

CAMINO INGLES – SEPTEMBER 2010



About ten months ago we heard that the Order was organising a pilgrimage to Santiago in October of this year, being a Holy year. This only happens when the feast of St. James (25th July) falls on a Sunday. Since the dates almost coincided with our annual week in Lourdes doing Stage while working for *Hospitalité de Lourdes*, the idea of our Camino was born. Over the next few months many discussions were held, many opinions were voiced and many people seemed interested in being part of this Camino. Adrian Strickland, perhaps the pioneer enthusiast in Malta of the Camino to Santiago de Compostela was always available to guide and advise us on all issues and his enthusiasm was nothing less than contagious. So, after months of deliberation, a rather motley group consisting of a priest, two married ladies, a bachelor and an oap (but by far the fittest of all) began preparing in earnest for this big adventure.

Serious training ensued, at first individually but during the last two months (July and August) we would meet up twice a week at the ungodly hour of 6am, thus ensuring we avoided the worst of the summer heat, for 10km treks in full kit and with weighted rucksacks. These walks took us all over the Maltese Islands, from Pembroke to Siggiewi, Rabat to Zejtun and even on the Sliema Sea Front, which we soon gave up on as the comments of people who recognised us were far too curious and intrusive!

The day finally came when we set off from Ferrol to start our 120 km journey to Santiago, having arrived there via train from Lourdes and stopping off in Santiago on the way to deposit our luggage which we would need on our return. The enthusiasm within the group was tangible and

excitement abounded however there was always concern about whether we were really up to it and if we would ever get to the finishing line.

We averaged about 20 km a day, over six days. The longest walk was 29 km, but the toughest was when we had to climb a 3 km, almost vertical hill, right after lunch, having consumed a large *bocadillo con jamon Serrano y queso* and a very healthy gin and tonic. Blisters, damaged toe nails and sciatica abounded but we soldiered on with a lay day taking a bus to Coruña where we visited the grave of Sir John Moore, the Military Museum and the Hercules Lighthouse.

We had been well prepared for the very basic sleeping and washing conditions, but nothing prepared us for the Spirituality that we would feel while walking through the pathways of Northern Spain. Beautiful scenery, warm weather, a solitary downpour that left us soaked to the skin and meeting up with other pilgrims along the way all helped to make this the very special and moving experience it was. Stories told, wounds administered to, jokes laughed at, tears shed but above all the experiences shared are memories that will last for the rest of our lives.

On Thursday 30th of September we walked the final 16 km from Sigüero to Santiago. Nothing can describe the elation one feels sighting the great cathedral of Santiago approaching the end of our journey. Also, the knowledge that we would be spending the next three nights in a five star hotel did much to encourage us over the last few kilometres. Once in Santiago, straight on to the Town Hall to collect our Compostela – a certificate proving one has done the walk and then on the same evening to Holy Mass in the Cathedral for the Pilgrims, where one can see the famous *Bottafumeiro* being swung from side to side in all its glory.

This tired and foot-sore group of five had achieved their aim and walked the 120km from Ferrol to Santiago, notwithstanding any and all the problems they had encountered along the way. The feeling of celebration and jubilation was great and the dinner that followed rose to the occasion. All are looking forward to the next Camino!

Special thanks to Adrian for organising and leading us and to Fr. Savio for our daily Rosaries and Holy Masses.

