Day 4
Friday
August 29, 2025

Pamplona to Puente la Reina
Destination: Albergue Puente para Peregrino

Time on Trail: 7 hours, 15 minutes
Distance Traveled: 15.26 miles (24.6 km)

Speed: 2.1 mph (3.9 km/h)
Pace: 28 minutes/ mile (18 minutes/km)



Note of the Terrain Graph:
Yes, this graph is exactly what it looks like:
One long, rather steep climb up - 1135 feet (346 meters) in about 4 hours
and one even steeper climb down - 1376 feet (419 meters) in about 3 hours

Jimś Daily Trail Report:
¨Really rough down hill stretch, tested both of our ankles, shins, knees and a few other places…but we passed (we shall see tomorrow AM)¨

Jim and I left Valerie resting with other late-rising pilgrims in our albergue and were out ¨on the road" about a half hour before sunrise. Literally. In Pamplona, like many of the cities and towns we passed through on the Camino, the trail is a road going through the center of town. Sometimes with a sidewalk for pedestrians, sometimes without,

Also like many other cities and towns of the Camion, Pamplona stretches out a long way along a river. This was our first time leaving a big city, and we almost got lost. At one point, the yellow markers seemed to be leading us into a larger municipal parking lot. There were a few other hikers on the early morning trail, but not enough to keep sight of as we traveled through the city. At one point near the far end of town the yellow arrows seemed to be leading us into a large municipal parking lot. We stood there confused for a while, together with Lucy, a very petite woman we recognized from Larrosana; and Mike, a new face to us. After a few minutes of indecision, we managed to agree to one path that would lead us out of town through a very modern section of the city.

While hiking together for a few miles, we learned that Lucy was from England, and she and her husband had hiked together the first three days. Her husband had to return to England and she was hiking alone for another week or so before she had to return.

And MIke, originally from Detroit and now a lawyer from New Jersey.

We saw Lucy many times over the next week before she left the Camino, always brightly wishing us a "Buen Camino" as she briskly walked by. (By this time I had realised that I was definitely the slowest person on the Camino.) Mike also joined us on and off for the few weeks. Unlike the other pilgrims we met, Mike stayed in hotels rather than hostels every chance he got. By doing so, he had fewer opportunities to mingle with the other pilgrims, but much more comfort and privacy and better meals. The more we traveled, the more we learned that "Each of us walks his own Camino" as a common Camino proverb tells us.

When I reviewed this day's photos before writing this, I could not figure out why there were so many photos of places I did not recognize. Then I remembered that because of her persistent blister(s) from Day One, Valerie decided to skip this part of the journey. We knew that it contained a long steep uphill climb followed immediately by a long steep downhill. It also contained one of the most iconic sites of the Camino, but it was agreed that the risk of further damage to Valerieś foot was not worth the view. As a result, I gave Valerie a pair of "toe socks" that I had, and she took the bus from Pamplona to Puena la Reina, giving her feet an opportunity to heal, and enjoying a chance to tour both cities more thoroughly.



Police car in Pamplona



Liquor store in Pamplona

I´m hoping there was no connection between these two photos for Valerie



A Pamplona sculpture paying tribute to the The annual ¨Running of the Bulls



Brave Jike, confronting an angry bull

The first seven miles of today's hike were thoroughly enjoyable. Open fields, mild temperatures, nice gravel trail. We watched a huge flock of sheep (300+) being herded down a distant hillside guided by only one shepherd and one sheep dog - another border collie I believe.

We also passed by a 6'tall trailside stone cairn with a long vacant castle and monastery in the distance beyond.



