Day 2
Wednesday
August 27, 2025

Espinal to Larrosa
Destination: Albergue “San Nicholas”

Distance Traveled: 14.2 miles (23 km).
Time on Trail: 8 hours, 16 minutes

Speed: 1.8 mph (2.9 km/h)
Pace: 35 minutes/mile (22 minutes/km)



Note on Terrain Graph:
Generally a gradual downhill today, with one rather steep section in the middle. About 1,000 feet (305 meters) in about 90 minutes.

Jimś Daily Trail Report:
None today.

It was with great trepidation that I filled out the envelope for the Donkey Service, enclosed the 5 Euros (adding an extra Euro as a tip (bribe?) and tied it to the flap of my backpack early this morning and left it inside the door of the hostel alongside a couple backpacks from other hikers.

Although my pack was not alone, I admit I was very worried that I would lose all of my gear on just the second day on the Camino. How could I replace it? Would I have to just give up and go home, leaving Jim to finish the Camino on his own?

(Earlier, Jim and I discussed what we would do if our partner had to leave the Camino early. Jim reassured me that, "Yes," he would go on without me. He was surprised when I replied, "Nope. You leave, I leave." I'm not sure if I was serious, but I was nice to know Jim would continue on without me.)

I did find a small leather pouch (or big purse?) with a long shoulder strap among the gear discarded in the albergue lobby by previous pilgrims. (Throughout the journey, we discovered that pilgrims were always discarding items in hostels along the way, trying to lighten their loads while making them available if another pilgrim might find the item useful. Only truly damaged items were actually discarded.)

Before I left my backpack, I took what I thought was absolutely necessary - two filled water bottles and some snacks - and stuffed them into this small leather pouch, and left my backpack in the hands of strangers as we left, shortly after sunrise.

The day ahead promised nice weather, with sunshine and mild temperatures. It was only a week prior that temperatures here were in the 90's (32 - 38 Celsius).

Today's hike was much easier for all of us, but especially for me. My load was only about 6 pounds (3 kg) rather than about 19 pounds (9 kg). And the trail was generally flatter and mostly downhill.

We came upon several flocks of sheep very early in the morning, much to Valerie's delight, and stopped to take some photos of this new Camino experience. This was the beginning of Jim's frustration at what he felt were unnecessary delays for taking photos and exploring attractions. I don't think he ever really got over the impatience, but looking back after the Camino was over, he did realise that we had experienced many encounters that we would have missed if we had simply passed then by, and we captured in photos many of memories that would probably have been forgotten.





Since we had again skipped breakfast, we finally did stop to eat about 4 miles and 2 hours of hiking. We stopped at our first trailside bar, Bar Dena Ona, just outside the tiny town of Viscarret.

There was a larger enclosed pen of chickens and goats just outside the entrance to the dining patio, which served as a reminder of just how different the local culture was to me. A group of pilgrims were leaving just as we arrived, including a couple we had dined with the night before. This was our first experience with something that would become commonplace - meeting up with people you recognized in towns miles apart.

As was often the case, the bar had no meat on their breakfast menu, so Jim had just orange juice and coffee, while I tried my first *tortilla espanola* (Spanish omelet). Just eggs, potatoes, cheese, and sometimes onion, cooked like a round cake and served in pie shaped slices. I had it frequently on the Camino. Usually hot, though sometimes served cold. It is very filling and nourishing, and it is often the only breakfast item available beside the ever-present chocolate croissant. But Jim never touched it.

I also collected my first bar sello. Gradually I was becoming a true Camino pilgrim!

Shortly after the bar, we came across one of our first well-known photo ops - a row of about a dozen tall cement blocks that serve as a high evenly-spaced man-made stepping stones, giving a dry path over a now-shallow creek that ran across the Camino trail. It is a popular photo site - a unique “bridge” allowing pilgrims to cross the stream without getting the shoes wet.



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Walking up to our first trailside bar - Bar Dena Ona in Viscarret



Our first real Camino photo op - crossing a stream on man-made stepping blocks

Most of the day was spent hiking carefully along a stretch of the trail known as “The Dragon’s Teeth” - about 7 miles (11 km) of narrow trail of loose stones and exposed tree roots. The “Teeth” are layers of hard grante and soft shale, exposed at differing angles and differing depths. It was slow going and stressful, and it seemed likely that any misstep would result in a twisted ankle or worse. Fortunately, all of the slopes here were gradual, so this stretch wasn’t physically demanding. But we were all relieved when we finally exited The Dragon’s Teeth near the town of Zubiri



Typical trail condition in The Dragonś Teeth



Taking a break from a challenging section

We detoured briefly off the trail to take a break in Zubri, walking over our first of many many beautiful centuries old stone bridges that arc across the rivers we traversed. The effort and workmanship to build these bridges without modern equipment is astounding to my mind - accustomed to modern bridges of steel and cement.

As we were leaving Zubri, we met Becka as she entered the town. We were surprised to see her so close after us, as we left the hostel before her that morning, and she was still recovering from her ankle sprain.

