

# *Ultreia et Suseia! The Newsletter.*

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**Vol 5. No 2.**

**June 2025, Christchurch Camino Group**



“And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.”— Erica Jong

## **Editorial**

### **An Alternative Universe**

Returned pilgrims are often asked to describe their experience of walking the Camino de Santiago. Answering is not that easy! Firstly the inquirer is usually dumbfounded that you had walked 800 kilometres, the act being beyond their comprehension. So one can easily be replying from a hardly credible position. What then does one say to try and normalize the event? How to describe a series of paradoxical factors in play during your journey, to a sceptic? The short answer is that any reply will sell the experience short. Perhaps saying the Camino was a life changing experience due to the welcoming nature of the Spanish, the comradery of fellow walkers and the beauty of the landscape will suffice. Omitting all the magical stuff like synchronicities and coincidences is probably best. Save that for the “converted.” To add grist to the mill how will you manage the reaction when it is announced that you are returning to Camino!!

Buen Camino  
Philip

**Image:** 13<sup>th</sup> Century Fuente de Los Moros (Fountain of the Moors), Camino Frances.  
Photograph taken from the steps inside the fountain.

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### **Noticeboard**

#### **Scheduled 2025 Christchurch Camino Group Meeting Dates**

The following are the scheduled meeting dates for 2025: Monday 25 August, Monday 17 November. Our venue for 2025 will be meeting Rooms 2 & 3 Upper Riccarton library, entry via the library main doors.

### **Newsletter Ultreia et Suseia**

This is the final newsletter in this format. Originally the intention was to have contributions from other pilgrims about their Caminos and curate different ideas and solutions. After 17 editions, I've said pretty much everything I have to say about the Camino, both inner and outer journeys. This final edition has a comprehensive index of topics covered. All 17 editions may be found on our website and are downloadable. It has been a pleasure writing them. A big thanks to Deb for her proofreading. [www.chchcamino.net](http://www.chchcamino.net)

### **Christchurch Camino Walking Group**

The Christchurch Camino Walking Group is for people who attend our quarterly meetings and have a Camino interest. They meet on the second Sunday of the month, usually at 10 am. The walks are a



mixture of flat and hill walks around Christchurch and surrounding areas. They provide an opportunity to try out new walks, and exercise with people who share a love for the Camino. Walks are usually completed by around 3 pm.

Please contact Cecilia for more information and to join the separate mailing list:

[chchcaminogroup@gmail.com](mailto:chchcaminogroup@gmail.com).

**Image:** The Bealey Spur walk was one of our longer and perhaps most beautiful walks. Ideal training for the Pyrenees challenge!

### **Christchurch Camino Group Website**

Have you visited our website? Alan has archived all of the newsletters. There is also a collection of memorable stories from returned pilgrims, recommended reading and useful resources.

[www.chchcamino.net](http://www.chchcamino.net)

### **Advice Given to Pilgrims**

We wish to emphasise that all information and answers given by our presenters, organisers, meeting participants and in our newsletter are provided in good faith, and have been found to work for them/us on that particular occasion.

The information provided is a starting point for your research so that there is a range of possibilities to investigate and can be adapted to suit individual circumstances.

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## *Camino Group Gathering Follow Up* *9 June, 2025*

**Welcome:** A warm welcome was extended to all. **Apologies:** The following apologies were received; Sheldine, Deborah, Elle, Tom, Liz, Sally. Newcomers to our meetings were asked to introduce themselves and provide information regarding their Camino interest.

**Returning Pilgrims' Ceremony:** Following the welcome back ceremony returning pilgrims had the opportunity to present a highlight of their Camino.

**Departing Pilgrims' Ceremony;** Those pilgrims departing before our next meeting had the opportunity to participate in the Departing Pilgrims' ceremony.

Those leaving for their first Camino were gifted a shell as a symbol of our support for their upcoming journey.

**Christchurch Camino Walking Group Report:** Cecilia presented the Christchurch Camino Walking Group Report. The following are the walks undertaken by the walking group since our February meeting; March; ~ Bealey Spur Track Arthurs' Pass National Park. April ~ Waipara Vineyards

**Image:** Waipara Vineyards Walk.



walk, May ~ Okuti Track Little River, June ~ Te Ara Otakaro Avon River Walk.