Vacant monastery and castle



A trailside cairn - who & why unknown

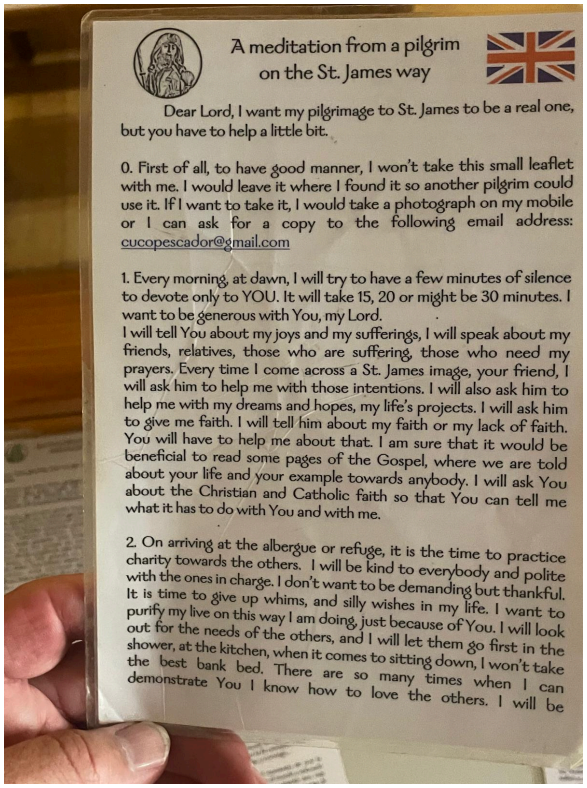
Less than four miles out of Pamplona, we took a breakfast break in the tiny town of Zariquiegui, we took a breakfast break with Lucy, Mike and many other pilgrims before we got into the serious hiking of the day. I also stopped and paid a visit to the Church of San Andres, which appeared in the movie "The Way".

Inside the church I noticed a laminated copy of "A meditation from a pilgrim on the St. James way" - some advice for nurturing a "pilgrim" attitude on the Camino. Unfortunately, I only took a photo of the front of the meditation, and I don't remember what was on the back side.

I was beginning to love those small churches. It was an unexpected pleasure to hear the ringing of their bells. I knew if I could hear church bells, a rest stop was within easy walking distance. Additionally, the peaceful, reflective atmosphere in the sanctuaries was refreshing.



Inside the Church of San Andres



A meditation from a pilgrim
on the St. James way

Dear Lord, I want my pilgrimage to St. James to be a real one, but you have to help a little bit.

0. First of all, to have good manner, I won't take this small leaflet with me. I would leave it where I found it so another pilgrim could use it. If I want to take it, I would take a photograph on my mobile or I can ask for a copy to the following email address: cucopescador@gmail.com

1. Every morning, at dawn, I will try to have a few minutes of silence to devote only to YOU. It will take 15, 20 or might be 30 minutes. I want to be generous with You, my Lord.
I will tell You about my joys and my sufferings, I will speak about my friends, relatives, those who are suffering, those who need my prayers. Every time I come across a St. James image, your friend, I will ask him to help me with those intentions. I will also ask him to help me with my dreams and hopes, my life's projects. I will ask him to give me faith. I will tell him about my faith or my lack of faith. You will have to help me about that. I am sure that it would be beneficial to read some pages of the Gospel, where we are told about your life and your example towards anybody. I will ask You about the Christian and Catholic faith so that You can tell me what it has to do with You and with me.

2. On arriving at the albergue or refuge, it is the time to practice charity towards the others. I will be kind to everybody and polite with the ones in charge. I don't want to be demanding but thankful. It is time to give up whims, and silly wishes in my life. I want to purify my live on this way I am doing, just because of You. I will look out for the needs of the others, and I will let them go first in the shower, at the kitchen, when it comes to sitting down, I won't take the best bank bed. There are so many times when I can demonstrate You I know how to love the others. I will be

The front page of a Pilgrim meditation.
Why did I forget to take a photo of the back?

The next stage of our hike that day was a narrow, steep, winding path of loose rock and sand up to Alto del Perdon and an even steeper very uneven path of loose boulders down the other side.

For the first time on our Camino, there seemed to be a steady stream of pilgrims. All lining up for a steep uphill climb.

I had to pause frequently on the way up. Not from pain or exhaustion, but from lack of breath. But I wasn't alone. Despite the narrow path, there were numerous spots for hikers to step off the trail and allow others to pass.

