Day 5
Saturday
August 30, 2025

Puente la Reina to Estella
Destination: Albergue Capuchinos Rocamador

Time on Trail: 7 hours, 13 minutes
Distance Traveled: 15 miles (24 km)

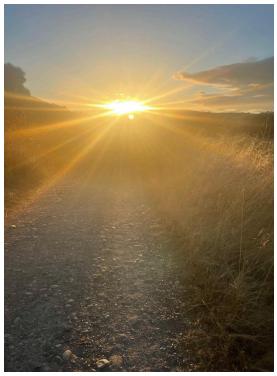
Speed: 2.1 mph (3.4 km/h)
Pace: 29 minutes/mile (18 minutes/km)



Note on Terrain Graph:

Jimś Daily Trail Report
¨The sun definitely made an appearance today.¨

We enjoyed our first real Camino sunrise today, shortly before 8AM and not long after we started on the trail again. Turning back and witnessing a bright sunrise across a wide rural vista was a rewarding experience and was an unexpected blessing to our Camino for me. One that never failed to lift my spirits many mornings and made our early morning starts well worth the extra effort.





Our first Camino sunrise

As Jim mentioned, we had bright sunshine all day. And we were also entering a dry section of Spain, away from the forests of the Pyrenees foothills. We encountered our first vineyard, and instead of meadows and pastureland, we began to walk through large wheatfields.

One other change was the presence of more frequent churches and chapels along the route. The towns we were now beginning to pass through were so small that they had little else of interest than a church, a cafe or bar, and perhaps an albergue. Fewer stores, fewer cars, fewer people. Often the ringing of the church bells and the sight of the church steeple were our first hints that we were nearing a town. That was the case in the town of Manero, where we never really noticed the town, just saw an impressive church structure behind a tall fence lined with a row of trash bins.




The Church of Saint Peter in Manero

Jike in his first vinyard

The town of Cirauqui was more memorable for the way it rose out above the surrounding countryside visible from miles away, with the church building rising high above the surrounding structures. As was almost always the case in this part of the Camino, the trail took us directly

through the town, past the village church, and down narrow streets nearly vacant of cars or people.



The town of Cirauquai, rising beautifully from a distance

It was in Cirauqui that we first noticed that flocks of swallows often made clay nests in the eves of the roofs of one or two buildings in many of the towns. These flocks were busy darting in and out of the nests and around the towns. I have no idea what they ate, because we seldom noticed any insects. (Duh, Mike! Their presence was probably the main reason we didn't see many insects.) Do these swallows migrate, or are they year round residents?

It was along this section of the trail that we first noticed thousands of dead snails clinging to reeds growing along the trailsides. I still haven't discovered the cause - was there a severe drought, or was this a natural annual die off? And are these native snails, or an invasive species? The total number we saw along the Camino is staggering.

Questions like these were part of the reason I found the Camino such a unique experience. So many unfamiliar sights, allowing my mind to ask Who? What? Why? about so many things.



Swallow nests under the roof overhangs



Thousands and thousands of snail shells

I believe it was somewhere between Cirauqui and Villatuerta that we first met Marina. I was so slow that we seldom passed any other hikers on the entire Camino. But we were frequently passed by other hikers. So it was becoming my habit to greet those passing me by with "Buen Camino. My name is Mike, and that's my brother Jim and our niece Valerie up ahead. We're from the United States.¨

Very often, the hiker passing me would reply with a friendly "Buen Camino" and give their name and country of origin.

There were two reasons for my friendliness.

One was to meet other pilgrims.

The other was to slow Jim down.

Jim and I compliment each other in that respect.

I am better at meeting strangers and Jim is better at talking with strangers.

Especially while hiking, where I am usually just trying to catch my breath.

When Marina passed me and gave her place of origin as Brazil, I mentioned that JIm had been to Brazil, and I yelled to JIm, "Hey JIm, this is Marina and she's from Brazil."

So when Marina caught up with Jim and Valerie, they talked about Jim's experience in Brazil and slowed down a little for a mile or so.

You would think that I would use the opportunity to catch up.

Not me! I used the opportunity to slow down even more!

We actually passed Marina briefly again as we left Villatuerta, but she soon outpaced us - again!

Marina became one of the friends whom we met frequently during the Camino. Like Bethan, Marina was always easy to spot along the trail - always with a bright welcoming smile and a joyful attitude. It helped that her trail clothes were distinctive. A faded light blue jacket if it was cold, a black top with yellow (or red?) sleeves if it was warm. For some reason, it took us days before we were sure of her name. Marianna? Marina? Minniehaha? It wasn't until we had heard other people say her name several times before we felt sure enough to say Buen Camino Marina!" She too was a confident hiker. Though not as swift as Bethan, she made hiking look like fun. And she was always good company to hike with, easy to carry on a conversation with.

