Day 9
Wednesday
September 3

From Najera to Granon
Destination: Casa Rural Cerreo de Mirabel

Time on Trail: 8 hours, 51 minutes
Distance Traveled: 18,01 miles
Total Distance to Date:

Speed: 2.0 mph (3.3 km/hr)
Pace: 29 minutes/mile (18 minutes/km)



Note on Terrain Graph:

Jim's Daily Trail Report:
"Hot, slight breeze, and changed from vineyards to wheat fields.... I think I prefer the wheatfield.... our 3rd 18 miler in a row. It was tough. We are supposed to get a break tomorrow."



We were smiling when we started the day! Notice the bloody scar above JIm´s left eye.

I don't remember much of this day. We got another early start, and went through a few small towns. I think I only took 5 photos the whole day.

I do remember that it was the last time we saw Gene, who somehow seemed to be present in every town we stayed in since Lasorrato on Day 2. I don't think we ever saw him on the trail itself, but we saw him often once we stopped. We wished him a "Buen Camino" in the Hotel cafe just before we left for the morning, and never saw him again. I believe he was planning on leaving the Camino to head to Italy for a motorcycle event.

We did stop briefly in Santa Domingo de la Calzada, which is the suggested destination for the day, but since we could not get a reservation in that town, we ended up going another 4½ miles (7 km) to the next town, Granon.

The town of Santa Domingo de la Calzada does have a very famous cathedral of the same name, dedicated to St. Dominic of Calzada, who did much to aid pilgrims passing through the area on the Camino around 1100, including building a bridge over the Rio Olja o Giera. The cathedral itself is famous for having a pair of live chickens in the sanctuary at all times,even through the services. There is a miracle attributed to St. Dominic in which two beheaded chickens are resurrected to testify to the innocence of a pilgrim, traveling with his parents from Germany, who was wrongly accused of theft after he spurned the advances of a local woman.

He was hanged, and his sorrowful parents continued to Santiago. On the way back, the parents came to the site of the gallows from which their son hung, only to discover that he was still alive, being kept alive by St. James.. When they went to the local magistrate, who was sitting down to a dinner of roast chicken, to tell him that their son was still alive and to have him taken down, the magistrate replied. “That boy is no more alive than these chickens on my plate!” Whereupon the chickens grew back their feathers and began to peck their way around the magistrate’s dinner table. Properly chastised, the magistrate immediately rushed to the gallows, released the young German pilgrim and pardoned him. (A very hardy folk those Germans are!)



The very impressive front of Santa Domingo de la Calzada

We were tempted to tour the church (just to see the chickens) but the line was long and there was a fee to get in (5 euros?) and we still had 4 miles to go, so we took a short break (bananas and croissants?) and resumed our walk to Granon.

(I have found out since then that there is an almost identical story about a church on the Camino Portuguese. The Story of the Rooster of Barcelos in Portugal.)

I was so tired after walking 18+ miles each day for the last 3 days, that I didn't even try to send a message to the family from Granon. But the next day I sent this Whatsapp text.

"I was so tired yesterday after the 3 day, 55 mile trek that I took a shower after we finished at 3, got a beer & 2 cokes from a local bar, and went back to the albergue and took a nap - from 4:30PM till 5:30AM the next day!

Yesterday's hike was so unremarkable that I had a hard time finding anything to photograph! At one point, Jim commented - LOOK! A whole bunch of ants! TAKE A PHOTO!"

(I think he was being sarcastic, as he was understandably a little annoyed at my habit of stopping for photos. I have a hard time keeping up with his pace, and there is no way I could ever "catch up" if I paused to take photos, so our daily hikes often ground to a halt when I saw something I found interesting even to photograph. Gradually I learned to take photos while walking - just take a bunch of them and delete the ones that didn't turn out well!)

That whole episode took place as we walked through probably the strangest town on the Camino - Ciruena. This town was built as part of the modern Rioja Alta Golf Club, a modern development project back in the early part of this century. There was a financial crash in 2008 from which the town still hasn't completely recovered. Though the golf course is still open (and offers a nice stop for pilgrims who want a good meal and a sello) much of the town still seems empty, with few cars on the modern streets. I believe there are fewer than 300 people living amongst modern apartment buildings that could house thousands. We were accustomed to seeing only a few people in the small ancient rural towns. But it seemed very strange to see few people in such a large modern town.

I believe it was on this stretch of the Camino where we stopped at a small cafe for lunch and enjoyed the company of a British father-daughter Camino pilgrims. I don't remember if they were from Plymouth or Portsmouth (or more likely, from neither). We had seen them often, but this was the first (and last) time we got to hear their stories of hiking the Camino together. From their stories, it appeared that hiking was a mutual interest and passion for them, and they were enjoying their experience together.

At the same cafe, we spotted Marina, who seemed to have been ¨adopted¨ by a large group of Italian hikers. The lively happy group had passed us many times in the past few days. And I was a little jealous that people could have that much fun on what was for me an exhausting experience.



The front of our hostel in Granon



For some reason, painted flower pots were popular in this section of the Camino

I do have a photo of the interior of the local church in Granon, Iglesia de San Juan Bautista. We did nothing more than take a quick look inside the church, but there is a well-known rustic albergue located right in the attic of this church.

I believe several of the pilgrims we met mentioned staying there and finding the stay a wonderfully memorable experience. The albergue hosts 40 pilgrims, and pilgrims are not charged for their stay or meals. The hospitality is by donation only, and includes communal dinner and breakfast. They sleep on mats on the floor under the tower of the church, and participate in an evening reflection in the church choir. If I do hike the Camino again, this is the one albergue I would make an extra effort to stay at.



The interior of The Church of San Juan Bautista, Granon