It was along this climb that I talked with RIchard and his wife Chris, with whom we shared the dorm room in Pamplona, and with whom we met throughout the Camino - all the way to Santiago. Like me, they stopped frequently on the climb up. But not because they needed to rest, Rather, because Richard was taking photographs of the journey. Dozens of them just on this one climb.

We also had a few pilgrims on bikes joining us on the climb. It was an awkward situation, as the trail was so crowded with hikers, the cyclists had to pause and sometimes carry their bikes to the top. (Up until recently, there was no official alternate route for cyclists. But because of the growing popularity of both hikers and bikers, there is now a safer alternate route for them. It takes both types of pilgrims through most of the same towns, but along different routes.)

It was on this climb that I noticed my first trailside memorial plaque, giving the name and age and date of death of someone who had died at that spot on the hillside. A sobering reminder that this Camino was not a walk in the park.

The summit of the hill is called Alto Del Perdon - The Hill of Forgiveness. Legend tells us that the devil tempted a pilgrim here but failed, allowing the pilgrim to continue the journey to Santiago. The name was given as those who reached the summit would receive forgiveness for their sins.

The view from the hilltop is stunning in all directions. Had it been a sunny day in late spring, the distant fields of green would have taken a pilgrim's breath away.. As it was, my breath was already taken away - by the climb itself.

It was here that we first encountered the huge wind turbines that lined the ridges of many high hills and mountains.

As it was, we paused for a quarter hour to catch our breath and pose for a few photos (thanks to Richard) in front of the famous sculpture there - Monumento al Peregrino, a group of life-sized iron pilgrims journeying - THROUGH TIME. The monument bears the inscription "Where the path of the wind crosses with that of the stars."

It struck me as a little odd to see that there was a well paved road that runs along the mountain crest back to Pamplona and onward to the east. We had just endured a challenging four hour climb to see this iconic monument, while others could just take a 15 minute taxi ride from Pamplona to enjoy the same view. It seemed a little unfair and Un-Camino like. In retrospect though, itś easy to understand that tourists would want to see this sculpture as well. And indeed, the one or two taxis that were present would be invaluable to those pilgrims who did not want to risk injury on the challenging rocky downhill slope ahead. If i remember correctly, there was also a welcome food truck parked on the crest, providing food and refreshments to tired pilgrims in a spot where no other sources were present.

Also at the summit was a memorial for 92 local people who lost their lives during the Spanish Civil War less than 100 years ago.

While at the summit we ran into Sue, the pilgrim we had met at the hostel in Pamplona who shared that she had hiked the Camino thirteen times before, but wasn't sure if her knees would allow her to complete it one more time. I have heard that she was a wonderful source of Camino advice and information, but no one seemed to know if she was able to complete her fourteenth Camino.

Also at the top I first noticed a large group of English-speaking pilgrims. Among them was a tall, slender young woman whose similarity to the actress Anne Hathaway was striking. Poised, refreshed, with expressive eyes and a small smile on her lips, she seemed to be eager to be on the trial again. It wasn't until weeks later that we learned her name was Bethan (and it took even longer for me to remember it). But toward the end of the Casmino, she frequently joined us at meals and card games.

Bethan was one of the many hikers who frequently passed us each day on the Camino. Even though it was still early in our Camino, I had learned that hikers played leap frog all day long: passing each other, only to be passed by later on, and then passing them again. Perhaps several times in a single day.

I realised that everyone on the Camino had their own starting times and their own pace, and their own specific needs for rest breaks and lunch breaks along the way. So it was natural to see hikers several times each day, without ever walking with each other.

Bethan was easy to spot - always smiling and walking briskly and effortlessly, as if the Camino was as easy as a walk in the park. I think she could fly if she wanted to despite a full backpack.

We also noticed a man, (whom Bethan later identified as Jason) who hung a large bright green sign declaring “LEGALLY BLIND” from his backpack. We noticed Jason frequently the next week or so, offering hiking advice to others. I understand Jason and several others from that group of Englishmen sped on and finished the Camino much faster than we did.

