cell tower is directly on your left. Keep ascending, and when you begin to descend, the mojón takes you off to the left (while the main logging road keeps going up). From here on, there are a few ups and downs, but it's basically flat for a while. There are no mojones at a number of merges or forks, but it is obvious how to stay on the main path.

Cross the paved road with many signs pointing in all directions –the mojón takes you straight into Castroncelos. After Castroncelos, stay on the main road, past the turn off for Piñeros. Arrive in Vilarmao at a farm, turn right towards Reguengo. This takes you into the town of A Pobra do Brollón. There are two cafés on the main road, which is named after the fascist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera. The town of Pobra marks the end of the second up and down, only one more to go before Monforte de Lemos.

22.9 km Pobra do Brollón (distance from Quiroga)

Health clinic, pharmacy, cash machine, grocery store, bars, restaurants, taxi.

The closure of Hostal As Viñas in Pobra was not welcome news for pilgrims. Yet for those who do not want to walk the 35 km from Quiroga to Monforte, there are several current options for lodging in or near Pobra de Brollón:

1. The polideportivo was available for pilgrims in Summer 2018. Press reports say it is for 2018 only. For 2019, the town hopes to have the old Guardia Civil barracks (or at least a room or two in this empty building) renovated for an albergue. <https://www.lavozdegalicia.es/noticia/s-camino-invierno/00031528144889178245218.htm>

I assume that if the barracks are not ready for pilgrims in 2019, the polideportivo will continue to be available, because the mayor seems quite interested in keeping Pobra de Brollón on the Invierno radar.

2. There are several casas rurales and a hotel in Salcedo, about 3.5 km off camino. All under one management. <http://www.turismoruralensalcedo.net/>
Casas Rurales A Salanova AND Hotel O Forno, Tel. 982 430 501 OR 619 813 834. The owner is happy to provide transportation to and from the camino at no extra charge.

The town of A Pobra has made a little swimming area by constructing a simple dam along the river. Residents sing its praises, saying that it has been a hugely successful amenity. In summertime, it is the place to go in the warm afternoons. The water may be cold, but even if you don't want to swim, it's worth a visit to enjoy the very popular gathering spot.

Café Bar Restaurante Avenida, on the Camino, is highly recommended.

To leave A Pobra, the mojón taking you out of town is right next to the big Guardia Civil (national police) building, with its motto "Todo por la Patria" (everything for the homeland). You are soon on a beautiful green track, which comes out to the road paralleling the river – go right along the river.

You emerge at the first houses of Cereixa, go over bridge and into the center of this little town. Cross the paved road, and go towards the crucifix and the church. The Camino then goes to the right towards Rairos. There is one more short ascent before Monforte.

The way is well marked and takes you through yet another pine forest. You will cross a channel and descend into Reigada, the last hamlet before Monforte. From there into Monforte the way is well marked, on agricultural roads and tracks. The last stretch before entering town is on a dirt path which seems to always be waterlogged, even in dry times. Reports in the press describe efforts to re-route the Camino at this spot – let us know. If the dirt path is just too muddy (some report mud and muck almost up to the knees), go back to the road, turn left and take that road into town. This will take you on the older route and past the train section, so you may see faded arrows.

When the Camino takes you over the railroad tracks, you will be on the Rúa Escultor Francisco Moure in central Monforte, where there are many bars, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. The Camino leaves Monforte on the Puente Romano, where there is a hotel and pensión. There are few if any arrows in town until you reach the Puente Romano.

The last section into the city of Monforte has been re-routed. When I first walked in 2008, the arrows took you past the RR station. That is a kind of scruffy area of town and no longer on the Camino, though you may still see arrows. Intown lodging options are likely a better choice. If you have trouble finding the arrows, just ask for how to get to the Puente Romano, Roman Bridge. That's in central Monforte and is where the Camino crosses the river to leave town.

Monforte de Lemos (12.5 km)

Aida Menéndez Lorenzo, one of the key promoters and defenders of the Invierno (and author of the newly published and translated guide), lives in Monforte. The owner of the Hotel Puente Romano, Oscar, will help you contact her. She is reportedly keen to meet Invierno pilgrims!

Monforte is the starting point recognized by Pilgrim Office authorities as the 100 km mark from Santiago de Compostela, even though waymarks show contradictory numbers. If you are interested in obtaining a Compostela, try to have your credential stamped at least twice each day from Monforte onward. This can prove challenging at times.

If your next stage is the 29 km to Chantada, make sure to save time to stock up on food and drink here in Monforte. It's a long stage with little in the way of services.

Monforte offers attractions to lovers of history, art, and architecture. Top of the list is the Colegio Nuestra Señora de la Antigua (also known locally as the Colegio de los Escolapios), an austere renaissance monastery, which currently houses a K-12 school. Tours of the rest of the monastery are 3€, at noon and 4 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday. Two El Grecos dominate the little art gallery; the dome of the church is breathtaking, a startling change after days of wide-open sky.

It was reported in 2018 that the concession has been pulled from the wine museum, so it may be closed. Here is the information we have from how it was working last year: The wine museum in the center of town (next to tourist office) has daily tours. One 2016 pilgrim reports that it is very interesting, cheap (2.5 €) and the price includes wine tasting! <http://www.centrovino-ribeirasacra.com/en/contenido.asp?sec=1&id=3> Hours: Thursday to Sunday 10 – 2 pm; 4:30 – 8 pm. Guided tours may be available at 11:30, 12:30, 5 pm and 6:30 pm. Tours can be in English. Sello available. Hours may be shorter between October and April. Some confusion about time of the tours.

The railway museum is reported to be fascinating for English train enthusiasts and the public alike. <http://www.muferga.es/> .

Tourist office is closed on Monday.

Monforte has a sports hall that may be available for pilgrim stays, but offers nothing but floor space and showers. Tel. 982 402 501. If you stay here, let us know!

