
THE WAY

an Emilio Estevez Film



HISTORY AND HERITAGE

For over a thousand years, the Camino de Santiago has led travelers to the shrine and relics of St. James the Apostle in Galicia, the northwest corner of Spain. The crypt of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, titled for James's common Spanish name (Sanctus Jacobus, Sancti Yagüe, Santiago), has long been one of Christianity's premier pilgrimage sites. While Rome and the Holy Land surpassed it in popularity during the Middle Ages, Santiago outstripped them in forging myriad mythic trails such as the Camino francés (the French Route from the Pyrenees), the Ruta mozárabe (the Mozarabic Route that skims the north of Portugal) and the Vía de la Plata (the Silver Route that starts in Seville). The cry of "Ultreya" or "Go beyond" rang out along a thousand highways of hope.

During the height of its popularity from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, the trek to Santiago attracted perhaps as many as a hundred thousand pilgrims a year. Travelers sought a chance to pray in

the presence of one of Christ's closest friends and the first apostle to be martyred. They also came to beg for cures for illness or affliction, to ensure blessings for their families or communities, to repent their sins, and to overcome their doubts and stumbling faith. A rosary of sublime monuments, folksy secondary shrines, and hospitable monasteries and refuges were created to welcome vulnerable travelers. In return, these seekers gave their good will, artistry and labor to the Camino as they passed by.

Pilgrimage fell from favor in the early modern period in the face of stiffening national identities and borders and new conceptions of faith. Protestant reformers pointedly denounced the abuses of casual pilgrimage and its often carnivalesque trappings. Even the once choked roads to Santiago lapsed into silence. Lonely travelers made their own shelter in increasingly abandoned structures where the footsteps of aged guardians echoed



along crumbling corridors. The Route of St. James became a trail smudged by time. But in the late twentieth century, for reasons that remain unclear, spiritual seekers and scholars began to thread their way along the nearly forgotten byways to Santiago once again. Spain undertook the mission of recovering the Camino as part of its national heritage, publicizing the ancient routes and investing in a simple infrastructure of well marked scenic trails. Town councils, parishes and local associations of Friends of the Camino equipped modest refuges (*albergues* or *refugios*) to provide a night's shelter at minimal cost. The goal was to provide safe passage for those hoping to breathe the same air, experience the same landscapes, and rest in the same cool churches that inspired an age of faith.

The tide of modern pilgrims now approaches a quarter million per year who undertake at least portions of the various Caminos in Spain, starting from their homes within Iberia, or trekking from elsewhere in Europe.

Thousands more come from Brazil, Canada, Mexico, the United States, South Africa, Israel and Japan to reenact the rites of pilgrimage.

Associations of Friends of the Camino in nearly every Spanish province, and in England, France, Norway and the United States produce magazines, newsletters, and websites. The success of the Spanish Camino phenomenon has excited the emulation, even the envy, of neighboring states. Hungary boasts its own circuit of shine sites, and Norway has a consecrated trail from Oslo to Trondheim in honor of St. Olaf. Italian authorities are attempting to reestablish travelers' itineraries connecting Rome with Santiago. As internal tourism grows within the European Union and national borders have become porous, pilgrimage once more is performing its former function of blurring local loyalties and making them look petty.



THE WHY AND HOW OF MODERN PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is travel for transformation. Those who believe in the transcendent universally believe in humankind's potential to approach the sacred on its own turf. Modern pilgrims are often uncertain about the depth of their faith. Though hesitant to declare themselves best examples of any one church or tradition, many do sense the potential of travel to spark change from within as well as to expose them to new cultures, creeds, and foods. In an age of jet travel, the rhythms of walking make pilgrimage a refreshing experience, body centered and soul centering.

The Camino de Santiago or the Way of Saint James is a spiritual journey that pilgrims of diverse spiritualities and backgrounds have traversed for a thousand years. Pilgrimage essentially begins at one's doorstep, but once in Europe there are countless routes leading to Santiago from all directions, the most popular being the Camino francés which crosses the Pyrenees along the Spanish-French border.

