

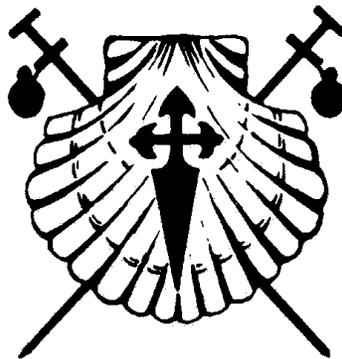
Confraternity of Saint James

Pilgrim Guides to Spain

4. Los Caminos del Norte

E: Camino del Salvador

León to Oviedo



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A Guide to the Camino del Salvador

From León to Oviedo

A route through the mountains



Introduction: This pilgrim route is an ancient one. When the Muslim conquerors swept through the Iberian peninsula, holy relics from Christian communities in the south travelled northward with the refugees, and found permanent homes in northern Spain. Many of them ended up in the Cathedral of the Holy Saviour in Oviedo, Asturias (above). Later on, Christian pilgrims from all over Europe were encouraged to honour the relics of Jesus and his apostles in Oviedo before travelling onwards, usually on the *Camino Primitivo*, to Santiago de Compostela. As one popular saying goes:

*He who travels to Santiago and not to El Salvador
Honours the servant and ignores the master.*

There still are sound reasons to travel this Camino. It bypasses the overcrowded second half of the Camino Francés beyond León,

and deposits the pilgrim on the *Camino Primitivo*, a “road less travelled” to Santiago. Oviedo is a unique and beautiful city, well worth visiting. Pilgrims are not a common sight, so they are often treated with care. And the scenery on this trail is among the most spectacular in all of Spain.

The route: The *Camino del Salvador* extends over some 120 km of roads and trails. It connects León, a major stop along the Camino Francés, to Oviedo, the start of the *Camino Primitivo* and a longtime pilgrimage destination in its own right. From León, it follows the east bank of the Río Bernesga for some 40 km of relatively flat river plain. There are small towns and stopping places. From Buiza onward for the next 25 km the path climbs over two significant ridges of the *Cordillera Cantábrica*, to *Puerto de Pajares*, a mountain pass at the León–Asturias frontier. It descends steeply to Puente de los Fierros, then winds its way through Asturian mountain towns and ends with a visit to the holy relics of the *Camera Santa* in Oviedo cathedral.

From Oviedo, the Santiago-bound pilgrim may continue on the spectacular, mountainous *Camino Primitivo*, or travel a few days northwards and connect with the Camino del Norte at the coast, at either Villaviciosa or Avilés. The *Camino del Salvador* is generally less remote than the *Camino Primitivo*, with the exception of the high-altitude kms before the *Puerto de Pajares*. It has some segments of asphalt walking, particularly when leaving León and entering Oviedo—but it also offers some breathtaking vistas of rural Spain in between.

Planning your Camino

An excellent Spanish guide has been translated into English and is available on the web: <http://caminodelsalvador.net/?cat=13> . Good information is also available on the website of the León-

Asturias Friends of the Camino, <http://www.caminosantiagoastur.com>. Both suggest stages, list the towns in between, describe accommodation, and show elevation gains. Their outline maps clarify several alternative routes, especially at the places where trails split and rejoin. The online guide, though extremely detailed and up-to-date, is 56 pages long and a bit bulky for trail use. You may want to annotate these pages with information from those online sources.



Weather/when to go: Weather in León province is very hot in July and August, and generally similar to that on the Camino Francés. The summer sun rises by 7 am, so consider an early start in hot-weather months. Weather in the high-altitude sections of the cordillera is highly variable and sometimes *dangerous* – especially if you travel outside the high summer season. Deep drifts of snow are a real possibility as early as November and late as April, and we experienced sleet, gale-force winds, and nearby lightning strikes during a sudden storm in mid-September. Travellers also report thick fog, heavy rain, and severe cold. Weather in Asturias can be markedly more damp than that on the León side.

Waterproofs and a hiking stick (or two) are essential.

Water along the route.

Looking at any map of the Salvador, and you'll see it is peppered with villages and towns. Hikers rarely go more than 8 or 10 km without finding a *fuenta* or meeting a villager willing to top-up a water bottle. The following towns have fountains: Cabanillas, La Robla, Puente de Alba, Peredilla, Pola de Gordón, Poladura de la

Tercia, Santa María del Arbas, Pajares, San Miguel, Llanos de Somerón, Puente de Fierros, Campomanes, Pola de Lena, Ujo, Santullano, Mieres, El Padrún, Olloniego. Confirmation of this information would be most helpful.