She was staying in Zubri that night, while we were going on to our hostel in the next town. But she suggested that we keep in touch via phone.

Another Camino first for us - a fellow hiker asking for a trail connection!

The concept - giving contact info to an almost stranger who you probably will never see again - seemed a little weird for an old Luddite like me. But, since neither Jim nor Valerie offered to swap numbers, I gave her my phone, and she entered her name and phone number, and sent herself a message from my phone with my contact info.

Jim and I joked that Becka had probably hacked my phone, and since she told us she worked for the government in Washington DC, she was probably using the connection to monitor us for the rest of the Camino.

Despite efforts to contact Becka over the next few days to see how she was doing, she never did respond, and that was the last that we saw or heard from her. I still wonder if she was able to continue, or if her injury caused her to abandon the Camino. Or if indeed, she was just trying to hack my phone or collect information on us for some mysterious US government agency. Eventually I deleted her from my contact list, and changed my password out of an abundance of paranoia.

And it was a long time before it again occurred to us to try to join any kind of Camino hiker network. We were Camino loners in a Camino Whatsapp world.

Most Camino guides recommend Zubri as a recommended stop for the day's travel, but as we often found out, all of the available beds in town had been reserved. Instead, Jim had to make reservations 3 miles further down the road in Larrasoana. Since we had stayed further on the trail than Roncesvalles, staying in Zubri would have been too short a hike anyway.

Back on the trail after Zubri, we encountered another steep hill, followed by a gradual downhill around a few small gardens - with real geese and a rubber duck! Someone with a good sense of humor left it as a pleasant surprise for tired hikers.

But it was otherwise an easy hike into Larrasoana, where we again crossed a high stone bridge and hiked through a fairly modern town to our second hostel - Albergue San Nichols.

And it was quite a relief to find my backpack safely delivered, waiting for me amongst several other backpacks. I gave a silent sigh of relief, and mumbled a quiet prayer of thanks.

This albergue was a big, modern-looking building. I remember a large brown mass of curls lying near the registration desk, which Jim identified as a living creature - Spanish Water Dog!



Pilgrim littering? Or a pleasant surprise??



Spanish Water Dog?? Or a dirty mop??

We were assigned a small room with two bunk beds. Jim and I grabbed the bottom bunks, leaving Valerie to climb up to one of the upper ones.

We had a wonderful Pilgrim DInner with about 20 other hikers seated at two large tables. My Whatsapp report for that day read:

"Met with several people from our last hostel, including the two men who were drinking rye whiskey on the albergue's patio yesterday. They were Danish prison guards. Also a man from Italy who spoke only Italian, and a Spaniard who spoke only Spanish, and a Canadian, Gene, whose parents only spoke Italian, but who lived in Milwaukee and worked at Harley Davidson there for many years.

When the dinner was over, someone asked one of the prison guards if he was finished, and he replied, much to our surprised amusement, , 'No, I'm Danish'."

We did run into the prison guards a few more times along the trail, but each time they seemed a little less happy, and we never saw them after Logrono.

Gene, from Milwaukee, seemed to appear at almost every hostel we stayed at for the next week or so. But we never encountered him on the trail, so he was something of a mystery.

One other person at that pilgrim dinner was Lucy, who we encountered frequently on the trail. Always pleasant company, she had started the Camino with her husband, but he had to return home after today, so she was planning on hiking alone for the next 8 days before returning to England.

Before dinner, but after showering and washing our clothes, Jim and I checked out a small, nearby *supermercado* (grocery store). The owner was originally from Belgium, and has hiked the Camino Frances FIFTEEN times. He had met his wife, who is originally from Russia, while

on one of those hikes. They both loved the Camino so much that they decided to live and work on it. That became a familiar story along the Camino - pilgrims who had become so attached to the Camino that they decide to live somewhere along it and provide services for other pilgrims.

The grocer told us in broken English that there are five lessons that are learned by those who travel on the Camino. (And I am very much paraphrasing here…)
FIRST: The Mountains: They teach us how to endure pain as part of life, not expecting everything to be easy.
SECOND: The Backpack: It teaches us how to throw away unnecessary things to make life simpler and with less unnecessary baggage. It also helps us to realise how little we actually need day-to-day.
THIRD: The Albergues: They teach us how to listen to those around us. That listening is more important than talking. For everyone, but especially with strangers. We never learn anything when we are talking. Only when we are listening. It is in albergues where we receive the best advice.
FOURTH: The Journey (the Trail): It teaches us how to live in the present. Not in the future or in the past. Becoming more aware of what is around you. No distractions. Just you and the Camino. One careful step at a time.
FIFTH: The Shell. The symbol of the Camino. It represents the shell with which John the Baptist baptised Jesus. It teaches us to be open to change (be reborn) by our experiences on the Camino. And to spread the good news.

I noticed that the grocery had a display of painted rocks. The grocer explained that his wife painted the rocks for the pilgrims. I bought two. I gave away the “PASO A PASO” stone to someone who seemed to be having difficulty on the Camino. I don´t remember where or to whom. The blue stone with the Camino shell symbol I still have at home.

