

Confraternity of Saint James

Pilgrim Guides to Spain

8. The Camino de Invierno



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A Guide to the Camino de Invierno.

The Camino de Invierno is a newly waymarked alternate walking/bicycle route to Santiago. From its start in Ponferrada it follows along riverbanks, climbs mountains, and passes through the wilds, farmlands, and small towns of Leon and Galicia. About 210 kilometers later it joins the Via de la Plata near Lalín for the final 65 kilometers to Santiago de Compostela. Depending on which alternatives are chosen along the way, the Invierno adds up to roughly 275 kilometers.

As of 2010 the Archbishop of Santiago had not recognized the Invierno as an "official" camino, but Invierno pilgrims with the requisite sellos report no trouble in obtaining a Compostela at the Pilgrims' Office. If you have any doubt, snap photos of yourself standing at landmarks along the way, and take your camera with you to the pilgrim office.

Historic information is vague regarding the use of this path as a road to Santiago. Proponents say this old Roman road became "the Winter Way" during the camino's medieval heyday, offering an alternative to the snowy winter weather of O Cebreiro and dangerous floods on the Rio Valcarce. Church documents from the Middle Ages refer to pilgrims' hospitals, churches and other pilgrim-related sites along this Way, but some groups, including the Gallego Camino Association, dispute their historic authenticity. Santiago de Compostela notwithstanding, this route, which follows the contours of the River Sil gorge, has been in use at least since Roman times.

This guide is sketchy and new. It is assembled from materials provided by two area Friends of the Camino groups, trail notes from Invierno pilgrims, web searches, and personal experience. It is a work in progress and a labor of love. The Invierno now is a tough, solitary,

and charming passage through some of Spain's most spectacular scenery and authentic rural territory. Pilgrims here are still seen as something strange and special.

Some warnings are in order: The Invierno is not a Camino for beginners or for hikers looking a cheap-and-easy holiday. The few "guide" leaflets available are flashy and vague, designed more for public-relations purposes than actual trail-finding. Many locals do not know a Camino exists in their neighborhood, and there is no pilgrim-oriented infrastructure as such. Waymarks are sometimes far apart, wrong, or even non-existent. A good level of Spanish is essential. This is what the Camino Frances was for centuries – a challenge for flexible, determined pilgrims.

Private accommodation along the route is plentiful, but some of the daily stages are long and lonely. Albergues – youth hostels – are said to exist in the towns of Puente Domingo Flórez, Biobra, Rubiá, O Castro, Villamartín, Quiroga, Chantada, and Rodeiro. These are not Camino-related albergues, however; they are used by youth groups and other local associations. They supposedly are available to pilgrims as well, but they are not anywhere along the marked path. Information on the type of facilities offered, or even where they can be found in town, is hard to find, even when asking in person at the town hall. A pilgrim will have much better luck simply asking local park-bench observers where a room can be found in town, or if any of them offers simple rooms to pilgrims.

There are two Friends of the Camino de Invierno Associations with good websites. One group is located in the Sil River area, www.caminodeinvierno.com (The group's name is the Asociación Camiños a Santiago de la Ribeira Sacra). The other is located in O Barco de Valdeorras, www.caminodeinvierno.es (This group's name is Asociación Amigos do Camiño de Santiago por Valdeorras). The president of the latter organization, Ramon Garcia Rodriguez, can be reached via email at asociacionvaldeorras@hotmail.com. The organization's phone number is listed as 657 405 303.

This document is pulled from various sources, and some of the text is a translation by Laurie Reynolds (laurie.reynolds@gmail.com) of documents written in Spanish by Aida Menéndez Lorenzo, president of the Friends of the Camino de Invierno. Michael Matynka (camino@matynka.com, wisepilgrim.com), a Spanish-American pilgrim, provided GPS maps and valuable advice on mileages of the camino route. Helpful accommodation websites include www.infohostal.com and www.turgalicia.com. Many more small and privately run family-run accommodations can be found along the Way.

POSSIBLE STAGES ON THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

The Spanish guide lists the first set of stages, for a total of 9 days. A second one cuts down on the 30+ kilometer days and adds up to a 12-day walk.