Another pilgrim we noticed often was a young woman (college student?) who had a sign reading "SHARE YOUR GRIEF”on her backpack.



Mike toward the front of the line of pilgrims
Notice he is petting the pilgrim dog!



Bethan in the center, with Richard holding his camera on left and Jason on right

So it was during this hike up Alto Del Perdon that I finally began to feel part of a larger group of pilgrims. I started to identify many of them by sight, and a few of them by name.

It took a little longer to realise that there were some pilgrims (like Bethan and Richard) who would likely be with me for the long haul; and other pilgrims (like Jason and Gene) who would journey with me for awhile and then leave (or be left) on their own Camino; and still others (like Becka and Sue) who would appear briefly for a day or two and then quickly exit OUR Camino, leaving only a memory.

The downhill slope of Alto Del Pedon was, as JIm mentioned, a “really rough downhill stretch, tested both of our ankles, shins, knees, and a few other places”.

I would describe it as a 10' wide gorge that had been roughly dug out of by a bulldozer and then haphazardly filled in with an assortment of rocks and boulders ranging in size from a golf ball to a bowling ball. And extending steeply downhill for almost 7 miles without pause.

We didn't talk much during our descent. And surprisingly, only a few other hikers passed us by on the downhill stretch. All of us moved slowly and carefully, picking our way through the loose rocks and tangled roots and random boulders, fearful of twisting an ankle or falling.

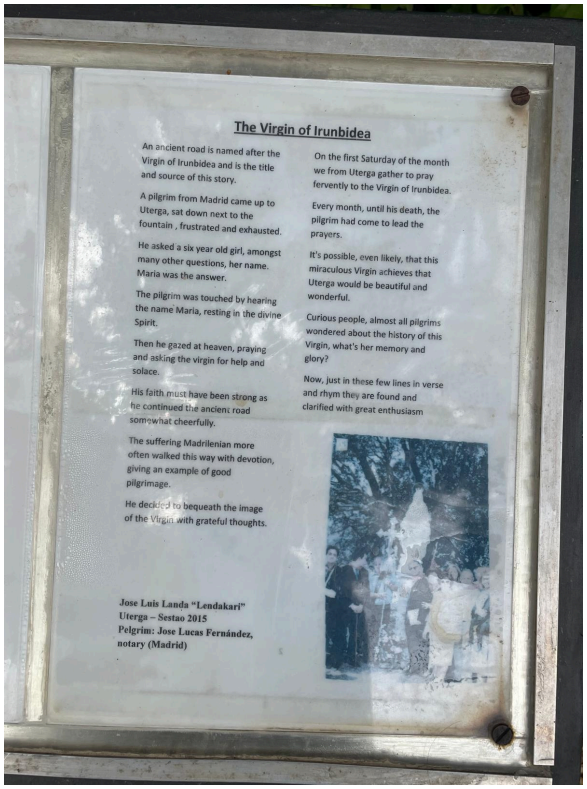
Jim wondered just how Sue would be able to complete this section since she was already having trouble with her knees.

As we did with Becka back in Zubiri, we were already becoming concerned with the fate of those we met.

On the last few miles to Puente la Reina, we passed the first local shrine we encountered, dedicated to "The Virgin of Irunbidea". Just a large white statue of Mary on a pedestal and a laminated one page story, in English, about the Shrine. We would encounter many such simple, local shrines dedicated to miraculous events that were said to have occurred at various sites. We didn't stop at each of them, although I'm sure there are some who did. The shrines and churches were constant reminders of the original sacred nature of the Camino.



A local shrine: The Virgin of Irunbidea



The Virgin of Irunbidea

An ancient road is named after the Virgin of Irunbidea and is the title and source of this story.

A pilgrim from Madrid came up to Uterga, sat down next to the fountain , frustrated and exhausted.

He asked a six year old girl, amongst many other questions, her name. Maria was the answer.

The pilgrim was touched by hearing the name Maria, resting in the divine Spirit.

Then he gazed at heaven, praying and asking the virgin for help and solace.

