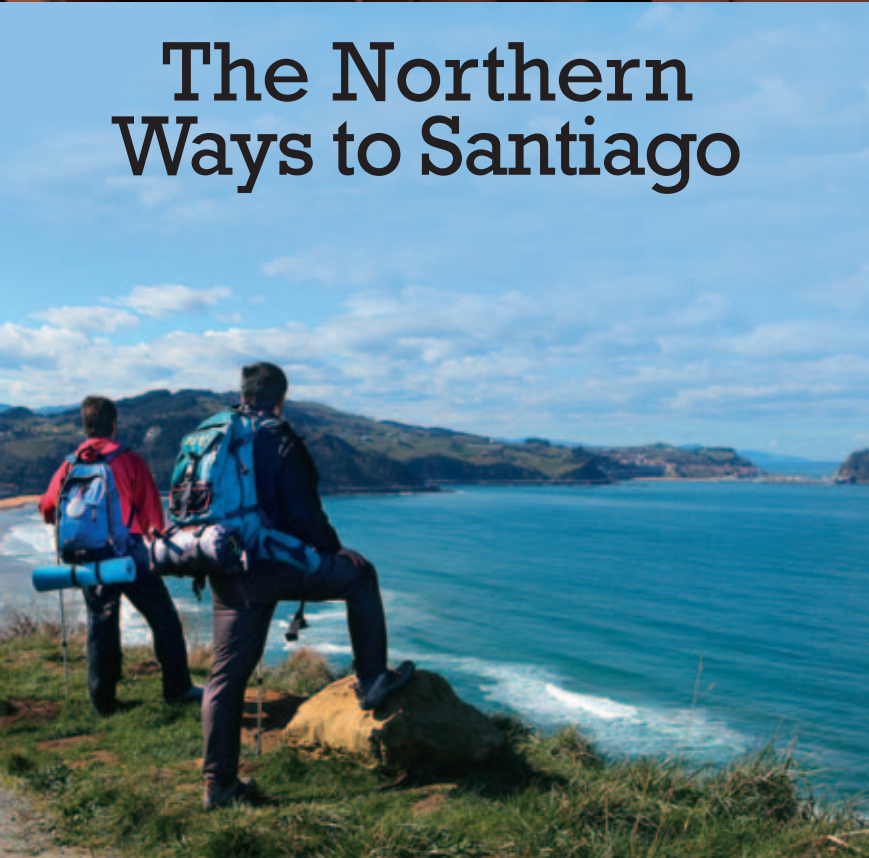
Northern Way _ Primitive Way _ Inland Way
Baztanés Way _ Lebaniego Way

The Northern Ways to Santiago



The Northern Ways to Santiago

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The Northern Ways: a gateway to discovery

In 1987, the Council of Europe awarded the Ways of Saint James the status of First European Cultural Route, carefully considering the potential of these routes in raising awareness of European identity, in the valorisation of Cultural Heritage, and the creation of a space where European citizens can enjoy cultural tourism and leisure.

This is, in fact, an entire network of routes that joins European Peoples, from different countries and different realities; routes steeped in the historical and cultural memory of the people.

This capacity for discovery, for combining geography, history, religion and tourism, and the need to offer the essential information required before embarking on the pilgrimage, has moved us, the Governments of the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias, Galicia, Navarre and La Rioja, to publish this Guide to the Northern Ways of Saint James.

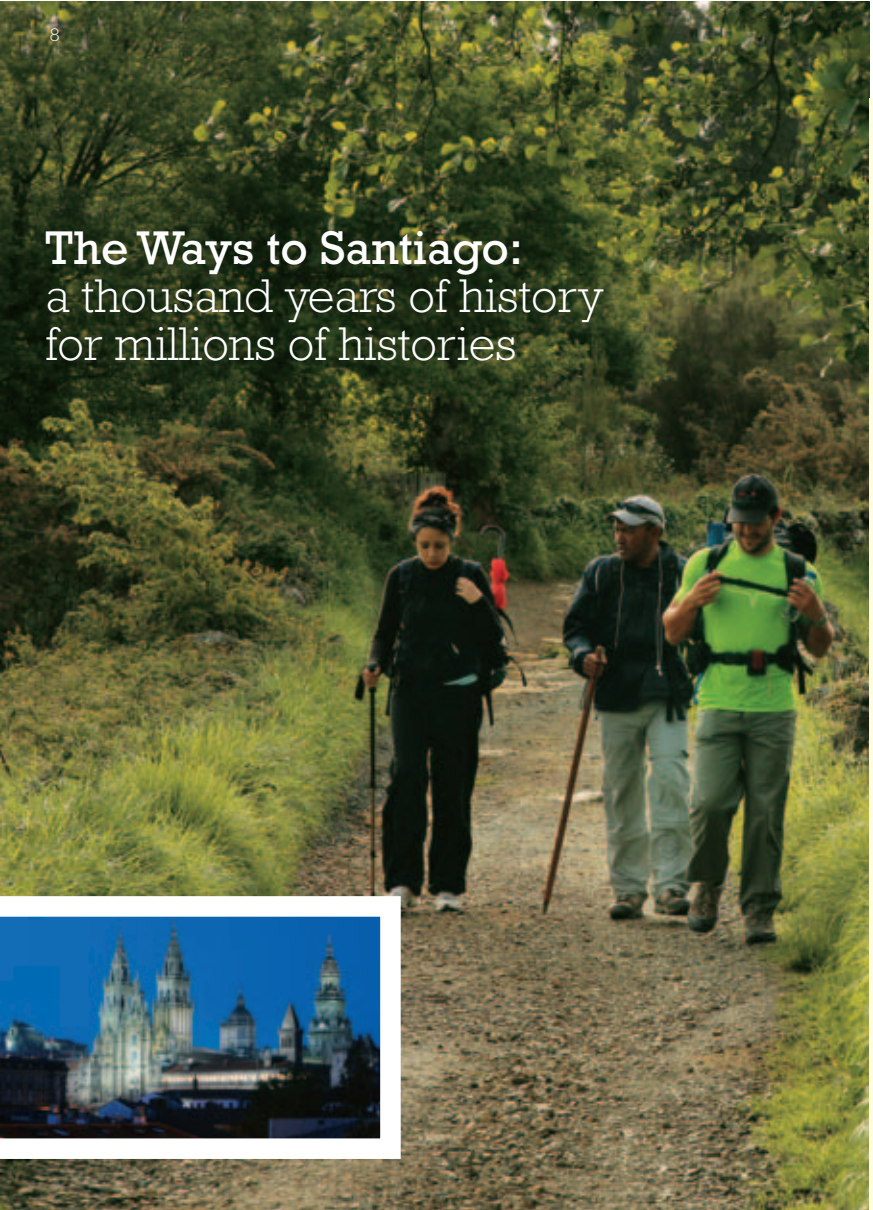
A variety of people, ideas and cultures have travelled the Northern Ways; the pilgrims who walked them helped to make Europe a place where beliefs and values could be shared through the different routes that make up those Ways: the Coastal Way (Irun – Santiago), Primitive Way (Oviedo – Santiago), the Inland Way (Irun – Vitoria-Gasteiz – La Rioja – Santiago), the Baztanés Way (Urdazubi/Urdax – Arre) and the Lebaniego Way (San Vicente de la Barquera – Santo Toribio de Liébana). The Way of Saint James began the construction of Europe, and represents a historical continuity, an attractive human and cultural trend that encourages the strengthening of inherited values such as democracy and respect for human rights, and thus to ensure we can live together in peace.

We have been working for many months, planning, cooperating and collaborating between different institutions and organisations to promote the thousand-year-old Ways of Saint James, understanding them as an opportunity for social and personal enrichment.

The Northern Ways of Saint James are a first-rate European channel for cultural exchange and offer the perfect chance to enjoy an unforgettable life experience. The Way combines History and histories; there is architecture, art, music, theatre, different cultural and linguistic realities; there is food & drink, landscape and nature; there is leisure and tourism... in short, there is HUMANITY, thousands of people walking with an open attitude and a kind heart, people who are keen to meet others, to discover, to communicate and to share.

The Ways of Saint James, and in this case, the Northern Ways, are an opportunity to revive some of the best values a human being can have: living together and sharing with people from different origins, the enrichment that comes with the exchange of cultural identities, respect for human dignity, and a common culture as a guarantee for a peaceful co-existence.

The Ways to Santiago: a thousand years of history for millions of histories



What is it about the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela that has attracted people of all kinds for over a thousand years? What secrets are hidden in the remains of Saint James that even now, in the 21st century, move thousands and thousands of people to embark on a journey of dusty tracks, damp forests and sheer mountains? How have these mediaeval routes survived to this day in such excellent condition? In other words, what is it about these pilgrim paths that seduces those who walk them?

The answers to these and other questions can only be given by those who take thirty days out of their everyday life to throw themselves heart and soul into a journey spanning over 800 kilometres that separate the Pyrenees from Galicia. There are as many experiences as there are people, but only one origin, only one Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, and only one legend of Saint James.

The history of the pilgrimages to Santiago began some two millennia ago, in the year of our Lord 44, when Saint James the Apostle, also known as the Son of Thunder, was beheaded in the Holy Land. His disciples took his body to a boat on the coast of Palestine and set sail. Some time later, they miraculously reached the shores of Galicia, where they carried the remains inland. After coming face to face with the hostile Queen Lupa at whose house they had begged for help, the men buried the apostle in a marble chest, the site of which would remain a secret for eight centuries.

It was not until the year 830 that a Galician hermit found the tomb. Pelayo, as the discoverer of the site was called, informed the bishop of Iria Flavia, Teodomiro, of this, who visited the place in question and ruled that the remains were, indeed, those of Saint James the Apostle. The news of the miraculous discovery (the nature and rigour of which were questioned from the outset) spread like wildfire all around the Iberian Peninsula, both in those territories that had been conquered by the Moors, and in the free kingdoms of the north. The King of Asturias, Alfonso II the Chaste, was the first to make the pilgrimage to Galicia from Oviedo to pay his respects to Saint James. Without realising it, he actually inaugurated the most primitive of all the Ways: the route that joins the capital city of Asturias with Santiago inland, through Grado, Cornellana, the Puerto de Palo pass and Lugo.

> The reasons behind the discovery

The reasons behind the finding of the body of Saint James, as well as the curious circumstances surrounding the discovery, have been debated for centuries. Did Saint James really go to the Iberian Peninsula to Christianise it not long after the death of Jesus Christ? Is the hypothesis

that his body was found 800 years after all trace of it had been lost really credible? Whose remains are venerated in the crypt of the Cathedral of Santiago? Do they belong to Prisciliano, the heretic who fostered the largest congregation of the faithful in Galicia? Or do they belong to a dog or a horse? as Martin Luther claimed, in his fervent thirst for reformation. The variety of theories is as long as it is wide. There are those who uphold that the finding was exploited for political reasons, to give heart and motivation to those who were fighting to recover the different Iberian kingdoms from Muslim hands, land that had been conquered just a hundred years before. The Christian soldiers would not only have further reason to ferociously defend the Cantabrian coast, but they would also have direct help from Saint James himself. This was the case in the battle of Clavijo (La Rioja) in the year 844: in the course of the battle, the apostle suddenly appeared to the men, riding a white horse and brandishing a sword. His intervention, believed to be bloody and brutal, as shown in the numerous representations of Saint James the Moor-slayer that can be seen in churches all along the Way, was decisive in gaining victory against the Arabs.

