

A Guide to the Camino de Invierno.
January 12, 2016

The Camino de Invierno is a waymarked alternative walking/bicycle route to Santiago. From its start in Ponferrada it goes along riverbanks, climbs mountains, and passes through wilderness, farmlands, and small towns of the Bierzo region of León and all four of Galicia's provinces. Depending on which alternatives are chosen along the way, the Invierno adds up to roughly 260 km into Santiago. It has a fair amount of ups and downs, particularly between Ponferrada and Las Médulas, between Quiroga and Monforte de Lemos, and between the church at Diomondi and Chantada.

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

Monforte de Lemos, 130 km. from Santiago, is the accepted starting point for walking pilgrims determined to earn a Compostela. Historic information is vague regarding the use of this path as a pilgrimage road to Santiago. Proponents say this medieval route became "The Winter Way" during the Camino heyday, offering an alternative to the snowy winter weather of O Cebreiro and dangerous floods on the Río Valcarce. Church documents from the Middle Ages refer to pilgrim hospitals, churches and other pilgrim-related sites along this Way, but some groups, including the Asociación Gallega de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, dispute their historical authenticity. Santiago de Compostela notwithstanding, this route, which follows the contours of the Sil River gorge, has been in use at least since Roman times, primarily as a track for moving mineral wealth out of the region.

For many years, the Xunta (the regional government of Galicia) had been promising an "official recognition." Finally, in 2015, the official recognition came in a rather oblique way. Without any official announcement, the Xunta's published "Master Plan" of all Caminos to Santiago included the Camino de Invierno. This means that more promotion and spending of money should be forthcoming. Albergues are sorely lacking, with only a couple of youth hostels and two pilgrim albergues (one in Xagoaza and one in the house of Asún in A Rúa). Nevertheless, and in spite of the Xunta's foot-dragging, the Archbishop of Santiago has for years authorized the Pilgrims' Office to grant Compostelas to pilgrims who complete the Camino de Invierno.

The marking on this Camino has improved dramatically since I first walked in 2010. What has also changed is the level of local awareness. In 2010, very few people had any idea about the Camino de Invierno. In 2015, that awareness had also increased a lot; townspeople are now asking their government officials to open albergues, because they know that pilgrim traffic boosts the local economy. They can also frequently point you back to the arrows if you get lost.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Albergues: There are currently four albergues along the Invierno before it joins the Via de la Plata after Lalín. Two are pilgrim-specific (in Xagoaza and A Rúa) and two are not (Vilamartín and Quiroga). In the past, municipal sports centers have opened their doors to pilgrims, but this practice seems to be changing. This is actually in some ways a positive development, because it undoubtedly indicates that the pilgrim traffic is increasing and that opening up municipal buildings is becoming more of a hassle. The guide lists phone numbers for polideportivos and a few other municipal facilities (like the Centro Social in Priaranza del Bierzo), but you should check in advance if you wish to sleep there. Private accommodation along the route is very adequate, but some of the daily stages can be long. Pilgrims should not hesitate to ask at the

neighborhood park bench or bar about where inexpensive rooms can be found in town. As a last resort, ask local police or the Guardia Civil for help.

Invierno Associations: There are two Friends of the Camino de Invierno Associations with good websites. Each has published its own guidebook. One group is located in the Monforte-Chantada area. Its name is the Asociación Caminos a Santiago de la Ribeira Sacra, (www.caminodeinvierno.com). Its guidebook is described here, (<http://caminodeinvierno.com/content/gu%C3%AD-del-camino-de-invierno-santiago-por-aidamen%C3%A9ndez-lorenzo>)

The other association is located in O Barco de Valdeorras, (<http://caminodeinvierno.es/>). This group is called Asociación Amigos do Camino de Santiago por Valdeorras. Its guidebook is described on the main page of its website. The president of the Valdeorras organization is Asún, the owner of the albergue in A Rúa. She can be reached via email at asociacionvaldeorras@hotmail.com. Telephone is 616 124 521. Many GPS maps of the route are available at wikiloc.com. The author of the best tracks is MYFAIR.

There is a third group that promotes the Camino de Invierno, and that is the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago del Bierzo. (<http://www.amigoscaminobierzo.org/>) Although their activities focus primarily on the Camino Francés, they are beginning to work more with the Camino de Invierno. The group has an information hut in Ponferrada, down a short distance from the municipal albergue and right at the point where the Invierno splits from the Francés. Avenida del Castillo, 106 (Caseta de Madera) 24400 Ponferrada. Tel 987 419 283. The president of the organization, Roger Morán de la Cruz, is a very nice and helpful person. Unfortunately the hut has very irregular hours, so you should not count on getting necessary information there.

Accommodation: Although we have tried to provide full and current information on available options, we may have missed something. Helpful websites include www.infohostal.com and www.turgalicia.com.

Bars and cafés: This guide notes the location of (hopefully nearly all) bars and cafés along the route. But you should be aware that all of them are likely to be closed one day a week, and many of them do not open early in the morning (particularly on the weekends). Thus, outside of the bigger towns, it is better to carry what you want to consume rather than rely on places being open.

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

1. Ponferrada to Las Médulas. Gronze reports 27.2; the range of GPS tracks on the web and from forum members goes from 27-31. If you are uncomfortable with 30+ days, this is one you may want to break up into two (easy to do with a stop in Borrenes). That's because the day includes two ascents – one of about 300 m elevation gain, and the second of 250 – and the opportunity to take a break from walking to visit the Cornatel Castle, which is, IMO, worth a visit.
2. Quiroga to Monforte de Lemos. Gronze reports 35.4; GPS tracks run as high as 38, even 40. Again, there is an easy way to stop after the first 24 or so, in A Pobra de Brollón with its very pilgrim friendly pensión, As Viñas.
3. Chantada to Rodeiro. Gronze reports 25.8; GPS tracks run as high as 30. Much of the discrepancy comes from whether or not the pilgrim decided to detour off to visit the chapel at Alto do Faro. There is no obvious intermediate stop with lodging possibilities. Many of the small towns in the vicinity have casas rurales, though, so careful planning might come up with a good mid-point stopping point (with an owner willing to pick you up). Another option would be to have a taxi pick-up from Chantada (Taxi Rogelio Vazques, 982 440 512 or Taxi Carlos Nova, 619 44 51 13) or Rodeiro (Taxi Fabián Calvo, 986 790 137) at a point agreed upon ahead of time; the most obvious one would be up on the Alto do Faro. Although Rodeiro is closer to the Alto de Faro, you might prefer to spend extra time in Chantada over Rodeiro, just because it's a bigger place with a little more going on.