Suggested itineraries: (distances are not exact)

FOUR DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 – León to Pola de Gordón, 36 km

Day 2 – Pola de Gordón to Pajares, 29 km via Poladura de la Tercia

Day 3 – Pajares to Pola de Lena, 23 km

Day 4 – Pola de Lena to Oviedo, 33 km

FIVE DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 – León to La Robla, 27 km

Day 2 – La Robla to Poladura de la Tercia, 23 km

Day 3 – Poladura to Campomanes, 31 km

Day 4 – Campomanes to Mieres, 21 km

Day 5 – Mieres to Oviedo, 19 km

SEVEN DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 – León to La Robla, 27 km

Day 2 – La Robla to Buiza, 13 km

Day 3 – Buiza to Poladura de Tercia, 10 km, mountain

Day 4 – Poladura to Pajares, 15 km, mountain

Day 5 – Pajares to Pola de Lena, 23 km

Day 6 – Pola de Lena to Mieres, 14 km

Day 7 – Mieres to Oviedo, 19 km

NOTE on seven day itinerary: If you don't mind staying in private accommodations, consider changing days 5 and 6. Day 5 from Pajares to Campomanes (15 km) and Day 6 from Campomanes to Mieres (22 km), because the walk from Pajares to Campomanes can be challenging, whereas Campomanes to Mieres is flat.

Many towns along the way have hostels, hotels, and pensions available, so pilgrims may break up their days as their energy, condition, and budgets allow.

Albergues are provided in the following towns: León, Cabanillas, La Robla, Buiza, Poladura de la Tercia, Pajares pueblo, Pola de Lena, Mieres, and Oviedo.

Starting in León : León is well-served by buses. Route and fare information is available at www.alsa.es or www.movelia.es. León is also a rail junction. Check www.renfe.es. The RENFE website can be frustrating to use; if you are unsuccessful and don't mind paying a fee, try Raileurope or Petrabax online. www.db.de is useful.

Pilgrims departing for the Salvador the following day – even if they do not walk into León -- are permitted to spend the night in the pilgrim albergue at the Convent of the Madres Benedictinas, Plaza Santa María del Camino. There are 144 beds in four dormitories. The albergue opens at 11:00 a.m. and charges 5 Euros per person.

If you spend more than a night in León, or if you prefer private accommodation, options range from the luxurious Parador San Marcos (where the Salvador separates from the Camino Francés), to comfortable mid-range hotels such as the Posada Regia, to low

priced pensiones. Pensión Blanca, Calle Villafranca no. 2 (corner with the main commercial street, the Avenida Ordoño) is well located, spotlessly clean, and offers free breakfast, free use of kitchen and refrigerator, a computer in the common area, and laundry service. Single room with shared bath, 23 euros; single room with private bath, 27 euros. Phone : 987 251 991 OR 678 660 244.

A Credential for the Salvador

In 2012, a group of Salvador *aficionados* led by an Asturian miner called Ender, created a special credential for the Camino del Salvador. Available at the Benedictine albergue (Madres Benedictinas) in León, it contains information on all albergues and towns along the route. Upon completion of the Salvador in Oviedo, a "Salvadorana" (certificate of completion) is available in the Oviedo albergue. A different Salvadorana is available in the Cathedral.

A note on waymarking

From León to Poladura de la Tercia trail marking is good, if a bit sparse at times. At least until the town of Buiza, the Camino is marked with wooden posts (*mojones* in Spanish) decorated with stick figure pilgrims and a yellow arrow to indicate the way. These were erected in 2008 by Cuatro Valles, a local tourism association, which in 2009 also released a more-or-less helpful guide to the towns along the trails. The booklet is free and available at tourist offices in León, La Robla, and Mieres.

The most remote part of this route is from Poladura de la Tercia to Santa María del Arbas. Until 2011, this part of the Camino was poorly marked and potentially dangerous. Thanks to the loving work of Ender and his group, this spectacular section is now extremely well marked with custom-made metal yellow arrows and scallop shells, inserted into the ground on metal stakes.

At the church of Sta. María del Arbas, very near the mountain pass of Pajares, the waymarking changes to the more familiar scallop shell ceramic markers. From here to Oviedo, the marking is quite good, but remember: in Asturias, due to some hard-headed regional reasoning, the scallop-shell directional guide is mounted BACKWARD. That is, in Asturias, the “hinge side” of the scallop shell points the way, and not the radiating lines.