There is no shortage of places to stay in Monforte de Lemos. Rumors about an albergue are rampant, but we have not seen any action yet.

Hostal Medieval, right across from the Colegio. This small place was recommended in 2016; price was reported as 22.5€ for a single, but a 2019 pilgrim was charged 41 €. Calling ahead is recommended by a pilgrim who couldn't get a room. Tel. 617 987 588.

Hostal Duquesa; Duquesa de Alba, 50. 800 m from old town. Tel. 982 403 467. Recommended in summer 2015, on a street of nightclubs, but reported quiet. Room with bath 17 €, and owner did wash for free, prompting a donation.

Pensión Miño, Rúa do Conde, centrally located. 20€ individual. Tel. 982 40 1850.

Hotel Puente Romano; Paseo del Malecón s/n. Tel. 982 411 168 (recommended, double room 38€. Bar next door under same ownership and open 7 am; some negative reports.)

Hotel Condes de Lemos; Praza da Estación, 2. Tel. 982 400 319 (reported good, but a ways out of the center and not directly on the Camino anymore).

Hostal Rúa; Roberto Baamonde, 30.

Hotel Ribeira Sacra; Rúa do Conde, 17. Tel. 982 411 706 (recommended – big comfy room with breakfast starting at 8 am – 36 € for single)

Hotel El Castillo; Huertas, 36. Tel. 982 402 150

Pensión Galicia; Calle Rosalia de Castro, 24. Tel. 982 400 010. 15€ per person and 12 € for an evening meal. Good value and friendly, near the railway station (outside of the center and off Camino).

Hotel Parrillada Nunez; Barrio Las Lamas, s/n (s/n is an indication in Spanish, sin número, which tells you that the site has no street number; it usually means that the place is not centrally located)

Hotel Terra Gallega; Chantada, 218. Tel. 982 405 090

The Parador de Monforte de Lemos overlooks it all from atop the hill, a four-star treat set in a 17th century Benedictine monastery. Tel. 982 418 414. Last minute specials may be a very good deal, especially if you are in their “golden age” category, which starts at 55.

Several pilgrims report having a very good meal at Al Portal. Another remembered an excellent meal in O Grelo, which is located up on the hill near the parador (not cheap, but reported as serving great food). Also recommended is Restaurante Polar in the center. Restaurante Cardenal on the main pedestrian street highly recommended. Café Chokolat on Rúa do Comercio open early and good breakfast.

A laundromat recently opened in Monfort de Lemos. Laundromats are rare in Spain, so this may be a good opportunity for you. Located on Rúa Chantada (the road going over the Puente Romano), just before the Lidl and Gadis supermarkets. It is opposite the Mapfre insurance offices at the traffic lights.

Monforte to Chantada (29.7 km)

Between these two towns, the only accommodation is in casas rurales. They include: the Michelin-listed La Rectoral de Castillon <http://www.rectoraldecastillon.com/> Tel. 982 455 415, which is about 10 km from Monforte; Torre Vilarino <http://www.torrevilarino.com/> , Tel. 982 45 22 60, which is another 4 km beyond that; and Penelope’s place in Castrotañe. Be sure to phone ahead and reserve if you plan to stay at any of these places. The owners of La Rectoral have been happy to pick up pilgrims from points on the Camino. These casas rurales provide a good and less taxing first-day option if your pilgrimage begins at Monforte.

Leaving Monforte, the waymarking is poor. Find the Roman bridge, cross it, and make a quick left at the monastery of the Clarisas. Go right at the old town hall plaza – you will see a waymark on the pavement. Follow Rúa Abeledos right out to the edge of town, passing by an unmarked but friendly bread bakery on the left (pick up a warm loaf for later). Where two roads come into Abeledos from the left (Rúa O Savinao and Poeta Manuel María), take the latter road. Walk between the church of San Antonio and the backside of the A Gadis supermarket, and come to the roundabout with a hórreo (a Galician granary). This is the zero kilometer mark for the LU-

P-3204, which you will stay on till A Vide. At the next roundabout, there is a statue of a pilgrim, who is pointing towards A Vide. Pass the 24 hour Repsol gas station on the right.

3.5 km A Vide

In good weather, the Camino goes off-road here for about 3.5 km. It becomes an earthen trail that winds over and around water channels, bridges, and ponds, and is well marked. If there's been a lot of rain, stay on the pavement, because this can be very muddy. The path continues on to Moreda, and passes through As Lagoas, Campos and Pacios on the way. In 2016, however, a yellow X told you not to go that way. But one 2016 pilgrim did take that path and said it was lovely, though overgrown and wet.

If this stretch of Camino is water-logged, simply continue along the LU-3204 road and regain the Camino in Moreda. In dry weather the marked path is easier on the feet and offers prettier scenery.

In Moreda, leave the hamlet with the church on your right. This takes you to an asphalt road that twists to the right towards O Pazo de O Reguengo, passing through Broza. This is another asphalt stretch, about 2.5 km., but with the noble old pazo (farm complex) there to provide a landmark.

After the Pazo de O Reguengo, things may get confusing.

The first possibility is to take the path that makes a hard left about 100 m after the Pazo wall ends. This will take you to the hamlet of Castrotañe, where an English woman, Penelope, has a casa rural and offers rooms to pilgrims at reasonable prices. One pilgrim stayed here in 2015 and paid 20€ for room and kitchen access. Penelope also took her into town for shopping.

Information on Penelope's place: <https://www.galiciaholidayrentals.com/to-find-us.html> Tel. 677 120 321 OR 982 17 16 32 or via email at penelope@galiciaholidayrentals.com.

Unfortunately, this first turn-off path has been reported as impassable many times during recent years. The mojón that used to be at that point has been removed, and there are numerous yellow arrows telling you not to go that way.