9 DAY WALK

Day 1 – Ponferrada to Puente de Domingo Flórez (35 km)

Day 2 – to A Rúa (31.5 km)

Day 3 – to Quiroga (28 km)

Day 4 – to Monforte (33 km)

Day 5 – to Chantada (29 km)

Day 6 – to Rodeiro (27 km)

Day 7 – to Albergue de A Laxe (27 km)

Day 8 – to Albergue de Ponte Ulla (34 km)

Day 9 – to Santiago (17 km)

12 DAY WALK

Day 1 – to Las Médulas (27.5 km)

Day 2 – to Barco de Valdeorras (25.5 km)

Day 3 – to A Rúa (14 km)

Day 4 – to Quiroga (28 km)

Day 5 – to Puebla de Brollón (23 km)

Day 6 – to Casa Rural (depending on which of the two you choose, either 20 or 24 km)

Day 7—to Chantada (either 19 or 15km, depending on previous night)

Day 8 – to Rodeiro (27 km)

Day 9 – to Lalín (21 km)

Day 10 – to Silleda (15 km)

Day 11 – to Ponte Ulla (20 km)

Day 12 – to Santiago (17 km)

WALKING THE CAMINO DE INVIERNO

PONFERRADA TO LAS MÉDULAS (27 KM) (4.4KM TO TORAL DE MERAYO)

The route is marked as the “Camino Real” (Royal Road) through this part of the Bierzo region of León. Pilgrims can begin the Invierno trail at the Albergue de Peregrinos San Nicolas de Flüe in **Ponferrada**, where credentials and a very basic map are available. Walk along the Camino Frances a few meters until you reach the first cruceiro traffic circle. Make a LEFT here, cross the Puente Boeza bridge, and turn right. **Ponferrada** will be across the river to your right. This is not the prettiest walk at first, and those coming off the Camino Frances will notice the familiar yellow arrows give way to a bounty of other kinds of markings, including a red/blue arrow on a white field. 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.) Keep to the left road, and soon familiar conch-shell mojones will reappear to guide you uphill toward

TORAL DE MERAYO (2.5KM TO VILLALIBRE DE LA JURISDICCIÓN)

Has a pharmacy, a nice stone bridge, and a very friendly bar (*Cafe Bar Mariluz*) located in the square which is not square. WIFI, post office and a pasteleria. When leaving Toral de Merayo, keep on the road at the first fork (gentle right). You will leave town on the asphalt road, turn left on another, and begin a climb off to your right shortly thereafter. Soon you will arrive at:

VILALIBRE DE LA JURISDICCIÓN (0.8KM TO PRIARANZA DEL BIERZO)

Fountain

PRIARANZA DEL BIERZO (2.7KM TO SANTALLA DEL BIERZO)

Fountain

SANTALLA (3.9KM TO VILLAVIEJA)

Overlook of the valley just before getting into town. There are two sets of arrows when leaving town, and a mojon which keeps you on the camino towards

VILLAVIEJA (4.6KM TO BORRENES, 1KM TO CASTILLO DE CORNATEL)

Possible fountain, but otherwise just a small hamlet set in the base of the valley. From here

you begin a climb with great views of the nearing castle.

Castillo de Cornatel

Closed Mondays. Open from 11:00-13:30 and 16:00-20:00 the rest of the week. Free for pilgrims. 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. (Other pilgrims say the visit was not worth the climb, and you should skirt along the base of the hill.)

Once you are done with your visit, continue on 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:

BORRENES (6.5KM TO LAS MÉDULAS)

Nice, quiet town along the camino. It has a small shop of the typical “lights off but we carry everything” Spanish variety, a bar which does full meals and has a wifi signal, and a pharmacy. (Maps indicate accommodation).

Continue out of town in the same direction you walked in, and resist the temptation to take a small, manicured “camino cholesterol” 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 come upon will take you to **Carrucedo**, which is not technically on the camino. Instead, continue on straight and turn left on the next road (which takes drivers to **Las Medulas**). A short distance along the road the camino once again diverts into a more scenic landscape of chestnut groves.

Accommodation - Borrenes

Casa Marisol

987 420 568

686 055 938

LAS MÉDULAS (8.5KM TO PUENTE DE DOMINGO FLÓREZ)

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 Roman road built to transport mineral wealth out of the region. Along the river you will still see remains of Roman mines alongside their modern counterparts.

Las Medulas, an environmental holocaust two millennia ago, is now a spectacular, spooky assembly of deep-red cliffs and valleys, with a 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. (Be warned: breakfast is very hard to find in this town before 9 a.m.!)