[Further Note for 2015]

Please remember that this Guide was compiled in 2010 and updated in 2013. Some prices and availability will have changed. All feedback gratefully received office@csj.org.uk.]



Cathedral of Santa María de León

Walking Instructions

Start at the San Marcos Parador, a León landmark that stands alongside the River Bernesga. A statue of a peregrino in front of the parador marks the split between the Camino Francés and the Camino del Salvador. Waterways will be your companions from here almost all the way to Oviedo, but the trip starts out with the river at your back. Walk along the front of the Parador away from the river, to the Avenida de los Peregrinos, to a roundabout with a small airplane on a pole in the middle. From here, straight ahead, you will see the first wooden *mojon*. For the first part of this Camino (up to Buiza, more or less) the markers are about waist high and have a yellow stick figure of a hiker with a walking stick.

The next few kms take you through suburban housing estates, a few small towns, fields, and a nature park of pine forest. There is not much elevation gain.

If you want to cut 8 km off this day, you can take Bus #12 from the Plaza de Santo Domingo in León out to Carbajal de la Legua. That will get you through León's suburban sprawl. An ALSA bus runs a regular route from León's central bus station to La Robla, Pola de Gordón, and Pola de Lena. Renfe trains also serve several towns along the route. In Asturias, the narrow-gauge FEVE railroad runs a commuter train route from Puente de Fierros to Oviedo centre, with stops in many towns along the Camino.

Cabanillas (about 16 kms from León): This small village keeps an equally small albergue. Bring your own food, as there are no stores or bars/restaurants.

La Robla (about 10 kms from Cabanillas) has several restaurants and general commerce. An excellent albergue with 16 beds and a washing machine opened in 2012. It is on the Camino at the very end of town, adjacent to a municipal park. You must call the hospitalero (Carlos) at 659 093 647. The Staff at the tourist office can call him for you; their office is inside the doors of the town hall (ayuntamiento) on Calle Mayor. The office has a sello and a tourist guide of the Salvador. They will also call ahead to Poladura de la Tercia if you plan to stay there for a room and/or meal.

We had a good meal in Meson la Bogadera close to the Camino in the Calle Plaza de la Constitucion, 9. Private accommodation can be found at the Hostal Ordonez de Celis, on the Calle Ramon y Cajal, 5. Tel: 987 572 342.

Ermita del Buen Suceso is a charming little hermitage along the N620 about three kms from La Robla. It may be open, and it has a fuente out front. Across the highway is the popular Cafeteria del Buen Suceso, which offers breakfasts and a good-value *Menu del Dia*.

Pola de Gordón (10 km from La Robla) has two supermarkets, restaurants, commerce and private accommodations: Pensión El Arenal, Calle Arenal, 4. Tel: 987 577 427. Individual room with bath 18E. Pensión 15 de Mayo, tel: 696 404 370. Hotel Valle de Gordón (2**), Capitan Lozano 37 (675 159 259). 50 euros for two. Dinner 12 euros a person.

The Meson de Antonio, at the main downtown crossroads, is run by the family that owns the Pensión Arenal. They serve a good *Menú del Día* each afternoon, and breakfast starting at 7 a.m. with fresh-baked croissants. Take food with you when you leave Pola de Gordón, as grocery stores and restaurants are rare for the next couple of days. Leaving Pola de Gordón, head into the mountains on a paved secondary road.

Buiza (5 km from Pola de Gordón). Buiza keeps a municipal albergue in the refurbished school building on the right as you enter the town. Some report a bar for food, but it only opens at the whim of the owner. If you stay in Buiza, you are advised to carry your own food. The albergue offers a small kitchen with only microwave cooking capacity. To have the place opened, walk up the main street to a small green garden gate on the right, where a radio blasts Top-40 hits night and day. That is La Casa de Angel, where the hospitalero lives. Bang loud and long on the door, and someone will arrive soon to help you out.

[Update 2014: From Damian Cox

Page 11 Buiza

- No bar in the village
- The green gate has gone but the radio may still be playing.
- Snow certainly can be expected from November –April
- That in case of emergency in the summer months, ask for “el inglés” who may be able to help out.]