Staying on the road, you soon come to a mojón indicating that you should take the paved road to the left. Go through another little hamlet of a few houses, named San Lourenzo. When the road ends, the Camino goes into the fields for an extremely short distance. Penelope says that her house in Castrotañe is no more than .25 km away, so even if there is overgrowth, pushing through it will be short and sweet. Reports from Fall 2016 indicated that it had been cleared and was passable, but things grow quickly in Galicia!

If neither of the first two options work for you, you can remain on the paved road, the LU-P-4112 and in a few minutes you will arrive in Piñeiro, where you can pick up the Camino again at the water fountain. If you take this third option, however, you will miss Penelope's house.

At the fountain of Piñeiro, the water is sweet, delicious, and welcome. This is a great picnic spot. If you plan to stay at La Rectoral de Castillón casa rural (a splendid option at a good price) this is the place to phone Rosa, the proprietor, and ask for a ride. The inn is very nearby, but walking directions are unclear. She can return you to the fountain in the morning, or set you down at a place along the road if there is too much mud.

From Piñeiro onward to Camiño Grande, the markings are immeasurably improved since my first Invierno in 2010. Very shortly after Piñeiro, a mojón takes you off the LU-P-4112 and onto a path. It's a lovely walk, through fields and green tunnels, with stone walls on either side. Flooding and overgrown brush may still be a problem, but the odds of getting lost are now very low. In contrast, between 2010 and 2013, nearly all pilgrims I heard from got lost on this stretch.

Consider the pictures posted on this blog, particularly the ones indicated at the times of 11:40 through 12:24. These pictures illustrate a marked path between Piñeiro and Camiño Grande, and is the route we should all be looking for!

<http://www.tumbarumba.co.uk/PILGRIM%20WALKS/Camino%202014%20Part%202/Day%209%20Monforte%20to%20Belesar.htm>

And finally, there is an all-road alternative from the Pazo de Reguengo, Castrotañe, San Lourenzo, or even later on in Piñeiro. I have left the description in this edition but want to stress that the Camino is now very well marked, so you should only take the road if you find too much mud or too many brambles. The LU-P-4112 meanders through small hamlets after Reguengo, going through or past San Lourenzo, Piñeiro, A Regueira, A Airoá, Cobreiro, A Xesteira, A Ermida and Galegos, finally merging with the Camino in A Barxa. One pilgrim who took the road route recommended staying left on the road at the entrance to Galegos, rather than going right and through the village, because of several loose and reasonably threatening dogs. After Galegos, you will see Camiño Grande on the right (to the east), and one km later, the paved road from Camiño Grande joins from the right and you are then back on the Camino at A Barxa. The total distance from Reguengo to A Barxa on the side of the highway is, according to google maps, 5.4 km.

From the mojón in Camiño Grande, continue on country roads to A Barxa. At a crossroads entering A Barxa, where there is a turn-off for Escairón to the right (you don't take it, unless you plan to take the alternative route described below), take the LU-P-5807 straight ahead to Fión. You will see the road marker for km 0, indicating that this is the start of that road. At this point there is also an option to take a 400 meter detour to the left to another Casa Rural, the Torre Vilariño. This intersection has more signs than I have ever seen at one place.

Casa Rural Torre Vilariño. <http://www.torrevarino.com/> Very highly recommended, with Camino-friendly staff; pilgrim price for room is 20€ each. Swimming pool; menú del día 15€, pilgrim menú, 10€. Also would be a good lunch or coffee break for pilgrims doing the entire Monforte-Chantada stage. Tel. 982 45 22 60. Restaurant closed on Wednesdays, except in summer (mid-June through mid-September).

If you plan to spend the night in the Casa Rural and are looking for something to do in the afternoon, there is a well-known lookout above the Miño River about a km away. It is named the "Mirador do Cabodomundo." Unfortunately, we have received news from a local that the view from the mirador is totally blocked with overgrowth. Fingers crossed that there will be some work done to restore the view. From the mirador, it's another km or two to the Igrexia Monacal de San Martiño da Coba, also perched up high with a view of the Minho. Google will show you lots of pictures.

An announcement about an albergue has been reported in O Saviñao. This is about 3 minutes from Torre Vilarino. One 2018 news report projects a 2020 opening.

From Fión the Camino stays on the side of the road (virtually no traffic) and passes through a number of small hamlets – Fontela, Vilaravides, Vilatinosa, A Madredauga, Sobrado, O Cerdeiro, A Vendanova, Outeiro, Montecelo, and finally Diomondi.

[ALTERNATIVE: Splitting the Monforte to Chantada stage with a detour to Escairón.

The town of Escairón is about four kilometers from the crossroads described above (where you go left to the Torre Vilariño and straight ahead to stay on the Camino). But if you know you are going to sleep in Escairón, and don't mind getting slightly off the Camino, you can go there straight from Monforte de Lemos. Cross the Puente Romano and keep going straight on Rúa Chantada until you get to the roundabout with a hórreo (old stone Galician granary). Keep going straight, you will be on the LU 617, which is the road that goes straight into Escairón. There are a few bars on the way, and at least one restaurant. Google maps shows this as almost 14 km.

A Pobra do Brollón is about 26 km from Escairón, which is a do-able stage for most. The next day from Escairón to Chantada would be approximately 17 km.

In Escairón the 2** Hotel O Ruso is recommended. Large modern room, 37 € includes individual room, main meal, and breakfast. Tel. 982 452 134. Excellent tapas bars include O Noso Lar, El Candíl and Avenida. Stamp available in Casa de Concello and Hotel.

The next day, continue on the LU 617. Turn left by the cheese factory, onto LU-P-5806. There is a sign indicating you are 4 km from Diomondi church, and when you arrive there you will be back on the Camino, and ready to start the descent to Belesar. **END OF ALTERNATIVE.]**

From the crossroads in A Barxa to the church Diomondi is about 7.5 km.