A little later we traveled through the town of Villatuerta, a more modern town with many cars and people present. It was in Villatuerta that we stopped at a nice modern-ish cafe for ice cream along with a large enthusiastic group of "younger" hikers - mostly in their 20s, and I think mostly American. I struck up a conversation with one of them, a young man named Ernst, who was from the East Coast and hoped to go to grad school at Northwestern in Chicago. He said he had wanted to hike the Camino since finding out about it while in high school. He decided to hike the Camino before he started grad school.

What I remembered about the group was that some of them carried hollow hiking poles, perhaps bamboo, that made a delightful rich "thunking" sound when they were struck. We saw (and heard) some of the group several times that day, but never again on our Camino.

It was at the same rest stop in Villatuerta that I first noticed one petite woman wearing soft pink flip flops instead of shoes. We noticed her many times along the Camino, often carrying a silver umbrella as a sun shield, traveling with a much younger companion. It wasn't until weeks later that we had the opportunity to introduce ourselves. She was Roxanne from Minnesota, and she was hiking with her son Wyatt. I was always intrigued that she could hike the Camino in flip flops. And do so faster than I could! She told us she had injured her ankle on the first day, but didn't want the injury to cut short her pilgrimage! Hence the flip flops.



Roxanne and her flip flops



Roxanne and her silver umbrella shade

Also in Villatuerta, we enjoyed watching a woman and her dog playing fetch in the Rio Iranzu, and Jim filled his cap with the water from the mouth of a colorful clown fountain.





Before leaving town, we visited the Church of the Assumption, where there is a larger statue of St. Veremudo, an abbot in the Eleventh Century who played a large part in the early development of the Camino Frances and is considered a patron saint of the Camino







In front of and inside the Church of the Assumption, and St. Veremudo, Camino patron saint

We weren't far out of Villattuerta before I insisted we make a slight quarter-mile detour to a small abandoned Hermitage just off the trail. I couldn't resist, as it was dedicated to San Miguel - St. Michael the Archangel. The interior was nearly empty, with a simple wooden cross hanging on a wall above a small cut stone altar on which were scores of photos and cards and handwritten notes amidst crucifixes and holy cards. Although no longer used for religious

services, it was obvious that the building had been the site of countless personal visitations over the years.



The abandoned Hermitage of San Miguel
(And this is the Letter M!)



The interior of the small hermitage, the stone altar covered with notes, letters and gifts

Again, this was a feature of the Camino that I did not expect - impressive stone buildings - churches and forts and hospitals and hostels and monasteries - built long before the Europeans had even reached North America. Now unused, but still standing and often still accessible to the curious visitor. I was becoming aware of just how recent our American history is, and how disposable we Americans tend to consider our heritage.

While walking out of Villatuerta, we came across some young gypsy children along the sidewalk trying to sell jewelry and candy and Camino shells to pilgrims passing by. I stopped briefly to ask the prices, which were incredibly high. When I declined, they halved the price, which was still above what would be considered fair for the quality. When I still declined and started to walk away, I was sent off with some rude words and gestures.

Jim fared much better when we came upon another group of young “merchants” a little further out of town, and managed to barter for a good price for some cloth bracelets.

On that stretch we crossed a high arced wooden bridge over Rio Ega that reminded me of bridges from a Japanese Garden. At the other end of the bridge we came across a young couple sitting on the cement edge of an irrigation canal branching off from the river, soaking their legs from knees down in the cool water. Looking back at the photo now, I realise that we saw this couple frequently throughout the road to Santiago. They never appeared to be very happy with the journey (or with each other) but they did seem to persevere.

It was along this stretch too that we came across three horses - two in a distant pasture, and one gray one wandering loose right alongside of the trail we were on. Valerie befriended it instantly, and I am sure she would have gladly ridden it for the rest of her Camino if she could have done so with a clear conscience. (“Yes, I was rescuing the poor lost horse.”) But alas, a man did show up in a pickup truck and talk to her about the free-range horses.



Jim, bargaining with young peddlers



Valerie and the horse she ¨found¨



A Japanese-style bridge in Spain?



Two travelers soaking their legs in a canal

Estella itself was a charming town. Perhaps my favorite town next to Astorga. Very lively, with numerous shops and restaurants and quite a few churches and historic buildings lining the hillsides on both banks of Rio Ega.

Our hostel for the evening, Albergue Capuchinos Rocamador, was a nunnery until the late 1900's. It is still easy to notice the clean but spartan look of a convent in its rooms and dining area and small garden with a small building for laundry. There was even access to the choir loft of their chapel from near our room.