The route splits in Buiza

In Buiza the Camino takes you to the parish church, where the path splits. A clear marking points the way to Villasimpliz on the right, or the Camino route uphill to the left. If you take the option to Villasimpliz, you will end up walking on the N630 highway for many kms up to the Puerto de Pajares. This option is recommended only in case of bad weather or heavy snow. The leftward and better-waymarked route goes to Poladura de Tercia; it goes through remote mountain areas with plentiful wildlife and beautiful views. *Snow lies deep on the northward-facing stretches of this path well into April, so be prepared.*



In the mountains after Buiza

The 9.6 kms from Buiza to Poladura start with a moderately steep climb, taking you past a towering rock named *Las Forcadas de San Anton*. It then reaches an upland meadow, which may be the site of the monastery of San Anton which looked after travellers on this route in the Middle Ages. You reach the summit at 1401 m. and there is a cleared track for the gas pipeline crossing the Camino at right angles. From the summit the path makes a steep descent through woodland. Pass a water control house with a door badly damaged by floods, and shortly afterwards, the track does a hairpin right turn with another water control house just beyond the turn.

➤ This little fork is known as “the Great Divide.” It used to be easy to go wrong here. Unless you need to return to civilization right away, you do NOT want to



continue on the wide track through the gorge, which will take you to into the village of Rodiezmo, and from there to many kms of road-walking on the N-630. Look to your left past the little shed and you will see a waymarked path running diagonally on the contour along the face of the cliff. As of 2012, this turn is very well marked. The contour path skirts round the mountains with terrific views, and takes you westward over meadows and along the valley to Poladura de la Tercia. The final km of the waymarked path into Poladura passes through much overgrowth and a deep creek. Until 2013, it was difficult to stay dry on this section. Once again, Ender and his friends came to the rescue and built a sturdy wooden bridge over the creek. A medieval lane then takes you into Poladura.

Be aware that semi-wild horses and cattle wander free in this area. They may be curious, (especially if you are carrying fruit with you), but none so far has proved dangerous.

Poladura de la Tercia (9.6 km from Buiza): Private accommodation at La Posada del Embrujo: <http://www.toprural.com/ficha/es.cfm/idp/24/ids/4433.htm>. Tel : 987 69 83 13 or 659 030 282. Recommended. 42 euros for two people; dinner 15 euros a person. There is an albergue in the old school in Poladura, but reports from 2013 say it is not maintained and very dirty. The albergue is usually unlocked, but if you need to speak with someone, the hospitalero Esteban works at La Posada. There are no cafes or shops; the only bar is in the Posada. They provide meals, but advance notice is required; if they do not know you are coming, they may not have food to cook for you. The proprietors are pilgrim-friendly and know the route.



The next leg of the journey requires some forethought. It is the highest-altitude and most remote section of this Camino, and your mobile phone probably will not work there. Snow, sometimes drifts hip-deep, stays on the path and hides the waymarks well before and after the winter is felt in the valley. Listen to weather reports, and keep a sharp eye on the sky. Carry a compass or a walking navigator, a good map, and warm, waterproof layers. If walking alone you are advised to inform others of your time of departure and estimated time of arrival at your planned destination.

The path from Poladura starts out along the tarmac road for a hundred metres, crosses a creek and then goes off across a field to the right (marked by a *mojon* just beyond a metal gate on the right). The path is now extremely well marked with Ender's arrows and scallop shells.

The first few kms go up, up, up past mountainsides of grazing mares and foals.

When you reach the top, a wide valley opens up before you. The scenery is splendid, and Ender's markings follow along the lip of the valley until it dips down to a natural notch, a shepherds' trail to the next valley. The path leads uphill again and to the left, following the contour of the cliff-face among sharp vertical rock formations that give this range its name, the "Sierra de Cuchillos," or "knife mountains."

At the highest point of the Salvador, El Canto de la Tusa (1568 m), Ender has placed a lovingly crafted cross, visible for long distances in many directions. It is a beautiful spot for

contemplation, the Camino del Salvador's answer to the Cruz de Hierro on the Camino Francés.



After the cross, the Camino descends a bowl-like valley criss-crossed with cattle trails; keep left, cross the creek, and you will be at the base of yet another sharp uphill climb. From here you can see down the valley to the N-360 and the little town of Busdongo, with its train station and mountain hostels. You will not walk into Busdongo, but it is a good point of reference. A signal tower blinks from the peak of the hill you are climbing, but a *mojon* will send you off to the left when you reach the top.

Follow the signs downhill, where the markings take you through a scrubby hillside wound with barbed wire. Head northeast, (rightward) following a fallen barbed-wire fence, and the markings lead left, down a pretty farm road, past a waterfall, and through a wide cow pasture toward the N-630 and Santa María de Arbas. (If all else fails, follow the high-tension powerline down the hillside to the highway. **Take great care on the final descent, which is dangerously steep.**)

From Poladura to Santa María by this route is 9.3 km, but the going is rugged... especially when the weather turns nasty.