The little hamlet of Diomondi has a jewel of a Romanesque church, San Pelagio de Diomondi. It is an architectural highlight of this Camino. The church is easy to find, just stay on the road for a few meters when the arrows point you down and off-road to the left. The thousand-year-old cow heads carved above the side doors are a sweet salute to the creatures in the fields all around. After many years of scaffolding, the episcopal palace attached to the church seems to have been repaired. We have no information about possible visiting hours, however.

In Diomondi, the Camino leaves the road and turns to the left, beginning to descend the many switchbacks of the Codos (Elbows) of Belesar, a 2.5 km stretch of steep, broken pavement with remnants of the old Roman Road. The 17th century chronicler of his route home from Santiago on the Invierno noted that the bridge and path were named after a Roman Captain named Belisario, apparently in charge of the construction of the bridge. There is a small covered “rest stop” – a bench, actually, but it has a nice cover for protection from the elements. The rest stop is located at the top of the descending trail to the river.

(see <http://www.jrcasan.com/rutasc/Rueda/Belesar/Belesar.htm> for pictures and a description in Spanish). The descent is spectacular, for between the trees and the vines you can see the Miño River and the terraced vineyards on the opposite bank. The path zig-zags from the forest into the vineyards, down to the river itself. This descent can be very hard on the knees; hiking poles would help a lot. The path down to the river is marked with the GR red and white blazes. Don't worry about the lack of arrows.

Turn right at the bottom. A hundred meters or so ahead, after the bridge, is a marina-bar restaurant, Abaceria o Batuxo. Closed for a while in 2018, we received reports that it has reopened, but hours appear irregular.

Boat tours stop here periodically; a ride up and down this beautiful, terraced river valley will ease your feet and show you a piece of Camino few pilgrims ever see. Information at http://www.lugotierra.com/cs/rutas_fluviasis.asp

After crossing the Río Miño, begin a steep ascent. Some of the path is rocky, some is earth; keep a sharp eye out for waymarks, as some are poorly placed and faded. You will pass a beautiful old stone mill. Farmers sometimes fence off the marked pathway to keep their dairy cows in-bounds, but they use ribbons you can pass through. Be sure to close all gates and put the ribbons back if you move them. (Don't worry, dairy cows may be curious about pilgrims, but they are harmless.) If the path is too steep for your liking, you can always go out to the road and head up on a less steep grade.

About halfway up the steep ascent, if you are on the road, the Mesón Adega do Veiga on the left side offers a comfortable terrace with fantastic views back down to Belesar, as well as warmth and quality home cooking. In low season, the mesón is only open on weekends. June through September it is open every day except Tuesday. The mesón is ALWAYS closed on the 5th and the 21st of the month. The owner is very friendly and expressed willingness to help people out in a pinch. Tel. 657 805 731. This is a very popular restaurant; people come from Ourense to eat here; highly recommended. The winery Via Romana is nearby on the opposite side of the street. The caretaker may invite you to look around, take a bathroom break, or rest on the balcony overlooking the river.

There is a welcome fountain a few km further up.

2.8 km San Pedro de Líncora

Nice shaded rest area near the church.

A 2013 pilgrim had advised that a Dutch couple, André and Linda, were in the process of opening a Casa Rural in San Pedro de Líncora, next to the church. Tel. reported as 982 031 079. You can also try emailing them at info@casasanpedrodelincora.com. No sign of anything in Fall 2017. One 2017 pilgrim chatted with another expat resident of San Pedro, who reported that the Dutch couple is still living in town. It sounds like the plans may have changed. Updates appreciated.

From San Pedro to Chantada is mostly downhill. Cross the Río Asma, and the Camino continues into the old part of Chantada.

3.0 km Chantada

This town's arcaded streets are lined with elegant portals and mansions from the 15th and 16th centuries. All services.

As you come into town, the first bar, Piolindo, has good food and the manager Rachel is very helpful. Highly recommended by two separate pilgrims! Rachel will help you find your way to the place you want to stay.

Bar Lucus, under the arches near the tourist office, was the only restaurant in Chantada that received unanimous praise. The owners retired a couple of years ago, and reports on the new

management are mixed. The outdoor seating near the river is lovely, even if the food may have dropped a notch.

Bar No Río, also on the river and near Lucus, is highly recommended for coffee and drinks.

One restaurant nearby is the Bar as Amizades on the new main drag, Juan XXIII. 9 € menu; nothing gourmet but totally edible. Pulpería Os Pendellos is reportedly fantastic, too, but be ready for crowds. Rúa de Benigno Ledo, 13. Pizzería Agocho, close to both the Hotel Mogay and Hostal Yoel, recommended. Café Amedeo also highly rated by one pilgrim.

Panadería Ascención recommended for breakfast, just around the corner from Hotel Mogay.

Chantada's polideportivo is no longer available to pilgrims.

Lodging:

Hotel Mogay; Antonio Lorenzana, s/n. Tel. 982 440 847 (acceptable, a few negative comments). 20% discount for pilgrims makes a double 44€, single 33€ (includes breakfast). One lucky pilgrim only paid 26€. Check the AC if it's hot outside, because one pilgrim reported trouble with its functioning. Beware that the reception sometimes closes for several hours in the afternoon, which may make for a very late check-in. Breakfast will be provided in a hamper if you leave before the restaurant opens.

Hostal Yoel; Avda. De Lugo, 16. Tel. 982 440 294. Single room with shared bath 12€; single with private bath, prices have ranged from 17€ - 25€ (outdated but clean, has wifi, located near supermarkets). This hostel is above a discotheque by the same name, so weekends might be noisy. You will not get a key to the outside door, which means you must rely on the owners to open up when you buzz.

Hotel Gamallo; Garcia Arias, 7 Tel. 982 440 833 (not recommended; really dirty).