This guide is assembled from materials provided by two Spanish amigos associations, trail notes from Invierno pilgrims, web searches, and personal experiences. Rebekah Scott, the author of the first edition, has turned future editions over to me, and I hope to live up to her high standards. Like the trail itself, this is a work in progress and a labor of love. Updates rely on the contributions of people who walk the route, The Invierno now is a solitary and charming 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.

POSSIBLE STAGES ON THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

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

9 day walk

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

Day 2 to A Rúa (32.5 km)

Day 3 to Quiroga (26.3 km)

Day 4 to Monforte (35.4 km)

Day 5 to Chantada (29.7 km)

Day 6 to Rodeiro (25.8 km)

Day 7 to A Laxe (27.2 km)

Day 8 to Outeiro (34.1 km)
Day 9 to Santiago (16.7 km)

10 day walk

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

12 day walk

Day 1 to Las Médulas (27.2 km)
Day 2 to O Barco de Valdeorras (26.4 km)
Day 3 to A Rúa (14 km)
Day 4 to Quiroga (26.3 km)
Day 5 to A Pobra de Brollón (22.9 km)
Day 6 to one of two Casas Rurales beyond Monforte, either 20 or 24 km
Day 7 to Chantada (either 19 or 15km, depending on previous night)
Day 8 to Rodeiro (25.8 km)
Day 9 to Lalín (21.3 km)
Day 10 to Silleda (15.6 km)
Day 11 to Ponte Ulla (19.9 km)
Day 12 to Santiago (19.8 km)

Short Stages on the Invierno

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

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

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

Day 4 -- Barco to A Rúa (14.2 km)

Day 5 -- A Rúa to Montefurado (9.8). Take the train back to A Rúa, then the next day train back to Montefurado. If you're up for a 24 km day, you could combine day 4 and 5. Arrive in late morning in A Rúa, rest up a bit, and then walk to Montefurado in the afternoon. There is a train

back to A Rúa at 18.08, arriving at 18.17. The morning after, you can then get up slightly later, have a leisurely breakfast, and catch the 10.03 train from A Rúa, get off at Montefurado at 10.12, and continue from there onto Quiroga. No ‘cheating’ involved!

Day 6 -- Montefurado to Quiroga (16.5) (Having given this option to split A Rúa to Quiroga, though, I think that the A Rúa to Quiroga is a very do-able day for most pilgrims. There's an ascent at the end of the day up to the castle, and there is a bit of a slog into Quiroga through suburbs, but all in all an amazing day). Note though, that the only bar along the way, in Soldón, opens only in summer.

Day 7 -- Quiroga to A Pobra de Brollón (22.9 km)

Day 8 -- A Pobra de Brollón to one of five options, all of which make for a mid-20 kms day. Castrotañe, Torre Vilariño, Rectoral, Casa Santo Estevo, or Escairón. This option means that you will not spend a night in Monforte de Lemos, which is a nice place and has a fair amount to see and do. Monforte is about 12.5 km from A Pobra.

Day 9 -- Casa Rural to Chantada (about 15 or 16). This day is one to really savor -- first stop, romanesque beauty of a church at Diomondi, then the lovely (though hard on the knees) descent to the Miño River, then back up the other side through vineyards to Chantada. Absolutely a five star walk.

Day 10 -- Chantada to Rodeiro 25.8 km

Day 11 -- Rodeiro to Lalín 21.3 km

Day 12 -- Lalín to Silleda 15.6 km

Day 14 -- Silleda to Ponte Ulla 19.9 km

Day 15 -- Ponte Ulla to Santiago 19.8 km

WALKING THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

The Junta de Castilla y León has put mojones (granite waymarkers also called bollards in English) in every crucial spot of the Camino de Invierno, but Castilla y León ends 35kms from Ponferrada when you leave Puente de Domingo Flórez and enter Galicia. From that point, the marking is not uniform and has been undertaken by different authorities and associations. You'll find wooden arrows, green signs, yellow arrows, standard Camino mojones, yellow cast iron shells and arrows, marked loose stones on the ground -- in short, a potpourri of signage. In general, the Camino de Invierno is well marked. You will have to wean yourself of the expectation of arrows or markers of “confirmation,” that is, to assure you that you are going the right way. The markers are there when you need them, but often not in between.

Ponferrada to Las Médulas (27.2 km)

The Camino de Invierno is sometimes also marked as the Camino Real (Royal Road) through this part of the Bierzo region of León province. Pilgrims can begin the Invierno trail at the Albergue de Peregrinos San Nicolás de Flüe in Ponferrada, where credentials and a very basic map are available, but often little encouragement from hospitaleros. (987 413 381.) Not to worry: this part of the trail is well-marked.

In summer 2014, a private albergue, Alea, opened in Ponferrada. Calle Teleno, 33. 18 beds, 4 rooms, 10€, meals available. Highly recommended. tel. 987 40 41 33 OR 660 416 251. email: info@alberguealea.com.

In 2015, another private albergue opened, Albergue Guiana, which is on the main street, Avenida del Castillo, very close to the Invierno turn-off. Also recommended. 90 beds, 12 €. Tel. 987 40 93 27; email info@alberguiguiana.com

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

5.8km Toral de Merayo

Pharmacy, nice stone bridge, and a friendly Café Bar, located in the plaza. Bar opens late on Sundays, around 10 or 11. Wifi (reported very weak) (note that the pronunciation in Spanish is wee-fee), post office, shop just before bridge, and a bakery. Bar El Puente is just before the river, and Bar Valduera and Mesón Alondra are on the way out of town, but be aware that these bars, and many others on this route, have irregular opening hours, particularly on the weekends.

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

When leaving Toral de Merayo, 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:

2.6km Vilalibre de la Jurisdicción

Fountain, Bar la Estrella along the highway, but the Camino passes through the middle of town and does not pass that bar.

1.5 km Priaranza del Bierzo

Fountain, Farmacia, Bar in town with pharmacy on the right and another one along the road leaving town with small shop adjoining. (Bar Taberna “El Sitio de mi Recreo” nice patio and recommended as “cozy”).

The bar Taberna is actually in the village itself, if you turn right after Centro Social and keep straight on. On the way to the bar is also one fuente. From the bar proceed straight, out of the village and ascend on the dirt track. Much nicer than going through village on the main street.

The Centro Social may be available for pilgrims to spend the night. It is at the entrance to the village, at the point where you cross the N-536 and shortly before actually leaving the hamlet of Vilalibre. Pilgrims may also want to call the mayor José (682 591 483) or his secretary Nuria (647 993 963), who helped a pilgrim in 2014. Another possible phone is 987 420 806. No showers or beds, but toilets are clean and there is ample space to sleep. Aerobics mats available.