Santa María de Arbas del Puerto (approximately 8 km from Rodiezmo on the highway option and 9.3 km over the mountains from Poladura de la Tercia). In Santa María de Arbas del Puerto is a beautiful Romanesque church and former pilgrim hospital, with *sello*. Sunday Mass at 1 p.m., keys usually available at the *meson* across the road. In the *meson* car park is a fountain for refilling water bottles.

From Santa María, the “official” route (as described on pps. 35-36 of the guide at caminodelsalvador.net) goes to the east (right side) of the highway, but it is not well marked, it is populated by bulls and barbed wire, and it bypasses Puerto de Pajares with its welcoming bar. Most people just stay on the side of the highway for the remaining km to the mountain pass, the Puerto de Pajares. If you do wish to take the off-road route, you can detour down to the bar at the Puerto de Pajares and return after having your break.



Upwards towards the Puerto de Pajares

The Puerto de Pajares is the dividing line between León and Asturias. This is not a town, just a mountain pass; the town of Pajares is further on. The pass offers beautiful views and a

family-run bar on the east (right) side of the road that serves sandwiches and full meals. That establishment is closed on Mondays. There is a now-closed Parador on the west side of the highway (for sale in 2013), and its parking lot is a popular stopping-place for travellers and truck drivers.



View from Puerto de Pajares

Leaving Puerto de Pajares, you have three options.

1. You can stay on the side of the N630 for 5 kms to the town of Pajares. This is NOT recommended because there is very little hard shoulder, and you may find a lot of truck traffic. The last kilometre or two has a pavement, but the rest does not, and you will have to walk on the right side of the highway, because the left side has no hard shoulder in many places.
2. From the bar on the right side of the road, you can find your way to return to the marked Camino. One pilgrim from

August 2013 found this alternative “difficult and confusing,” with overgrowth, barbed wire, etc. You will ascend and then descend to the N-630 at the point where there are flashing lights and a runaway truck sand pit. Cross the N-630 and you have a steep rocky descent to verdant pastures and bucolic scenery. (A variant of this option would be to stay on the N-630 for 500 m from the parador – when you come to the flashing lights, take the turn-off on the left and continue; this has the advantage of avoiding the overgrowth and barbed wire, but has the disadvantage that you are on the side of a busy highway for 500 m.)

3. Right in front of the parador (which is on the left side of the N-630) there is a pole with a yellow arrow. It takes you off road immediately. One of us took this route in June 2012 and it joins up with alternative number two after the initial descent.

The path down from the N-630 begins with a steep and stony downhill stretch, but it is pretty, passing through forests and pastures. A few kms along is a well-marked split, a choice between continuing downhill to San Miguel (picturesque, but no place to stay) or the town of Pajares (not the mountain pass). Pajares has a long tradition of pilgrim hospitality, and a spotlessly clean and well-staffed albergue. The phone number of the hospitalera is on the door. From Pajares you do not backtrack to the split, but take a direct route down to San Miguel.

Pajares (14 kms from Poladura). The albergue in Pajares (capacity for 16 in bunks in two separate rooms) is in the house where the school teacher once lived. Showers are very hot, and there are room heaters that you can regulate yourself. Views are

top-notch! There is a minimal kitchen, but nowhere to buy groceries – coffee and tea are supplied. The hospitalera may cook dinner, 9 euros, if enough pilgrims show interest.

Food is served at the Taberna de las Cortinas, a *meson* at the top of the town along the highway. A friendly couple bought the place in 2012, and work hard to overcome the bad press earned by the previous proprietors. The kitchen is open for home-cooked meals anytime the doors are open. Take something extra back with you to the albergue, as breakfast is not available anywhere in town.

If you prefer private accommodation, the Posada Real Pajares has 4 rooms and charges 30 euros a person. It is on the way out of town on the highway; all facilities (kitchen, washing machine) available to guests (no wifi or PC). Information on their website: <http://www.posadapajares.com/>

The Camino descends from Pajares/Payares to the valley adjacent, to the hamlet of San Miguel del Río. It gradually ascends to ridges along the west side of the bucolic valley, finally emerging in the town of Campomanes. The way is well marked and free of noise from trains or highways. If bad weather makes off-road walking too messy or dangerous, you can walk along the N-630, taking your chances with steep gradients and smoking brakes. There are remnants of an older drovers' path on the east side of the valley, passing through little towns like Flor de Acebo, Romia de Arriba, Navedo, and La Muela, but the marking is very poor and footing bad in some areas. It is preferable to stay with the Camino.

