A Walking Exploration of the Pilgrimage Route El Camino de Santiago

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Abstract
During the fall of 2005, I walked the pilgrimage route El Camino de Santiago. I was studying this pilgrimage route as my research project for Semester Abroad: Europe; a study program offered by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Located in northern Spain, this trail passes through the cities of Logroño, Burgos, Leon, Ponferrada, and Santiago de Compostela. This pilgrimage is approximately 500 miles in length. If a pilgrim wished to continue to Fínisterre and Muxía, the total distance would be 550 miles. This pilgrimage began in 813 A.D. and is still being walked today. The last two decades have shown a decisive increase in the number of pilgrims. July and August are traditionally the busiest months, but September and October still sport large numbers of pilgrims for walking ranged from needing a personal reflection to giving thanks for something that happened in the past. I walked the Camino at the age of sixteen, and I have walked it on several other occasions. The following are synopses of conversations I had with six people who walked the Camino.

Methods
Reading about the Camino was one thing, but I wanted to talk to someone who had actually completed this pilgrimage. Utilizing the vastness of the Internet, I obtained the email addresses of six people who had completed the Camino during the time of the year that I would be in Spain. Of these six, only one returned my email. The rest did not reply or did not use the Camino in their lives at all. I talked with Bill for three hours about the Camino experience. I found this out to be a truly amazing experience. His story is one of perseverance.

Results
The following are synopses of conversations I had with six people from the Camino—these stories affected me greatly. Each person has a different background and a different history, which makes this a unique journey for each person. So often people complain about the small pains of blisters or sore feet, but this woman was amazing in her strength.

Discussion and Conclusions
People from all over the world walk El Camino. I learned about many different countries without even leaving Spain. The types of people who walk El Camino are ones who are good ambassadors for their countries. The diversity of people that I met, the history associated with this pilgrimage, and the sheer length of the Camino were three things at humbled me before I even set foot in Spain. This experience was a pinnacle point in my education. First, studying abroad in general is one of the most important learning experiences that a person can undertake. Education in a classroom is important, but living in another country and experiencing culture is entirely different. Second, I believe both aspects are essential for a complete college education. The internet, I obtained the email addresses of six people who had completed the Camino. I did this because I wanted to talk to someone who had actually completed the pilgrimage. I found this out to be a truly amazing experience. His story is one of perseverance.

Figures

Figure 1: Map of the Caminos of northern Spain

Figure 2: Elevation profile of the Camino Frances

Introduction
El Camino de Santiago is a famous pilgrimage route that officially begins in St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, France, and crosses northern Spain to end in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Santiago is the final destination of El Camino de Santiago; the Cathedral of Santiago.

Figure 3: Graphical representation of the number of pilgrims per year (1989-2005)

Figure 4: Graphical representation of gender distribution

Figure 5: Graphical representation of age distribution

Figure 6: Graphical representation of number of pilgrims representing each country

Figure 7: Graphical representation of the number of pilgrims per year (1989-2005)

Figure 8: Graphical representation of gender distribution

Figure 9: Graphical representation of number of pilgrims representing each country

Figure 10: Graphical representation of the number of pilgrims representing each country

Figure 11: Graphical representation of number of pilgrims representing each country

Figure 12: Graphical representation of gender distribution

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