This Camino covers nearly 800 kilometers (some 500 miles) traversing an idyllic, rolling Spanish countryside. By following the yellow arrows painted along the trails, a pilgrim can expect to walk 15-25 km (10-15 miles) a day to reach his next night's shelter and welcome. At this pace, a pilgrim can reach the Cathedral de Santiago in 6 to 8 weeks to attend one of the several Pilgrims' Masses held at the cathedral in Santiago each day.

Along the way travelers encounter charitable or family operated shelters that cater specifically to the thousands of pilgrims of all ages who make the journey each year, immersing themselves in regional cuisines, architecture and landscapes. Some travelers choose a more reflective, slower pace, others walk briskly from much further away. Despite its solitary nature, the journey to Santiago de Compostela has always been one of rhythms. The soft churning of footfalls, the cadence of the wind, the alternation of eloquent open country with holy chanting by morning



and merry conversation by night become the yardsticks of time for the wandering pilgrim. Sometimes the very blankness of the countryside—in Spain one speaks of the central *meseta* as a terrain where “the sky is your landscape”—invites the modern pilgrim as much as his or her medieval predecessors to look inward.

Pilgrims still walk the Camino for a variety of reasons, some to fulfill promises, others seek enlightenment, and still others long for adventure. All, however, lean forward toward the western sky, the Cathedral in Santiago, and the remains of the apostle. Most pilgrims choose to carry a scallop shell with them as a symbol of their journey in honor of St. James, a medieval token of having sought the farthest coast of the known European continent. Another, perhaps more useful symbol is a walking stick to aid a weary pilgrim on his or her journey. Pilgrims also carry a pilgrim’s credential, a sort of passport that is stamped whenever a traveler stops for rest or prayer, and this

document is officially recognized with a special certificate at the cathedral’s welcome center in Santiago.

Regardless of whether a pilgrim’s journey begins for religious, spiritual or cultural reasons, the meditative setting of the Camino offers the perfect landscape for contemplation. Pilgrims follow the path through villages and towns, across silent rivers, over mountains and skimming fertile valleys that have changed the lives of millions who have walked before them. In 2010, designated a “holy year” because the feast of St. James fell on a Sunday, some 300,000 individuals performed this pilgrimage following these well-trodden footsteps of history, paving the way for the millions who will surely come after them.



ON THE MOVIE, *THE WAY*

Through months of thoughtful conversations, Emilio Estévez and Martin Sheen decided to create a tribute to Galicia to help others discover the land where the Estevez family had its roots. The Camino de Santiago served as the perfect partner in their efforts. While Spain provided the backdrop, the film's primary theme of self-discovery belongs to everyone from all ages and backgrounds, as does the Camino, which has helped transform the lives of millions of diverse pilgrims for centuries.

Martin Sheen plays Tom, an American doctor who comes to St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, France to collect the remains of his adult son killed in the Pyrenees in a storm while walking the Camino de Santiago. Driven by profound sadness and a desire to understand his son better, Tom decides to embark on the historical pilgrimage leaving his "California bubble life" behind. While tracing these ancient trails, Tom meets other pilgrims from around the world, all broken and looking for greater meaning in their lives: a Dutchman

(Yorick van Wageningen), a Canadian (Deborah Kara Unger), and an Irish writer (James Nesbitt) who is suffering from a bout of writer's block. From the hardships they experience along "The Way," this unlikely quartet, each out of step with his personal world, creates a powerful bond and Tom begins to learn what it means to be a citizen of humankind and the difference between, "The life we live and the life we choose."

In the film, a father comes to understand his son's life through his death and along the road finds himself as well. The true antagonist of the film is the conflict we each confront within ourselves between choosing merely walking through a life and deliberately embracing one. This greater question of finding oneself is a matter of acceptance and choice. Given the circumstances of our lives, how do we understand ourselves, our family and our friends, and the choices we make? Do we blindly go through life unaware of our actions and how they affect not only



ourselves but others as well? What role does our community, friendships and faith play in our decisions?