Others believe there is a less war-related reason: the Way of Saint James would be an attempt to Christianise an old and sacred pilgrimage route that they walked to see the sepulchre of the Sun and the world of the dead at the Galician coastal cape of Finisterra, the Romans' Finis Terrae. In the early centuries AD, the walkers would head there to get a close glimpse of death, that of the Sun, sinking into the Atlantic waters, and this symbolic experience would give them strength. The fact that the Milky Way points westwards, reinforced the ancient superstitions that allured them to walk in that direction. In fact, this is why one of the most common names for the Way of Saint James is "The Milky Way".

> Europe looks to Jacobsland

Whatever the reason for the finding, just a few years after the remains of Saint James were announced to be in Galicia, thousands of people took to their feet and embarked on the walk to the west of what is now Spain to pay homage. They came from all over Europe, and turned the city of Santiago into a major reference point, on a par with other holy places for Christianity around the world: Rome, where the venerated remains of Saint Peter were kept; or the Holy Land, where the life of Jesus Christ unfolded. As the pilgrimages and worship of the apostle grew, the church where the remains were kept also had to undergo change. From the primitive and humble constructions of the time, under the Asturian monarchy, there was a shift to Romanesque construction, the jewel of which is the Pórtico de la Gloria, created by Maestro Mateo and a masterpiece of mediaeval art. Economic prosperity would reach the city in the 18th century, and this would enable the cathedral to be adorned with the spectacular Baroque portico that today stands looking out over Obradoiro square.

In the Middle Ages, Europe turned its sights to this remote region in which the remains of Saint James were venerated. In German documents of the time, there are even references to the Iberian Peninsula as 'Jacobsland', the land of Saint James, or Santiago. This, together with the consolidation of religious orders such as the Cluny order and the establishment of monasteries and convents, meant that there was a surge in the creation of a network of routes that would lead to Santiago de Compostela, and which were perfectly fit for people to walk: the houses were clustered together every few kilometres to make small hamlets and villages; the dreaded rivers could now be crossed, thanks to the construction of bridges; pilgrims' hospitals provided care for those in need, etc.

All the roads had their purpose. The Inland Way, also known as the Bayonne route or the San Adrian Tunnel route, followed the path of one of the main communication channels between the Cantabrian coast and the plateau (through the Oria Valley) to then go on to connect with the trace of one of the oldest Roman roads, joining Burdigala (Bordeaux) and Asturica (Astorga), which is visible at the Llanada Alavesa, or Plains of Alava.

The Northern Ways (Primitive and Coastal) have different origins. In fact, it is believed that these were the first institutionalised routes to reach the Galician city. Back in around the year 1000, the peninsula was still one big battle ground where the Reconquest hostilities were being fought out, so the paths nearest to the Cantabrian Sea (in a geographically adverse land for the Moors) were the safest and farthest away from the raging war. The wide variety of commercial and fishing ports that dotted the Cantabrian coast also made it possible for people from all over Europe to come by sea and arrive at ports such as Deba, Santander or Avilés, from where they would continue on foot up to the apostle's tomb.

As the Reconquest advanced south, what was known as the French Way became more established. This route was fully recognised by the early 12th century, as reflected in the Codex Calixtinus. Compared with the demands of the coastal mountain ranges and the river estuaries, the path that runs through the heart of Castile had a much more even route. These days, the two Coastal Ways (both the Primitive Way that was inaugurated by Alfonso II in the 9th century, and the Coastal Way that says farewell to the Cantabrian Sea at Ribadeo) and the Inland Way connecting the French Way at Santo Domingo de la Calzada, have ceased to be alternative channels, and are now perfectly conditioned and signposted routes, with a growing number of hostels available, which makes it a lot more convenient for the pilgrims and other walkers.

Practical tips

Although the essence of the Way lies in its simplicity (a person walking every day for almost a month), it is wise to bear in mind the most basic aspects of the pilgrimage, both regarding the practical side as well as health & hygiene. The decisions a person makes before leaving home will affect the success of their experience.

> Backpack and clothing

The choice of backpack is fundamental. Although the final decision depends on each individual, it is highly recommendable to choose a pack that does not exceed a capacity of 60 litres, it should be ergonomic, cushioned on the parts that come into contact with the body, and have good, strong straps on the shoulders and waist. An inadequate backpack can ruin the pilgrimage. Ideally, the load should not exceed 10% of the person's body weight, i.e. if a person weighs 80 kilos, the backpack should not carry more than 8 kilos.

It is a common mistake to fill the backpack in excess, so it is important to be methodical when preparing your luggage. If you are doing the pilgrimage in summer, you will need no more than three T-shirts, three pairs of socks, three sets of underwear and a pair of trousers (long or short, depending on your preference), a light jersey or fleece, and a raincoat. The latter can be replaced with a rain cape, which is more awkward but very useful for particularly rainy days, and to protect your backpack. In the summer season, a light sleeping bag is more than enough for staying a night at a hostel, some of which will also have blankets available. In the event that the hostels are full, you can always sleep on the floor: for this reason, some pilgrims carry a light mat. Although hygiene is a standard, some people prefer to take a pillow cover of some sort, or even just a spare T-shirt to save for this purpose.

Do not forget a towel for after a shower (or a dip in the sea), and remember to carry several bags to separate clothes and objects inside the backpack, and to protect them against any possible storms. The quieter the bag, the better: at night, any noise in the hostel is magnified a hundredfold.

Two or three days of walking are usually enough for a person to realise what they do not really need (which can always be posted home) and what they are missing (which can be bought along the way) in their backpack.

> Other objects

A set of trekking poles, or a good staff, considerably reduce the strain

on your knees, particularly when going downhill, and the risk of injury. It is also useful protection against bad-tempered dogs! The Pilgrim's Shell, which is provided in many places, such as the provincial associations of Friends of the Way, are not compulsory but they are ideal for creating a bond with other people who are walking the Way to Santiago. Manners are a must, and respect is present throughout the journey. On the Way, in theory nobody knows anyone else, but everyone says hello.

> Footwear

It is just as important to choose appropriate, good quality footwear as it is to get used to walking in it. Try out your boots a few weeks in advance, and get your feet used to them, as they are going to be used an average of eight hours a day for a whole month, if you are walking the whole Way. So it is advisable to prepare yourself physically for the Way in the same footwear that you will be using on the pilgrimage. The choice of suitable socks is also fundamental. There are anti-blister socks on the market that have had good results, and also trekkers who have their own tricks, such as wearing two pairs of socks: one thick pair and another light pair, although an infallible remedy for preventing the dreaded blisters has yet to be discovered. Heat, sweat, the different road surfaces and the arduous pace of the Way usually take their toll on your feet, however many preventive measures you take. If you are doing the walk in summer, a pair of light hiking boots, or even a good pair of trainers that hold your feet firmly, will be sufficient. In winter, the harsh elements and rain make it necessary to take other measures, such as water and mud-resistant Gore-Tex boots. Apart from the footwear used on the walk, it is also a good idea to carry a pair of light, comfortable shoes, sandals, pumps or even flip-flops, for those moments of rest or visits to monuments at the end of each day's walk. If you do not pack a pair of flip-flops, it would be advisable to take a pair of plastic socks or slippers for showers at the hostels.

> First-aid kit

You should carry a first-aid kit with you for any possible cuts and bruises or other similar injuries that your feet may suffer along the route. A basic first-aid kit should include: iodine, surgical spirit, sewing needle and thread, scissors, plasters, sterile gauze pads, medical tape, aspirin or paracetamol, anti-inflammatory cream, and some kind of anti-diarrhoea medication.

On a preventive level, you should carry sun protection cream, lip balm, insect repellent, vaseline (to prevent rubbing on thighs and feet) and a skin moisturising cream that can be soothing after the efforts of the day.

> Hygiene

Your wash bag should include everything you use in your everyday life, but reduced to a minimum: the items that are particular to each sex, toothbrush and paste, a bar of soap (for personal use as well as for cleaning clothes), nail clippers, toilet paper (one roll), and a small towel. Although to a lesser extent than on the French Way, many hostels have a washing machine (some, but not many, even have a tumble dryer) and washing powder available.

> Accessories and Documentation

There are some small objects, for example, clothes pegs (half a dozen would be sufficient) or safety pins, that can be of great use on the walk: they can both be used to hang wet or damp clothes on your backpack, and thus take advantage of the walk to dry them in the sun. A cap or hat can become your best ally, as can a penknife, ear plugs, a small torch, the necessary documents (I.D., Social Security or medical insurance card, credit card, and, of course, your credential). Make sure you keep all these documents protected in a plastic envelope or sealed waterproof bag. It is not advisable to carry too much money in cash: there are cash machines all along the route.

> Food & drink

Except for a few specific stretches, the Northern Ways are perfectly supplied with bars and restaurants, where you can eat the usual three meals of the day (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Some hostels have a kitchen and utensils for you to prepare your own food. Even so, it is always advisable to carry a small, light stock in your backpack, with basic food and drink items, such as dried fruits and nuts, cereal bars, something sweet (chocolates, biscuits…), isotonic drinks, energy bars and gels, sugary drinks, etc. There are many towns and villages along the way in which you can fill up on drinking water, so all you need to do is carry a medium-sized flask or bottle, with a capacity of between 0.75 and one litre.

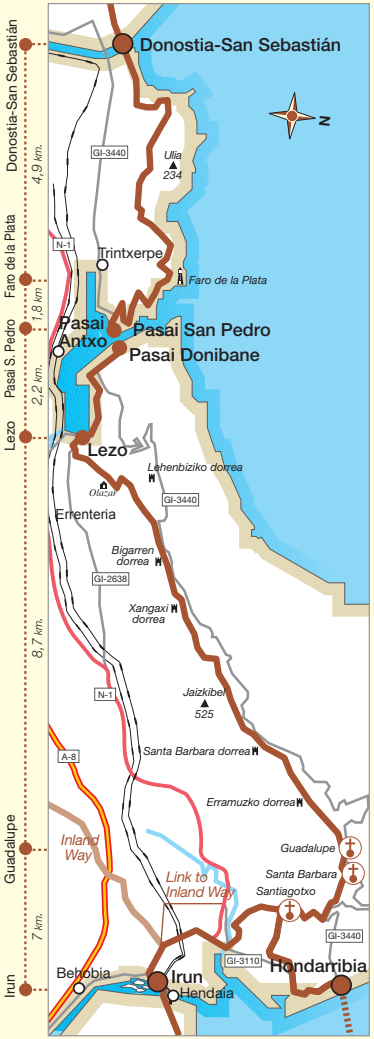
Northern Way

(Coastal Way)

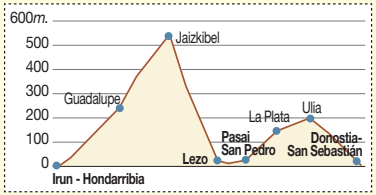
The Northern Way flirts with beaches, cliffs and coastal towns for 80% of the route, until it reaches Ribadeo, in the province of Lugo. There is no end of charming fishing villages, of capes that dive bravely into the sea, or the *indiano* houses and estates, almost always accompanied by a couple of palm trees brought from the other side of the Atlantic. One of the attractive parallels of the coastal routes are the culinary delicacies that have always been associated with the Cantabrian Sea. You can savour delicious fresh fish and seafood dishes at any number of restaurants in the fishing villages that dot the Northern Way.

The Coastal path joins the French path at Arzúa, and from there, all the roads become one up to the final destination of Obradoiro square.

1 | Irun - Hondarribia → Donostia-San Sebastián (24.6 km)



The start of the Northern Way could not be more laden with symbolism: it sets off at the Santiago bridge crossing the River Bidasoa, the natural border dividing France and Spain, or in Hondarribia, if you want to cross by boat. Major road and rail networks start and end here, as it is has been a point of reference since the Middle Ages for those who were on the pilgrimage and dreaming of reaching Santiago. This first stage is a perfect synthesis of the constant features that will appear throughout the journey: mountain ranges beside the sea, as is the case with Jaizkibel or Ulía; estuaries that need to be overcome, such as the one in Pasaia; paths with splendid views over the coastline; fishing villages, such as Hondarribia; and the perfect ending, Donostia-San Sebastian, a city of undeniable natural beauty and charm, the chosen summer residence of kings and queens. This border crossing that makes it possible to overcome the Pyrenees along the coast, has great secular importance, not only for humans, but for the migrating birds who make a stop every year at the Txingudi wetlands.



