

13km Ponte Ulla

P Pensi^o O Cruceiro da Ulla; 981 512 665; info@ocruceiro.es

H Hostal Churrasco de Juantio; 981 512 619

4.2km Outeiro

R Albergue de Vedra, municipal. Beautiful pilgrim fountain. Snack stand nearby during high season.

6km Lestedo

CR 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.

10km Santiago de Compostela

Sources and Credits:

This document is pulled from various sources, and some of the text is a translation by Laurie Reynolds (laurie.reynolds@gmail.com) of documents written in Spanish by Aida Menendez Lorenzo, president of the Friends of the Camino de Invierno. Laurie used the original version of this CSJ guide in June 2011 to find her way, and arrived safe and sound in Santiago de Compostela. Her trail notes and updates are included here.

“Camino de Santiago: Guia del Camino de Invierno,” a 2011 guidebook by Jos D. R. Perez, is a great resource, published by people who live along the path -- a fact that works for good and for ill. (It can be ordered from the Valdeorras Camino Friends website, listed above). Guide-writers from the Netherlands Friends of the Camino group offered great company and plenty of support in updating this guide in April 2011; an Invierno Guide in Dutch is forthcoming. Helpful accommodation websites include www.infohostal.com and www.turgalicia.com. Many more small and privately run family-run accommodations can be found along the Way.

The writer hopes those who use this guide on the Camino Invierno will help pilgrims to come by sharing notes and news. Please send corrections and updates to rebrites@yahoo.com

Confraternity of Saint James

Pilgrim Guides to Spain

8. The Camino de Invierno



Rebekah Scott

1st published 2010 by
The Confraternity of Saint James
27 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NY

2nd edition, June 2011

Company no 4096721
Charity no. 1091140
Website: www.csj.org.uk
e-mail: office@csj.org.uk

Copyright © The Confraternity of Saint James 2011

ISBN: 978 1 906364 28 1

This edition is placed on the Confraternity's website and may be downloaded free of charge. However, users are invited to respect these conditions:

- to make a donation, through the donation facility in the Bookshop section of the website;
- to send comments and corrections, based on their experience of the route, to Rebekah (rebrites@yahoo.com); and
- to note that re-use of the material contained in this guide is governed by Creative Commons terms; please see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/uk>

H Hostal Las Palmeras. Calle Arenal, 8. Tel: 986 780 222
H Hostal As Vilas. Address: Calle Arenal, 4. 986 780 140
H Hostal Mourino. Tel: 986 780 073
H Hostal Naval do Espinal. Tel: 986 787 604
H Hotel Pontinas. Address: Rua da Ponte, 82. Tel: 986 787 147 www.hotelpontinas.com
H Hotel Camino de Santiago. Tel: 986 794 078 (4 km out of town along the trail.)

The *Camino de Invierno* joins the *Camino Sanabria* fork of the *Via de la Plata* a few kilometers out of Lalín, with abundant trail markers and perhaps fellow pilgrims. The nearest pilgrim albergue to Lalín is at A Laxe, just beyond the junction. It is a well-designed but poorly-kept albergue. Food is available from a bar across the road.

Those interested in trail-finding details should consult a *Via de la Plata* guide, but be assured the trip is clear sailing from A Laxe straight through to Santiago de Compostela.

A Laxe to Silleda (9.5 km)

R Albergue de Peregrinos
H Hostal Ramos; San Isidro, 24. Tel: 986 580 217
H Hotel Spa Oca Katiuska; Outeiro, 52 (this is a four star hotel)
H Hostal O Porto; Camilo JosCela, 12.

On the main street of Silleda the Bar Toxa offers an occasional pulpo and Ribeira Sacra wine special when you see the pulpo-boiler set up outside the front door. Inexpensive rooms are available upstairs. The farmacia here is known to double its prices for foreign pilgrims.

7km Bandeira
R Albergue 3 kms out of town.
H Hostal Conde Rey, 986 585 333
H Hostal Victorino 986 585 330
Good food and warm company at Bar Arume. Sandwich vegetal recommended.

direct. The trail, though sometimes poorly marked, follows beautiful back roads through the Galician heartland; there are plenty of towns, but no services except the occasional fountain.

Leave Rodeiro on the PO-5330, the main road west for about 2 km. A mojon stands along the road across from a chicken-processing factory, directing you to the right onto a dirt road towards Ponte Pedroso. From here to Lalin is 9 km. as the crow flies, but several more if you follow the zig-zagging marked path. Through the day 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 King Juan Carlos. From here travel on to Eirexa, where the camino crosses a 12th century bridge.

The next mojon points down an asphalt road that ends in a Y... without any markings to show the way. Even though the asphalt goes right, TAKE THE LEFTWARD, westward earthen path. You will see no waymarks or arrows for another half-kilometer, but soldier on until you see the beautiful waymark farther up, pointing you left again. From here on, the trail is well-marked, shifting from pavement to dirt roads, paths, and sidewalks as you near the city. After many more (better-marked) up-and-down kilometers, Lalin appears with a refreshing water fountain on the road into town.