Leaving Priaranza, about 1.5 km 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 Santalla.”

2.0 km Santalla del Bierzo

Bar on the highway, grocery store in town center.

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

Be careful of your footing when the weather is wet, as part of the road is in shade most of the day, and sometimes is icy or slippery. There are two sets of arrows leading out of town, and a mojón which keeps you on the Camino. From here, you have a choice between a stiff climb on the path to the left to reach the castle, and staying on the road to bypass the castle and go directly on the road to Borrenes. If you take the climb, you will have a great view of the castle and arrive in:

3.7 km Villavieja

Spring-fed fountain, Church of Santiago. This hamlet in the base of the valley was once home to the serfs who worked for the inhabitants of the castle up above. An 8-bed municipal albergue was under construction here in April 2011, and news reports promised its opening in 2013, but so far we have seen nothing. A Casa Rural is in operation, however (advance booking required). <http://casaruralcornatel.es/>

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

Villavieja is one of the places where pilgrims repeatedly report having been scared by a very large mastiff, loose and barking loudly. The owner has so far refused to keep his dog tied up or inside. Though the barking is a bit unnerving, we have no reports of any bites.

1km Castillo de Cornatel

Recent reduction in visiting hours, so you may be disappointed. From what I have found, the castle is open Thursday through Sunday, 11-2 and open again in the afternoons. Free for

pilgrims, 2€ 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.” You can see pictures, to help you decide whether it’s worth a visit, here: http://www.rottodigital.com/vistas_cornatel.html

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:

3.7 km Borrenes

Nice, quiet village. Fountain in main square. It has a pharmacy and small shop of the typical “lights off but we carry everything” variety. The shop is closed on Sunday. Bar Casa Marisol does full meals and has a wifi signal. Prices are a bit steep, but maybe they are “special pilgrim prices.” 1.80€ for a coke is high.

Centro de Turismo Rural Cornatel, also run by Marisol (tel: 987 42 05 68 OR 686 055 938), offers meals and bed-and-breakfast accommodation. <http://www.escapadarural.com/casa-rural/leon/ctr-cornatel-medulas> 45€ double room, breakfast, 3€ each, evening meal, 10€. Some reports of very indifferent treatment; some pilgrims suspect that she saves her charm for the Brittany Ferry customers.

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

Space unlikely to be available for pilgrims in the polideportivo. If you want to check, call ayuntamiento at 987 420 510.

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 Carucedo, which is not on the Camino. There is however a hotel in Carucedo, Hotel Rural La Peregrina, <http://www.laperegrina.es/index.htm> 50€ individual room. Carucedo also has several bars/restaurants if you want to take a slight detour and then walk along the road up to Las Médulas.

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

6.9 km Las Médulas

The Las Médulas cultural area has been named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It was at one time the most important gold mine of the Roman Empire, and a long stretch of the Camino Invierno follows a road built to transport minerals out of the region. Along the river you will still see remains of Roman mines alongside their modern counterparts. Las Médulas, an environmental holocaust two millennia ago, is now a spectacular, spooky assembly of deep-red

cliffs and valleys, with wooded parkland and pathways threading in between. It is a popular summertime tourist attraction, with all the joyful merriment and price-fixing that goes with it.

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

Las Médulas has two tourist information centers (one at the entrance to the village on the right, and another in the village itself, close to the church), accommodation, cash machine, bars, grocery store at lavadero, and restaurants targeting weekenders hiking the many trails around the area. Its small museum is well worth a visit. You can also pick up a map describing various walks around the site. The absolute best place to go for a view is the Orellán lookout. There are several ways to get there. We unintentionally took the 6 km route, so be careful when following the map. The shortest way to Orellán is to go to the hotel complex Agoga, and take the road on the LEFT side of the complex. That will take you to the turn-off for the slightly steep but beautiful pedestrian path up through chestnut forests; when you are at the top, turn left and you will soon come to the large lookout area. A little beyond the mirador Orellán, there is an entrance to one of the galleries and you can walk through the tunnel channels that water was pumped through. Kind of spooky fun! <http://www.galeriaenlasmedulas.com/>

Eateries include Bar Reigo, Taberna Romana (described by one pilgrim as “bohemian but pilgrim-friendly), Restaurante Marif, but some of these may be closed when the tourists are gone.

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

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

Casa Socorro in town, rooms in a private home with access to kitchen. Call 987 422 858 (4 rooms, 30 € double, 20 € single). (To find the Casa Socorro, take a left from the lavadero, then right, then quick left; it is very close to the town church).

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. There is the possibility of a short detour to the left (perhaps 500 metres) to a beautiful ‘mirador’ with stunning views back over Las Médulas and the Bierzo valley. Though a sign at the top of the ascent tells you that Puente de Domingo Flórez is only 5.7 km away, don’t believe it. It’s actually 2 km more than that! The Camino descends along a mountain lane with views across the valley to distant mines and villages. Coming into Puente de Domingo Flórez, the mojones take you through a small hamlet on the outskirts of town. It will

seem that you are being directed to go to the left of the town. But after going through the hamlet, you will come to a small bridge that crosses the river. Turn right, cross the bridge, and you will be in:

8.1 km Puente de Domingo Flórez

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

The bridge you have crossed to enter Puente de Domingo Flórez ends in a T-junction. Turn left immediately and you will pass the first of two Claudio supermarkets.

Hostal Restaurante La Torre, nearly a km from the bridge you have just passed, is on the left on the Calle Chao do Marco. Tel: 987 460 589 OR 987 460 081. Email: info@hrlatorre.com <http://www.hrlatorre.com/> This roadside hotel, with its bar, restaurant and reception is just after the Repsol gas station (open all night). It has a rather run-down riverside garden, complete with exotic birds and animals. (double room 30€, single 20€, with shower, bathroom just across the hall; wifi). To continue on the Camino the next day, simply retrace your steps a few hundred meters until you reach the road to Quereño and turn left.

Polideportivo reported unavailable to pilgrims, but the number to try is 987 460181.

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

The Camino keeps to the right bank of the Sil River, 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.

Continue on Calle Chao de Marco. When it ends, go left onto Calle Aceso Quereño, and cross the bridge. You are now in Galicia. New slate waymarkers have been installed in many places, and you will come to the occasional table, bench, or rest stop with a plaque indicating the Xunta has paid to provide for pilgrims. After crossing the bridge, the Camino makes a big looping upside down U, and you then will make a relatively sharp right to go up a hill to cross the tracks. Right at the turn, there is frequently a loud barking dog (on a chain that takes him to the very edge of the owner's property) and if you are startled, you may continue straight rather than take the required right turn. (Look closely as you ascend after the turn -- you should see what were faded arrows in summer 2015). You will then weave around a bit, until you eventually cross over the RR tracks (thus putting you between the tracks and the river), only to cross back over them about a km later.