Irun Town Hall

Irun

Pop. 61,103 / Even as far back as Roman times, Irun (called Oiasso by the Latins) has been a city accustomed to the movement of people and one with a significant commercial tradition. In the Late Middle Ages, the people on the pilgrimage would approach the Church of Nuestra Señora del Juncal to worship the 12th century image of Our Lady, the oldest in Gipuzkoa, and this custom is still practiced to this day.

Hondarribia

Pop. 16,500 / There are over 800 years of history behind this walled town with two sides: one mediaeval, and another coastal, looking out onto the Cantabrian Sea and the Txingudi bay. Possibly its most delightful spot is the Plaza de Armas, or main square, which was governed over by the castle of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, an impressive stone building with hardly any windows. Leaving its old quarter, you will see the odd hint at the pilgrims' Way: the 15th century Chapel of Santiagotxo, dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, as the route moves into Jaizkibel territory. After climbing the mount, we will find the Sanctuary of Guadalupe where a 15th century Black Madonna is kept.

District of La Marina (Hondarribia)

Lezo

Pop. 6,022 / Nestled at the feet of Jaizkibel, and at one of the ends of the extensive bay at Pasaia, Lezo has a pretty old quarter in which the Basilica of Santo Cristo stands out. Inside, there is an unusual image of Jesus Christ on the cross, crucified and beardless, which was not at all common in that type of sculpture.

Pasai Donibane

Pop. 2,372 / It is difficult for anyone who visit this charming little fishing village with its brightly coloured windows to get lost: Pasai Donibane only has one street that runs through the village from north to south. Around this street we will find the village churches, such as the Church of San Juan Bautista, which is particularly worth visiting as it has a fine Baroque altarpiece, small palaces, such as the one in which Victor Hugo stayed at one time, and its highly recommended seafood restaurants.

The bay separating Pasai Donibane from Pasai san Pedro

Pasai San Pedro

Pop. 2,781 / Once through the fiord of the inlet, using the boat service available, you come to the neighbouring fishing village of Pasai San Pedro. This is also designed around a narrow cobbled street that you branch off in the direction of the La Plata lighthouse. This lookout point of breathtaking beauty is set on a rocky crag and marks the start of the path that will lead through Mount Ulía.

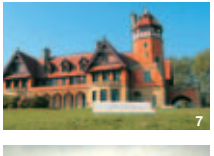
Donostia-San Sebastián

Pop. 184,248 /

After arriving at Donostia-San Sebastian, after crossing Mount Ulía, the first sight to behold the eyes is the Zurriola beach, today under the spell of two modern buildings designed by Rafael Moneo, the Kursaal Centre (9). The so-called 'Cubes' (1999) have been one of the most recent projects to be completed in a city that has seen architectural and development excellence become a mainstay for over a century now. Since the old walls encasing Donostia-San Sebastian were demolished midway through the 19th century, seeing the city emerge as a summer residence for the royal family, the city has undergone an incredible metamorphosis. At this point it went from being a humble fishing village to a provincial capital that looked to European cities such as Paris and Barcelona for aesthetic reference.

The Way of Saint James has been recorded since mediaeval times: many of those who walked to Santiago stopped off at the monastery dedicated to San Sebastian, on the site of what is today the Palacio Miramar. Before the River Urumea was channelled, there was also a Templar's mission next to what is now the bridge of Santa Catalina, which has long disappeared. The city was a reference point for hikers who avoided the Pyrenees to enter Spain, and its scallop-shaped bay, La Concha, appeared almost as a knowing nod to the pilgrims' emblem par excellence: the scallop shell, making it a location to be captured in the people's photographic memory forever.

← Irun - Hondarribia 24.6 km | → 842.4 km



① Church of San Vicente

This Gothic church is the oldest building in the city, having been constructed in the 16th century and having survived the devastating fire that swept through Donostia-San Sebastian in 1813. Its sombre, majestic interior holds a Renaissance-style altarpiece with fine foreshortened figures in movement.

② Church of Santa María

It was constructed out of the funds provided by the Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas, who traded with the American colonies. The Baroque-style building dates back to the 18th century, and is nestled between Mount Urgull and the *Parte Vieja*, or old quarter. The black sculpture of the *Virgen del Coro*, or Our Lady of the Choir, is worshipped here, as she is the patron of the city.

③ Constitución Square

This arcaded square is the very heart of the old quarter, and was built from scratch after the fire in the 19th century. It is dominated by the former Town Hall building, and the numbers on the balconies refer to the stands that used to be set up in bygone years when bullfights were held here.

④ Oquendo Square

It is in this square, next to the River Urumea, that we find one of the most spectacular monumental settings in San Sebastian, living proof of the city's golden age in the early 20th century. The monument to Admiral Oquendo is flanked by the Victoria Eugenia Theatre and the Hotel María Cristina, epicentre of the Film Festival held here in September.

⑤ Cathedral of Buen Pastor

The neo-Gothic cathedral, built in the late 19th century, is the tallest building thanks to its spire, measuring over 80 metres. The modern urban expansion area has built up around the cathedral, forming a perfect square filled with beautiful sandstone buildings.

⑥ Mount Urgull

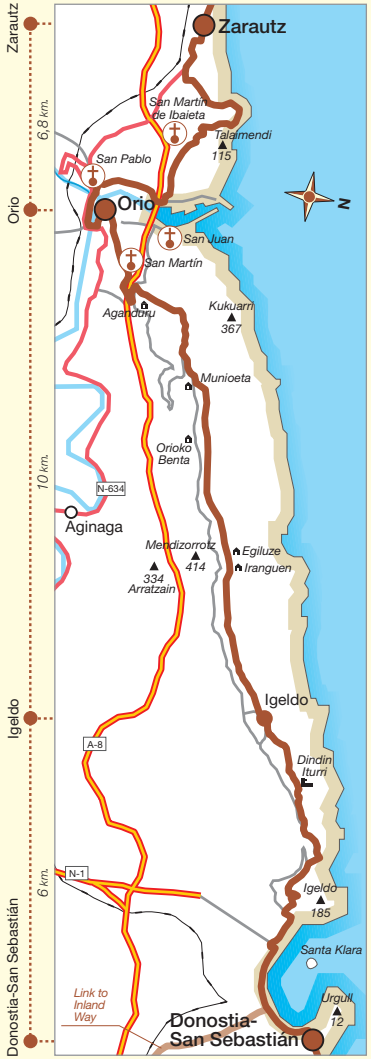
The smallest of the mounts in San Sebastian used to be a major stronghold in times of war, as it was completely fortified and crowned by the castle of La Mota, whose origins date back to the 12th century. Today it is a park with many interesting paths and hidden monuments amid the green, for instance, the English Cemetery.

⑦ Miramar Palace

Riding on a stretch of land with privileged views over the bay of La Concha, this building has a notable British influence and was opened in 1863 to accommodate Queen María Cristina and her family during their summer holidays.

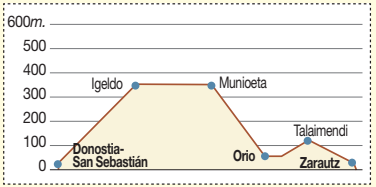
⑧ The Wind Comb

"The Wind Comb", Eduardo Chillida's most famous work of art is a perfect clasp for the western side of the bay. The sculptural ensemble, made in his characteristic weathering steel, has, for over three decades now, been particularly radiant on stormy days, when the sea engulfs it with gigantic waves.



Way of Saint James Interpretation Centre (Orio)

After leaving the capital of Gipuzkoa, the Way once again takes on a rugged complexion and this is evident in three mounts: Igeldo, Mendizorrotz and Kukuarri, that accompany the pilgrimage for about fifteen kilometres until the former whaling town of Orio appears. The journey through this exposed mountain range once again offers us veritable treats for the eyes. The lonely farmhouses, the odd cattle farm and the vegetation-ridden paths are the standard here. Orio is another of those villages or towns that boasts ancient pilgrim credentials, with its old quarter on a slope and another estuary that, this time, can be crossed using a bridge. As the route takes us closer to Zarautz, and climbs the Talaimendi hill, we will gradually see the vineyards that provide the fruit for what is locally known as "white gold": txakoli. The next stop is Zarautz, another of the summer gems in the Cantabrian Sea, with one of the best sandy beaches for sunbathing, swimming and surfing.



Mount Igeldo

Igeldo

Pop. 1,000 / A hundred years ago, Igeldo was a barely developed mountain, with a strong rural nature and populated by the odd farmhouse. It is situated on the western side of the bay of La Concha, enclosing it before starting another coastal mountain range with three, very different, small peaks: the Igeldo itself, Mendizorrotz, which stands at just over 400 metres high, and Kukuarri, at 365 metres, which fade away next to the River Oria. It was from their quarries that tons of rock were extracted and later used to construct the main buildings in San Sebastian and the surrounding area.

At the top of Kukuarri there is an image of the Madonna and Child, sculpted by the Orio artist, Jorge Oteiza.

Orio

Pop. 4,969 / Long before pontoons were built across the river, those who arrived at Orio had to cross the river by boat. Times have changed, and now two huge structures make it possible to cross the water, but Orio is still one of the towns in Gipuzkoa with the most devotion to the route of the apostle. On the outskirts of the town, you will find the chapel dedicated to San Martín de Tours, with its Romanesque foundations and beautiful views over the sea. The porch here was a great refuge for hikers. The origins of Orio date back to the 12th century, as its Goiko Kale, or old quarter, shows. This is a gorgeous mediaeval hub on a slope, and the houses here form a kind of corridor that leads to the Church of San Nicolás. The Palacio de Iturriaga houses the Way of Saint James Interpretation Centre in the Basque Country.

Port of Orio

Zarautz beach

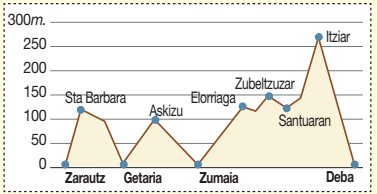
Zarautz

Pop. 22,402 / Once past the Talaimendi hill, the sea shows its face again, along with the protected biotope dunes of Iñurritza, in Zarautz. The coastal town is one of the jewels of the Basque summer, thanks to its extensive beach (it is the largest in the whole of Gipuzkoa), its promenade and annual surfing competitions. Zarautz stands out for its magnificent tower houses, such as the Tower of Luzea or the Palace of Narros, although it is the Church of Santa María la Real that has most association with the Way to Santiago, being home to the sepulchre of an anonymous pilgrim who asked to be buried in this church in the 16th century. Santa María la Real also holds a major archaeological site with Roman and mediaeval remains.

The Chapel of Santa Bárbara, on a privileged site on a cliff, bids the hiker farewell, as we continue our journey along a sea of txakoli vineyards until reaching the next destination. Hikers can also follow the coastal road, which has been specially prepared for pedestrians, to reach Getaria after about 5 kilometres.