To follow the Camino from the town of Pajares, turn left going out of the albergue, and follow the street up to the highway. After about a minute's walking you will see the "Leaving Pajares"

sign (Pajares with a red line diagonally through it) – the path to San Miguel del Río cuts down the bank to the left. This path takes you down two steep kms through beautiful countryside. It is used by all-terrain vehicles, which means the grade is not so steep that you have to scramble.

At San Miguel follow the signs along a little-used rural road to Santa Marina, the next little pueblo. When you near Santa Marina, you will see a scallop shell pointing you straight ahead, and a road sign pointing uphill to the left to Santa Marina. If you follow the Camino marking, you will end up on the N-630 highway. Follow the road to Santa Marina, and don't worry -- the Camino arrows reappear soon.

When you get into town, continue to the church at the end of the village. On the right is a blue gate. Pass through it (making sure to close it again), and continue straight on. You pass through several gates and cross a few fields, making a gentle ascent through beautiful but sometime overgrown countryside. Two kms on is Llanos de Somerón, with a good fuente; the next 4 kms follow along a paved rural road to Puente de los Fierros. Here all the paths from Pajares again converge, just in time to make another decision.



From Pajares to Puente de los Fierros

In **Puente de los Fierros** (9 km from Pajares), you choose again which side of the riverbank to follow: the “right side” of the valley (meaning along the N-630) or the “left side,” another quiet, rural walk. The split comes before you cross the bridge that gives Puente de los Fierros its name. On the bank on the left of the lane are painted two yellow arrows. One points upward, and indicating “Fresnedo” on a little path—that’s the one to take for the off road route. The other direction says “La Frecha”, and it follows along the highway to Campomanes.

The Fresnedo path is one of the most bucolic and peaceful of all the Spanish caminos. From Puente de los Fierros it tracks along the face of the valley to Fresnedo and onward through hardwood forests and flowery meadows, past ghost villages, crumbling stone barns and tiny hermitages. Views are breathtaking. The way was well marked and clear in 2012, a project of the Asturian

Forestry Commission, but reportedly somewhat overgrown in July 2013. Wear long sleeves and trousers and be careful of ticks.

From semi-abandoned Herias it's only a couple of kms to Campomanes, where the Camino once again meets the N-630. Along this stretch it is essential to recall you are in Asturias, where the scallop-shell directional signs are reversed – follow the hinge of the scallop, not the lines radiating outward!

In **Campomanes** (6.5 km from Pte. de los Fierros) are restaurants, commerce, and private accommodation. Hospedaje Senda del Huerna (a 2 ** hostel), Avenida del Huerna, 8, 1D. Double room 38 euros for two. Tel: 985 496 447 OR 675 654 550. Also Pensión Casa del Abad. Tel: 985 49 65 78 OR 670 262 036.

From Campomanes the Camino used to follow the N-630, but in 2012, Ender and Friends found a better way. Follow the arrows out of Campomanes, cross the N-630, and walk straight ahead across the river on a footbridge. Turn left, parallel to the river for 3 kms, then pass through a small tunnel and turn right. Three hundred meters away, up a well-marked path, stands the pre-Romanesque church of Santa Cristina de Lena.



Pre-romaneseque church at Santa Cristina de Lena.

The beautiful, severe little church was built in the mid-800s, and has, it is said, 365 corners formed by its many stout buttress-like columns. (Caretaker María says that's nonsense.) Lawns outside offer great picnic spots. It is beautiful and peaceful.

Hours of Santa Cristina de Lena church: 11-1 and 4:30-6:00; closed Monday (or phone María at 985-490-525 or 609-942-153). Admission 1 Euro; sello. There is no need to retrace your steps; a path takes you downhill to rejoin the Camino.

Pola de Lena (7 km from Campomanes and about 4 km from the church of Santa Cristina). Pola de Lena is a big town with private accommodations, an albergue, shops, restaurants, bars, and a health centre. Make sure to wander the town in the evening and into a Sidreria to sample *sidra*, the strong apple cider that's poured into big glasses from high altitudes.

The albergue is up the hill by the train station, behind the big central church, on the second floor of a building full of social services and association offices. If you arrive during business hours the attendant will give you keys to access the building as well as the albergue. Accommodation comprises two gender-segregated dormitories. The female side has bunks for at least 16 people. No kitchen, but in 2012 there was a microwave. On weekdays the showers have plenty of hot water, and internet is available on the main floor at a pilgrim-friendly youth centre. The building is closed on weekends, though, so pilgrims must go to the police station on the Plaza Mayor for the key...and do without hot water!