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

4.9 km Pumares

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

The arrows disappear coming into Sobradelo. To avoid going into town, just stay up high and you will reach the OU-0801 road, which takes you out of Sobradelo. Bar Mar is on this road. Owner, Manuel Angel Martínez Ramos (988 335 106) has plans to open an albergue but currently offers private lodging for peregrinos, but if you don't call ahead, you may or may not be able to convince the owner to let you stay. 8€. Wifi available. Highly recommended as a place for a snack and coffee.

4.5 km 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, the Restaurante Museo. 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. Leaving town, you walk alongside the OU-0801; though it goes to O Barco, arrows take you onto more scenic trails through the forest.

After leaving Sobradelo, you will be on the side of the road for a few km. But shortly before the small hamlet of Éntoma, a marker takes you off the road and then into:

3.2 km Éntoma

Wind your way through this pretty, but small, place (well-marked). Beautiful old bridge, great for rest stop. The bar, Bar Martillo, has a terrace. (Conflicting reports on whether this place is closed or open, updates appreciated).

As you leave the hamlet, get on a dirt road that takes you up through a forest with pine trees, a few chestnut trees, some cherry trees, some vineyards. About three minutes after you pass a totally unnecessary mojón (which takes you around a curve essentially), you may be frustrated to reach a fork that is not marked. Go right and up, NOT down. You soon arrive in O Barco's outskirts and back on the OU-0801 and finally into town, which is stretched out along the highway for a very long time.

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

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

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

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

One good place to stay is right off the Camino and the Calle Eulogio Fernández. Pensión do Lar, Calle de Peñas Forcadas, 26 (988 320 980). Recommended, double room 35€, single 25€, both with bath. Good meal, 15€. Bar and bakery across the street opens very early for breakfast.

Other centrally located pensiones include:

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

La Gran Tortuga, Avenida Conde Fenosa 34 (988 347 044 or 608 573 480) (recently renovated)

Wifi, restaurants, bakeries, and bars aplenty in the downtown area. O Barco is the center of the Valdeorras D.O. wine-producing region, and those with a taste for Spanish wine should sample the up-and-coming local Mencía and Godello vintages, proudly poured at every bar in town at bargain prices. Casa Galaica, Av. Eulogio Fernández, has a great menú. Casa Paradelo (Rúa Xirimil, back street near the station) has a nice garden area out back.

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

[NOTE ON BYPASSING THE TOWN OF O BARCO DE VALDEORRAS

If you do not plan to stop in O Barco (though it is a big lively town with all services, great wine, and good accommodation), you can save a few hundred meters and avoid following the waymarked Camino, which goes through town and then out again. Once you are on the river walk, after you pass the cafés, parks, and playgrounds, you will come to a small wooden footbridge with two freshly painted arrows. This bridge does not take you across the river itself; it takes you over a small tributary emptying into the river. The path is wide and covered in gravel, so it is obviously a path used by townspeople. After about a km, take a sharp right turn, onto Camino Praia de Ouro, which leads to a roundabout. Take the road heading to the left (not the N-120, but a lesser traveled road that is slightly north of the N-120), which passes by the Gadis supermarket, and you will soon merge back onto the Camino and enter the town of Arcos. This link will take you to the GPS tracks of the stage out of O Barco. You can zoom in to see the river walk, the roundabout, the Gadis, etc, and maybe that will help you. <http://www.wikiloc.com/wikiloc/view.do?id=8420979>

Two additional comments:

-- If you plan to go to the albergue at Xagoaza, you do NOT want to take this bypass because you will have missed the turn-off to the albergue by the time you merge back onto the Camino.

-- If you find yourself on the Camino de Invierno this summer, sleeping in O Barco, with some time in the afternoon to enjoy a river walk, we would be most appreciative for any enlightenment you could bring to the question of the O Barco bypass. **END OF O BARCO BYPASS DISCUSSION]**

If you have spent the night in O Barco, the next day has an easy exit. Make your way to the railroad underpass at the end of Calle Eulogio Fernández, where you will see a blue Camino sign pointing your way west. At the roundabout by the Repsol gas station take a left turn onto Rúa de San Tirso. At the modern Church of San Tirso, turn right. Then keep straight, and go through a narrow tunnel. Up ahead there is a marker pointing up to the hamlet of Xagoaza, where there is an albergue. From the church of San Tirso, you have a bit of an ascent.

Albergue Xagoaza (Hospitalera, Gloria, tel. 639 921 679). This albergue is several km outside of Barco, and 1.4 km off the Camino. The hospitalera may provide meals if needed. Reported quite nice in 2014. Two rooms with 5 bunks each, large dining room with fireplace, two PCs and Wifi, completely furnished kitchen with stove, oven, fridge, and washing machine. Clean bathrooms and lots of outside space. 6€

If you are not going to Xagoaza, the Camino goes left at the albergue turnoff. This path may or may not be overgrown (different pilgrims at different times of year had different reports), but you should continue straight ahead. You will arrive back on the road, having gone around a nicely renovated home.

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

Another peregrino says that the Camino stays along the river to the roundabout just before the Hiper Gadis (a big supermarket), which is about 1.5 km before Arcos.

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

5 km Arcos

Pensión Restaurante A Lastra (on the highway). Tel. 988 300 232.

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

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

3.3 km Vilamartín (outskirts near river)

Restaurants, hostals, and a municipal albergue. To reach the town turn right at the little bridge underpass at the entrance to the town. Municipal albergue is straight ahead along the river. (5€, phone Salvador for keys at 680 602 423). Pharmacy, food stores, health center, cash machine.

Hostal-Restaurant Marbella, Calle Cervantes 32. About 500 m from Camino in town. 988 300 025.

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

Albergue de Vilamartín, tel. 680 60 24 23 OR 988 300 001. Open all year, 60 beds, near municipal swimming pool. No kitchen. 5€.

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

Coming into town there is an arrow to the right for the Camino if you don't plan to stop in A Rúa. That right hand turn will also take you directly to the albergue. Going straight takes you into the town center, with its stores, bars, Casa de Cultura, etc. If you go into town and plan to continue walking, it is easy to get back on the camino. Just turn right at the ayuntamiento, which is located on the main street. It is a fair distance from the town entrance to the albergue, about 20 minutes by most counts.

5.9 km A Rúa de Valdeorras

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

Intown bar recommended – Bar Pepa, near the ayuntamiento (town hall). If you are as charming as our friend KinkyOne you may even find that you get double or triple tapas sent your way. Waitress was a peregrine, which may also explain the special treatment!