Stretch of the Way between Zumaia and Deba

The Way continues across the mount, without losing sight of the Cantabrian waters, and stopping at the main fishing ports in Gipuzkoa. The stage starts and finishes in typical seaside enclaves, but in between it makes a stop at the Itziar heights to catch a glimpse of the Basque countryside that will become increasingly more familiar in the forthcoming days. The gentle hills of the previous days will give way to more abrupt routes, surrendering to the natural course of the rivers and brooks that start just a few kilometres north of here. In days gone by, both Getaria and Deba were important ports of entry for those arriving by sea, who later continued the route on foot along the coast. There is also no shortage of religious icons, worshipped by the faithful for centuries, both the locals and those visiting from afar, who come to sanctuaries such as the Itziar, seduced by the stories they have heard about the Black Madonna, one of the oldest and most venerated in Gipuzkoa.



Getaria with the "Mouse" in the background

Getaria

Pop. 2,585 / The profile of the birth place of Juan Sebastian Elcano, the first seaman to sail around the world, is characterised by the mount of San Antón, popularly known as the Mouse of Getaria. The sailor's figure is commemorated in several monuments around the town. The Church of San Salvador, one of the finest Gothic examples in the Basque Country, is perfectly integrated into the mediaeval quarter, thanks to the tunnel passing under it. Some of the best grilled fish restaurants in Gipuzkoa are concentrated in the port area.

We leave the town along the steep street of Calle Herrerieta, to continue along the Askizu road, where we can see the Gothic-style Church of San Martín de Tours, until arriving at the Gaintza and Agerregitxiki farmhouses. To the right of the latter, we will once again take the road that, around 600 metres further on, leads to the GI-3392 road. We will continue along this road until we come to the Azti farmhouse, where we will take the path that leads us directly to the district of Askizu.

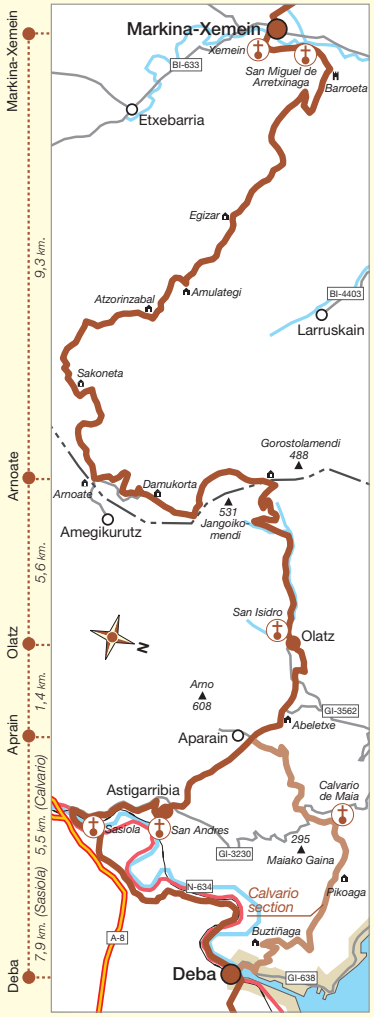
Zumaia

Pop. 9,483 / The Santiago beach welcomes us and, beside it, the house that the painter, Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945), had built, which today has been converted into a museum. Zumaia lies next to the mouth of the River Urola, which is easily crossed to come to the Church of San Pedro, with its appearance more reminiscent of a fortress than a religious temple. Inside, there is an interesting Renaissance-style altarpiece by Juan Antxieta. Even though the Way leaves the coastline and moves inland, it is worth visiting the Chapel of San Telmo or the Itzurun beach to appreciate the geological treasures that the cliffs on the way to Deba offer: what is known as flysch.

Beach at Deba

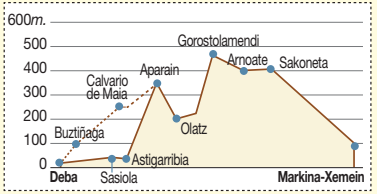
Deba

Pop. 5,430 / The rural district of Itziar is the highest point in this stage (400 metres above sea level, with unbeatable views of the coast), dominated by the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Itziar, where one of the seven Black Madonnas of Gipuzkoa are kept. After a steep descent, we reach Deba, a town with a tourist past that, to this day, has conserved lovely holiday buildings on the seafront. Its port was an important commercial hub for things such as the export of Castilian wool to Flanders. Many people who were joining the pilgrimage also passed through here. The polychrome portico at its Church of Santa María is its most prized artistic feature, along with the cloister that was created in the 16th century. The old quarter possesses some hidden surprises in the form of colonial houses bearing their coats of arms, and tower houses, such as the Sasiola.



Farmhouse in the Astigarribia area (Mutriku)

The vision of the River Deba becoming one with the sea is the last scene of the Basque coastline that you will see until you come to the border with Cantabria. From now on, the path reveals another side of the Basque Country: mountainous, wooded, shaded, much more taxing, and yet, at the same time, unique and beautiful. You can choose between the Sasiola route and the Calvario route to reach Aparain, where both routes meet, heading in the direction of Mount Arno. This stretch is characterised by dense pine forests, country lanes and an atmosphere that inspires solitude. Few stretches of the Northern Way to Santiago are so far removed from civilisation as this path we are on now, in direct contact with nature. The path finally leaves the Gipuzkoa coast and dives into rural Biscay. The landscape is the same, but the surprises are endless: the noble Markina-Xemein is the ideal reward at this point on the route.



Valley of Olatz and Mutriku

Pop. 4,979 / If you choose the Sasiola route, you will need to go up the Deba River until the junction with the road that leads to Astigarribia. We will immediately arrive at the Church of San Andrés, the oldest church in Gipuzkoa, built on an earlier pre-Romanesque temple, from which the church inherited a pre-Romanesque window. We will then walk one of the hardest stretches on today's section, both due to the slopes and the state of the path. First we will go up as far as Aparain and then go down to Olatz, an idyllic and quaint valley. A small rural district, with the same name as the river bed, formed by several disperse farmhouses and hamlets, and arranged around the Chapel of San Isidro, will be our only company until we tackle the Arno pass. Despite its modest height (barely 500 metres), this group of peaks is the highest point along the Way as it passes through the Basque Country. Almost without realising it, in these lands we will cross the border between the historical territories of Gipuzkoa and Biscay.

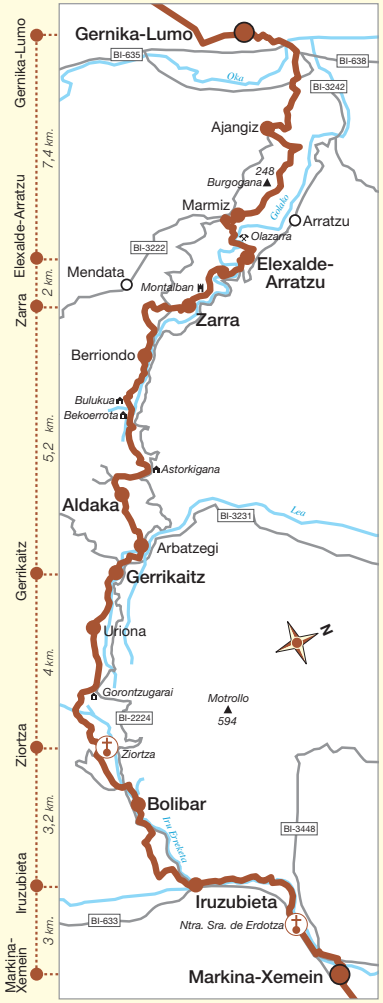
About 5 kilometres from the main pilgrims' Way, Mutriku lies on a hillside that falls sharply over the sea, which in the past made it a port of entry for those on their way to Santiago. At the highest point of this whaling village (evidence of which can be seen by the whale on its coat of arms), the Neoclassical Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción is situated. Beyond this break, Mutriku is known for its narrow and steep streets, and its magnificent mediaeval historical quarter, with a number of monuments and houses bearing coats of arms.

Chapel of San Miguel de Arretxinaga (Markina-Xemein)

Markina-Xemein

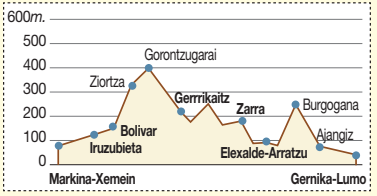
Pop. 4,897 / Markina is the first town in Biscay on the Pilgrims' Way. It is an old mediaeval town that, although it has since lost its walls, conserves its primitive features. It is easy to imagine what it looked like in bygone years, when you look at its urban towers, such as the Ansotegi and Antxia examples, or other rural towers, such as the Renaissance style of Barroeta and Ugarte. The loveliest space in the town is the Goiko Portala square in which the Town Hall (the Palacio Mugartegi) lives side by side with the church of the Carmelite fathers dating back to the 18th century, with a profusely decorated interior. If Markina is known for anything, it is for two other religious temples. Firstly, the Church of Santa María de la Asunción, created in the 16th century and since then converted into the largest church of its kind in Biscay. Secondly, the Chapel of San Miguel de Arretxinaga, a curious hexagonal building with an altar that was built using three huge rocks, and which were arranged to resemble a megalithic monument.

Pre-Romanesque window at the Church of San Andrés de Astigarribia



Section of the road at Ziortza

There are few beginnings as stimulating as the departure from Markina-Xemein. Firstly, the idyllic village of Bolibar and later, a religious monument that is one of its kind in Biscay: the Collegiate Church of Ziortza, that has borne witness to the passing hikers on their way to Santiago for over nine centuries. The forests of Gorontzugarai will be the last rural concession before returning to the inhabited dales and clustered hamlets that are the preface to the historical town of Gernika, or Guernica. From now on, the Basque landscape par excellence will make itself known, with its typical farmhouses, pastures and small clusters of houses around a church, and in most cases, a *frontón* (or open pelota court), with hardly any geographical jolts. The stage will offer transition stretches and every few kilometres, whether in Munitibar or in Zarra, we will come across fountains or roadside bars where we can fill our flasks and bottles, or exchange a few words with the locals. The Casa de Juntas meeting house and the historical Oak of Guernica are the best possible reward for today's stage.



Bolibar

Pop. 396 / The origins of Simón Bolívar, the liberator of several countries in South America, can be traced back to this small, friendly village. The Museum dedicated to him is situated in a typical farmhouse, the Errementarikua, which belonged to his ancestors. The profile of Bolibar is dominated by the cylindrical church tower of Santo Tomás, a mediaeval construction that was rebuilt according to Renaissance criteria, and to this day maintains the characteristic appearance of a temple-fortress.

Collegiate Church of Ziortza

Legend has it that an eagle carrying a skull in its talons dropped the remains on the top of a hill. This was an unmistakable sign that the current Collegiate Church of Ziortza, a religious complex that is unique in the Basque Country, had to be built on that site. It is made up of a beautiful cloister, the canons and abbot's houses, and the 15th century church, which houses an exquisite Plateresque high altar. The monastery is still loyal to the norms of hospitality and takes in any pilgrims who wish to spend the night there.

Cloister of the Collegiate Church of Ziortza

Munitibar-Arbatzegi

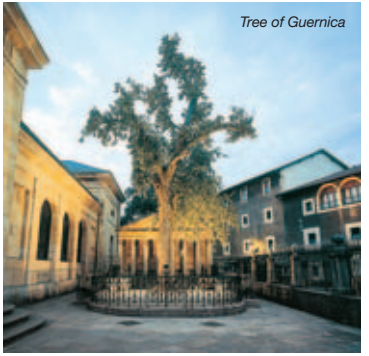
Pop. 423 / A nice little village formed from the union of neighbouring hamlets and municipalities, it has a Neoclassical church dedicated to Saint Vincent, with an interesting 17th century front. The Chapel of Santiago, situated at the heights of the Aldaka district, is another reference to the Way of Saint James.