### **Presentation One**

#### **Reflections on a Life Changing Spiritual Camino,' ~ John**

John presented a very personal account of his transformational pilgrimage on the Camino del Norte. He opened by acknowledging the challenge of speaking about the spiritual side of walking the Camino. 'You could say that Life itself, if you're open to it, will eventually lead to a "Camino-like experience – something transformational.'

John outlined his background, right from childhood which led to an openness toward both religion and spirituality, leading to an ability to learn, reflect and adapt. All of these qualities were put to good use while on Camino. His employment involved studying creativity, and pondering the group mind or collective consciousness. This led to work in the area of 'Remote Viewing.' So with this rich background he began the Camino Nordt following a series of calamities which left him physically and emotionally overloaded, including an overweight pack.

Once he began walking, he noticed things began to change for him. Staying in albergues was important in promoting contact with others making their way along the Camino. Pilgrims he met also were in pain. All were looking for something – healing, forgiveness, faith. He found the Camino broke him down physically and emotionally, and then rebuilt him. It stripped him of the unnecessary. One day he realised he had been only looking inwards, consumed by pain. He noticed the green trees, birds singing, people playing and living. He realised this journey was about **letting go**, waking up to the beauty and kindness around him. As he walked, he often asked the angels for help, and always felt strengthened. His belief in the core values of; kindness, humility, forgiveness, were strengthened.

A chance encounter was pivotal. John met an elderly Spanish man in a Bilbao park. His dream was to make the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. He couldn't complete it physically. Would John carry his staff to the cathedral door in Santiago de Compostela for him? This man walked with him the whole way in spirit. John said, 'And in that act of carrying his dream, I was changed. It taught me to let go of the past, and live simply with kindness and openness.' The Camino experience gave him the strength to start again and helped realign with what matters; doing the right thing, helping others, living kindly.

John finished by saying he's ready to walk again not just to walk, but to reaffirm his faith in the human spirit.

During the presentation his journey was projected onto the screen. While walking he had utilised the 'Relive,' app for iPhones. This showed a 3D version of the route he walked and towns visited. It also inserted photographs and film where appropriate. (Those familiar with end credits from Efron Gonzales Camino documentaries will recognise the style.)

A library book which discusses walking the Camino as a transformative experience is

**'Into the Thin, A Pilgrimage Walk Across Northern Spain,'** Stephen Drew, 946 DRE, 2020, Christchurch City Libraries, (3 copies.) Review previously published in November, 2021.

This memoir is very well written and will bring back memories as Stephen describes his Camino journey. As promised in the title he does deliver regarding his inner journey. [Down to 2 copies currently. Both on shelf.]

Stephen discusses his book in the following podcasts.

**Episode 47 - Into the Thin,** The Camino Podcast, [54.14]

An interview with Stephen Drew. A walk towards love and away from guilt and shame.

**Stephen Drew, - 'How the Camino helps us process grief and life's many challenges,'** Camino Café podcast, July 3, 2021, [56 min].

See newsletters: Vol. 3. No. 4. Vol. 4. No. 2, Vol. 4. No. 1. For further information on the inner journey,

## **‘Presentation Two**

### **Gear/Clothing Extravaganza**

**Pauline** in her introduction shared useful tips: Most things to have 2 uses, walking poles with reflective tape, add email address in case lost etc, add initials with nail polish, exchange shoe laces for coloured ones, separate credit cards, wear woollen/merino socks, change regularly through day, pin on the back of pack to dry, shoe horn for shoes and in case caught short with no nearby toilets, umbrella sun and rain, hip drink bottle - ease of use, “S” hook for showers, universal plug, clothes pegs (same colour), assorted safety pins, large scarf, as a wrap and on plane, privacy screen on bottom bunk, Steradent denture tables for sterilizing H2O bottle, cycling/walking gloves, compression tights, at night, plane, small scarf – bandana for sun, hair tie in evenings, 2 lipsticks!!

A change of plan was called for as there were insufficient packs/gear for the group activity envisaged. (A big thank you to those who brought them.) Instead Pauline presented a variety of “on Camino” photographs which demonstrated various items of gear in use on her Caminos. She had her two packs and demonstrated why she was opting for the slightly larger one. (One of the images showed this perfectly.) Finally she shared a couple of important items; a quilt instead of a sleeping bag, and a light weight day pack/bag for the aeroplane, supermarket and security of belongings while showering.