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

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

Municipal sports center (polideportivo). To sleep here, go first to the ayuntamiento (town hall).

Hostal Niza, Dr. Vila, 30. Tel: 988 310 807 Central, near train station. 25€ single.

Hotel Espada (not recommended);

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

Pensión Fabio, Rúa Progreso, 201. Tel: 636 897 217; 626 876 691

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

Casa Rural Pacio do Sil, <http://www.paciodosil.es/paginas/Historia.html>, is very close to Asún's home/albergue. Recently under new ownership, no longer offers special prices for pilgrims. Calle Xestal 33. Tel: 988 311 346.

A Rúa to Quiroga (26.3 km)

From A Rúa to Quiroga there are not many services. Carry extra water and food. Two welcome fountains, one just past Alberedos, and another (look for the lavadero under the bridge) at Bendilló, at the entrance to the village below a left hand curve.

Leave A Rúa by climbing up Calle Currelada to the church of Our Lady of Fátima (look for the slate-roofed twin towers. Contrary to local tales, the church was not designed by Gaudi!) and head for the N-120 road. (If you are leaving from Casa Asún, you have a short walk to the church and the arrows). Arrows lead beneath the highway; make an immediate left (arrows are faint). There are now 7 km of asphalt walking on the OU-933 (the name of the road changes to LU-933 as you cross from the province of Ourense to Lugo), but there is practically no traffic. It is a walk of exceptional beauty above the Sil River, if you are lucky enough to walk on a clear day.

6.9 km Alvaredos

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

Lovers of Galician rural culture and panoramic vistas will enjoy the long, switchback ascent on a medieval cart track that commences about 2 km beyond Alvaredos and then descends to the ancient gristmill at the valley bottom. There an arroyo meets the railroad track and the Sil. Here, in a grange called El Molino, 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:

2.9 km 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 exposed mountain innards and a hole blown through a riverside rock-face are remnants of more 2nd-century Roman ingenuity: the miners shifted the course of the Sil in their search for gold. The village is built atop a maze of ancient tunnels, now used for storing wine and cheese.

There is also a train station in the town. From there, one pilgrim hopped on a 10:12 am train to Monforte (runs Monday through Saturday as of this writing).

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

7.6 km Bendilló

As you enter Bendilló, you will see an old mill and a small shrine, community olive-press, and welcome spring at the Ermita das Farrapas. More spectacular views. Turn right here and go up through Bendilló. Go through town and then on a dirt track towards the national highway N-120. Do not cross over the highway; rather, take the dirt road going up the hill in front of you.

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

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

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

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

At the end of the vineyards, turn right onto a paved road (no arrow here), and then at the next fork, go left and begin to descend (you will see a mojón soon after that).

Go through this hamlet (you will go under a room connecting two houses that passes over the path) and leave on a gravel road. Go over a bridge with a metal rail on the left. At the fork, stay up and right (do not go left and down). Go up to the plaza of the castle. The Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem built it and ran several pilgrim hospitals in the 14th century, probably attracted by the strategic lookout over the Sil River. In the plaza with the castle in front of you and the ermita behind you, turn right. This turn is counter-intuitive because you can see Quiroga in front of you.

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

Keep going straight through several intersections. This takes you through the hamlet of Casbedro. At the end of the hamlet, go to the right of the little church, then straight through another group of houses. Finally you will emerge on the LU-933, which is the road you left Rúa on.

The marked camino described in the previous paragraphs becomes fiddly and labor-intensive after Bendilló, in efforts to keep pilgrims off the busy N-120 highway. It continues along the up-and-down country lane that parallels the river after Soldón. It is possible to take the LU-933 or N-120 highway into Quiroga, cutting out the hill-climbs on the old road to the castle. (If you follow the N-120, 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 then cross a little bridge that turns into the main street of Quiroga. Turn left into Quiroga.

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

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

End of detour to pilgrim hospital

8.9 km Quiroga

Quiroga is located in a beautiful valley of vineyards and orchards. All services. There is a municipal albergue (a former school) on the main street. (Tel: 982 255 220 or call Eduardo at 669 812 659). The albergue is not pilgrim-specific but they have a stamp, pilgrim prices and large rooms with wonderful hot baths. Beware large school groups that may keep you awake all night. Email: info@alberguedequiroga.com; contact person is Eduardo Nuñez.

As you enter Quiroga, the first bar on the right, Dino’s, has a sello they are anxious to use. For meals, the good value restaurant Casa Kuña is nearby (not all pilgrims give this place a good recommendation, however)

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

Hostal Quiper: Calle Real, 62. Tel: 982 435 276 (20€ single, clean.) (access to the hostel available at the adjacent bar, run by the same family).

Hostal Marcos. Calle Secide. Tel: 982 428 452

Hotel Remansiño, Calle Ricobao, 900 m beyond town, virtually on Camino. 10 rooms, Tel: 982 43 51 68

Albergue Quiroga: <http://www.alberguedequiroga.com/index.html> Tel. 982 435 290; email: info@alberguedequiroga.com; contact person: Eduardo Núñez. Free wifi in the albergue

A good place to eat is the Resturante Arouza, off the main street and near the Plaza Mayor. Really highly recommended, great food. If you don’t want a full meal, their tapas are also excellent.

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

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

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

Hotel Restaurante Las Vegas, Rúa do Ferrocarril, 1. Tel: 982 42 82 83 OR 982 43 51 12. Bar opens very early; nice shady garden with tables.

Shortly after going through the village, you take another bridge back over to the N-120 and continue alongside it for several kms. Cross under the highway near a derelict roadside nightclub.

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

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

At the intersection of about five dirt roads, you see a chapel straight ahead. The camino mojón and PR trail markers go past the Capela dos Remedios (Chapel of the Remedies). Soon after, the PR trail diverges from the Camino. PR goes to the left, while the Camino keeps going straight. There is a sign and also an arrow. Keep straight down to a small hamlet, Carballo do Lor. (possible detour to a fountain/lavadoiro about 30 meters to the right before you start going down). At the end of the hamlet, the Camino sign takes you right, on a gravel road, then left, then right. This is all well marked.

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

Barxa de Lor has a Casa Rural Pacita, tel. 982 430 008, but it is two kms off the Camino, located on the LU-933.

For an unmarked 300-meter detour to a useful bar/restaurant area, (Mesón 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.)