This town has a tourist information center, accommodation, bars, and restaurants targeting weekenders hiking the many trails around the area. You will have to go through the town, and leave on the opposite end. If the arrows are not visible at a fork in the road just out of town, take the path more traveled to your left.

Accommodation - Las Médulas

Hotel Medulio

987 422 833; 987 422 889.

www.hotel-medulio.com

Complejo Rural Agoga

www.ruralagoga.com

LAS MÉDULAS TO PUENTE DE DOMINGO FLÓREZ (8 KM).

Waymarks are scarce, but head to the western edge of town and you will spot the familiar conch-shell marker. Leave Las Médulas on a tractor path that leads to a beautiful morning's walk through a series of wooded hills popular with hunters. At the top of the first rise is a lovely view back to **Las Médulas**. Then the Camino descends, along a mountain lane with views of distant mines and villages, arriving at **Puente de Domingo Flórez**, where there are friendly restaurants, supermarkets, bars, a medical center, and accommodation. Internet is available at the town hall.

The camino track leads to a busy two-lane road. Turn left to continue through town and keep on the camino that follows the highway. Alternatively, turn RIGHT toward the river and *Hostal Restaurante La Torre*.

PUENTE DE DOMINGO FLÓREZ TO O BARCO DE VALDEORRAS (17.5 KM) (5.3KM TO NOGUEIRAS)

From **Puente de Domingo Flórez** to **O Barco de Valdeorras**, there are three possible alternatives:

One, which is marked with mojones, is longer and takes you towards **Rubiá** and **O Barco**, passing through **Víbora**. Not much used.

The second, which is shorter, goes along the left side of the Sil River, following the highway that goes to **O Barco**. This alternative follows a secondary Roman Road.

The third, also 14 kilometers, is recommended because it avoids highway walking. It keeps to the right bank of the Sil, 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. Finding the start is tricky, as there are several bridges in town.

For the third option, from the hostel walk downhill past Guardia Civil station. Soon you will pick up yellow arrows near the Claudio supermarket, which lead down to a narrow bridge crossing and under the railway bridge to the little town of **Quereño** on the other side of the tracks. Just beyond the bridge, take a sharp left up a residential street, leftward onto a dirt path, and over the railroad tunnel. (Do not be tempted to short-cut through the tunnel!) The path becomes a gravel track between the train tracks on the right, and the river on the left. This rail line will be your guide for many miles: the camino pathway follows it along for the next few days. For now, there are two towns on the way to **Sobrado**.

Accommodation - Puente de Domingo Flórez

Hostal Restaurante La Torre. Chao do Marco.

987 460 589 - 987 460 081

info@hrlatorre.com

www.hrlatorre.com

This roadside hotel seems seedy and un-economical until you figure-in excellent meals and a charming riverside garden, complete with animals and exotic birds.

PUMARES (1.6KM TO NOGUEIRAS)

Small with only a few well cared for houses. Natural spring fountain, tasty and cold. No services.

NOGUEIRAS (3.6KM TO SOBRADELO)

An interesting ghost town along the train track. Beware of snakes.

SOBRADELO (2.4KM TO ENTORNA)

Arrows lead you left into town, right to continue along the camino to Entorna.

If you go left: Sobradelo's pride is a magnificent 16th-century, seven-arched bridge. Cross over it for a meal in the notably good restaurant on the other side. Sobradelo is built on a fairly steep hill, with an ice cream kiosk, pharmacies, a shop, train station, bars, banks, health center, and a swimming pool. There is not an arrow in sight which will get you back to the camino, however. To do so, look for an opening in the buildings near the kiosk/park which leads to a set of stairs leading steeply upwards. Climb. At the top turn left and keep on the OU-0801 out of town.

ENTORNA/ENTOMA (4.9KM TO O BARCO)

Although the OU-0801 road will take you all the way to **O Barco**, there are arrows which take you onto more scenic trails through the forest. Eventually you rejoin the road. Keep an eye out for a blue camino sign indicating the way to your left and under the train tracks. Go under and turn right where you will take a gravel track (the gravel in these parts is overspill from the train tracks and is not the best to walk on). **O Barco** is near enough.

O BARCO DE VALDEORRAS (ENTERING THROUGH CORTES BARRIO) (4.3KM TO ARCOS)

All the services you could want in this town. *La Gran Tortuga* is a hostel at number 34 of the main road. Wifi is included and it was a clean if aged room. It is a long town to walk through, and the way out near the end of town is confusing, with a variety of contradictory arrows and signs. The best advice is to follow road signs to **A Pobra**, **Arcos**, and **Villamartin**.