In the lobby of our hostel

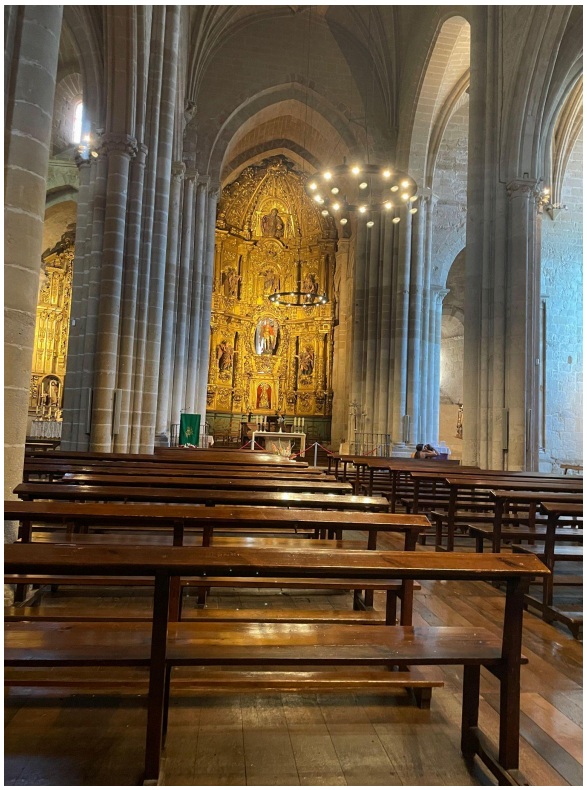


The choirloft was open to view the chapel

We were early enough to tour some of the town, including a visit to another Church of St. Michael. The second of the day! This one up at the top of a hillside at the end of a long wide stone staircase. The interior of the church was impressive, as was the view of the town from up there.



The exterior of St. Michael´s, Estella



The interior of St. Michaelś

I believe it was in Estella that we upgraded my backpack again. This time to a model that had a little more room as well as netted exterior sleeves to hold my water bottles.

After touring the Church of St. Michael and shopping, the three of us rested on a bench near the riverside, and our English friend, Lucy, with whom Jim & I hiked out of Pamplona, sat down and joined us. We had seen Lucy often on the trail, exchanging "Buen Caminos" as she hurried past us, but never really talked much. ANd this was the first time on the Camino that a fellow pilgrim actually sought out our company at a rest stop.

We asked about her albergue for the evening, and she replied, "Four women and one man. Much better than last night, when I was the only woman in a room with four men. With all the noises and smells that night, I thought I was in a tropical rain forest all night long."

I knew she was near the end of her Camino, and that she was due to return to her husband in England soon. I regret not inviting her to join us for dinner. I wasn't sure of the proper Camino etiquette (if there is one), so I let the opportunity pass. It would have been nice to share our stories. The next day near the WIne Fountain would be the last time we saw her.

We did have a reservation for a nice pilgrim dinner at a nearby cafe. Someone back home had earlier inquired about the food we were eating on the Camino. Generally we had chocolate croissants for breakfast, and hamburgers, cheese pizzas, and some form of chicken if available. Occasionally it was possible to get toast and eggs for breakfast, and I would have the Spanish omelette if I was hungry. JIm avoided any food that contained vegetables. Generally, we decided to eat cheap, and we were not willing to risk unfamiliar and more expensive regional dishes knowing that we had to walk long distances the next morning. I did take photos of a dish of pasta with white sauce and ham and Creme caramel at the restaurant in Estella to prove to the family that we were actually eating some Spanish food. While we waited for our meal I took out my deck of cards and we played a couple hands of Flip It. That was the first time we played cards on the Camino. But definitely not the last.

I don remember what Jim and Valerie did,, but after dinner I went back to our room, read and rested until it was time to turn the lights out.



View of Rio Ega running through Estella



In a plaza in Estella. Valerieś instructions: ¨Pretend you like each other!¨

A couple general observations that I have noticed on the Camino.

Despite all the warnings I had read about the need to do stretching and warm up exercises before any strenuous activity, I never ever saw anyone do any stretching or warm up exercises before hitting the trail. Even on the trail, there never seemed to be any physical activity except sitting. Occasionally people would take off their shoes and rub their feet, but that was about it.

Other hikers were generally clean and well groomed. There was no one who appeared like the popular image of a ¨penitential pilgrim¨. I have a poor sense of smell, but I never heard of anyone complaining about body odor on the trail. (Of course, farting at night was a whole other story.) I think most of us looked forward to a shower after a day on the trail. And since most of us only had two or three sets of clothing, we were careful to wash our hiking clothes and hang them up to dry on a daily basis.

Most albergues prohibited shoes beyond the lobby, so sandals of some sort were the usual off-trail footwear. Iḿ sure this made keeping the albergues clean much easier, but there was often a backup at the entrance as we got ready to leave in the morning. Iḿ not an experienced hiker, but I quickly learned how vital it was to make sure feet were clean, socks were debris free, and the shoes were entirely empty inside.

Poop!!! By this time I was becoming concerned by my lack of it! Almost nothing was coming out! And yet I didn't feel bloated or constipated. I gradually convinced myself that my body was just using food so efficiently that there was practically nothing left of poop out! At least I fervently hoped that was the right reason!