



CAMINO ENGLISH WAY

Kieran Walsh reports

from Camino's English Way

THE port of A Coruna was the port of call for Irish and English pilgrims to Santiago de Compostella back in the middle ages.

Sir James Rice was one famous Waterford man to make it there to Santiago via Coruna.

We traveled via **Camino Ways** in Dublin to travel the old and less fashion able English walking route to Santiago at 122km from Ferrol, it was not too long. We did stay in the El Suizo Hotel, there and the manager there knew Waterford and had even some Waterford Crystal at home, as his Dad had taken him there from Liverpool, where they lived.

This was a homely start before the big walk outside there was much noise with a Spraoi type festival on called Fashion Night, with live bands and Spanish dancers performing.

Not the best prep, but Ferrol turned out to be quite friendly and a good tonic before the pain ahead we reckoned.

We surprised ourselves that we could do it in 5 days but could be done in 4 if you wanted to do a 40 km day, but being in the 50 plus age not recommended.

The first 30 km day walks on the opening day was hard enough, especially after seeing a music festival in Ferrol, Mark Graham would have enjoyed it.

The early part of the walk saw one walk along the old ship building and naval city zone, some of which were closed.

Ferrol, like Waterford has seen better days. General Franco a native of Ferrol took over the ship yards after the Spanish civil war and re-equipped the navy, leading to a boom in the town, but like the UK has been hit. We met an English shipyard engineer, named Richard, who gave us the story and said now his work is in the far east in Korea and Singapore.

Much of the first day was on tarmac and warm at 25C, nice!

Later on in the day we would see beautiful Pontedeume through forests and by well kept farmers gardens but the early part of the day was along suburban roads.

Early on there were just casual walkers from the town. later we met some British and Spanish plus a Czech and her Irish husband some working for airlines, others at Palma Airport in Spain. They were a large group on their 3rd Camino, we stopped at lunchtime with them at a fine inn they located in Neda, we still had another 16km to go 14km clocked up from Ferrol, half the target achieved and no big blisters yet. We were glad to say.

Like myself they were doing it with the luggage sent on ahead (this is allowed). **Camino Ways** in Dublin arrange this and means you can cover more ground and be less exhausted than with the heavy back pack.

Following the scallop shell

Their tales of the Portuguese Way and French way,

showed that I was a real novice but prepared to learn, we had the right walking boots and head gear for the heat but lacked the Spanish to find the right eating place but they did that part, we forgot to get our first stamp for our Camino passport so got on our way and refused a beer and stuck to coca cola to get going further on the 30km first day.

At 25C plus it was hard going but a forest loomed and that was nice and cool, took some water then met two Americans from Oregon. Jeff was a writer like myself, but also a computer man and his partner, Sinclair, a psychiatric nurse, they were back packing and with better mapping we kept on the final 5km to the town of Pontedeume.

We passed beautiful farm house gardens, small rivers, then a beach area, where families, we just had to struggle the last 1km across the river.

A day on the beach at Cabanas (missed the swim) is easier than a long walk, but there was a great sense of achievement at the end of the day as we shared a meal and drink. Try the Os con Pasos for great sea food we learned later from the Spanish, where they do local speciality, octopus. Hotel Eumesa is convenient just on the bridge from Camanas.

We learned about each others country and way of life, energy sources and food, American politics and lots of other stuff. Jeff sells his solar energy and gets free electricity for the energy firm using his roof space as panels.

The benefits of the Camino are not just the sense of well being but the inspiring and interesting people you meet. We thought we might meet some odd balls but that was not the case.

We walked together the next day till lunchtime, having company makes the journey shorter and interesting as you learn from one another.

It was slightly hilly from the town of Pontedeume, warm but manageable and later we had forest cover keeping the sun off us.

We enjoyed the wonderful scenery, watching the farmers at work.

At the next town, Mino, the Americans withdrew as Sinclair had some knee trouble and stopped her camino, Jeff did it on his own after, he told us and got his story done. Mino had a lively market that Sunday.

We did the rest on our own to Betanzos and after 24km in total arrived at hotel Complejo Palacete. The food was good served by a man from Senegal who told us about life in Dakar and France where he lived before. A Muslim man, he was ready to open a business with his daughter with a guest house near the beach of Dakar. Senegal is a land that is stable and peaceful we learned where Christians and Muslims co exist well

Betanzos has an old town centre well worth discovering with lots of churches and nice café bars to., where the young date and congregate, bikers were also there in big numbers on the Sunday.