Now the second ascent begins. After the first hamlet, the red wooden sign for another trail goes off the paved road to the right. Ignore that and keep climbing on the paved road (you will see an arrow on the street soon). The road curves around a large fenced off house complex. You arrive

at a fork with a cell tower in the middle, go up and right, and a mojón then takes you quickly left, so the cell tower is directly on your left. Keep ascending, and when you begin to descend, the mojón takes you off to the left (while the main logging road keeps going up). From here on, there are a few ups and downs, but it's basically flat for a while. No mojones at a number of merges or forks, but it is obvious how to stay on the main path.

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

22.9 km Pobra do Brollón (distance from Quiroga)

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

Hostal As Viñas, Avenida de Outeiro, 13. Tel: 982 430 124 . Friendly, clean, accommodating family establishment. 25€ single room. Well worth it. Owners speak Spanish, Galego, Portuguese, French and some basic English. The hostel may appear closed on Sunday (bar and restaurant are closed), but if you go around to the right side of the building and knock, someone will appear. The owners will also feed pilgrims on Sunday even if the restaurant is closed. The owner of the hostel also runs the local taxi service, so if you don't fancy the steep climb up from the Roman Bridge towards Castroncelos, stop off at the bar (300 meters to the left after crossing the bridge) and call him from there ; he says he picks up regularly.

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

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

The way is well marked and takes you through yet another pine forest. You will cross a channel and descend into Reigada, the last hamlet before Monforte. From there into Monforte the way is well marked, on agricultural roads and tracks. The last stretch before entering town is on a dirt path which seems to always be waterlogged, even in dry times. When the Camino takes you over the tracks, you will be on the Rúa Escultor Francisco Moure, where there are many bars, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. The Camino leaves Monforte on the Puente Romano, where there is a hotel and pensión. There are few if any arrows in town until you reach the Puente Romano.

Monforte de Lemos (12.5 km)

Monforte 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 tourist office on Campo de Compañía (982 4047 15, or www.concellodemonforte.com.) Monastery tours are 3€, 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.

The railway museum is fascinating for English enthusiasts and the public alike. The wine museum, next door to the tourist office, is also worth a visit. Both have sellos. Tourist office is closed on Monday.

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

The infohostal website lists nine hostales and pensiones in Monforte de Lemos:

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

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

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

Hotel Condes de Lemos; Praza da Estación, 2. Tel: 982 400 319

Hostal Rúa; Roberto Baamonde, 30.

Hotel Ribeira Sacra; Rúa do Conde, 17. Tel: 982 411 706 (recommended)

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

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

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

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

Summer 2014 pilgrims report having a very good meal at Al Portal. Another remembered an excellent meal in O Grelo, which is located up on the hill near the parador (not cheap, but reported as serving great food).

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

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

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

Monforte is also the center of the Ribeira Sacra wine region. Its landmark wine bar/restaurant and tasting room is in the old town next to the tourist office and near the Roman bridge, providing a delicious education in the many flavors achieved by the humble Mencía 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 from Monforte, be sure to stock up in Monforte.

Monforte to Chantada (29.7 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, Torre Vilarino (<http://www.torrevilarino.com/> , Tel: 982 45 22 60), which is another 4 kms beyond that, Penelope's place in Castrotaña, or Casa de Santo Estevo (Tel. 982 452 734 OR 655 751 735, www.ribeirasacra.com), a very nice walk from the Diomondi church off the path you will take down to the Miño River. Be sure to phone ahead and reserve if you plan to stay at any of these places. Both the Casa Santo Estevo and La Rectoral have been happy to pick up pilgrims from points on the Camino. These casas rurales provide a good and less taxing first-day option if your pilgrimage begins at Monforte. Staying in one of these places will cut in half a long and rugged day's walk.

Leaving Monforte, the waymarking is poor. But you want to find the Roman bridge, cross it, and make a quick left at the monastery of the Clarisas. Go right at the old town hall plaza – you will see a waymark on the pavement. Follow 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). At an arrow, Abeledo branches to the right, but the marked Camino goes left. Walk between the church of San Antonio and the backside of the A Gadis supermarket, and at the roundabout with a hórreo (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. There is a gas station immediately after the roundabout in the direction of A Vide. This is a long, straight asphalt road that arrives in A Vide after 3 kms.

3.5 km A Vide

In good weather, the Camino goes off-road here for about 3.5 km. It becomes an earthen trail that winds over and around water channels, bridges, and ponds, and is well marked. If there's been a lot of rain, stay on the pavement, because this can be very muddy. The path continues on to Moreda, and passes through As Lagoas, Campos and Pacios on the way. In 2015, however, no arrows to take you off the road were visible.

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.

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

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

Information on Penelope's place: www.castrotane.weebly.com You may contact her directly at 677 120 321 OR 982 17 16 32 or via email at penelope@galiciaholidayrentals.com.

Unfortunately, this first turn-off path has been reported as impassable numerous times during 2014 and 2015.

If you don't take that first left-hand turn, you will still be on the road. Very shortly (one pilgrim remembers this as being in sight from the first turn, probably no more than .5 km) you will come to a mojón indicating that you should take the paved road to the left. This paved road goes into another little hamlet of a few houses, named San Lourenzo, and then it goes into the fields for an extremely short distance, Penelope says that her house in Castrotañe is no more than .25 km away, so even if there is overgrowth, pushing through it will be short and sweet. Reports from Fall 2015 indicate that it has been cleared and is passable.

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

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

From Piñeiro onward to Camiño Grande, the markings are immeasurably improved since my first Invierno in 2010. Flooding and overgrown brush may still be a problem, but the odds of getting lost are very low. In contrast, between 2010 and 2013, nearly all pilgrims I heard from got lost on this stretch.

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

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

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

Galegos, you will see Camiño Grande on the right (to the east), and one km later, the paved road from Camiño Grande joins from the right and you are then back on the Camino at A Barxa. The total distance from Reguengo to A Barxa on the side of the highway is, according to google maps, 5.4 km.

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

Casa Rural Torre Vilariño. <http://www.torrevilarino.com/> Highly recommended, with Camino-friendly staff; pilgrim price for room is 20€ each. Swimming pool; menú del día 15€, pilgrim menú, 10€. Also would be a good lunch or coffee break for pilgrims doing the entire Monforte-Chantada stage. Tel. 982 45 22 60.

If you plan to spend the night in the Casa Rural and are looking for something to do in the afternoon, there is a beautiful overlook looking down over the Minho River about a km away. It is named the “Mirador do Cabodomundo.” From there, it's another km or two to the Igrexia Monacal de San Martiño da Coba, also perched up high with a view of the Minho. Google will show you lots of pictures.