ARCOS (3.1KM TO VILAMARTIN)

VILAMARTÍN (OUTSKIRTS NEAR RIVER) (5.2KM TO A RÚA DE VALDEORRAS)

Restaurants and albergue.

A RÚA DE VALDEORRAS (DISTANCE TO QUIROGA UNKNOWN)

All services, including a pilgrim information office where information on every camino but the Invierno can be found. In A Rúa there are restaurants, markets, and accommodation. Be sure to stock up.

Accommodation - A Rúa

Hostal Niza

Dr. Vila, 30

988 310 807

Pensión Fabio

Rua Progreso, 201

636 897 217 - 626 876 691

www.fabiosanchez.com

This town once offered travelers several alternative paths on to Monforte de Lemos, but trail authorities recommend using a rugged and scenic northward route that passes through **Quiroga**. (The GPS track is missing here.)

From **A Rúa** to **Quiroga** are 28 kilometers and no services – no lodging, no restaurant, not even a place to have coffee. Carry extra water and food. Leave A Rúa by crossing town and heading for the N120 road. This goes underneath a bridge, and then follows the old highway towards **Quiroga**. This is 7 km of asphalt walking, but there is practically no traffic. It is a

walk of exceptional beauty near the Sil River.

Seven kilometers on you reach the little town of **Alberedos**, the provincial border of Ourense and Lugo.

From **Alberedos** to **Montefurado** is another 2.5 km. In **Montefurado** there is a famous tunnel that the Romans drilled in the rock face in the 2nd century in order to shift the course of the Sil River for gold mining.

From **Montefurado** to **Bendilló** is another 8.5 km, and in this hamlet you will find an old mill and a small church, the Ermita das Farrapas.

The road passes through **Soldón**, **Sequeiros** and **Torres Novais**, with its ruined castle. In this isolated place the Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem built the castle and ran several pilgrim hospitals in the 14th century, probably attracted by the strategic lookout over the Sil River.

QUIROGA (2.6KM TO ESPANDARIZ, DISTANCE FROM BENDILLÓ: 9.5 KM., VIA TORRES NOVAIS)

Town in a beautiful valley of vineyards and orchards. All services. There is an albergue in this town, on the main road. It is not pilgrim specific but they do have pilgrim prices and large rooms with private baths. Beware large school groups who will keep you up well into the night. Also, you may be interested in getting a stamp at the town Casa de Cultura (free wifi) as the Albergue does not have one.

The trail from **Quiroga** to **Monforte de Lemos** is long, and services are short along the way. Pack as much as you can, and fill up your water bottle as often as possible. At certain points along the way the track is vague, poorly marked, coincided with another trail (one of them is marked, ironically, the GR-8), and similarly diverge from other trails without notice. Perhaps there is a man walking his dog who knows the way, perhaps there is not. The gps track will get you to **Castroncelos** well enough, but from there to Monforte I do not know if it is marked. The gps will get you there, but it is based ONLY on satellite footage and my best guess. Use with caution.

Leaving **Quiroga** along the main road, cross under the N-120 and follow the country lane (LU-933) which runs along the river.

Accommodation - Quiroga

Hostal Quiper

Calle Real, 62
982 435 276

Hostal Dimar

Calle Camilo José Cela, 14
982 428 978

Hostal Marcos

Calle Secide
982 428 452

Hotel O Remansiño

982 435 168
www.remansinno.es.vg

Albergue Quiroga

www.alberguedequiroga.com
982 435 290

info@alberguedequiroga.com contact: Eduardo Núñez

QUIROGA - A PUEBLA DE BROLLÓN - MONFORTE (33 KM)

From **Quiroga** to **Puebla de Brollón** is approximately 23 kilometers. Leave **Quiroga** following the waymarks – Don't be tempted to cross the bridge, even though signs point to the medieval monastery of San Clodio. Years ago there was an alternative route that made use of the monastery's hospitality, but travelers then had ferrymen to carry them back to the camino on the opposite bank. Alas, the boatmen and the monks are long gone.

Nowadays the Camino keeps to parallels the N120 highway for 4.5 kms, then crosses the N120 and continues on the asphalt for 5 more kms. Keep an eye out for markers pointing left, where the camino becomes a dirt path. In the next 8 kilometers the path ascends gently towards the little church of **Los Remedios**, then descends to **Carballo de Lor** and **Barxa de Lor**. In **Barxa**, the route crosses a Roman bridge. Be careful, other walking trails in this area

For a 300 meter detour to a useful bar/restaurant, take a left turn after crossing the bridge in **Barxa** and follow the river's course. Return to the bridge to continue the Camino.