22.5km Lalín

All services.

The Romanesque church of Lalín de Arriba (upper Lalín) has the date 980 carved into a stone window sill. Something is always happening in downtown Lalín, a town famous for its *cocido* – an entree that serves up greens, garbanzos, broth, and assorted stewed pork bits in a great steaming heap. A life-size bronze hog stands in the main street, a tribute to the area's culinary mainstay.

Calle de la Calzada takes you through Lalín, past the modern church and town hall, and from there to the Pontinas river walk and out of town.

A Guide to the Camino de Invierno.

The Camino de Invierno is a newly waymarked alternative walking/bicycle route to Santiago. From its start in Ponferrada it follows along riverbanks, climbs mountains, and passes through wilds, farmlands, and small towns of the Bierzo region of León and all four of Galicia's provinces. About 210 km later it joins the *Via de la Plata* near Lalín for the final 65 km to Santiago de Compostela. Depending on which alternatives are chosen along the way, the *Invierno* adds up to roughly 275 km.

Getting there is not difficult. Daily buses and trains travel to Ponferrada and Monforte de Lemos from Madrid, Hendaya, Sarria, and Barcelona; the RENFE afternoon Arco from Hendaya to Vigo stops at Burgos, Sahagún, León, Astorga, Ponferrada, O Barco de Valdeorras, A Rua, Quiroga, and Monforte de Lemos. Camino Francés hikers who have had enough of the summer crush can choose from several starting-point options on this "road less traveled."

As of July 2011 the Archbishop of Santiago had not recognized the *Invierno* as an official camino, but *Invierno* pilgrims with the requisite *sellos* report no trouble in obtaining a Compostela at the Pilgrims Office. If you have any doubt, snap photos of yourself standing at landmarks along the way, and take your camera with you to the pilgrim office. Monforte de Lemos, 120 km. from Santiago, is the accepted starting-point for walking pilgrims determined to earn a Compostela certificate.

Historic information is vague regarding the use of this path as a pilgrimage road to Santiago. Proponents say this medieval highway became "The Winter Way" during the camino heyday, offering an alternative to the snowy winter weather of O Cebreiro and dangerous floods on the Rio Valcarce. Church documents from the Middle Ages refer to pilgrim hospitals, churches and other pilgrim-related sites along this Way, but some groups, including the *Asociación Gallega de Amigos del Camino de Santiago*, dispute their historic authenticity. Santiago de Compostela notwithstanding, this route, which follows the contours of the River Sil gorge, has been in use at least since Roman times, primarily as a track for moving mineral wealth out of the region.

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 all-but unusable to modern pilgrims during winter months. 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.

Other warnings are in order: The Invierno is not a Camino for beginners or for hikers looking a cheap-and-easy holiday. The few guide leaflets available are flashy and vague, designed more for public-relations purposes than actual trail-finding. The singular Spanish-language guide is nicely illustrated and detailed, but somewhat heavy and expensive. Many locals do not know a Camino exists in their neighborhood, and there is little pilgrim-oriented infrastructure as such. Waymarks have improved significantly in recent years, but still are sometimes far apart, contradictory, or even non-existent. A good level of Spanish is essential. This guide is sketchy and new. It is assembled from materials provided by two area Friends of the Camino groups, trail notes from Invierno pilgrims, web searches, and personal experience. Like the trail itself, this is a work in progress and a labor of love. The Invierno now is a tough, solitary, and charming passage 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.

Private accommodation along the route is plentiful, but some of the daily stages are long and lonely. Albergues or youth hostels exist in the towns of Puente Domingo Florez, Biobra, Rubi O Castro, Villamartin, A Rua, Quiroga, Chantada, and Rodeiro. These are not pilgrim-specific albergues, however. Most are gymnasiums or sports arenas, used by youth groups and other local associations. They supposedly are available to pilgrims as well, but most are not located along the marked path. Pilgrims should not hesitate to asking at the neighborhood park-bench or bar about where inexpensive rooms can be found in town. As a last resort, ask local police or *Guardia Civil* for help.

A provincial road, the CC-553, carries traffic to the shrine from Rodeiro. Tired pilgrims may want to follow the road down into town, 8 kms on.

The marked Camino leaves the tarmac on the right beyond the picnic area, and parallels windmills on a limestone access road with lovely views back to Chantada. Three km on the path meets pavement again, turns left, and crosses a bridge over the big Lalín-Chantada highway. Here you pick up yellow arrows again, but look carefully at the stone marker – someone has chipped loose the mortar and reversed the arrow, pointing you left, along the highway that leads directly into Rodeiro. That is a legitimate option.

But if you wish to keep to the more pastoral road, go right, uphill about 300 meters along more windmills. Soon a granite waymarker shows the Camino de Invierno off to your left. This pretty path passes El Pazo de Camba and the friendly town of Rio, where there two useful bars fuel the final push into Rodeiro, with its restaurants and accommodation.

8km Rodeiro

All Services.