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

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

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

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

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

The next day, continue on the LU 617. Turn left by the cheese factory, onto LU-P-5807. There is a sign indicating you are 4 km from Diomondi church, and when you arrive there you will be back on the Camino. **END OF ALTERNATIVE.**

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

In Diomondi is a jewel of a Romanesque church, San Pelagio de Diomondi, 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. The episcopal palace built on to the side of the church is currently undergoing emergency repairs. The building has been in scaffolding since at least 2011, but in summer 2015 we actually saw men at work.

A Casa Rural alternative exists about 4 kms walking from the Diomondi Church. You can walk halfway down the mountain on the path named the Codos de Belesar, 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. Prices are 54€ double, 45 € single, 14 € for dinner. They can give clear instructions on how to arrive. They can also arrange to pick you up, most easily at the church in Diomondi. To contact them directly, email them at casasantoestevo@ribeirasacra.com. Phones: 982 452 734 OR 655 751 735.

In Diomondi, the Camino leaves the road and turns to the left, beginning to descend the many switchbacks of the Codos (Elbows) of Belesar, a 2.5 km stretch of steep, broken pavement with remnants of the old Roman Road. There is a small covered “rest stop” – a bench, actually, but it has a nice cover for protection from the elements. The rest stop is located at the top of the descending trail to the river. To see the church, continue on the road a little more.

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

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 the only bar in little Belesar; coffee is 2 €.

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

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

About halfway up the steep ascent, if you are on the road, the Mesón Adego de Veiga on the left side offers warmth and quality home cooking. This is a very popular restaurant; people come from Ourense to eat here; highly recommended. The winery Via Romana is nearby on the opposite side of the street and may be open for a look around, a bathroom break, or a rest on the balcony overlooking the river.

There is a welcome fountain a few kms further up.

2.8 km San Pedro de Líncora

Nice shaded rest area near the church.

A 2013 pilgrim advises that a Dutch couple, André and Linda, are in the process of opening a Casa Rural in San Pedro de Líncora, next to the church. They hope to offer rooms and campsites to pilgrims in 2015, so a call to 982 031 079 would be a good idea. You can also try emailing them at info@casasanpedrodelincora.com. No sign of anything in summer 2015.

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

3.0 km Chantada

This town's arcaded streets are lined with elegant portals and mansions from the 15th and 16th centuries. There are good restaurants, markets, a health center, and places to stay.

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

Bar Lucas, under the arches near the tourist office, is recommended for a place to eat. Closed on Wednesdays. Fantastic, cheap place, with incredible quantities of food. Bar area, huge inside room with a fireplace in winter, and great outside terrace looking down over the river and walkway. Three generations of ladies serving you: the grandmother still cooks!

Alternative restaurant nearby is the Bar as Amizades on the new main drag, Juan XXIII. 9 € menu; nothing gourmet but totally edible.

Pulpería Os Pendellos is fantastic, too, but be ready for crowds. Rúa de Benigno Ledo, 13.

Chantada has a polideportivo where pilgrims have slept, but is usually busy right up to 11 p.m. (982 440 011). Recent reports suggest it may no longer be available to pilgrims.

Hotel Mogay; Antonio Lorenzana, s/n. Tel: 982 440 847 (recommended) (20% discount for pilgrims makes a double 44€, single 33€. (check AC if it's hot, one pilgrim reported trouble with its functioning).

Hostal Yoel; Avda. De Lugo, 16. Tel: 982 440 294. Single room with shared bath 12€; single with private bath, prices have ranged from 18€ - 25€ (outdated a bit, but clean, has wifi, located near supermarkets).

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

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

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

Chantada to Rodeiro (25.8 kms).

This is a lovely stretch with some critical turns early on that are (or may be) incorrectly waymarked. The path crosses over a mountain and past the landmark Hermitage of Monte Faro.

On this stretch are several beautiful “petos de las ánimas,” medieval crossroads shrines with striking sculpted images of the souls in purgatory.

Leave Chantada from Praza Santa Ana along Alferrez 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 mojón pointing you straight on. **THIS MARKER IS WRONG.** Instead, follow the yellow arrows to the **RIGHT**.

After that right turn, about a hundred meters or so down the road, go left, to walk on the service road of the main Chantada-Lalín highway. You will stay on the service road for a few kms. Pass over a paved road or two, and when you come to a little summer house on the left with swings and plastic play equipment, turn left. Go through the hamlet of Boan, where you find another mojón pointing in the wrong direction, but the arrows will keep you on the right path.

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

Continue to the little town of Penasillás.

8.7km Penasillás

There is another peto de ánimas here. Penasillás offers a fountain of cold spring water. The wise pilgrim will fill up here for the long climb up a timbering road toward the Alto de Faro shrine. There is also a bar here, but pilgrims have found it closed at mid-morning. Others have reported going through early in the morning with quite a few loud barking loose dogs – none was vicious, just annoying. Waymarking is quite good, both up and down.

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

4.5 km Alto de Faro

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

After several kms walking on paths and unpaved roads after Penasillás, the Camino merges with a paved road. If you plan to go up to the Alto and its ermita, look for stone steps on the left. These steps take you off the Camino and ascend past the crosses representing the Stations of the Cross. Soon you will be at the high point, a huge field with its ermita, lookout tower, and cruceiro. To rejoin the Camino, go to the cruceiro (decorated standing crucifix), and the arrows will take you back to the Camino and past the picnic area.

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

After 5-6 kms walking through the other-worldly windmill farm with its constant flap flap flap and motor rumblings, the path meets pavement again. At this point the Camino turns left, and crosses a bridge over the 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. This is the spot for those who wish to save a few kms and go directly to Rodeiro on the side of the road. It is not pretty, but not at all dangerous, since you can walk along an access road the whole way. I have not taken this route, but on the map it looks like a straight shot into Rodeiro.

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

According to one GPS calculation, this alternative has 180 m of ascent, compared to the Camino’s 420. You would then reconnect with the Camino at the intersection of the PO-533 and CG-22. **END OF DETOUR**

6.0 km Crossing of the CG-22 and PO-533.

If you stay on the Camino, granite waymarkers will take the Camino off to your left. One is the standard mojón with the tile scallop shell. The other is larger, placed there by the “Concello de Rodeiro” and indicates that you are on the Camiño de Inverno. This pretty path passes El Pazo de Camba and skirts the friendly hamlet of Leboro. Leboro has two bars, which used to be on the Camino route. It is an easy detour into the hamlet to find them.

After Leboro, the Camino takes off-road options nearly all the way into Rodeiro. In summer 2015 there was road construction going on and many temporary signs closing off roads to traffic. I just kept going straight ahead (that is, never taking a turn onto a dirt road that was signed as being under construction) and had no problem. But a large group walking from Ponferrada, who all arrived in Rodeiro after I did, told me that many members of their group got lost on this stretch.