From the bridge the arrows point you back along the road with a dirt path alongside. Take the ascent towards the church, following an asphalt road. A dirt path will be visible, and it takes you to **Castroncelos** and from here to **Puebla de Brollón** where you will find food and lodging.

PUEBLA DE BROLLÓN (12.0KM TO MONFORTE DE LEMOS)

If you still feel energetic, press on to Monforte for a better choice of accommodation, food, and attractions.

Accommodation - Puebla de Brollón

Hostal As Viñas

Avenida de Outeiro, 13
982 430 124

MONFORTE DE LEMOS

Full services and plenty of historical landmarks to check out. Tourist information office located next to Nuestra Señora la Antigua's School.

From **Monforte de Lemos** it is a long way before getting to the first town with a bar, **Belasar**. Pack wisely.

Leave **Monforte** by crossing the bridge over the river (Avenida de Galica). Once over the bridge it becomes the calle de Chantada. Continue until the first roundabout where you will turn towards your left and follow the sign towards **A Vide**. This is the LU-P-3204. This long and straight asphalt road will take you to **A Corga**. There is also a parador here, located atop the hill a 17th century Benedictine monastery, so you have the full range in terms of price and luxury.

Monforte is the starting-point recognized by Pilgrim Office authorities as the 100 kilometer mark from Santiago de Compostela, even though waymarks show contradictory numbers. If you are interested in obtaining a pilgrim Compostela certificate, be sure to have your credential stamped at least twice each day from **Monforte** onward – this can prove challenging at times, in an area that's not always aware of the needs of pilgrims.

Monforte is center-point for the Ribeira Sacra wine region. Its landmark wine bar/restaurant and tasting room is in the old town 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.

If you plan to walk all the way to **Chantada** the following day, be sure to stock up in **Monforte**.

Accommodation - Monforte

Parador Nacional de Turismo - H

Plaza Luís de Góngora
982 418 484/982 418 295(fax)
monforte@parador.es

Condes de Lemos - HR

Plaza da Estación, 2
982 400 319

Puente Romano - HR

Paseo do Malecón
982 411 168/982 403 551(fax)
hotelpromano@interbook.com

Ribeira Sacra - HR

Rúa do Conde, 17
982 411 706/982 411 546(fax)

El Castillo - H

Rúa das Hortas, 36
982 402 150/982 400 600(fax)

Terra Galega - HR

Rúa Chantada, 218
982 405 090

Puente Romano - HTR

Praza Doutor Goyanes, 6
982 411 168/982 403 551(fax)

Miño - PR

Rúa Conde, 25
982 401 850

Galicia - P

Rúa Rosalía de Castro, 24
982 400 010

Río Sol - HTR

Praza da Estación, 5
982 400 319

Casa Reboiro - H

Bergazos, 4
982 400 617

Duquesa - P

Duquesa de Alba, 50
982 403 467

Hostal Río

Roberto Baamonde, 30.

Hotel Parrillada Núñez

Barrio Las Lamas, s/n

MONFORTE TO CHANTADA (29 KM)

Between these two places the only accommodation is in “casas rurales”, such as *La Rectoral de Castillón* (www.rectoraldecastillon.com Tel: 982 455 415), which is about 10 km from **Monforte**, or *Torre Vilariño* (www.torrevilarino.com, Tel: 982 45 22 60), which is another 4 kms beyond that. Be sure to phone ahead and reserve if you plan to stay. These casas rurales provide a short, easy first-day option if your pilgrimage begins at **Monforte**, and cut in half a very long and rugged day’s walk.

In **Monforte**, leave town on the Roman bridge, 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, pass by an unmarked but friendly bread bakery on the left (pick up a warm loaf for later), pass between the church of San Antonio and the backside of the Haley supermarket. 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**. This is a long, straight asphalt road that arrives in **A Vide** after 3 kms.

At **A Vide**, in good weather, the Camino goes off-road for about 3.5 km. It becomes an earthen trail that winds over and around water channels, bridges, and ponds, but is well-marked. It continues on to **Moreda**, and passes through **As Lagoas**, **Campos** and **Pacios** on the way.