The infohostal website lists a few more places to stay, but they are outside of town: <http://www.infohostal.com/guia/lugo/chantada/1705/alojamiento/hostales.html>

Laundromat in the same building as Pensión Yoel. 3 € with a credit card, 3.5 € if you pay cash.

The modern church in the center of town is pilgrim-friendly and offers a sello. The Casa de Cultura, alongside the church and with free wifi, also offers a sello and is very helpful.

Chantada to Rodeiro (25.8 km).

This is a lovely stretch with some critical turns early on that may be incorrectly waymarked. The path crosses over a mountain and past the landmark Hermitage of Monte Faro. On this stretch are several beautiful "petos de las ánimas," medieval crossroads shrines with striking sculpted images of the souls in purgatory. The little slot was there so the faithful could make monetary offerings on behalf of those souls.

Leave Chantada from Praza Santa Ana along Alferez Baanante, heading towards Centulle. You are actually walking on the in-town portion of the LU-1809 highway. Just past the first "peto de ánimas," a mojón takes you off the road. Continue through the little hamlet of Centulle. You will eventually be back on the LU-1809. With a cruceiro on your left and an old Asador restaurant across the highway, you will see a scallop-shell mojón. Follow the arrows to the right.

After that right turn, about a hundred meters or so down the road, go left, and walk on the service road of the main Chantada-Lalín highway. You will stay on the service road for a few km. Pass

over a paved road or two, and after you go under the road bridge, turn left. Go through the hamlet of Boan, where you may find a mojón pointing in the wrong direction, but the arrows will keep you on the right path.

Enter Lucenza and keep straight on. Before the end of this hamlet, take the path to the right. At the stop sign, cross a paved road, follow the mojón onto a composite road on the left. At the next stop, cross the road and keep straight on. The next hamlet you pass through is Vilaseco.

Continue to the little town of Penasillás.

8.7km Penasillás

There is another peto de ánimas here. Penasillás, a town of 18 people and surely as many or more dogs (none menacing, however), offers a fountain of cold spring water. The wise pilgrim will fill up here for the long climb up a logging road toward the Monte Faro shrine. There is also a bar here, Cantina o Peto, but pilgrims have found it closed at mid-morning. Officially, it is supposed to open around 10 am, but 2018 pilgrims have found it open as early as 9. It also has a stamp for your credential. If closed, one pilgrim urges others to knock on the door of the house on the right, where the owner lives. The family told him they would be happy to increase their pilgrim traffic.

The next five km steadily ascend to the Monte Faro. Eventually you reach an asphalt road with a monolith and a spring on the right. Clear cutting has confused the trail in parts, but it is not too difficult to follow.

4.5 km Monte Faro

Atop this tall mountain is a beloved regional shrine, the Ermita de Nosa Señora do Monte do Faro. It is considered the geographical center of Galicia. Although an ascent to this place was almost certainly not part of any historical ancient Camino, we recommend a detour, if only for the views – all Galician provinces are visible from the high point (though you are unlikely to be able to distinguish which is which!). If you want to totally avoid the ascent to the Monte Faro, you can take a paved road from Penasillás. This option is described further on.

After several km walking on paths and unpaved roads after Penasillás, the Camino merges with a paved road. If you plan to go up to the Alto and its ermita, look for stone steps on the left. These steps take you off the Camino and ascend on the grass past the crosses representing the Stations of the Cross. In a few minutes, you will be at the high point, a huge field with its ermita, lookout tower, and cruceiro. One pilgrim in 2017 enjoyed going to the lookout tower for a nice conversation with the fire ranger there.

To rejoin the Camino, you have two options. One would be to backtrack down the stairs and rejoin the Camino at the exact spot that you left it. Another, which is straightforward but has caused some pilgrim headaches, would be to go to the cruceiro (decorated standing crucifix, located within sight of the Ermita). From there, the arrows will take you back to the Camino and past the picnic area. From the cruceiro, you descend a hill and turn right at the bottom.

If you do not wish to ascend to the Ermita on the Monte Faro, simply continue straight at the turnoff with the Stations of the Cross. You will pass the picnic area on your right. Shortly thereafter, you come to a T-junction, and a waymarker takes you to the right, so you are

essentially hugging the picnic area on your right. If you have taken the descent from Monte Faro that leaves from the crucifix, you will rejoin the Camino at this T-junction, continuing straight to rejoin the Camino just before the picnic area.

The marked Camino leaves the tarmac to the right beyond the picnic area, and parallels windmills on a limestone access road with lovely views back to Chantada. At this point, you will see a beaten up old street marker, pointing to Rodeiro to the left. There is a clear yellow X (indicating that you should NOT go this way). Even if you are interested in the “road option” to Rodeiro, **this is not the road that will take you there**. You should wait till a later point, when the Camino crosses the PO-533, which is the direct road option to Rodeiro. Several pilgrims followed this first road sign to “Rodeiro” and learned that it is the “back road route” and weaves around, crossing with lots of unmarked roads. They got lost many times.

After a few km walking through the other-worldly windmill farm with its constant flap flap flap and motor rumblings, the path meets pavement again. At this point the Camino turns left, and crosses a bridge over the PO-533, which is the highway from Lalín to Chantada. Here you pick up yellow arrows again, but look carefully at the stone marker. Going left will take you along the highway, going right is the official camino route through farmland and hamlets. This is the spot for those who wish to save a few km and go directly to Rodeiro on the side of the road. It is not pretty, but not at all dangerous, since you can walk along an access road the whole way. I have not taken this route, but on the map it looks like a straight shot into Rodeiro.