The Camino, by its nature, serves as the ultimate metaphor for life. Footsteps along a well-trodden path may be our guide, but do not shield us from the questions that most of our busy everyday lives prevent us at times from recognizing. The road offers very little to hide behind. Embracing a life is stepping out onto whichever road, path,

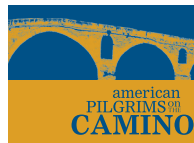
Camino or Way we find ourselves. Our humanity toward ourselves and others, our history and our future is what defines us.

As an indication of the diffusion of general interest in pilgrimage among religious communities, and traction among a wider public of movie goers, The Way marks a passage from sacred travel as an endeavor for special populations to an opportunity embraced by far larger numbers questing for deeper meanings in their lives.

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This publication was supported in part by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.



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RESOURCES ON THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

The best starting points for learning about the Camino de Santiago in English are the official web sites of the American, Canadian and British national organizations of pilgrims who have made the trek to Santiago and who dedicate their energies to helping others prepare for the experience. American Pilgrims on the Camino, the Canadian Company of Pilgrims, and the Confraternity of St. James are easy to find on the internet and provide hundreds of pages of practical and insightful information for the modern pilgrim. They also provide study resources and excellent books to read, even for the armchair pilgrim. Pilgrimage studies embrace over a dozen fields of research from archeology to migration, from folklore to economics and infrastructure, from religious studies to ecotourism. Some of the most thoroughly documented and comprehensive studies may be found in this short list spanning multiple fields of interest.

- Ashley, Kathleen; Marilyn Deegan. *Being a Pilgrim: Art and Ritual on the Medieval Routes to Santiago*. Lund Humphries, 2009. Beautifully illustrated for the art historian and curious traveler alike.
- Badone, Ellen; Sharon Roseman, eds. *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*. U of Illinois, 2004. This thoughtful collection of studies surveys the insights of anthropologists who examine treks to Santiago, Chimayó in New Mexico, and interfaith travel woven through the companion religious traditions of Japan.
- Davidson, Linda Kay, and David Gitlitz, *Pilgrimage: from the Ganges to Graceland: an encyclopedia*. 2 vols. San Francisco: ABC Clio, 2002. The most comprehensive and thoughtful of all encyclopedic guides to world pilgrimage, including contemporary cultural shrines like Stonewall, Holocaust camps and memorials, and minor Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Native American sites.
- Gitlitz, David, and Linda Kay Davidson. *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook*. St. Martin's, 2000. Surely the finest guide for the educated traveler who takes to the ancient trails of Spain.
- Hitt, Jack. *Off the Road. A Modern-Day Walk Down the Pilgrim Route into Spain*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994, 2005. The NY Times journalist whose literary riff on Jack Kerouac's masterpiece travel narrative, *On the Road*, suggested that the Camino could be avatar of the all-American road trip.
- Howard, Donald R. "Writers and Pilgrims". *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their Posterity*. Berkeley, 1980. 11-52. How the genre of travel writing becomes sacred.
- Sargent-Baur, Barbara N., ed. *Journeys toward God. Pilgrimage and Crusade*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1992. Lest we forget the difference between armed and unarmed pilgrimage.
- Stanton, Edward F. *Road of Stars to Santiago*. UP of Kentucky, 1994. A highly readable personal narrative from a scholar intimate with the history and textures of Spanish culture.
- Swatos, William H., Jr.; Luigi Tomasi, eds. *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism. The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*. Westport, CT & London: Praeger, 2002. An important anthology which broke new ground with essays like Swatos's "Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey", and Lilliane Voyé's "Popular Religion and Pilgrimages in Western Europe".
- Turner, Victor; Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. Columbia UP, 1978. A classical study, now contested, but a persistent point of departure and reflection for believers of any tradition.
- Ward, Robert. *All the good pilgrims. Tales of the Camino de Santiago*. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007. Reflective travel writing with deep sympathies for belief and the human condition.
- Webb, Diana. *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West*. London, 1999. Perhaps the best comprehensive historical introduction to pre-modern Christian pilgrimage.

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