In Rodeiro consider visiting the tower that belonged to the local nobility. Today it is the city hall, where a sello is available. Rodeiro’s Romanesque church dates to the 12th century.

Sports Hall. Tel.: 986 790 009.

H Hospedaxe O Guerra. Tel.: 986 790 061 (excellent Caldo Gallego in the restaurant); 20 Euro for single room.

H Hostal Carpinteiras, atop the hill at Estrada Xeral, 62. Tel.: 986 790 196.

Phone in advance a hearty meal will be waiting for you here, served by friendly family.

Markets, bank machines, health center.

Distances listed for the next day’s walk 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

Chantada to Rodeiro (27 kms)

This is a long, hard, and lovely stretch with a critical turning early on that is wrongly waymarked. The path crosses over a mountain and past the landmark Hermitage of Monte Faro. On this stretch are several beautiful “petos de las animas,” medieval crossroads shrines with striking sculpted images of the souls in purgatory.

Leave Chantada from Praza Santa Ana along Alferéz Baanante, heading towards Centulle. Waymarks and arrows are clear right up to the intersection of the LU-1809 highway. With a cruceiro on your left and an old Asador restaurant across the highway, you will see a scallop-shell mojon pointing you straight on. THIS MARKER IS WRONG. Instead, follow the yellow arrows to the RIGHT. This path continues on, with regular waymarks, through woods and fields paralleling a quiet highway, to the little town of Penasillas. (Reports say more mojones in the area point in wrong directions, but arrows painted beneath consistently correct the record. If in doubt, trust the yellow arrows!)

8.3km Penasillas

Penasillas offers a fountain of cold spring water. The wise pilgrim will top up his water supply here for the long climb up a timbering road toward the Alto de Faro shrine.

Eventually you reach an asphalt road with a monolith and a spring on the right. Clear cutting has confused the trail in parts, but the path is not too difficult to follow.

5km Alto de Faro

Atop this tall mountain is a shrine church beloved of the locals, considered the geographical center of Galicia province. A shady picnic area and spring offer refreshment after the climb; from there stout hearts may want to make the final ascent to the top, along a manicured Way Of the Cross that is traditionally done in bare feet.

There are two Friends of the Camino de Invierno Associations with good websites. One group is located the Monforte- Chantada area, <http://www.caminodeinvierno.com/> (The group’s name is the **Asociacion Caminos a Santiago de la Ribeira Sacra**). The other is located in O Barco de Valdeorras, <http://caminodeinvierno.es/> (This group is called **Asociacion Amigos do Camino de Santiago por Valdeorras**). The president of the latter organization, Ramon Garcia Rodriguez, can be reached via email at asociacionvaldeorras@hotmail.com; The phone number is 657 405 303. Ramon can often be found on duty at the tourist information kiosk on the road into A Rua. A GPS map of the route is under development; check the website for [Het Nederlands Genootschap van Sint Jacob](#) for the latest updates.

POSSIBLE STAGES ON THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

The Spanish guide lists the first set of stages, for a total of 9 days. A second one cuts down on the 30+ kilometer days and adds up to a 12-day walk, but skips past the glories on Monforte de Lemos.

9 day walk

Day 1 Ponferrada to Puente de Domingo Flórez (35 km)

Day 2 to A Rua (31.5 km)

Day 3 to Quiroga (28 km)

Day 4 to Monforte (33 km)

Day 5 to Chantada (29 km)

Day 6 to Rodeiro (27 km)

Day 7 to Albergue de A Laxe (27 km)

Day 8 to Albergue de Ponte Ulla (34 km)

Day 9 to Santiago (17 km)

12 day walk

Day 1 to Las Médulas (27.5 km)

Day 2 to Barco de Valdeorras (25.5 km)

Day 3 to A Rua (14 km)

Day 4 to Quiroga (28 km)

Day 5 to Puebla de Brollon (23 km)

Day 6 to Casa Rural beyond Monforte, either 20 or 24 km

Day 7 to Chantada (either 19 or 15km, depending on previous night)

Day 8 to Rodeiro (27 km)

Day 9 to Lalín (21 km)

Day 10 to Silleda (15 km)

Day 11 to Ponte Ulla (20 km)

Day 12 to Santiago (17 km)

bar in little Belesar.

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

(You are now 23 kms from Monforte de Lemos.)

After crossing the Rio Mino, waymarks point to a steep ascent to

2.5 km San Pedro de Lincora.

Some of the path is rocky, some is earth; keep a sharp eye out for waymarks, as some are poorly placed and faded. Farmers sometimes fence-off the marked pathway to keep their dairy cows in-bounds, but they use ribbons you can pass through, but 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.)

5.5km Chantada

is mostly downhill from San Pedro. Cross the Asma River, and the camino continues into the old part of Chantada, whose arcaded streets are lined with elegant portals and mansions from the 15th and 16th centuries. There are good restaurants, markets, a health center, and nice places to stay in Chantada. Bar Lucas, under the arches near the tourist office, is recommended.

Chantada has a sports hall where pilgrims can sleep, but is usually busy right up to 11 p.m. (982 440 011).