6.8 km Rodeiro. All services.

As you come into Rodeiro, cross the river. You emerge on the square with the Casa do Concello (town hall – stamp). The Camino leaves to the right of the Casa do Concello, and not up the hill

through town. You will find the first arrows taking you out of town near the monument to the wheel, located in a prominent roundabout.

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. Pilgrims have slept in the polideportivo in the past, but recent reports suggest that it is no longer available to them. Tel.: 986 790 009.

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

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. Recommended. Up a hill, about 200 m from the center. Summer 2015 pilgrims paid 15€ each for a room. Good drying facilities.

Markets, bank machines, health center.

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

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

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

At the next Y intersection, arrows point left. The road becomes a dirt road very soon, stay on this for a couple of kms, ignoring the paths going off on either side. You may see no markers, but always stay on what is obviously the main track. At another Y intersection, about 2 kms from where you left Mesón, the arrows point left. This arrow is below a sign that says: Tecor Socetario Rodeiro. You will remain on this wide dirt road with tractor marks for a long time.

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

The dirt track crosses a paved road. Stay straight ahead on the dirt track. You then finally emerge at a hamlet; from there another few minutes walking takes you onto the PO-933 into Lalín de Arriba. The arrows take you right in front of the church from 10th century (the keeper of the keys

lives close by and is very happy to open the church up if you can find her). The date 980 is carved into a stone window sill. Arrows then take you through the town of Lalín.

Lalín 21.3 km

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

Something is always happening in downtown Lalín (in 2015 pilgrims encountered a trotting competition). Lalín is famous for its cocido (try Casa Mouriño) – a dish that serves up greens, potatoes, 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.

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

Hostal Las Palmeras. Calle Arenal, 8. Tel: 986 780 222. Simple clean room for two, 27€, 11€ menú very good as well. One 2013 pilgrim reports that though the entrance and bar below are fine, rooms not so nice.

Hostal As Vilas. Address: Calle Arenal, 4. 986 780 140

Hostal Mourino. Tel: 986 780 073

Hostal Naval do Espinal. Tel: 986 787 604

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

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

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

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

Near the end you will see a sign on the right that indicates it is the exit to the N-525. Take that exit, go up, then left and past Hostal Camino Santiago. Bar open 24/7 according to their sign.

Continue on the edge of the N- 525, and then get off at the exit for the polígono industrial (industrial park). (You may also find that soon after passing the Hostal Camino Santiago, there is an arrow taking you up through a hamlet and then along the back of the long street that makes up the “parque industrial.” In any event, you will not have a problem getting from that long street to the spot where you cross under the autopista or divided superhighway).

The industrial park is several long blocks, and you will walk on straight for a while. At the second roundabout, where most cars are going left to get onto the autopista, arrows go right and you will be on a crushed rock trail that is on the right side of the autopista. The Camino arrows

point you alongside the highway for a short way, then left and under the highway through a tunnel, and then you are in Laxe. Arrows deposit you at the albergue door in

A Laxe 5.9 km

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

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

Hotel Spa Oca Katiuska; Outeiro, 52 (this is a four star hotel in the industrial park)

Hostal O Porto; Camilo JosCela, 12.

At the albergue in Laxe, the Camiño de Inverno joins the Camino Sanabrés. From here the Camino is well marked and well trodden to Santiago! The following towns and distances will give you all you need to plan your remaining days. The most obvious stages are from A Laxe to the albergue in Outeiro (34 km) and from there to Santiago (17 km, allowing for plenty of time to get to the pilgrims' mass).

Shortly after leaving Laxe, you will pass the Pazo de Bendoiro, a restored manor house with its spa treatments and swimming pool. www.pazodebendoiro.com

There's a lovely old bridge, originally Roman but with much rebuilding, hidden in the forest and inaccessible to cars. The Romanesque church at Taboada has a lovely carving of Samson over the doorway. You have to cross the busy highway to get there, but it is worth it, just a stone's throw from the Camino. In 2015, volunteers were on hand to keep the church open for pilgrim visits.

Silleda 9.7 km

All services.

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

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

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

On the main street of Silleda, the Bar Toxa offers an occasional pulpo 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.

7.1 km Bandeira

In-town albergue opened in 2013. Pictures and descriptions on the web:

<http://www.santiagoturismo.com/aloxamentos-santiagoturismo/albergue-de-a-bandeira>

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

Hostal Victorino, 986 585 330

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

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

A few kms after Bandeira is the hamlet of Dornelas. In that place, a young Italian couple, Cristina and Andrea, has renovated a house and opened an albergue, called Casa Leiras 1866. It is directly on the Camino. The albergue has 10 beds and meals are provided. Bed was 12 € and dinner 9 €. Highly recommended. Great, friendly people. Worth a stop, even if it's just for a coffee. Phones: 620-483-603 or 634-613-690; email: casaleiras1866@yahoo.es, Owners speak Italian, Spanish and English.

12.8 km Ponte Ulla

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

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

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

Hostal Churrasco de Juanito; 981 512 619. Located on the Camino, soon after crossing the river. (30€ room, 14€ menú overpriced and not great) (Pilgrim walking in October 2014 reported getting a room for 15€ and a meal for 8€, so walking off-season appears to have its financial benefits).

For any foodies out there, I passed a nice looking and well-reviewed restaurant on a walk last summer. Walk straight from the bridge into Ponte Ulla. When you get to the intersection with the AC-240 road, to the left is the Camino. Turn right, go up the hill and in a few minutes you'll see the Restaurante Villa Verde on the right side of the road, located in an old stone house, very pretty. <http://www.villa-verde.es/index.php/restaurante>

4.8 km Outeiro

Albergue de Vedra, municipal. Well maintained. Hospitalera provides meals onsite, pretty expensive in terms of price/quality. Kitchen for pilgrims' use has few utensils.

Beautiful pilgrim fountain.

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

3.3 km Lestedo

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

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

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

13.4 km Santiago de Compostela – FIN DEL CAMINO

Sources and Credits:

This document is pulled from various sources, and some of the text is a translation by Laurie Reynolds of documents written in Spanish by Aida Menendez Lorenzo, president of the Friends of the Camino de Invierno. That text morphed into the initial online guide to the Camino de Invierno published by the Confraternity of St. James. In 2014, Rebekah Scott, the original author of the guide, “retired” from guide-writing, and Laurie Reynolds and her pilgrim friends took over the task of keeping the guide up to date. I appreciate all the comments and updates from Roger and his walking partner, whose full names I have lost. Also KinkyOne (Boštjan Mašera), Bimblingalong, Freescot and Econodan from Ivar’s Camino de Santiago Forum.

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