Gerrikaitz

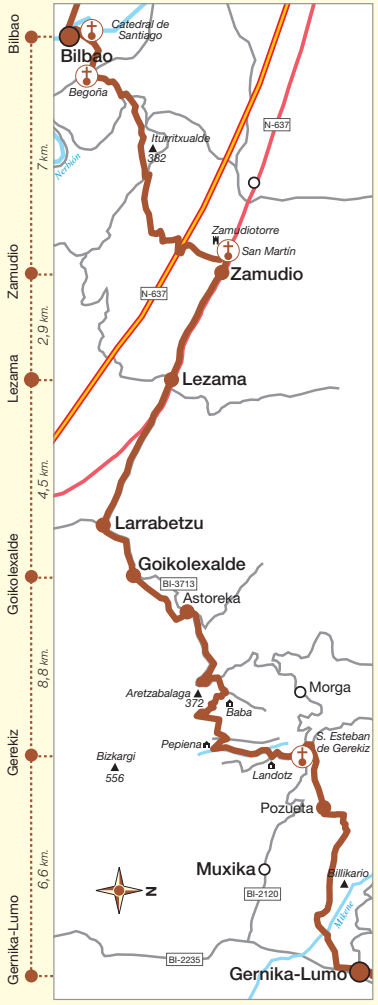
Pop. 93 / Separated from the previous village by a brook, Gerrikaitz is another rural hamlet arranged around the Neoclassical Church of Santa María, and with an interesting array of tower houses, such as the Jauregi example. It also has a chapel dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, and another in honour of Saint Lucy, or Santa Lucía, where legend has it that the eagle of Ziortza picked up the skull that was later dropped further up the hill.

Gernika-Lumo

Pop. 16,089 / Known the world over for the sad events that took place on 26th April 1937, when Guernica was bombed during the Spanish Civil War, the town is a living symbol of Basque traditions. This is the site of the Casa de Juntas meeting house, the hundred-year old oak tree and the neighbouring church to which the different representatives of the towns of Biscay debated their problems and made decisions, the "fairest" as Rousseau claimed, that affected the community. On Mondays, the entire town takes part in the traditional market, one of the most important and colourful in the Basque Country.

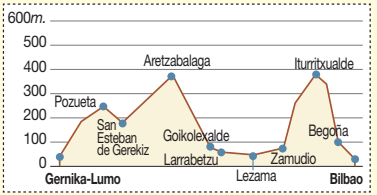


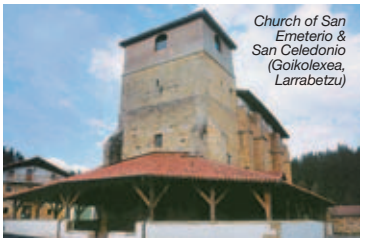
Tree of Guernica



Chapel of San Esteban de Gerekiz (Morga)

The proximity of another great Basque capital, Bilbao, will raise the hiker's spirits, as the landscape gradually loses its rugged nature and begins to show the work of human hands. Once you leave Guernica, you will come across a series of historical Biscayan towns and villages, all closely linked to the secular tradition of the *fueros* (or charters) and the old commercial relations between towns. From this point on, but the other way round, the road runs the Route of the Oath, the route that the feudal lord had to take to guarantee the community's rights and liberties. It began in Bilbao, passed through Larrabetzu, Guernica and ended in Bermeo. In spite of the tame landscape, which is most evident in the Txorierri, the geographical features have not ended, and after overcoming the heights of Pozueta and Aretxabalaga, the road at Zamudio will lead us to the peak of Iturritxualde, the last hurdle before reaching what was once the industrial capital of the Basque Country: Bilbao. The Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Begoña awaits us on the other side.





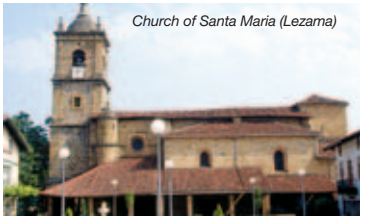
Church of San Emeterio & San Celedonio (Goikolexea, Larrabetzu)

Larrabetzu

Pop. 1,877 / Founded over six centuries ago in the heart of the Txorierri Valley, Larrabetzu boasts a lovely historical quarter filled with classical and palatial buildings under the watchful eye of the Church of Santa María de la Asunción, which was built in the 15th century and modified in the 17th century.

Shortly before reaching the centre of Larrabetzu itself, the hiker will come across the district of Goikolexea, one of the two parishes that used to form the town, back in the 9th century. It was here, in this Church of San Emeterio & San Celedonio, built in the Gothic-style, with arcades and an impressive prismatic tower, where one of the oath rituals was carried out in Biscay. Within its walls, you will see an immaculate Flemish altarpiece and remnants of old mediaeval paintings.

Larrabetzu's noble ancestry is also visible in the numerous examples of stately homes, such as the Ikaza, Anguleri (which blends popular Basque heritage with a palatial aesthetic and some fine original frescoes), and Oloste, known for its embossed heads.



Church of Santa Maria (Lezama)

Lezama

Pop. 2,439 / The Tower of Lezama is the finest architectural example in this small rural town in which internal battles were once fought between the different lords of the valley as a regular occurrence. This is why it has a certain warlike appearance, but at the same time, an elegant demeanour that merely enhances the nobility of the people who live here. The town was one of the last stops before entering Bilbao, and it is custom to visit the Church of Santa María and the Chapel of Cristo Crucificado, a light, simple and beautiful construction that nevertheless contains much of the grandeur of the Baroque. The Tuscan columns of its arcade have caught (and still catch) the eye of all those who walked (and walk) along the royal road that joined Bilbao and Guernica.

Church and Tower of Malpica (Zamudio)

Zamudio

Pop. 3,194 / Although it has been transformed by the Technological Park that houses a number of important businesses and by its closeness to Bilbao, Zamudio also offers some significant historical heritage buildings. The most magnificent is the Church of San Martín, an interesting temple of Romanesque-Gothic transition, situated next to the Way. The fortified Tower of Malpica, with its solid, thick walls with barely a window, is a remarkable example of the type of civil architecture that was being built in the Basque Country in the Middle Ages.

Bilbao

Pop. 355,048 /

After the lonely hikes along the lush green Basque Country, the Way delves deep into the most populated of all the Basque cities: Bilbao. The capital of Biscay is popularly known as 'Botxo', in reference to the hole in which it is situated, lying where several mountains meet. One of these such mounts is the Avril, the last obstacle before arriving at the Basilica of Begoña to worship the patron. This habit has scarcely changed since the Middle Ages, when in this very same place, a chapel was raised with fantastic views over the valley. The Calzadas de Mallona steps came down the fortified town that, in those days, was made up of what are now known as the "seven streets", the course of which has been conserved to this day. The Cathedral of Bilbao, dedicated to Saint James the Apostle and with its particular Pilgrims' Gate for those on the Way to Santiago, is the finest example of the extent to which the pilgrims' way has seeped into the city. From here on, we go back to the estuary that underwent a radical transformation as a result of the industrialisation that began in the 19th century. The Bilbao of today is a phoenix that came back from the ashes, partially thanks to the impact of the Guggenheim Museum. The city shed its skin and took on new monuments and infrastructure: the underground, tram lines, the Euskalduna conference centre, and the recovery of the river banks as a recreational area, to name but a few. It entered the new millennium with a bang, and a walk around Bilbao and its estuary is enough to fully appreciate this reality.

① Basilica of Begoña

The most emblematic and cherished religious symbol in Bilbao is this temple with its Gothic airs (its construction went on for several centuries) inside which you will find the patron of the city, Our Lady of Begoña. Its tower is barely a hundred years old: it was reconstructed after the damages it suffered in the First Carlist War.

② Plaza Nueva

This square is, along with the Seven Streets, one of the main components of Bilbao's old quarter. It is Neoclassical in style and is known for its arcades. Many shops and some of the best tapas bars in Bilbao are found around this square. A lively market is held here every Sunday morning.

③ Cathedral of Saint James

Designated as a cathedral midway through the last century, it is dedicated to Saint James the Apostle and is a marvellous receptacle of architectural influences, from its general Gothic lines up to its High Altar, steeped in the Renaissance, passing through the Baroque altarpieces in its chapels, and the cloister, a blend of several different styles.

④ Arriaga Theatre

Located in what used to be part of the docks, in the Arenal area, the style of this Neo-Baroque theatre was inspired by the Opera of Paris. It bears the name of the Bilbao composer, Juan Crisóstomo de Arriaga, a young talent who died at the tender age of 19.

⑤ Church of San Antón

The ensemble comprising this church and the bridge next to it, which was rebuilt after the Spanish Civil War, is one of the classic symbols of Bilbao, and is immortalised in its heraldry. Beside this 15th century church, which was constructed on the site of a former castle, is the Market of La Ribera, currently being completely refurbished.

⑥ Guggenheim Museum

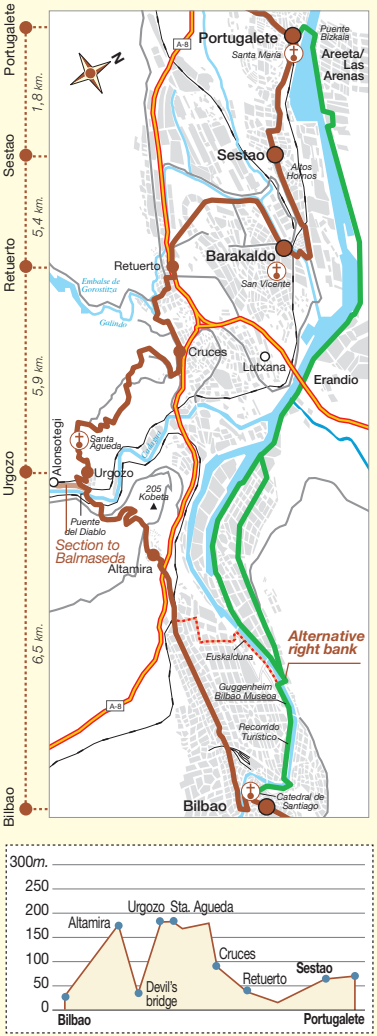
The Frank O. Gehry-designed titanium building did not only breathe new life into the area around the estuary in Bilbao, it revived the entire city, turning it into a major tourist destination. Its shapes and curves, the diversity of materials that were used in its making, and the versatility of the collections it houses, have all gone to make it a must-see in the new Bilbao.

⑦ Gran Vía Don Diego López de Haro

The stateliest and widest of all the streets in Bilbao is this high street lined with major commercial chains. Barely a decade ago, it was closed off to nearly all road traffic; today access is only given to buses and taxis, although the section from the Plaza Moyua to the Plaza del Sagrado Corazón squares is open to traffic, which contributes to this area being filled with life around the clock.

⑧ Paseo de Uribitarte and Avenida Abandoibarra

The former Uribitarte dock has now been converted into a delightful walk along the estuary, and has proved to be one of the city's most celebrated development achievements. Firstly, because it is a pleasant area for walking, cycling or simply lapping up the last rays of sun in the evening. Secondly, because many architectural novelties are clustered around here, such as the Zubizuri bridge or the Isozaki Atea tower complex, and many of the most emblematic buildings in the city, such as the Guggenheim Museum, the University of Deusto library, the University of the Basque Country auditorium, the Iberdrola tower and the Euskalduna conference centre.



Vizcaya Bridge (Portugalete)

Once the Way reaches Bilbao, it passes through a whole range of different scenery to the sights of the first few days. From now on, and until the Way reaches Portugalete, the most common forests will be made of concrete; the usual paths will be surfaced in asphalt or pavement; and the sounds you hear will be those of the traffic and the modern city. As soon as you get through the Biscayan capital, you climb Mount Kobeta, which encloses the city on the south and gives us a fantastic view of the Nervión Valley that we are about to travel through. The spectacular growth that this part of the Basque Country has undergone since the late 19th century has severely affected the environment that pilgrims in bygone years would have experienced. Old references such as the River Cadagua (the natural border between Bilbao and Barakaldo) and the Chapel of Santa Águeda have survived to the present day, but the standard scenery will be the suburbs and chimneys that are still standing from the old blast furnaces. An alternative route to the historical route, which is flat and 6 kilometres shorter, can be followed starting at the cathedral and passing by the Guggenheim Museum, bordering the estuary along the right bank and crossing the Vizcaya bridge, a masterpiece of engineering that is considered a World Heritage Site.