**Philip** on a PowerPoint outlined some useful **Packing Principles**: Pack Light, select lightest version, Layering, Quick drying, Sun proof, Stylish, Double use, Seasonal coverage. He also shared, ‘**The Soul of a Pilgrim, Eight Practices for the Journey Within**,’ by Christine Valters Paintner. Christchurch City Libraries has 2 copies. Paintner in a chapter titled, ‘the Practice of Packing Lightly,’ discusses what we might be carrying unnecessarily in our heads.

**Colleen** had set up a display of novel items on a side table to help with a comfortable Camino. Each item was clearly labelled to help identify its functionality. All were light weight. One turned from a cutting board into a useful bowl and a knife and fork which transformed into a long handled stirring implement! And there was the smallest stove I’ve ever seen, for that much needed cup of tea! Attendees were able to view and discuss these and other items at Small Group Discussion.

**Things to Share**: Philip shared ‘**a will and a way, on foot across france**.’ See review section. The evening concluded with **Small Group Discussion** where participants were free to look at the gear/packs in depth, and/or join groups to discuss Camino matters of interest. (The room was beautifully warm and everyone assisted with the pack up which was completed in a few minutes.)

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### **Featured Article**

#### **The Camino as a Paradox**

I pricked up my ears when Jennifer Wills said in response to a question that for her walking the Camino was a series of paradoxes. Intrigued I listened closely to her examples of: walking solo, in silence and yet enjoying the company of other pilgrims, the pleasure gained and the pain experienced, the challenges and the rewards of life lessons learnt, how life was simple on the road and yet simultaneously complex, that the journey was a physical exercise and yet also mental. I gave it further thought and realised we were pilgrims and yet could veer towards walking as tourists, keen to see the sights rather than experience them. Further examples of paradox came to mind: ie. journeying to a strange place to encounter what is already within us, returning home and continuing the journey!



**Paradox No 1.****Walking solo in silence/enjoying the Camino family and conversation.**

This is a paradox which is more common on the popular routes. Taking some deliberate actions, like slowing down, stopping to take lots of photographs, should ensure you are left behind. Try walking faster or saying politely I'd like to walk in silence now should also work. Although I haven't had to resort to the last one! If you are interested in the inner journey then periods of silence and solitude are needed. Disconnect from the internet and put away the ear buds, walk with awareness and see what happens. Forming a Camino family can be a Camino highlight, as can having in-depth conversations with others who have the time to really listen.

**Paradox No 2.****Pleasure of the beauty of the landscape/and the pain of blisters/tendinitis etc.**

Walking in Spain, and France and parts of the Portuguese rewards the pilgrim with stunning landscapes, a welcoming reception from locals and time out on a relatively safe trail. And for kiwis in particular beautiful 'built' landscapes. The price paid for almost all pilgrims is injury from climbing and descending mountains, and the constant pounding on unforgiving surfaces.

**Paradox No 3.****Challenges/Life Lesson Learning**

The pilgrim faces many challenges as they make their way to Santiago de Compostela. These include walking in continuous rain, sometimes for several days at a time, getting lost and having to backtrack on an already long day, snorers, plastic rustlers at 4.30 am etc. However lots of lessons are learnt, like tolerance, being observant, and taking care of the body.

**Paradox No 4.****Physical/Mental**

Much is made of the physical aspect of walking a Camino. We debate whether to face the climb up the Pyrenees on the first day or commence in Pamplona. We talk about how best to cross the meseta without becoming dehydrated in the section short on facilities and little shade for 17 kilometres. Rarely do we hear about the mental challenges and how to best meet these. The hours of walking where the pilgrim might look inwards and feel as though in the process they are disappearing down a rabbit hole. The struggle to will the body on to the top of the next hill, the silencing of the doubting voice within and the ordeal of letting go of long held but now irrelevant beliefs. Both the physical and the mental have to be mastered or at best held in check if arrival in Santiago is going to become a reality.

**Paradox No 5.****Simplicity/Complexity**

We bring only the essentials and leave behind (hopefully) our roles and responsibilities. We are seeking the simple life of the road. And yet this routine of walk, eat, shower, wash clothes, and

sleep is only part of the story. What is complex is the interplay between the mind, body and spirit and the energy that is the Camino.