(In April 2010 this stretch of camino was flooded – in which case simply continue along the asphalt road and regain the camino in **Moreda**. In dry weather the marked path is much 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. From here, look sharp: the path makes a sharp left about 100 meters after the Pazo wall ends, and the waymark is sometimes hidden in the brambles.

The dirt trail passes the tiny hamlet of **San Lorenzo** on the right. A stony medieval pavement twists 2 kilometers upward into chestnut and oak woods to the fountain of Piñeiro, where 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 near by, but walking directions are unclear. She can return you to the fountain in the morning, or set you down on the camino in **Fion** if the marked path is flooded – as it was in April 2010).

Cross the road and continue on the earthen path in between oak and chestnut trees on the so-called Camiño Grande. The path continues through **Fión**. On the left about 500 meters down the road, (well-marked) is another Casa Rural, the *Torre Vilariño* – another comfortable option with Camino-friendly staff and good dinners figured into the room price; a good lunchtime or coffee-break option for hikers doing the entire Monforte-Chantada etapa.

After **Fion** keep on through the cow and sheep-tending pueblos of **Vilaravides**, **Vilatiñosa**, **Vendanova**, (with a beautiful and ancient wayside shrine), **Montecelo** and **Diamondi**. From the fountain of Piñeiro to **Diamondi** is about 7.5 kms, and most of it is on a road with very little traffic.

In **Diamondi** is a jewel of a Romanesque church, San Pelagio de Diomondi – an architectural highlight of this camino. The thousand-year-old cows’ heads above the side

doors are a sweet stone salute to the creatures in the fields all ´round.

In **Diamondi**, the Camino leaves the road and turns to the left, beginning to descend the “Codos (Elbows) of Belesar”, a 2.5 km stretch of steep, broken pavement with remnants of the old Roman Road (see 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. Make a right at the bottom, and don´t cross the bridge yet – there´s a marina bar-restaurant a few meters further on, on the riverbank. It is posh and pricey, but it´s the only bar in little **Belesar**. In summertime 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.

You are now 23 kms from **Monforte de Lemos**.

After crossing the Rio Miño, waymarks point to a steep, 2.5 km ascent to **San Pedro de Líncora**. Some of the path is rocky, some is earth; keep a sharp eye out for waymarks, as some are poorly placed and faded. Farmers sometimes fence-off the marked pathway to keep their dairy cows in-bounds, but they use ribbons – you can pass through, but 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.)

From **San Pedro de Líncora** to **Chantada** is 5.5 kms., most of it downhill. Cross the Asma River, and the camino continues into the old part of **Chantada**, whose arcaded streets are lined with elegant portals and mansions from the 15th and 16th centuries. There are good restaurants, markets, and nice places to stay in **Chantada**.

The modern church in the center of town is pilgrim-friendly and offers a sello.

Accommodation - Chantada

Hostal Altamira

Carretera Orense-Pereira.

982 441 612

Hotel Mogay

Antonio Lorenzana, s/n.

982 440 847

Hostal Yoel

General Franco, 16

982 440 294

Hotel Gamallo

García Arias, 7

982 440 833

Hotel Las Delicias

Carretera Lugo-Orense, km. 56.

982 441 701

*from www.infohostal.com/guia/lugo/chantada/1705/alojamiento/hostales.html

CHANTADA TO RODEIRO (27 KMS) (8.3KM TO PENASILLAS)

This is a long, hard, and lovely stretch with a critical turning early on that is wrongly waymarked. The path crosses over a mountain and past the landmark Hermitage of Monte Faro. On this stretch are several beautiful medieval crossroads shrines – the area apparently

had a strong devotion to the souls in purgatory.

Accommodation - Rodeiro

Hospedaxe O Guerra

986 790 061

(excellent Caldo Gallego in the restaurant)

Hostal Carpinteiras

atop the hill at. Estrada Xeral, 62.

986 790 196.

If you phone in advance a hearty meal will be waiting for you here, served by friendly family. Highly recommended by Michael.

Leave Chantada from Praza Santa Ana along Alferéz Baanante, heading towards **Centulle** – waymarks and arrows are clear right up to the intersection of the LU-1809 highway. With a crucero is on your left and an old Asador restaurant across the highway, you will see a conch-shell waymark pointing you straight on. **THIS MARKER IS WRONG**. Instead, follow the yellow arrows to the **RIGHT**. This path continues on, with regular waymarks, through woods and fields to the little town of **Penasillás**.