Barakaldo

Pop. 98,316 / Although this town on the left bank of the Nervión River dates back over a thousand years (it was founded in 1051 as an *elizate*, an early form of village structure based around the church courtyard, even earlier than Bilbao), it was not until the second half of the 19th century that it underwent a radical change. The proximity of major iron ore mines, such as those in the area of Triano, fostered the creation of large iron and steel businesses that would end up merging with the blast furnace industry of Biscay. In recent years, the land that was once used for mining activity has been reconverted, although Barakaldo has still maintained some identifying features from its distant past, such as the Church of San Vicente, which dates back to the 13th century.

Church of San Vicente (Barakaldo)

Sestao

Pop. 29,249 / Separated from Barakaldo by the River Galindo, Sestao also bears the brunt of much of the industrial legacy that transformed the left bank. In another era, the town was a haven of wetlands, orchards, vegetable gardens and farmhouses, but today it still heavily relies on the steel industry. The mediaeval Church of Santa María, which was transformed and refurbished in the 19th century, is its pride and joy, set in a park in which a shoot from the oak tree of Guernica grows.

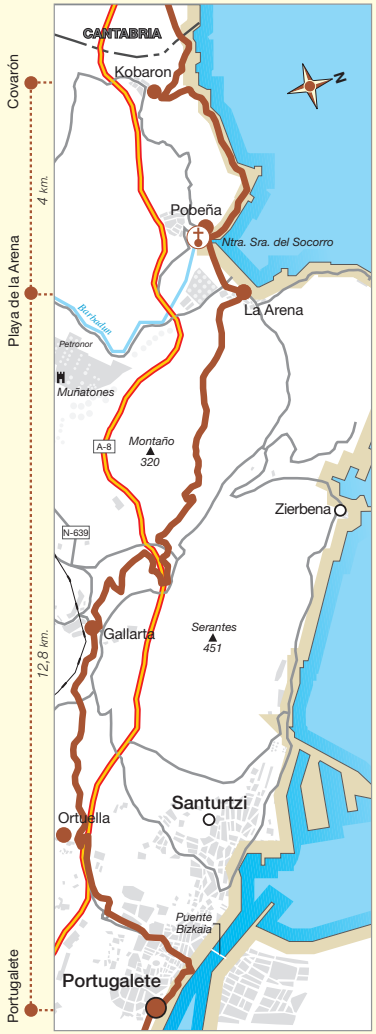
Shipyards in Sestao

Basilica of Santa María (Portugalete)

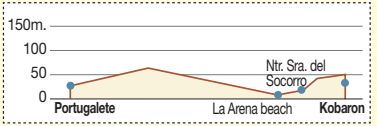
Portugalete

Pop. 47,955 / As is the case with almost the entire southern side of the estuary, the divisions between one town, Sestao, and the other, Portugalete, appear to have been erased over time. In this historical town, it is easy to find the traces of its mediaeval past in the three steep main streets, called La Fuente, Medio and Santa María, or the narrow alleys that run across them. It is precisely one of these alleys that leads to the Basilica of Santa María, which is Gothic in its origins but was rebuilt in the 15th and 16th centuries. One of its altars has an image of Saint James the Moor-slayer at the battle of Clavijo.

The suspension bridge over the Nervión, joining Portugalete and Areeta/Las Arenas, and which also enabled the large cargo carriers to travel inland, is the most important icon in the town. It is by its own merit that it has become such a unique structure; there is no other working bridge of its kind in the world. It has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and its construction was honoured with an advisor by the name of Gustave Eiffel.



The Cantabrian Sea once again appears on the horizon. After travelling through the lush green lands in the heart of the Basque Country, and passing through its industrial soul, the Way leaves Biscay to be reunited with the salty sea air. The route in this last Basque stage runs smoothly along a comfortable cycle lane that leaves Portugalete, and passes through Zierbena before reaching the beach of La Arena. As you pass through Ortuella, you will have the chance to leave the cycle lane and go into the town's historical quarter, before picking up the route again later. The course of the route is essentially flat, with just a few minor slopes, avoiding the heights around it, such as Mount Serantes or Montaño. You will find a mixture of views, including the A-8 motorway or the future Supersur motorway (which will clear some of the dense traffic from the motorway passing Bilbao). Once past Pobeña, the Northern Way offers us one of its most sublime stretches: the route of the old mining railway that carried goods up to the loading bay at La Arena. Today, all that is left is its memory, and some splendid views of the coastline running parallel to this green route. Once through the tunnel, there is a complicated section with very few signs until Ontón.



Mining Museum in Gallarta

Abanto-Zierbena

Pop. 9,627 / Just a few decades ago, these lands were active mining territory, so you can easily come across the marks of those times, from the housing estates and districts set up to accommodate the dozens of workers and their families, up to the mines such as the Corta de Bodovalle. At the Mining Museum in Gallarta, there is a great deal of information about this subject, and it has many of the tools and utensils used in the mines on display, as well as personal stories and testimonies, and its representation in the art world. It is not unusual to find industrial remains in perfect condition, such as the calcination kilns of the José and Lorenza mines.

Muskiz

Pop. 7,186 / The most famous part of Muskiz is the beach of La Arena, where we once again meet up with the sea that we have not seen since Deba. The town is made up of several districts, among which we should mention the district of San Julián, the earliest of all, as shown by the Gothic church of the same name, or the Muñatones castle, an impressive mediaeval fortress that was built in the 13th century but which was given major additions in the 15th century. When the conflicts between families came to an end, the fort fell into disuse, and it went on to be fitted out as a hospital to take in the pilgrims who had come to pray at the Chapel of San Martín (one of the blessed protectors of the Way), which is sadly no longer there. It is worth having a look at the district of Pobeña (which also has a comfortable hostel) even if it is merely to admire the marshlands or the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Socorro, which was built on what used to be an unusual island that has since joined the land and been inhabited by holm oaks and aromatic laurels.

Muñatones castle

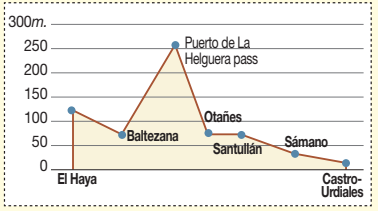
Chapel of Ntra. Sra. del Socorro, Pobeña (Muskiz)

Kobaron

Pop. 130 / The last village on the Northern Way through the Basque Country is also closely linked to the mining fever that broke out in the 19th century. It was at Kobaron that the McLennan company had its offices, and from here they designed their strategies to carry the iron ore to England in the most efficient way possible. The Amalia Vizcaína mine was one of McLennan's, which has since been flooded, and next to it were the calcination kilns that were used for almost 100 years to improve the value of the ore.

9 (Kobaron) El Haya → Castro Urdiales (17 km)

The Valley of Otañes



The Way to Santiago reaches this point from the Biscayan village of Kobaron and enters Cantabria through El Haya, in Ontón. To avoid what used to be the dangerous mountain pass of Saltacaballo, by the sea, the route heads south, following the traditional road that leads to the town of Castro-Urdiales, crossing through an area that has long been marked by the movement of people and goods: the old Roman road, the mediaeval path, the mining railway... This first stage through Cantabria passes through a landscape of valley pastures and mountains scarred by the exploits of the Setares mining company. Mining infrastructure, villages and remains of the railway are all around this land, but they share it with meadows, stables and cattle, offering a unique image of the ways of life that have left their mark on this area of Cantabria for centuries.

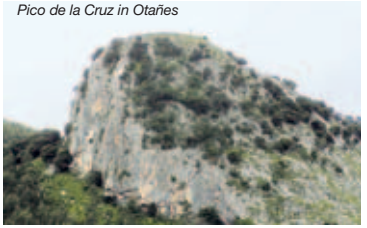
Baltezana

Pop. 400 / Although it has been significantly modified by the proliferation of new homes, the rural character of Baltezana, with its clusters of houses spread all along the main road, is still evident. The remains of a funeral stele from Roman times that were built into a wall of the small Chapel of San Juan show just how far back settlements in this area go.

Remains of mining infrastructure at Baltezana

Otañes

Pop. 680 / This village is divided into districts that are situated on both sides of the main road, and it has an important tradition of road transport that goes back to ancient times, evidence of which is shown in the Roman milestones along the Pisoraca-Flaviobriga way that were found in this area. Its association with Saint James has left the name of one of its districts, the Hospital district, taken from a building of this kind that was attached to the Gothic Chapel of San Roque. It also has an interesting collection of popular architecture, with colonial houses and palaces from the 15th to 18th centuries. Otañes is also known for the fact that one of the jewels of peninsular Roman gold and silver work was found here: the Otañes patera, found by chance in the 18th century among the ruins of the Tower of Pico de la Cruz or of the castle. Very nearby, and in its neighbouring land up from the mount, in Setares, the remains of the old mining village have survived to this day. The village has long since been abandoned, but at the time, in 1900, it had up to 1,500 inhabitants. It is a gem of iron mining-related industrial archaeology, which was a crucial sector in the region in the 19th and 20th centuries.

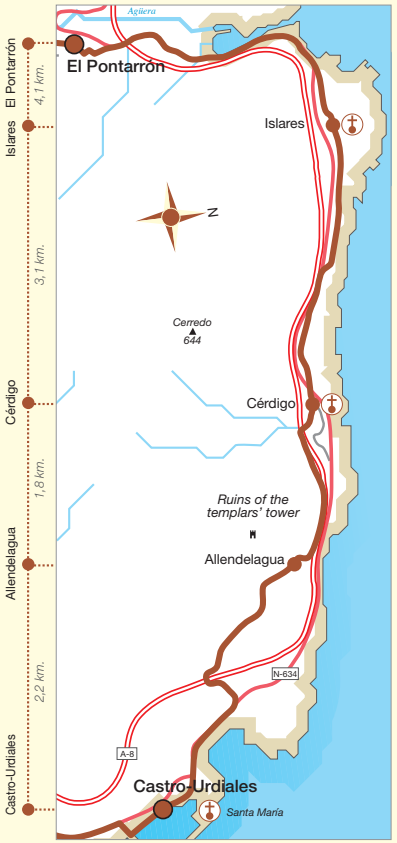


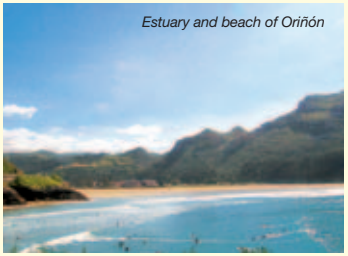
Pico de la Cruz in Otañes

The Valley of Sámano

Sámano

Pop. 2,660 / To our left, we will leave the huge mass that is La Peña, on the far west of which the Autrigones built a significant fortified town from the Iron Age, and from here we will reach Sámano. The ruins of the 14th century hospital and Chapel of Santa María de Ternedo are located near this town, which is situated at the bottom of a wide valley, surrounded by limestone hills where archaeological settlements abound. In particular, there are some caves with remains from the Palaeolithic to the Recent Prehistory Ages. The rural nature of its districts has gradually been lost over the years, and the development boom has left its mark, although there are still some interesting groups of typical houses, such as Sangazo.