The infohostal website lists places to stay:

<http://www.infohostal.com/guia/lugo/chantada/1705/alojamiento/hostales.html>

H Hotel Mogay; Antonio Lorenzana, s/n. Tel: 982 440 847

H Hostal Yoel; General Franco, 16. Tel: 982 440 294

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

The modern church in the center of town is pilgrim-friendly and offers a sello.

another *Casa Rural*, the Torre Vilarino. It is another comfortable option with Camino-friendly staff and hearty dinners figured into the room price; a good lunchtime or coffee-break option for hikers doing the entire Monforte-Chantada etapa.

After Escairon keep on through the cow and sheep-tending pueblos of Fion, Vilaravides, Vendanova, (with a beautiful and ancient wayside shrine), Montecelo and Diamondi. From the fountain of Pineiro to Diamondi is about 7.5 kms, and most of it is on a road with very little traffic.

In Diamondi is a jewel of a Romanesque church, San Pelagio de Diamondi, an architectural highlight of this camino. (the church is well way-marked, a few meters off the camino to the right.) The thousand-year-old cow-heads carved above the side doors are a sweet salute to the creatures in the fields all around.

A Casa Rural alternative exists about 3 kms from the Diamondi Church. On another easy-to-find path, you can walk halfway down the mountain and detour to the pilgrim-friendly Casa de Santo Estevo, (www.ribeirasacra.com.) This is a cozy, charming place run by an expat couple from England and Netherlands. They can give clear instructions on how to arrive. "I spent a lovely rest day there, enjoying the romanesque church next door, the views over the river, sipping wine that came from grapes grown on vines we could see from the terrace. Highly recommended," writes Laurie Reynolds.

In Diamondi, the Camino leaves the road and turns to the left, beginning to descend the Codos (Elbows) of Belesar a 2.5 km stretch of steep, broken pavement with remnants of the old Roman Road (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 Mino River and the terraced vineyards on the opposite bank. The path zig-zags from the forest into the vineyards, down to the river itself. Make a right at the bottom. If you are ready for a stop, do not cross the bridge: a marina bar-restaurant is a few meters further on. It is posh and pricey, but it is the only

WALKING THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

Ponferrada to Las Médulas (27 km)

The route is marked as the *Camino Real* (Royal Road) through this part of the Bierzo region of Leon province. Pilgrims can begin the Invierno trail at the Albergue de Peregrinos San Nicolas de Flue in Ponferrada, where credentials and a very basic map are available, but often little encouragement from hospitaleros. (987 412 381.) Not to worry: this part of the trail is well-marked. Walk along the *Camino Francés* 200 meters until you reach the first cruceiro/traffic circle. Make a LEFT here, cross the 16th-century Puente Boeza bridge, and turn right. Ponferrada will be across the river to your right. This is not the prettiest walk at first, and those coming off the *Camino Francés* will notice the familiar yellow arrows give way to a bounty of other kinds of markings, including a red/blue arrow on a white field. Just past the Embutidos Pajariel factory on the left the asphalt road goes to dirt. (Do not be tempted by a trail that goes off to the right, marked with white arrows.) Keep to the left road, and soon familiar scallop-shell mojones will reappear to guide you uphill toward

4.4km Toral de Merayo

Pharmacy, nice stone bridge, and the friendly Cafe Bar Mariluz, located in the square which is not square. WIFI, post office and a bakery. Bar El Puente is just over the river, and Bar Valduera and Meson Alondra are on the way out of town. When leaving Toral de Merayo, keep gently right at the first fork. You will leave town on the asphalt road, turn left on another, and begin a sharp climb off to your right through a vineyard shortly thereafter. Soon you will arrive at:

2.5km Vilalibre de la Jurisdiccion

Fountain, Bar la Estrella along the highway. Camino passes through the middle of town.

800m Priaranza del Bierzo

Fountain, Farmacia, Bar along the road, a sports hall where pilgrims can sleep (987 420 806.)

About 200 meters along the road out of town is the famous Mirador de Santallo, a scenic

overlook that offers views over the Bierzo valley and the craggy cliffs across the river, known as “Las Barrancas de Santallo.”

2.7km Santalla

Bar on the highway, grocery store in town center. Be careful of footing when weather is wet, as part of the road is in shade most of the day, and sometimes is icy or slippery. There are two sets of arrows leading out of town, and a mojon which keeps you on the camino towards

3.9km Villavieja

Spring-fed fountain, Church of Santiago. This hamlet in the base of the valley was once home to the serfs who worked for the inhabitants of the castle up above. From here you begin a climb with great views of the nearing castle. An 8-bed municipal albergue was under construction here in April 2011.