**Image:** Clothes drying on the Portuguese ~ from Lisbon.



**Paradox No 6.**  
**Walking as a pilgrim/Enjoying the sites/sights**

On my first Camino a nun in her pre-evensong talk enjoined us to be pilgrims not tourists on our journey. I took her message to heart. Now I've loosened up somewhat and on my 2019 Camino found myself admiring the Gaudi building in Leon, next time from the inside!

**Paradox No 7.**  
**Returning Home/The Journey Continues**

After reaching our destination on the pilgrimage, our turning point, we commence our journey home. We bring with us the 'boon' or new learning and understandings. Once home we reflect for some time and realise that our journey is not over, that it is continuing. The point of travelling is not to arrive but to return home laden with pollen you shall work up into honey the mind feeds on.' R S Thomas, 'Somewhere.'

'We sometimes think of the journey as a linear path to travel, when in reality we travel more in circles and spirals.' Christine Valters Paintner.

**Paradox No 8.**  
**Linear Time/Being in the Moment**

On the Camino the pilgrim is encouraged to change script and live in the moment. To take the time to smell the roses is seen as being a positive waymark on the inner journey. But, albergues have a curfew.



**Image:** Rose, Palacios del Generalife garden, Alhambra, Granada, Camino Mozarabe.

The pilgrim is expected to be in bed by 10 pm and with the lights out. Hospitaleira's love to see pilgrims leave before the stated time in the morning so they can begin preparing for the new day's arrivals. Guide books encourage pilgrims to begin their day early to avoid the heat of the day. To get clothes washed and dry becomes a challenge with a late afternoon arrival so the pressure is on to keep moving westwards throughout the day.

### **Paradox No 9.**

#### **Journeying to strange lands/Finding what is already present**

Pilgrimage itself may be seen as a paradox. We set out on a journey, probably across a strange land. We endure discomfort created by facing a different language, strange customs and cuisine. We go through the trials and tribulations of walking in the heat, cold and rain to crack open what is already within us. ' - let go of this endless searching and let the discoveries arrive at the doorstep of your heart.' Christine Valters Paintner.

### **Paradox No 10.**

#### **Preparation/"Monkey Mind"**

We are setting out into the unknown. The temptation is to consume guide books, watch YouTube videos, and read memoirs. And yet "Monkey Mind," a Buddhist concept where thinking is clouded by too much information can result. Striking a balance: knowing enough to stay safe with the observance of local custom and Camino etiquette, may suffice.

### **Paradox 11.**

#### **Freedom/Routine**

Pilgrims will often refer to a routine, or cycle of activity whilst walking their Camino. It goes something like this: walk, find accommodation, wash, (self and clothes) rest, eat, sleep walk, wash etc. On the other hand the Camino offers freedom. One stalwart recommends changing your name, and assuming a different persona! While this suggestion might be extreme, the time on the road does offer the opportunity to leave roles and responsibilities behind. It's this freedom, to take an interesting detour into the hills, or linger in a medieval town which causes me to resist when and where possible, being tied to pre-booked accommodation. While I have the good health and ability to carry my belongings I intend to enjoy this aspect of freedom.

### **Paradox 12.**

#### **Camino as Community/Transients**

The Camino is viewed as a community. It occupies a fixed space and like small communities harbors free flowing gossip. This is facilitated by exchange of guest book comments, the pilgrims themselves through daily conversation, and even by messages pinned to trees. However the members of this community are free flowing, with few pilgrims of a fixed term nature.

### **Conclusion**

So where to from here? Paradox, an example of either or thinking is limiting. Perhaps if these seemingly at odds positions are viewed as "and" then we will be in a stronger position when making our journey along the Camino de Santiago.

### **Reference**

Thanks to Jennifer Wills for the inspiration to consider the Camino through the lense of paradox, as discussed on; '**My Camino - the Podcast**,' 10 July 2018, Dan Mullins interviews Jennifer Wills.