[DETOUR. Alternative route from Penasillás that avoids the ascent to Monte Faro. One of the Amigos groups has an alternative route for those who wish to avoid the ascent, or at least some of it. From Penasillás you can take a series of secondary roads that pass through Mouricios, Ferreiros, Mundín, San Vicente. A sketch map is shown on this link, <http://Caminodeinvierno.es/etapas-itinerario-alojamiento-predicci%C3%B3n-meteorol%C3%B3gica/etapa-7-chantada-rodeiro/>

According to one GPS calculation, this alternative has 180 m of ascent, compared to the Camino’s 420. You would then reconnect with the Camino at the intersection of the PO-533 and CG-2.1. One pilgrim was happy he took the detour, but most have really enjoyed the Monte Faro and have stressed that the ascent is not bad at all. **END OF DETOUR]**

6.0 km Crossing of the CG-2.1 and PO-533.

If you stay on the Camino, granite waymarkers will take the Camino off to your left. One is the standard mojón with the tile scallop shell. The other is larger, placed there by the “Concello de Rodeiro” and indicates that you are on the Camiño de Inverno. This pretty path passes El Pazo de Camba. That old estate is usually closed, but two 2016 pilgrims happened upon it during preparation for a baptism in the small church, the 1st in 25 years. They were treated to a visit. After walking by the estate, the Camino passes through a field and out to the LU-P-1809. Arrows then take you off the road before the contiguous hamlets of A Feira and Leboro, but if you remain on the road, you will come to the Mesón Lamazares. (And continuing on, the LU-P-1809 will take you into Rodeiro). O Recanto, another hamlet before Rodeiro, also has a bar.

6.8 km Rodeiro. All services.

As you come into Rodeiro, cross the river. You emerge on the square with the Casa do Concello (town hall – stamp, but only open till 2 pm). The Camino leaves to the right of the Casa do Concello, and not up the hill through town. You will find the first arrows taking you out of town near the monument to the wheel, located in a prominent roundabout.

Rodeiro's romanesque church dates to the 12th century.

Sports Hall. Polideportivo is still available for pilgrims to sleep in. Call in advance. Tel. 986 790 009.

Hospedaxe O Guerra. Tel. 986 790 061 (excellent Caldo Gallego in the restaurant); 15-20€ for single room. Recommended. May be closed on Sundays.

Hostal Carpinteiras, atop the hill at Estrada Xeral, 62. Tel. 986 790 196. Recommended. Phone in advance; a hearty meal will be waiting for you here, served by friendly family. Up a hill, about 200 m from the center. A January 2019 pilgrim paid 22€ for a single room. Doubles were last reported at 30€ for a double. Good drying facilities.

Bar Desito highly recommended for tortilla española.

Markets, bank machines, health center.

Distances listed for the next day's walk to Lalín are contradictory: the average guess is 21.5 km if you follow the waymarked trail. Be sure to carry plenty of water and food for a picnic lunch. The way to Lalín can be made via road or by trail. The roadway is undoubtedly faster and more direct; you can just stay on the road that leaves Rodeiro and you will arrive in Lalín. There is a service road for the entire distance, so you will not be on the highway if you take this option, but it is a busy and noisy road. On your way, you will pass four bars, so there is no shortage of places to stop. The Camino, in contrast, follows beautiful back roads through the Galician heartland; there are several towns, but no services except the occasional fountain. You are likely to meet residents taking their cows in or out of the barn.

Leave Rodeiro on the PO-5330, the main road west for about 2 km. A mojón stands along the road across from a rabbit-processing factory, COGAL, directing you to the right onto a dirt road towards Ponte Pedroso. The Camino meanders over a wide valley with stone quarries, trout-fishing streams, and sunken lanes that sometimes turn to mud or streams. Waymarks are adequate, but sometimes require sharp eyes: mojones direct you from Penebosa to Puza to Penda, notable for an enormous granite monument the farmer has dedicated to the former Spanish king Juan Carlos. From here travel on to Eirexa, where the Camino crosses a 12th century bridge.

After crossing the bridge, keep straight on past the house on the right with the name Estanqueiro written over the door. Out of the village, on a bigger paved road, the mojón takes you left, the same way as a sign pointing to Maceira. You're not on this road for long, the mojón soon takes you off that road onto another asphalt road to the right.

At the next Y intersection, arrows point left. The road becomes a dirt road very soon, stay on this for a couple of km, ignoring the paths going off on either side. You may see no markers, but always stay on what is obviously the main track. At another Y intersection, the arrows point left. This arrow is below a sign that says: Tecor Socetario Rodeiro. You will remain on this wide dirt road with tractor marks for a long time.

Go down across a brook (which is heard but not seen), and then come back up and into a cultivated pine tree area. Go up and down a few times, arrows are there at all junctions.

The dirt track crosses a paved road. Stay straight ahead on the dirt track. You then finally emerge at a hamlet; from there another few minutes walking takes you onto the PO-933 into Lalín de Arriba. The arrows take you right in front of the church from the 10th century (the keeper of the keys lives close by and is very happy to open the church up if you can find her). The date 980 is carved into a stone window sill. Arrows then take you through the town of Lalín.

Lalín 21.3 km

All services: lots of cafés, restaurants, stores, and places to stay.

Ethnographic museum looks interesting: <http://museoetnografico.net/museo-etnografico/> Open Tuesday through Sunday, 10-2 and 4-7 pm.

Something is always happening in downtown Lalín (in 2015 pilgrims encountered a trotting competition, others have come across little specialized weekend markets of artisanal cheese, organic foods, etc). A life-size bronze hog stands in the main street, a tribute to the area's culinary mainstay.

Lalín is famous for its cocido— a dish that serves up greens, potatoes, garbanzos, broth, and assorted stewed pork bits in a great steaming heap. Casa Mouriño, across the street from the Palacio Hotel is a great place to try it.

Other recommended places to eat include:

Restaurant Cabanas, Rua Pintor Laxeiro, 3 (very good reviews on line, confirmed by a 2016 pilgrim);

Restaurante San Martín II, Rua C, 3;

Bakery Bar Dulces Encantados (near main church).