1km Castillo de Cornatel

Closed Mondays. Open from 11:00-13:30 and 16:00-20:00 the rest of the week. Free for pilgrims, 2 Euros for others. Some pilgrims enjoy looking over the castle, which was built, perhaps by Templar Knights, in either the 9th or the 14th century. Historians are undecided. The castle was a setting in Gil y Carrascos novel “El Señor de Bembibre.” (Some pilgrims say the castle is not worth the climb, and you should skirt along the base of the hill and regain the camino on the other side.) Once you are done with your visit, continue along the downhill road. Take a right (following the arrows) at the first intersection and a left at the one that follows. From here you will arrive shortly to:

3.6km Borrenes

Nice, quiet town. It has a pharmacy and small shop of the typical “lights off but we carry everything” variety. Bar Casa Marisol does full meals and has a wifi signal. Centro de Turismo Rural Cornatel (686 055 938), scheduled to open Holy Week of 2011, offers meals and bed-and-breakfast accomodation.

3km 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. It continues on to Moreda, and passes through As Lagoas, Campos and Pacios on the way.

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 kms., but with the noble old pazo/ farm complex there to provide a landmark. From here, look sharp: the path makes a hard left about 100 m after the Pazo wall ends, and the waymark is sometimes hidden in the brambles. (An English family reportedly plans to open an albergue here in coming months. Check on the progress at www.castrotane.weebly.com.)

The dirt trail passes the tiny hamlet of San Lorenzo on the right. A stony medieval pavement twists 2 km upward into chestnut and oak woods to the fountain of Pineiro, where the water is sweet, delicious, and welcome. This is a great picnic spot. If you plan to stay at La Rectoral de Castillon casa rural (a splendid option at a good price) this is the place to phone up Rosa, the proprietor, and ask for a ride. The inn is very near by, but walking directions are unclear. She can return you to the fountain in the morning, or set you down on the camino in Escairon if the marked path is flooded.

Flooding and overgrown brush are sometimes a problem on this stretch. The best advice to all is to “keep straight on,” and don’t be shy about asking for directions.

Cross the road and continue on the earthen path in between oak and chestnut trees on the so-called *Camino Grande*. The path continues to Escairon. At the crossroads with the LU-5807 you will see a mojon, and on the left about 500 meters down the road, (well-marked) is

credential stamped at least twice each day from Monforte onward. This can prove challenging at times, in an area that is not always aware of the needs of pilgrims.

Monforte is also center-point for the Ribeira Sacra wine region. Its landmark wine bar/restaurant and tasting room is in the old town near the Roman bridge, providing a delicious education in the many flavors achieved by the humble Mencia grape. The staff are pilgrim-friendly, and provide a sello. (Closed Mondays, hours limited Oct to April) info@centrovino-ribeirasacra.com.

If you plan to walk all the way to Chantada the following day, be sure to stock up in Monforte.

Monforte to Chantada (29 km)

Between these two places the only accommodation is in *casas rurales* such as the Michelin-listed La Rectoral de Castillon (<http://www.rectoraldecastillon.com/> Tel: 982 455 415), which is about 10 km from Monforte, or Torre Vilarino (<http://www.torrevarino.com/> , Tel: 982 45 22 60), which is another 4 kms beyond that. Be sure to phone ahead and reserve if you plan to stay. These *casas rurales* provide a short, easy first-day option if your pilgrimage begins at Monforte, and cut in half a very long and rugged day's walk.

In Monforte, leave town on the Roman bridge, 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 Abeledos Street 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). Walk between the church of San Antonio and the backside of the Haley supermarket, and at the roundabout with a *horreo* (a Galician granary) is a bar with your last chance for coffee. Cross the road to the left, and follow the signs for A Vide. This is a long, straight asphalt road that arrives in A Vide after 3 kms.

Continue out of town in the same direction you walked in, 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 Carrucedo, which is not technically on the camino. Instead, continue on straight and turn left on the next road, which takes drivers to Las Medulas. A short distance along the road the camino once again diverts into a more scenic landscape of chestnut groves.

6.5km 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. It is a popular summertime tourist attraction, with all the joyful merriment and price-fixing that goes with it.

Las Médulas has a tourist information center, accommodation, cash machine, bars, groceries, and restaurants targeting weekenders hiking the many trails around the area. Eateries include Bar Reigo, Taberna Romana, Restaurante Marif and food services at H Hotel Medulio: Tel: 987 422 833; 987 422 889. <http://www.hotel-medulio.com/> Average roadside hotel, 30 Euro for singles.

H Complejo Rural Agoga: <http://www.ruralagoga.com/index.html> (Touristy B&B, 40 Euro single, with breakfast made up ahead for early risers. Pilgrim-friendly.

Families in the town also rent rooms to pilgrims at reasonable rates. Look for "Camas" signs in windows, or ask the ladies near the *lavadero*. Plan ahead: breakfast is very hard to find in this town before 9 a.m.!

Las Médulas to Puente de Domingo Florez (8 km).

Leave Las Médulas on a tractor path on the western edge of town that leads to a beautiful morning walk through wooded hills popular with hunters. At the top of the first rise is a lovely view back to Las Médulas. Then the Camino descends along a mountain lane with views across the valley to distant mines and villages, arriving at

8km Puente de Domingo Flórez,

Friendly restaurants, pharmacy, supermarkets, bars, a medical center, and accommodation. Internet is available at the town hall in the old town, set against the old bridge on the Rio Cabrera.