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### **Camino Story**

#### **Animal Encounter**

I had been walking on the Primitivo for several days. I had a nodding acquaintance with 3 pilgrims, and had set out after them to cross a remote section of the mountains. Safety in numbers, or so went the theory. After rounding a bend on the hilly path I noticed them in the distance. They had stopped walking and were looking in my direction. Between me and them,



and grazing on the path was a good-sized cow. As I came closer it became apparent that our paths would cross. I slowed to think about my options. The path straddled a hillside so there was an up and a downside. I concluded that the best option for me was the cow yielding and scrambling upwards. So with this in mind I advanced. The horned cow looked up as I approached. It was clear to me it wasn't moving! Solution? Continue advancing while waving my arms and shouting encouraging 'uphill you go,' noises. By this stage I was committed to advancing. The cow continued looking in my direction. And then to my relief it turned and clambered up the hillside. Now I had a side on view for the first time. What was that hanging under the beast? I'm city born and raised but know an udder when I see one. And that was no udder! Luckily the beast continued its way upward. My fellow pilgrims were still rooted to the spot with astonished looks on their faces. It transpired they had taken a detour off the path to avoid the animal. They were filled with admiration for my bravery. Who was I to dispel their heroic viewpoint!

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### **Things to Do in: Burgos.**

Burgos is one of the largest cities on the Camino Frances.

- Walk under Arco gateway and over Puente de Santa Maria XIV and arrive at Plaza St Maria
- Visit the de Santa Maria 13<sup>th</sup> C cathedral
- View the tomb of El Cid near the entrance to Burgos Cathedral
- Explore the medieval Old Town precinct and its surrounding medieval walls
- Make the 0.6 km detour to Monasterio de las Huelgas Reales which is 1.4 km out of Burgos. Enjoy the spacious Romanesque cloisters
- Sight Hospital del Rey (adjacent to the Monasterio) – once the largest pilgrim hospital on the Camino.



**Image:** A side view of Cathedral of Saint Mary, Burgos.

### **Resource**

**Jordi Savall – Codex Las Hugelas**, YouTube performed in the Catedral de Burgos [1.44]

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### **Camino Tip**

#### **Sweet Dreams**

To ensure a pleasant sleep in a crowded, stuffy dormitory pick a few herbs like rosemary or place some eucalyptus leaves in your pocket while walking. Place the herbs beside your pillow, and crush a few eucalyptus leaves on the other side. Spend a pleasant night alternating between a forest and a herb garden.

## Camino Poem

### Thirty Nine Days to Muxia

Swirling mists greet pilgrims as the Pyrennes await.  
Prayers requesting a break in the enfolding blanket  
are answered.

Promised sweeping vistas are revealed, providing  
motivation to reach the summit  
and undertake the steep descent to Roncesvalles.

The hand of God is equally evident as fellow pilgrims  
show kindness and compassion towards one another  
as loving support, and first aid supplies are equally  
shared.

Tremendous cumulus clouds provide endless beauty  
above the meseta,  
as the featureless tableland stretches to the horizon and  
beyond.  
Odorous Galician farmyard smells,  
torrential rain and soaking clothes all add to the sensory assault.

Crashing waves on the Muxia rocks,  
and splashes of far flung spray  
ensure the pilgrim is well grounded  
in this moment of beauty and achievement.



**Image:** The meseta, 2013.

© Philip, 2013

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## New Camino Book ~ Kiwi Author

**‘A will and a way, on foot across france,’** by Wellington author Jennifer Andrewes was published in April. It covers her experiences on the Via Podiensis from Le Puy-en-Velay and the Via Lemovicensis from Vezelay. Jennifer was diagnosed with a neurological condition and attempted to walk off the symptoms. Christchurch City Libraries has purchased 5 copies.

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## Reviews

### YouTube

**‘Camino de Santiago Arles – Paragons,’** Jose P, YouTube, [16.27] An interesting overview.

**‘The 88 Temples (English Version) Full movie,’** Gian D Ceccato, YouTube, [46.29]

Excellent photography, commentary and overview. The videographer met some Japanese pilgrims on the Frances and they introduced him to the 88 Temple pilgrimage, they accompanied him to the beginning, one accompanied him for the first section, while the others meet him at the end. A great introduction to an exotic pilgrimage.

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## Websites

[caminodesantiagobybike.com](http://caminodesantiagobybike.com)

This is the complete index of topics for all issues of Ultreia Suseia! The Newsletter. Back copies of the newsletters have been archived on our website: [chchcamino.net](http://chchcamino.net)

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“If you are willing to do only what’s easy, life will be hard. But if you are willing to do what’s hard, life will be easy.”

— T. Harv Eker

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