Pizzería Casa do Gato, Rua Ramón Aller 5 (although the street has a different name, it is the continuation of Calle Matemático Rodriguez, one of the town's main streets, and the street on which the Hotel el Palacio is located). This place is owned by the president of the local association of the Friends of the Camino. Very pilgrim-friendly; stamp.

Lodging.

An albergue has opened in Lalín! Here are all the details:

Albergue Lalín Centro, Calle Observatorio, 8, 2nd floor

Tel. 34 610 207 992 OR 34 649 915 381

Email address: emilianomeijome@gmail.com ;can be booked on booking.com. The owner Emiliano, also runs the A Casa do Gato next door. Albergue reported clean and well-equipped in a recently renovatd apartment.

Lalín has a lot of private accommodations, here are a few recommended by others.

Hotel Restaurante el Palacio. Very close to the Camino. From the church, walk down to the second cross street, Calle Matemático Rodriguez and turn right. The hotel is on that first block (number 10). It's a 2**, very clean and comfortable. Pilgrim deal of 35 € for room, a main meal, and breakfast. Early breakfasts not a problem (I had mine at 6:30 and could have had it earlier; just check with hotel staff). Tel. 987 780 000.

Hostal Las Palmeras. Calle Arenal, 8. Tel. 986 780 222. Simple clean room for two, 27€, 11€ menú very good as well. One pilgrim reported that though the entrance and bar below are fine, rooms not so nice. You can always ask to see the room before committing to stay.

Hotel Caracas, on the N-525 at the edge of town. Not the best location, but recommended by a 2017 pilgrim as being nice and clean.

Hostal As Vilas, Calle Arenal, 4. Tel. 986 780 140

Hostal Mourino. Tel. 986 780 073

Hostal Naval do Espinal. Tel. 986 787 604

Hotel Pontinas. Address: Rúa da Ponte, 82. Tel. 986 787 147 www.hotelpontinas.com

Hotel Camino de Santiago. Tel. 986 794 078 (4 km out of town along the trail.)

The Camino leaves Lalín on the Pontiñas River walk. The path (with both a paved and unpaved option) is accessible at various points throughout the town. If you are unsure, just ask; everyone knows where it is. The name in Spanish is Paseo Fluvial.

To get to the river walk from the town church, walk down with the church behind you, on the street Rúa Colón. You will come to a plaza with a monolithic monument to Joaquín Loriga, an early 20th century aviator. Go past that square, continue behind the plaza, down hill, till you come to a big playground at the edge of the town. You will be able to join the river walk there, take it to your left. It's a very nice walk.

[Note to peregrinos: In 2016, several pilgrims had trouble after leaving the river walk. Between then and now, the route seems to have been re-routed and well marked, but I am sorry to report that a January 2019 pilgrim had trouble at this spot again. If you see arrows in strange places, it is probably because you have somehow gotten yourself on the old camino. KinkyOne's tracks may help you. <https://www.endomondo.com/users/16690154/workouts/380806628> They take the new route. You cannot get too lost, because you can walk through the industrial park on the side of the N-525, though it is not recommended.]

When the mojón takes you off the river walk, you will start to ascend. Turn left at a little ermita (arrow on the adjacent shed/garage) and continue on that back road. This means you will not have as much walking along the national highway or through the industrial park as earlier Camino routes had. There are no problems with marking on this new route. You will come to a gravel road that takes you to a tunnel under the super highway and enter A Laxe.

A Laxe 5.9 km

Albergue de Peregrinos (6 €, modern but poorly maintained). Washer 3 € and dryer 1.5 €. Meals available at a bar a bit further along the main road. Buses to Santiago from Ourense stop here. A mojón near the road declares the spot as the end of the Camino de Invierno.

Hotel Torre do Deza; (this is a four star hotel in the industrial park)

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

At the albergue in A Laxe, the Camiño de Inverno joins the Camino Sanabrés. From here the Camino is well marked and well trodden to Santiago. The following towns and distances will give you all you need to plan your remaining days. The most obvious stages are from A Laxe to

the albergue in Outeiro (34 km) and from there to Santiago (17 km, allowing for plenty of time to get to the pilgrims' mass).

Shortly after leaving A Laxe, you will pass the Pazo de Bendoiro, a restored manor house with its spa treatments and swimming pool. www.pazodebendoiro.com It looks beautiful, but no pilgrim has reported yet on the prices. In early 2018 their webpage listed a special of 53€ per person for a room, buffet breakfast, and some spa time.

There's a lovely old bridge, originally Roman but with much rebuilding, hidden in the forest and inaccessible to cars. The Romanesque church at Taboada has a lovely carving of Samson over the doorway. You have to cross the busy highway to get there, but it is worth it, just a stone's throw from the Camino. In 2017, volunteers were on hand to keep the church open for pilgrim visits.

Silleda 9.7 km

All services. Bar Gerardo just before entering town is recommended.

Albergue Turístico de Silleda, Calle Venezuela 38. Tel. 689 505 690 or 986 580 192. <http://www.alberguesilleda.com/index.html> The albergue is on two floors of an apartment building, with rooms with 2, 3, or 4 single beds. Kitchen and washing machines. 10€

Albergue Santa Olaia, Calle María Colmeiro 4. Tel. 986 580 013 or 606 434 386. <http://www.alberguesantaolaia.es/subpage/Inicio.php>, open June through September. 7€. Run by the parish and near the church.

Hostal Ramos; San Isidro, 24. Tel. 986 580 217

El Gran Albergue, Calle Antón Alonso Ríos 18, 986 580 156 or 615 604 393. 7€. Owners have a cafetería nearby for meals.

On the main street of Silleda, the Bar Toxa offers an occasional pulpo (only on Tuesday) and Ribeira Sacra wine special when you see the pulpo-boiler set up outside the front door. Inexpensive rooms are available upstairs. 15 € in 2018. Mixed reviews.