The camino track leads to the LE-164, a busy two-lane road. Turn left to continue through town and keep on the camino. Alternatively, turn RIGHT toward the river and

H Hostal Restaurante La Torre, 300 meters down the road on your left on Chao do Marco. Tel: 987 460 589 OR 987 460 081. Email: info@hrlatorre.com
<http://www.hrlatorre.com/> This roadside hotel seems seedy and un-economical until you figure-in excellent meals and a charming riverside garden, complete with exotic birds and animals. The other sleep option is the town sports hall (987 460181). Pharmacy, grocery stores, cash machines, bars. Bar El Cruce, along the highway, opens early.

Puente de Domingo Flórez to O Barco de Valdeorras (17.5 km)

From Puente de Domingo Flórez there are three possible alternatives:

1: marked with mojones, is longer and takes you towards Rubía and O Barco, passing through Vibora. Not much used, although Rubia has a sports hall accommodation.

2: shorter, goes along the left side of the Sil River, following the highway that goes to O Barco. This alternative follows a secondary Roman Road. More direct, but with much asphalt and traffic.

Monforte de Lemos

Monforte looks uninspiring at first, but it offers attractions to lovers of history, art, and architecture. Top of the list is the Colegio de los Escolapios, an austere renaissance monastery next to the (less-than friendly) tourist office on Campo de Compania (982 4047 15, or www.concellodemonforte.com.) Monastery tours are 3 Euros, 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.

Monforte has a sports hall available for pilgrim stays, but offers nothing but floor space and showers. (982 402 501).

The infohostal website lists nine hostales and pensiones in Monforte de Lemos:
<http://www.infohostal.com/guia/lugo/monforte-de-lemos/1720/alojamiento/hostales.html>

H Hostal Duquesa. Duquesa de Alba, #50. Tel: 982 403 467
 H Hotel Puente Romano; Paseo del Malecon s/n. Tel: 982 411 168
 H Hotel Condes de Lemos; Praza da Estacion, 2. Tel: 982 400 319
 H Hostal Rua; Roberto Baamonde, 30.
 H Hotel Ribeira Sacra; Rua do Conde, 17. Tel: 982 411 706
 H Hotel El Castillo; Huertas, 36. Tel. 982 402 150
 P Pension Galicia; Calle Rosalia de Castro, 24. Tel: 982 400 010
 H Hotel Parrillada Nunez; Barrio Las Lamas, s/n
 H Hotel Terra Gallega; Chantada, 218. Tel.: 982 405 090

The Parador del Monasterio de Santo Estevo overlooks it all from atop the hill, a four-star treat set in a 17th century Benedictine monastery. Monforte offers the full range in terms of price and luxury. Tel.: 982 418 414

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 pilgrim Compostela certificate, be sure to have your

Keep an eye out for wild boar. This road takes you down a long and somewhat lonely road to Castroncelos (fuente in the plaza), and from here to Vilarmao (keep left at the fork) and down to Puebla de Brollon.

12km Puebla de Brollon:

Health clinic, pharmacy, cash machine, grocery store, bars, restaurants, taxi. H Hostal As Vinas, Avenida de Outeiro, 13. Tel: 982 430 124 . Friendly, clean, accommodating family establishment.

If you still feel energetic, press on to Monforte for a better choice of accommodation, food, and attractions.

Puebla de Brollón to Monforte de Lemos: The mojón pointing you out of town is right next to the big Guardia Civil (police) building, with its motto “Todo por la Patria.” (“everything for the country”) blazoned over the gate.

paved road takes you through the outskirts, but you are soon on a beautiful green track, which comes out to the road paralleling the river go R along the river.

You emerge at the first houses of Cereixa, go over bridge and into the "center". A mojon here points leftward, but instead cross the paved road and KSO toward crucifix and the church – the camino then heads Right towards Rairos. There is one more short ascent before Monforte, plenty of woods and birdsong in season, with an inspiring view of the monastery towering above the distant city. You will cross a channel (be very careful of your footing) and descend into Reigada, the last hamlet before Monforte. The way into town is well marked on agricultural roads and tracks, with the mud and dung you expect from rural Galicia. When you finally enter the outskirts of Monforte, you will cross the railway tracks and turn L. From here it's still a couple of kilometers into the center. The camino leaves Monforte on the Puente Romano, where there is a nice hotel and pension.

3: 14 km, is recommended because it avoids most of the highway walking. It keeps to the right bank of the 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. Finding the start is tricky, as there are several bridges in town. From the hostel walk downhill past *Guardia Civil* station. Soon you will pick up yellow arrows near the Claudio supermarket, which lead down to the right to a narrow bridge, past an electrical station, and under the railway to the little town of Querena on the other side of the tracks. Just beyond the underpass, take a sharp left up a residential street, leftward onto a dirt path, and over the railroad tunnel. (Do not be tempted to short-cut through the tunnel!) The path becomes a gravel track between the train tracks on the right, and the river on the left. Do not be dismayed, the trail is marked!