PENASILLÁS (5.0KM TO ALTO DE FARO)

Penasillás marks the beginning of a long climb 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 the path is not too difficult to follow.

ALTO DE FARO

This medieval hermitage is a local pilgrimage destination, still popular with penitents.

Continue up the twisty road until you reach a picnic grove on the right and a manicured Way of the Cross pathway going uphill to the left, toward the high point (968 meters) where the Ermita church stands – the faithful traditionally travel this path in bare feet. Monte Faro often is wreathed in storm clouds when skies are sunny in the rest of the region. In bad weather, you may choose to skip the final climb and pick up waymarks that guide you to the right of the picnic grove, where dozens of gigantic wind turbines tower over the landscape along the ridge of the alto. (other pilgrims simply follow the tarmac road directly down to **Rodeiro**).

The Camino leaves the tarmac and parallels windmills on a limestone access road with lovely views back to **Chantada**. A few kilometers on the path meets pavement again, 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's chipped loose the mortar and reversed the arrow, pointing you left, along the highway that leads directly into **Rodeiro**.

If you wish to keep to the more pastoral option, go right, uphill about 300 meters along more windmills. Soon a granite waymarker shows the Camino de Invierno off to your left. This pretty path passes El Pazo de Camba and the friendly town of **Rio**, where there are two useful bars – fuel for the final push into **Rodeiro**, with its restaurants and accommodation.

RODEIRO (22.5KM TO LALÍN)

All Services. 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.

Mileages listed for the next day's walk are wildly contradictory. 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. The trail, though sometimes poorly marked, follows beautiful back roads through the Galician heartland; there are plenty of towns, but no services except the occasional fountain.

Leave Rodeiro on the paved road west for about 2 kms and then turn off on the right onto a dirt road towards **Ponte Pedroso**. From here to **Lalín** is 9 km. "as the crow flies," but several more if you follow the zig-zagging marked path. Through the day the path meanders over a wide valley with hillside stone quarries visible through most of the hike. Waymarks are adequate, but a critical crossroad is left unmarked once the path begins to scale the ridge on the west side of the valley. After passing through a tiny pueblo over an ancient bridge, waymarks lead right down a leafy country lane and vanish entirely at a Y-intersection. TAKE THE LEFTWARD PATH. You will see no waymarks or arrows for another half-kilometer, but soldier on. After many more (better-marked) country kilometers **Lalín** appears with a refreshing water fountain on the road into town.

LALÍN

All services.

The nearby romanesque church of Lalín de Arriba (upper Lalín) is quite ancient – below one of its windows, the date 980 is carved into the stone. Calle de la Calzada takes you through Lalín, past the modern church and town hall, and from there to the Pontiñas river walk. From here on, travelers interested in trail details may consult a Via de la Plata guide.

The Camino de Invierno joins the Camino Sanabrés fork of the Via de la Plata a few kilometers out of **Lalín**, with abundant trail markers and perhaps fellow pilgrims. From **Lalín** it's 6 more kms to the camino albergue at **A Laxe**, a well-designed but poorly-kept place in September 2010.

Accommodation - Lalín

Hostal Las Palmeras

Arenal, 8
986 780 222

Hostal As Vilas

Arenal, 4
986 780 140

Hostal Mouriño

986 780 073

Hostal Naval do Espiño

986 787 604

Hotel Pontiñas

Rúa da Ponte, 82

986 787 147

www.hotelpontinas.com

Hotel Camiño de Santiago

986 794 078

A LAXE TO SILLEDA (9.5 KM)

Albergue de Peregrinos

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

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

Hostal O Portón; Camilo José Cela, 12.

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. Farmacia doubles its prices for pilgrims.

SILLEDA TO BANDEIRA (7 KM). HOTEL AND HOSTALES. ALBERGUE 3 KMS OUT OF TOWN.

Hostal Conde Rey, 986 585 333

Hostal Victorino 986 585 330

Good food and warm company at Bar Arume. Sandwich vegetal recommended.

BANDEIRA TO PONTE ULLA (13 KM)

Pensión O Cruceiro da Ulla; 981 512 665; info@ocruceiro.es

Hostal Churrasco de Juantio; 981 512 619

PONTE ULLA TO OUTEIRO (4.2 KM)

Albergue de Vedra, municipal. Beautiful pilgrim fountain.

OUTEIRO TO LESTEDO (6 KM)

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

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

LESTEDO TO SANTIAGO (10 KM)