The farmacia here is known to double its prices for foreign pilgrims.

7.1 km Bandeira

In-town albergue opened in 2013. This place is modern and functional (others would describe it as charmless and soul-less) So you can decide for yourself, see the pictures and descriptions on the web: <http://www.santiagoturismo.com/aloxamentos-santiagoturismo/albergue-de-a-bandeira>

Hostal Conde Rey, tel. 986 585 333 (20 €, single room). Reported to be good value, but with a strange water heating contraption in the shower.

Hostal Victorino, tel. 986 585 330

Good food and warm company at Bar Arume, which is located up the hill on a side street soon after you enter Bandeira. Sandwich vegetal recommended.

Bar Plazoleta, just over the road from the Hostal Conde Rey, in a small square, is also great.

A few km after Bandeira is the hamlet of Dornelas. In that place, a young Italian couple, Cristina and Andrea, has renovated a house and opened an albergue, called Casa Leiras 1866. It

is directly on the Camino. The albergue has 10 beds and meals are provided. Bed was 12 € and dinner 9 €. Highly recommended. Great, friendly people. Worth a stop, even if it's just for a coffee. Tel. 620-483-603 or 634-613-690; email: casaleiras1866@yahoo.es, Owners speak Italian, Spanish and English.

A 300 m detour down to the N-525 highway will take you to a bar/restaurant El Emigrante. In the village of San Miguel de Castro there is a bar just before the steep descent to Ponte Ulla.

12.8 km Ponte Ulla

Día grocery store on the way out of town; stock up if you are going up to the albergue in Outeiro, because there aren't many options. Excellent panadería and bakery in town right on the Camino, in the block or two after you cross the river.

Bar Ríos. Immediately across the bridge on your right. Tel. 981 512 305. Restaurant and rooms available. Room prices seem to vary by season, from 10-15-20 €, based on what pilgrims have reported. Food reported to be quite good. Menú del día 12€, with additional charge for wine after the first glass.

Pensión O Cruceiro da Ulla; tel. 981 512 665; info@ocruceiro.es. Located across the street from the Día grocery store. Newly constructed, functional, good service and good prices. They also have an albergue room downstairs.

Hostal Churrasco de Juanito; tel. 981 512 619. Located on the Camino, soon after crossing the river. 30€ room, 14€ menú reported as overpriced and not great. A pilgrim walking in October 2014 said he got a room for 15€ and a meal for 8€, so walking off-season appears to have its financial benefits. More negative than positive reports on this establishment, however.

For any foodies out there, the Restaurante Villa Verde is the place to go. Walk straight from the bridge into Ponte Ulla. When you get to the intersection with the AC-240 road, to the left is the Camino. Turn right, go up the hill and in a few minutes you'll see the Restaurante on the right side of the road, located in an old stone house, very pretty. <http://www.villa-verde.es/index.php/restaurante> No menú del día, all a la carte. One 2016 pilgrim describes a yummy meal for 42 €, which is probably beyond the typical pilgrim budget. It may be worth a splurge, though, because the pilgrim enjoyed a feast of home-smoked salmon over fresh tomatoes, roballo (my favorite Galician/Portuguese fish, maybe something like sea bass in English ??), and a walnut and banana torte. Coffee and a few glasses of albariño.

4.8km Outeiro

Albergue de Vedra, municipal. 6 €. Well maintained. Hospitalera apparently no longer provides meals onsite. Kitchen for pilgrims' use recently reported as well equipped. Washer and dryer. Several nearby restaurants used to deliver food, but we have no recent reports. Your best bet is probably to bring up food from the Día supermarket in Ponte Ulla.

About a ten minute walk downhill from the albergue is the beautifully restored rural hotel, Pazo dos Galegos. <http://www.pazodegalegos.com/en/index.html> Family estate still producing wine, comfortable and cozy with lots of creature comforts. Contact for special pilgrim prices. This would be a very nice splurge! One pilgrim reported getting a 40 € price on booking.com.

3.3 km Lestedo

Fine casa rural: Casa de Casal; Tel. 981 503 227; <http://www.casadecasal.com/>

Good lunch specials at Restaurante Via de la Plata along the carretera.

The rest of the way is through the suburbs of Santiago, which display a mixture of modern construction and old stone houses, many of which are beautiful. The Camino crosses the railroad tracks very close to the spot where the RENFE train derailed in July 2013, killing 79 people and injuring many more. The fence has become a make-shift memorial, with many touching remembrances, photos and prayers.

3.4 km A Susana

Albergue Reina Lupa, next to Café Bar Rosende, 150 m off camino. 18 beds, 14 €, 2 private rooms.

10 km Santiago de Compostela – FIN DEL CAMINO

Sources and Credits:

This document is pulled from various sources, and some of the text is a translation by Laurie Reynolds of documents written in Spanish by Aida Menendez Lorenzo, president of the Friends of the Camino de Invierno. That text morphed into the initial online guide to the Camino de Invierno published by the Confraternity of St. James. In 2014, Rebekah Scott, the original author of the guide, “retired” from guide-writing. Laurie Reynolds and her pilgrim friends took over the task of keeping the guide up to date. I appreciate all the comments and updates from Roger and his walking partner, whose full names I have lost. Also Charrito, KinkyOne, ranthr, ozAnnie, Bad Pilgrim, Tincatinker, t2andreo, Caminka, Alansykes, sabbott, jlsalt, MJB, Omicko, Fares Ismail, Goran Larsson, MikeJS, chinasky, Bimblingalong, Freescot, Econodan, Alaskadiver, and some especially great commentary from Athena Atterdag, all from Ivar’s Camino de Santiago Forum.

I hope those who use this guide on the Camino Invierno will help future pilgrims by sharing updates, corrections, and news. Please send all correspondence to me at laurie.reynolds@gmail.com.