This rail line will be your guide for many miles: the camino pathway follows it along, more or less, for the next few days. Deep mud can be a problem, be careful of your footing, especially in wet or muddy weather.

3.8km Pumares

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

1.6km Nogueiras

A ghost town along the train tracks. On the far side note the old stone bee-keeping enclosure along the waterfall, still in use in 2011. Beware of snakes and owls!

3.6km Sobradelo

Arrows lead you left into town, right to continue along the camino.

If you go left: Sobradelo's pride is a magnificent 16th-century, seven-arched bridge. Cross over it for a meal in a notably good restaurant on the other side. 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. There are no camino arrows, however – to regain the trail, simply head uphill to your right. All roads lead to the OU-0801 out of town; the camino follows alongside.

2.4km Entorna/Entoma

Although the OU-0801 will take you all the way to O Barco, arrows take you onto more scenic trails through the forest. Entoma is a town of 320 souls, one bar, and not much else. Eventually you rejoin the OU-0801. Keep an eye out for a blue camino sign indicating the narrow tunnel to your left, under the train tracks. Turn right at the slate mill, where you follow a gravel track (the gravel in these parts is overspill from the train tracks and is not the best to walk on). O Barco is near enough, up a sharp climb and over the top of another train tunnel.

4.9km O Barco De Valdeorras (entering through Cortes Barrio)

All the services you could want are in this town, and the local wine is remarkably good! Those who wish to stay at the new albergue of Xagoaza (20 places; Gloria, the hospitalera, provides meals if needed: 639 921 679) should consider stopping in town to stock up on provisions, as the albergue is in a village 3 kilometers outside O Barco and 1 km off the trail.

This is a long, narrow town, strung out along the river. Hostals and pensions are plenty. Two are right on the camino path on the far end of town on C. Eulogio Fernandez, the street just behind the hospital:

Pension Mayo (988 322 098) and

Pension do Lar, (same phone number).

Wifi, restaurants, bakeries, and bars aplenty on the same block. 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.

No matter where you stay, the paths converge at the railroad underpass at the end of Eulogio Fernandez, where you will see a blue camino sign pointing your way west. At the roundabout by the Repsol gas station take a left turn onto Calle de la Rampa. At the modern Church of San Tirso, those who want to stay at the Albergue Xagoaza (639 921 679) should turn RIGHT and follow the well-signposted way to the Monastery of Xagoaza. The Camino keeps going straight up toward the charming little town of:

monastery hospitality, but travelers then had ferrymen to carry them back to the camino on the opposite bank. Alas, the boatmen and the monks are long gone.

4.5km parallel to N120, crossing under the highway near a derelict roadside nightclub.

The path rises over the little town of Noceda, and an ambivalent mojon points to the road down into town. Do not take it. Continue hiking up: it is another 4 km of quiet roadside before markers point left, where the camino becomes a dirt path. In the next 8 km the path ascends gently through pine forest towards the little church of Los Remedios. Other hiking paths in the area use yellow blazes and flashes, but keep to the arrows, keeping a sharp eye to the left as you reach the higher altitudes. The camino (along with the yellow-striped path) takes a sharp left onto another dirt path that leads downward through chestnut woods. (the new wooden trail marker was broken off its post and and face-down in April 2011, our repairs were temporary.) This timber-cutter path descends to the Carballo de Lor area, and rises slightly to the Ermita de los Remedios, a tiny chapel beloved of the locals.

It's a short downhill to the charming, shady village of Barxa de Lor, where a cool river flows beneath a cobbled Roman bridge and dozens of cats prowl through the tumbledown tollhouse and abandoned mills. For an unmarked 300-meter detour to a useful bar/restaurant area, (Meson do Lor: 982 430 150, Restaurante A Marquesa, 982 430 170), take a left turn after crossing the bridge in Barxa and follow the river. Return to the old bridge to continue the Camino. (Refill water bottles at farms along this stretch – you will need them later.)

From the bridge the arrows point you back along the road with a dirt path alongside. Take the ascent towards the church, following an asphalt road; keep LEFT and steeply uphill, and follow this winding country road past yet another small medula in a sheep pasture. Stay on the paved lane until you see a mojon leading you even more high up, onto a mining road.

(If you follow the N120, be careful to exit the highway along with the auto traffic, and make a right at the bottom of the exit ramp, following the road most traveled. Do not go to the Quiroga industrial park.) The routes finally converge at a roundabout, and cross together a little bridge that turns into the main street of Quiroga.

Quiroga stands in a beautiful valley of vineyards and orchards. All services. There is a municipal albergue in this town, on the main street. (982 255 220 or Eduardo at 669 812 659) It is not pilgrim specific but they do have pilgrim prices and large rooms with private baths. Beware large school groups who will keep you awake well into the night. Also, you may be interested in getting a stamp at the town Casa de Cultura (free wifi) as the Albergue does not have one.

H Hostel Quiper: Calle Real, 62. Tel: 982 435 276 (20 Euro single, clean.)