Estuary and beach of Oriñón

After leaving behind the city of Castro-Urdiales and its remnants of a glorious sea-faring and fishing past, the route continues almost directly along the coast on the narrow path amid the foothills of Mount Cerredo and the cliffs. The scenery in this part of the Way, beyond the limits of the N-634 road, remained almost unchanged for centuries, dotted with small villages and groups of houses where the people mostly earned their livelihood from cattle, making the most of the mountain pastures. The construction of the motorway and the increased population in recent years have changed the area somewhat, but they have by no means taken away the special character of this stretch of land that is as beautiful as it is rough. The views from the right bank of the Oriñón estuary are particularly impressive, with the Candina massif and its colony of Griffon vultures straight ahead. The original Way included a passage by boat from this stretch of sea, to then continue on foot once at the other shore.

Castro-Urdiales

Castro-Urdiales

Pop. 25,273 / Castro-Urdiales was built on the ruins of the Roman colony of Flaviobriga, founded during the reign of Vespasian in the second half of the 1st century, in the Portus Amanus territory of the Autrigones. After its moment of splendour during the times of the High Roman Empire, it suffered a long period of decline in the Late Antiquity era, which ended in it becoming just a simple fishing village. When King Alfonso VIII of Castile awarded it the Logroño charter in the second half of the 12th century, this meant the founding of the mediaeval town and it took off as a top economic centre, always hand in hand with its major commercial and fishing port. It was one of the *Cuatro Villas de la Costa* (a federation of the four main ports in the area), and an outstanding member of the *Hermandad de la Marina de Castilla* (a federation of the Castilian navy), together with other Cantabrian and Basque towns and the city of Vitoria, undergoing an intense period of development in the Late Middle Ages. As a reflection of those golden ages, we find the ensemble presided over by the magnificent Gothic-style Church of Santa María de la Asunción, with the castle-lighthouse and the Chapel of Santa Ana, as well as the little streets that make up its historical quarter. Among its many other points of interest to visitors is the group of houses and villas dating back to the late 19th century and early 20th century, and which are situated in the urban expansion area around the Bilbao road, as well as the impressive municipal cemetery of La Ballena, in Urdiales.

Allendelagua

Pop. 146 / The small village of Allendelagua is situated in the shadow of the San Antón peak, on which the building known as the "Templars' Castle" is built. It is really just a small rock castle that has kept part of its wall and tower, and which belonged to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages.

Cerdigo

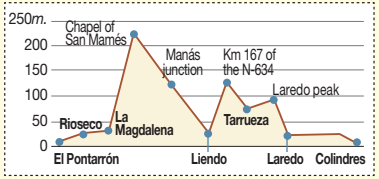
Pop. 257 / Cerdigo, nestled between the hillside of Mount Cerredo and a stretch of coastline that is particularly abrupt, has kept much of its rural character. The most outstanding element in this village is its 13th century church and Romanesque traces. A significant number of buildings from the 16th-18th centuries complete the picturesque ensemble.

Street in Cerdigo

Islares

Pop. 3,179 / The ruins of the Hospital of Vera Cruz, next to the Chapel of San Roque, bear witness to the passing of the Way of Saint James through Islares. Next to this village lies the small port of Arenillas, which was built in the late 16th century by the town of Castro-Urdiales to control the banks of the Oriñón estuary, which were within its jurisdiction.

Port of Arenillas in Islares



Beach of La Salvé in Laredo

This part of the journey runs through areas of spectacular natural beauty, with a whimsical geography going from sheer limestone peaks surrounding the polje of Liendo to the extensive sands of Laredo and the wetlands of the mouth of the Asón in the space of just a few kilometres. These form the largest part of the Santoña, Victoria and Joyel Marshes Natural Park, and are one of the most important refuges for waterbirds in the north of the peninsula, being of great ecological value. The human geography in this stage also offers significant contrasts, going from the agricultural, cattle environment of Liendo, to the seaside settings of Laredo and Santoña. At Colindres, which brings both worlds together, you cross the estuary by means of a swing bridge, the Treto bridge, a piece of work from the Eiffel school, and which replaced the former boat that would carry people and merchandise, including those walking the Way to Santiago, to the other side.

Liendo

Pop. 1,193 / The image of Liendo is of a huge karst depression with a flat background, surrounded by abrupt peaks covered in Cantabrian oak trees and dotted with rural districts that have superb examples of popular architecture and historical buildings.

Valley of Liendo

Laredo

Pop. 11,816 / In the year 1200, Alfonso VIII awarded a small hamlet situated around the Church of San Martín the Charter of Castro-Urdiales. Thus the town of Laredo was born. It would go on to earn major importance in the history of Cantabria and the Castilian Crown during the Middle and Modern Ages. One of the *Cuatro Villas de la Costa*, it was a member of the *Hermandad de la Marina de Castilla* and its former port, today the town centre, was the point of arrival and departure for the war fleets and royal delegations. After a period of decline from the 18th century onwards, it recovered its strength in the 1960s thanks to tourism. The old village is particularly interesting. This historical-artistic complex is made up of the village itself, with its orthogonal layout, and the suburb of San Francisco. Everything is dominated by the Parish Church of Santa María, built in the Gothic style and a fine reflection of the late-mediaeval splendour of this village. Inside the church there is a magnificent Flemish altarpiece of Our Lady of Bethlehem, dating back to the 15th century. Its main tourist attraction lies in one of its beaches, La Salvé, that stretches along over 4 kilometres of coastline and is the natural enclosure of the Asón estuary and the southern shore of the Bay of Santoña.

Santoña

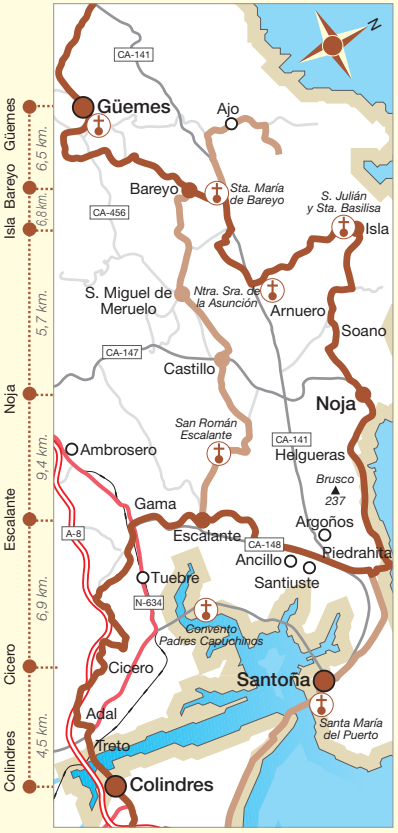
Pop. 11,257 / Santoña was known in the Middle Ages by the name of Puerto, reminiscent of a Roman port on the ruins of which the Parish Church of Santa María was built. It was also the seat of one of the most powerful monastic domains in the whole of mediaeval Cantabria. Set in a privileged enclave at the foothills of Mount Buciero and surrounded by sea and marshlands, it has one of the most important fishing ports in the Cantabrian Sea. It has significant military heritage from the Modern and Contemporary eras, with a large number of forts and batteries of all kinds, an eternal reminder of its role as a fortified town and strategic point in the north of the peninsula.

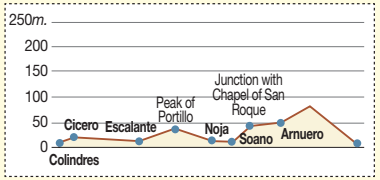
Asón estuary and Santoña marshlands

Colindres

Pop. 7,826 / Colindres has two clearly defined parts, the high part, which is rural and has many 15th-18th century houses bearing their coats of arms huddled around the Royal Road to Castile; and another, urban part in the area claimed back from the estuary, in a hub of land communication networks and with a major fishing port.

Treto bridge in Colindres





Valley of Meruelo

The Way, which has sailed into the lands of the former *Merindad* [mediaeval administrative region] of Trasmiera through Santoña, continues on foot along the Treto bridge over the Asón estuary. It then runs through the eastern half of this historical territory over small plains used for pastures, and which are separated from each other by oak-forested hills. Treto, Gama, Escalante, Castillo, Meruelo, these are just some of the towns and villages the Way passes through, depending on the particular route taken. In all these villages and towns we can see the ongoing struggle between an attachment to tradition, to cattle farming and to country life supervised from above by the old towers of the lords that has remained unchanged for centuries, and modern life, which has reached this corner of Cantabria by way of newly-built, modern housing developments. Nevertheless, the essence of rural Trasmiera has been kept alive all along the route, making it a singular experience that finds its ideal accompaniment in places such as Isla, San Román de Escalante and, in particular, Santa María de Bareyo.

Escalante

Pop. 526 / Escalante has an unusual urban setting, with terraced houses along some of the streets, maintaining its original appearance of a mediaeval village. There are even older buildings in the complex with Gothic remains, and some houses bearing their coats of arms dating back to the 16th-18th centuries, as well as some typical rural homes from the 19th century. If we head east out of the village centre, on the edge of the marshlands we will find the Franciscan Convent of San Sebastian, and above the convent, on the Montehano peak, we will see the remains of a 14th century castle. Heading west, the late 12th century Romanesque Chapel of San Román has a splendid example of decorative sculpture.

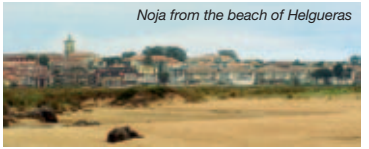
Street in Escalante

Castillo

Pop. 591 / The Castillo landscape is typical of this area of Trasmiera, with small districts in which some rural groups of houses are still maintained in rows, surrounded by meadows. The tower with a late-mediaeval wall from the Venero lineage, and the Parish Church of San Pedro, from the 15th-16th centuries, are particularly worthy of mention.

Noja

Pop. 2,635 / The road enters Noja through Trengandín, after crossing the 16th century bridge at Helgueras. The municipal hospital was built in the first of these districts, and it was here that several pilgrims were recorded to have passed away in the 18th and 19th centuries. Noja is an important tourist town, with several beaches and an extensive range of hotel and restaurants available. In its modern town centre there are still some interesting buildings, such as the Palace of Zilla, the tower-house of Velasco or the Palace of Albaicín, dating back to the 17th, 15th and 20th centuries, respectively.


Noja from the beach of Helgueras

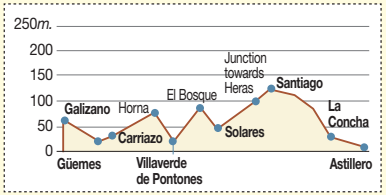
Isla

Pop. 301 / The Baroque Church of San Julián & Santa Basilisa; the parish council hall and the old hospital, with its image of Saint James the Moor-slayer; the Chapels of San Martín, San Roque and San Sebastian; the palatial complex of the Count and Countess of Isla; and the Towers of Novales, El Rebollar and El Cabrahigo, all make up Isla's historical heritage. It is a superb compendium of architecture from the Middle and Modern Ages, set in the heart of Trasmiera.

Bareyo

Pop. 160 / On a high point outside the village you will see the Church of Santa María de Bareyo, a genuine Romanesque masterpiece on the coast of Cantabria. The building dates back to the early 13th century and has one nave, side chapels and an important architectural collection of capitals, imposts, corbels, and other such features. The Romanesque baptismal font, with its decoration of intertwining palms and lions, is particularly worth looking at. Some pilgrims on the Way of Saint James who passed away in this village in the 18th century are buried here.

Santa María de Bareyo



Northern side of the Peña Cabarga mountain

In this stage, there are two options out of Trasmiera to get to Santander: you can cross the bay by boat, through Somo; or go around the bay on foot, along the southern route, crossing the Miera at Solares and the Solía estuary at La Concha. If you choose the second option, you will gradually leave behind the flat landscape of western Trasmiera and head along the lower part of the Peña Cabarga mountain range, probably the iron-filled hills that Pliny the Elder claimed to have found in Cantabria. As the Way approaches El Astillero, it passes through countryside that has been clearly affected by the indelible mark of late 19th/early 20th century mining, probably the most eye-catching feature of this being the reddish colour of the earth, and even of the water in the estuaries, resulting from the deposits of mining waste from the settling basins.