His faith must have been strong as he continued the ancient road somewhat cheerfully.

The suffering Madrilenian more often walked this way with devotion, giving an example of good pilgrimage.

He decided to bequeath the image of the Virgin with grateful thoughts.

On the first Saturday of the month we from Uterga gather to pray fervently to the Virgin of Irunbidea.

Every month, until his death, the pilgrim had come to lead the prayers.

It's possible, even likely, that this miraculous Virgin achieves that Uterga would be beautiful and wonderful.

Curious people, almost all pilgrims wondered about the history of this Virgin, what's her memory and glory?

Now, just in these few lines in verse and rhym they are found and clarified with great enthusiasm

Jose Luis Landa "Lendakari"
Uterga – Sestao 2015
Pelgrim: Jose Lucas Fernández, notary (Madrid)

The story page posted next to it

We stumbled on a quite unexpected "attraction" shortly after the shrine, where the Camino is on a paved road through the town of Muruzabal. Road improvements were being made, and evidently diggers came upon an unmarked cemetery while widening a paved road. Two graves had been discovered, and we could see one grave had been completely uncovered, with a scattering of ancient human bones lying on dirt, surrounded by flagstone walls that formed the

casket. A similar grave, still filled with dirt, was adjacent. There was a team of excavators present (archeologists?), and the whole area was fenced off to a crowd of onlookers. Quite a vivid lesson of the long history of the Camino. We only stopped briefly, and I quickly took a couple photos. Jim half-jokingly warned that I was being disrespectful of the dead and one of the townś observers had probably cursed our Camino because of it.





Open graves in Muruzabal discovered during road work. Who were they? When did they die?

Also on the route today was some sort of religious festival in the town of Obanos. The town had many food and souvenir stalls, and the residents, young and old, were dressed in white slacks and shirts with red belts and scarves and shoes. Four human figures, dressed as royalty and twice as tall as an adult, were paired at the entrance of one church, where residents were gathering and a band practiced. Very tired, we did not linger. But I wonder if those tall figures were statues or giant marionettes. And having researched the photo I took, it seems we stumbled upon The Obanos Mystery Play, commemorating the martyrdom murder of St. Felicia and the repentance of her murderous brother St. Guillien.



Yet another example of the cultural, historical, and religious surprises that the Camino presented us throughout our journey.

Puente la Reinia, our destination, was a good sized town (or small city?) and we met up with Valerie and enjoyed a nice meal on an outdoor patio. Several other pilgrims dined at nearby tables, and one English-speaking couple asked me “How old are you?”. I guess I look (and hike) a lot older than I feel, and I was under the impression they thought we were a three-generation group: Grandfather (me), son (Jim), and granddaughter (Valerie).

Ourhostel, a pension, was very nice and modern, and we had a nice semi-private room with just two bunks for the three of us. So a quiet night’s sleep and a leisurely morning. It had a nice open third story balcony complete with lounge chairs, a hammock, and greenery just outside our room. I found out that on the Camino, the floors are numbered differently than in the States. The first floor is actually what I would call the second floor. So since our room was on the second floor, we actually had to walk up to the third floor, something we had to get accustomed to in the weeks ahead.



Our own private patio, compete with hammock



The lobby of our hostel

After dinner and before we turned in, Valerie took us for a tour of the town, a charming mix of old and new, and, like Pamplona, mostly narrow cobblestone streets for both pedestrians and car, lined by walls of colorful three story high residences. Jim and I posed for a couple photos on an impressive 6-arched bridge over the wide Arga River built in the 11th century. Both Jim and I commented on the lack of river traffic of any kind. And we rarely saw any sign of fishing on any river we had crossed thus far.





Puente la Reina is a site of convergence for another branch of the Camino - the Camino Aragones, which reaches over through Tououse France all the way to Rome, so perhaps we had a slight influx of new pilgrims.

If so, we didn’t notice.

It was a very rough trail today, but one full of fresh insights, fascinating encounters, and new friendships. And it ended in a restful, peaceful evening. Life doesn't get much better than this.