A pilgrim in July 2013 found the albergue dirty and not well maintained.

Private Accommodation in Pola de Lena:

Hotel La Payareta (2** hotel), Menendez Pidal, 12. Tel. 985 493 975 (rooms 35E).

Hotel Lena (1* hotel), La Playa, 4. Tel: 985 493 329.

Hotel Dona Gaudiosa (1 * hotel), Munon Fondero, 38. Tel. 985 490 625.

Apparently, no bars open in Pola de Lena before 8 am, but a good breakfast and fresh bread can be had at the Confiteria Vienna, a fancy bakery on the left side of the main street as you head out of town. The Camino follows a well-marked stretch of two-lane road with narrow verges.

Pilgrims pressed for time or plagued by injury can take the Feve commuter train in Pola de Lena northward with stops in Mieres, Ollaniego, and Oviedo.

Ujo (6 km from Pola de Lena). Take special care, because there are sharp bends and truck traffic on the two-lane road from Pola de Lena. Just before arriving in Ujo, the arrows point to the river walk all the way to Mieres. If you want coffee, food, a bank, or a shop, just go straight into town and pick up the river path again when you leave.

In Ujo are a much-remodelled Romanesque church and a good coffee and pastry shop on the square.

In **Mieres** (8 km from Ujo), the arrows point across the pedestrian bridge and straight into town, where they then disappear. Go straight on up the street named Manuel Llana until it ends at a T, then head left onto Teodorío Cuesta. Keep going straight past a church, past a plaza with a statue of a man pouring sidra from over his shoulder. (Farmacia on the right here is very pilgrim-friendly: the pharmacist proudly displays his own

pilgrim credencial to all comers.) A cement plant appears on your left: the path passes below several highway bridges.

The Mieres albergue is a former school recently remodelled, about 50 m off the Camino on the outskirts of town in a neighbourhood called "La Pena." It is well marked and not far from the plaza with the cider-pouring statue. It has 18 beds. The albergue technically opens at 5 p.m., but the hospitalero Paulino will open earlier if he can. Call him at 985-463-266 or 665-523-426. In August 2013, a pilgrim said local police told her the albergue was closed, but she persisted and was successful. The police might not have the most up to date information, and this albergue was closed for a while in 2012. It is now open for business!

There are also pensiones and hotels in the town of Mieres itself: Pensión La Pena. 985 46 676 15 or 985 46 13 53. There is also a hostel above a bar on the Camino on the way out of town (34 euros).

From Pola de Lena to Oviedo, it's a long 33 kms. Staying in Mieres breaks that day into a 14 km day (Pola to Mieres) and a 19 km day (Mieres to Oviedo). To help you decide, we offer a short synopsis of those 19 kms into Oviedo:

It is three climbs. From Mieres the path ascends 200 meters and then descends to the town of Olloniego (bars/commerce). From there, another 200 meter climb goes to Manzanedo, followed by another descent. One more ascent of about 100 m takes you to a hill overlooking Oviedo.

Whether you sleep in Mieres or not, the Camino leaves town via Altu del Padrún. This is a 5 km uphill hike on a secondary road,

through several villages. In Aguilar you may meet Mari Angeles, a friendly lady who offers prayers, chatter, and fresh spring water to tired pilgrims. In the village of Padrun is a bar/sidreria. Just beyond is a clearly marked scallop shell that points the way off the pavement and onto a dirt track. The Camino now alternates between tracks and roads. Two kms of steady descent end in Olloniego.

In **Olloniego** (about 14 kms from Mieres), there are restaurants and bars but no place to sleep. The Camino follows the main street of the town and all its commerce. On the way out of town is a mouldering medieval tower and an ancient bridge that has lost its river.

Cross a lovely 17th-century toll bridge across the Río Nalon, and a scallop shell on the other side points you straight up through a forest for about a km, the beginning of the second ascent. At the top you emerge onto the road next to a place Centro Reto, where a shady, grassy space offers an opportunity to rest... if no animals are grazing there.

After the Centro Reto are more upward tracks, more ascent, but the climbs are not strenuous. Just past the hamlet of Manzanedo the city of Oviedo will appear in the distance below – but do not be misled into thinking that it's all downhill from here!

Here the shells point the way off and on secondary roads and medieval tracks. Paths are brambly in places, sometimes quite narrow, but they have a nice grade of descent and ascent and are well waymarked. A final, 100m ascent ends on a grassy hilltop overlooking Oviedo. There begin the residential suburbs, and the historic city center is not far away.