H Hostel Marcos. Calle Secide. Tel: 982 428 452

H Hotel O Remansino. Tel: 982 435 168. Website: <http://www.remansino.es/vg/> (far end of the town, along the camino);

R Albergue Quiroga: <http://www.alberguedequiroga.com/index.html>

Tel. 982 435 290; email: info@alberguedequiroga.com; contact person: Eduardo Nunez

The trail from Quiroga to Monforte de Lemos is long, and services are short along the way. Pack as much food as you can, and fill up your water bottle as often as possible. Leave Quiroga along the main street westward, cross under the N-120 and follow the country lane (LU-933) which runs along the river.

Quiroga to Puebla de Brollon (23km) to Monforte de Lemos (32 km)

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. Don't be tempted to cross the bridge, even though signs point to the medieval monastery of San Clodio. Years ago there was an alternative route that made use of the

4.3km Arcos

The path is well-marked over the next few kilometers; it may seem to vanish into underbrush for a moment or two, but keep straight on, past gardens and weekend houses, always with the river and railway and the N120 roadway in the distance to the left. One somewhat confusing intersection has yellow arrows pointing both up a mountain road and down toward the highway. Go LEFT, following the fresher set of arrows. The path is clearly marked from there on, and follows a pretty route much nearer the riverbank.

3.1km Vilamartín (outskirts near river)

Restaurants, a hostel, and albergue. To reach the town turn right at the little bridge underpass at the entrance to the town. Albergue is straight ahead along the river, in the sports hall. (5 Euros, phone Salvador for keys at 680 602 423). Pharmacy, food stores, health center, cash machine. Hostel-Restaurant Marbella, 988 300 025.

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.

5.2km A Rúa de Valdeorras

All services, including a pilgrim information office and sello, often staffed by members of the local Camino Amigos group. In A Rua are restaurants, markets, wineries, and accommodation, including a sports complex near the river where pilgrims can sleep (clearly marked). Be sure to stock up for the road ahead.

H Hostel Niza: Dr. Vila, 30. Tel: 988 310 807 Central, near train station.

Hotel Espada (not recommended);

Hostal Taxi: 988 31 14 73;

H Pension Fabio: Rua Progreso, 201. Tel: 636 897 217; 626 876 691

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

Albergue Privado: Casa da Solaina. Rua de Fonte, atop the hill behind the Church of Fatima. Lovingly restored historic house in the oldest part of town, behind the Church of Fatima and near the camino, run by Camino supporters full of tales from local lore. Reserve at

sulma.arias@gmail.com or phone 988 311 614 or 616 124 521. Beds 9 Euro, meals extra. Horses, donkeys, and bicycles also accommodated.

This town once offered travelers several alternative paths on to Monforte de Lemos, but trail authorities recommend using a rugged and scenic northward route that passes through Quiroga. Waymarks are new wooden signposts with green lettering, and the old reliable yellow arrows.

A Rúa to Quiroga (28 km)

From A Rúa to Quiroga are 28 km without many services. Carry extra water and food. Leave A Rúa by climbing up Calle Currelada to the church of Our Lady of Fatima (look for the slate-roofed twin towers. Contrary to local tales, the church was not designed by Gaudi!) and heading for the N120 road. Arrows lead beneath the highway; make an immediate left (arrows are faint) and follow along the vineyard roads towards Quiroga. This is 7 km of asphalt walking on the OU-933, but there is practically no traffic. It is a walk of exceptional beauty above the Sil River, if you are lucky enough to walk on a fog-free day.

7km Alberedos

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. At the Lugo line begins the region romantically named Ribeira Sacra, or Holy River. Some say the holiness came from the many monasteries along the riverbanks; Ramon Perez cites others who believe the oak trees so abundant here were sacred to Celtic tribes, and later speakers confused “roble” (oak) with “ribeira” (river).

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 Alberedos and ends at the ancient gristmill at the valley bottom. There an arroyo meets the railroad track and the Sil. Here, in a grange called El Molino, lives an octogenarian

called Casimiro – 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. Round a bend in the road the camino enters

2.5km Montefurado

Twenty people live here now, but the monumental 18th century Church of St. 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 medullas 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.

A waymarked trail leads along a green path upward, and the LU-933 also conducts the hiker uphill again to Hermidon and along a long asphalt slog to:

8.5km Bendillo

Hamlet with an old mill and, just before, a small shrine, community olive-press, and welcome spring at the Ermita das Farrapas. More spectacular views.

9.5km Quiroga

Via Soldon (with a riverside snack stand during summer), Sequeiros and Torres Novais, with its ruined castle. The Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem built the castle and ran several pilgrim hospitals in the 14th century, probably attracted by the strategic lookout over the Sil River. The marked camino becomes fiddly and labor-intensive after Bendillo, in efforts to keep pilgrims off the busy N-120 highway. One continues along the up-and-down country lane that parallels the river after Soldon; others follow along the side of the LU-933 or N-120 highway into town, cutting out the hill-climbs on the old road to the castle.