Oviedo

Oviedo (about 9 kms from Olloniego), offers a traveller many accommodation choices, including an albergue, hotels and pensiones. In 2010 the Camino Association of Asturias and León opened a new albergue in a family residence on Calle Adolfo Posada #3. It offers 30 beds, distributed over five bedrooms. It opens at 3:00 p.m. in high season; 5:00 p.m. in winter.

For private lodging, we can recommend the Hostal Arcos, Calle Magdalena, 3. Tel: 985 214 773; www.hostal-arcos.com. Well located in the old town adjacent to the Plaza del Ayuntamiento and close to the municipal library, with its 20 computers and free internet.

Hotel Ovetense, Calle San Juan 6, is another reasonable option in the old town with a good, popular restaurant downstairs.

A visit to the cathedral is essential. Pilgrims traditionally stop to pray before the beautiful statue of El Salvador, on a column in the right nave on the way to the altar. In an adjacent chapel is the ticket desk for the diocesan museum and the *Camara Santa*, an

ancient underground shrine at the centre of Asturian ethnic identity. Sellos are available at the cathedral sacristy. Pilgrims can view the shrine for free, but must pay the usual 2 Euros to view the other museum treasures. A *Salvadorana* (certificate of completion) is available here.

Hours to visit the cathedral: Monday-Friday 10:00–14:00 and 16:00-19:00; Saturday 10:00-14:00 and 16:00-18:00; closed to tourism on Sundays and holidays.

Many pilgrims stay an extra day in Oviedo to enjoy the beautiful city and to visit the pre-romanesque churches on Mt. Naranco. One time-saving tip is to visit the monuments in the morning, on your way out of town. It is an easy 4 km walk up to the site, and the route joins with the Camino Primitivo nearby. Esclampero, an 8 or 9 km walk beyond Oviedo, has an albergue and a couple of restaurants. That gets you started on the *Camino Primitivo*, and makes it easy to reach Cornellana the following day.

A visit to the church (San Miguel de Lillo) and the palace (Santa María de Naranco), is highly recommended. These two pre-romanesque monuments date from the 9th century. They open at 9:30 or 10 a.m. depending on time of year. You must take a guided visit, but these are not hurried at all. The two sites are about a 3 minute walk apart from each other and are unique. The palace is the only non-religious pre-romanesque site remaining in Asturias, and both are open on Mondays! Winter hours (Oct. 1-March 31): Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00 -13:00; 15:00 - 17:00. Sunday and Monday, 10:00 - 13:00. Summer hours (April 1 - Sept. 30): Tuesday - Saturday, 9:30 -13:30; 15:30 - 17:30. Sunday and Monday, 9:30 -13:30. Public buses also run to the Naranco sites from the train station. Bus #10 costs 1.50 euros;

ask the driver when to get off for San Miguel. It is the penultimate stop, but you won't know that unless you ask.

The *Camino del Salvador* is not for everyone – it is challenging even to experienced hikers and pilgrims. It offers spectacular scenery, solitude, friendly townspeople, great food and drink, and ample accommodation, compressed into a pilgrimage of less than a week's duration.

We hope this guide is useful to those who follow us on the trail, and we strive to keep it up-to-date and accurate. If you have any comments, corrections or additions to make, please contact Rebrites@yahoo.com. Many thanks are due to Pete, Susanna, Stuart, Gunnar, Piers Nicholson and other pilgrims who took the time to comment, and add to proposed revisions.

You may also care to browse:

Rebekah Scott's Blog with further information on this Route:
www.moratinoslife.blogspot.com

Grant Spangler's Camino website has a Google Interactive map of the Camino Salvador. <http://www.elcaminosantiago.com/Camino-Santiago-Map-Camino-del-Salvador-Google.htm>

Piers Nicholson contributed charts and information to the original version of this guide. His Website offers GPS points, maps, photos, and further information:
http://www.santiago-compostela.net/salvador/index_sa_en.html

Laurie Reynolds' photo gallery of this route from 2008:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/laurie.reynolds/CaminoPrimitivo1#>

Pictures of her 2012 Salvador are here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/104105778729242194944/CaminoDelSalvador2012?authkey=Gv1sRgCKSok6yontzEhwE>

Her blog from 2012 begins here:

<http://caminovadiniense.blogspot.com/2012/06/walking-again.html>

Gunnar Walgraeve's photos from his 2013 Camino del Salvador can be found here:

www.radiobuencamino.net Click on "news" and then on "read more" to gain access.