Somo

Pop. 1,728 / Those who decide to cross the Bay of Santander by boat will need to reach the coastal town of Somo. There is a regular boat service to Santander, which also stops at the neighbouring village of Pedreña. Both rely heavily on the tourist sector and their hotel and catering industry related to sea produce.

A "pedreñera" boat docking at Somo

Solares

Pop. 4,059 / Solares is situated on the left bank of the Miera, in the shadow of the Pico del Castillo mount, where you will find the ruins of an early mediaeval fortress: Cutellium castrum, which gave its name to the land of Cudeyo. This town, a hub of communications at the western tip of the *Merindad* of Trasmiera, is known for the properties of its waters coming from its prestigious thermal facilities. Apart from the spa, it has several interesting examples of 17th and 18th century civil architecture, such as the Palace of the Marquises of Valbuena, of Rubalcaba and the House of the Cuetos, the latter being in the district of Sobremazas.

La Concha

Pop. 487 / While the Way passes along without leaving the foothills of the Peña Cabarga, following the course of the old road, it goes under the peak on which the Iron Age Castro, or fort, of Castilnegro is situated. Further on, in Liaño, it comes reasonably close to the mining galleries of Morero, which were dug in Roman times to extract the abundant iron in the area. This iron mining

Bridge of Solía, at La Concha

industry has marked the landscape for all eternity, and you can see many remains of the intense labour exploits carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries. At La Concha, the Solía estuary used to be crossed using the late-Gothic bridge of the same name, which can still be seen but unfortunately is no longer in use. Beyond the Way, although very nearby, is the Nature Park of Cabárceno, a perfect place for nature lovers to take a break.

El Astillero

Pop. 11,779 / The birth and formation of this important town is closely linked to shipbuilding and mining. The first of these activities was a result of the Guarnizo shipyard, that was at its heyday in the 18th century; and the second was due to the collection and export of iron ore from Peña Cabarga in the 19th and 20th centuries. Apart from the important vestiges of industrial architecture that are dotted around the southern part of the town, there are also protected nature reserves of the *Marismas Blancas* and *Negras*, or white and black marshlands, both habitat and breeding grounds for many types of bird.

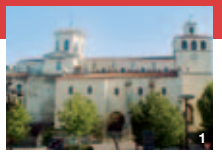
El Astillero

Santander

Pop. 182,762 /

The origin of Santander dates back to Roman times, although its true formation as a town took place in the Middle Ages. It arose in the shadow of the Abbey of San Emeterio & San Celedonio, and was awarded the Sahagún charter by Alfonso VIII at the end of the 12th century, thus commencing a demographic and commercial upturn that would make it one of the most important ports in the Cantabrian in the Middle and Modern Ages. After a period of decline in the 17th century, it made a comeback in the 18th century thanks to its maritime trade, and became the port of departure for Castilian wools and a point of reference in trade with the American colonies. At the end of that century, it was awarded the title of city, and in the second half of the 19th century, it became one of the destinations for the royal family to spend their summers. In 1941 a horrific fire destroyed much of its historical quarter.

The relationship between Santander and the Way of Saint James can be seen in several hospitals for pilgrims in the Middle and Modern Ages: Santispíritu, Santa María de la Consolación, San Lázaro, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, La Misericordia, etc. There is a chapel dedicated to Saint James, whose construction dates back to the 14th century, in the former collegiate church where the relics of the martyrs Emeterio and Celedonio are venerated. This is undoubtedly an attractive bonus for those on the Pilgrims' Way through the city.



① Cathedral

The Santander Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción is a complex made up of several buildings: the Lower Church, or "Del Cristo", from the 13th century; the Cathedral itself, built on top and with the same floor plan, from the 13th-14th centuries; and the cloister, a 15th century addition. Inside, it keeps two silver skull reliquaries with the remains of the martyrs Emeterio and Celedonio.

② Puertochico

At the point where the Paseo de Pereda and Calle Castelar streets meet, considered the first urban expansion area in the city and designed in the 18th century, you will find Puertochico. Although its roots lie in a fishing village (at the dock of Molnedo), it is today a mooring area for small leisure boats, keeping up its seafaring soul.

③ Maritime Museum

The Maritime Museum is located in a privileged part of Santander, with spectacular views over the bay. It houses some of the most important collections of fishing ethnography in Spain. It also has sections dedicated to maritime history and zoology, as well as tanks and aquariums reproducing different marine eco-systems.

④ City Hall

The City Hall square is at the centre of the city and a regular meeting point for locals and visitors alike. The building itself was built on the site of a former Franciscan convent that initially dates back to the early 20th century, although refurbishments carried out in the 1960s have given it its current appearance.

⑤ Fishing district

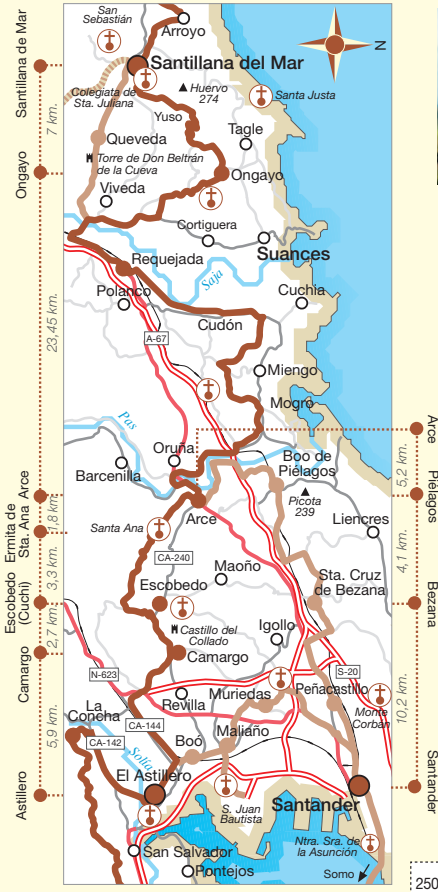
Midway through the 20th century, this village was set up at the entrance to the city, next to the new port. The fishermen and their families moved there from their traditional places of residence and work, such as Puertochico and Tetuán, giving way to one of the most typical and attractive areas for tourists in this city.

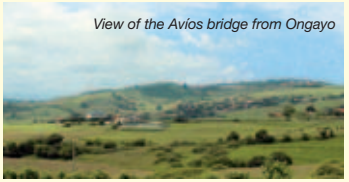
⑥ Palace of La Magdalena

Situated on the peninsula of the same name, watching over the entrance to the bay, the Palace of La Magdalena was built by public subscription in 1912 and given as a gift to the royal family for their summer residence. It is a magnificent building, with English, French and regional architectural influences. It is currently owned by the city and is the venue for the summer courses run by the Menéndez Pelayo International University.

⑦ Gardens of Piquío

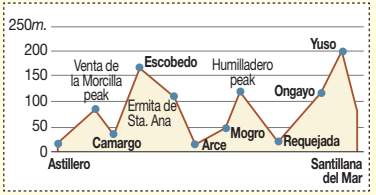
The gardens of Piquío were constructed in 1925 on a rocky headland that separated the first beach of Sardinero from the second. They are situated in the heart of the tourist area of Santander par excellence, among the sandy stretches looking out onto the Cantabrian Sea, and such emblematic buildings as the Casino or the Hotel Sardinero.





View of the Avíos bridge from Ongayo

The longest stage on the route through Cantabria has two alternative courses at the start, depending on where you depart from, and then which come together again before passing the first great river: the Pas. The existence of the end sections of rivers that cannot be crossed on foot is characteristic of this part of the journey, and seeing as the boats that carried travellers and hikers from one bank to the other for centuries are no longer in use, you have to head south in search of the bridges that replaced them. References to the Way, whether archaeological such as in Maliaño or documentary as in Ongayo, are found along the route in which history has left its mark for all time, in the form of prehistoric caves, mediaeval castles, Modern Age bridges or fortifications from the Spanish Civil War.



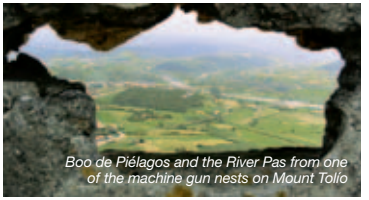
Maliaño/Muriedas

Pop. 9,563 / 13,124 / As you pass through the towns of Maliaño and Muriedas, it is worth heading east to the cemetery of the Alto Maliaño, to visit the archaeological site of La Mies de San Juan. These are the remains of a Romanesque church, complete with necropolis, which was built on the ruins of the Roman baths dating back to the 1st-4th centuries. The archaeological digs have discovered that the Church of San Juan was a point on the pilgrimage in the Late Middle Ages, proof of which can be seen in the perforated pilgrim's scallop shell and the Galician and Portuguese coins that were found. They probably crossed the bay by boat, although this expanse of water has since dried up and been filled in, heading for Santander and vice versa. Muriedas offers us the House-Museum of Pedro Velarde and the Ethnographic Museum of Cantabria, a definite must for those who are interested in the traditional ways of life in the rural environment.

Archaeological site of San Juan de Maliaño

Escobedo

Pop. 1,417 / Those who choose the route that runs through Escobedo will pass under the Castle of the Collado, which was constructed in the Early Middle Ages and restored in recent years. In the district of El Churi you will also find the cave of El Pendo, recently declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with another 8 Cantabrian and 8 Asturian and Basque caves, with their Palaeolithic drawings.



Boo de Piélagos and the River Pas from one of the machine gun nests on Mount Tolío

Boo de Piélagos

Pop. 2,499 / Very close to this town is a boat service for travellers and pilgrims who wish to cross the River Pas. To the north, and dominating a wide coastal stretch of land, we will see the Sierra de Tolío or de La Picota mountain range, with its splendid fortifications from the Spanish Civil War: over 20 machine gun nests and trenches built by the Republican troops in 1937.

Arce

Pop. 2,400 / In the district of La Calzada, whose name recalls the town's wayfaring past, the two branches of this stage meet. Less than 1 kilometre downriver, at Puente Arce, the route crosses the Pas over the stone bridge that was built in the late 16th century.

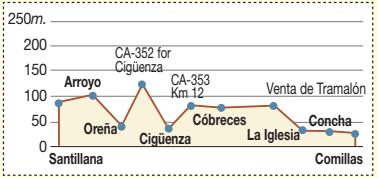
Bridge of Arce

Ongayo

Pop. 188 / When you get to Ongayo, at the point where a stretch of an old road that the locals call the "Way of Saint James", the actual route joins the old road that those who had crossed the Saja in a boat belonging to the Church and Boatyard of Santo Domingo, in Cortiguera would have taken. Their help in allowing pilgrims to pass is, among other things, mentioned in a document dated 1107.

Santillana del Mar and surrounding area

At Santillana del Mar, the Way joins up with the route that connects with the French Way, through the valleys of Besaya, Camesa and Pisuerga, making this town a hub of pilgrim communications. When you look around this town, you do not need much imagination to feel like you have gone back in time to the end of the Middle Ages, or the early Modern Era. The same cobbled streets that echoed the steps of those who then rested in the different hospitals for walking pilgrims are laid out today to welcome the modern-day hikers. From here, the route moves westwards, very close to the coast, and winding its way through coastal valleys, where the meadows and green hills almost merge with the sea crashing against the cliffs. The Baroque towers of the Church of Cigüenza and the neo-Gothic pinnacles of the Abbey and Parish Church of Cóbreces appear on the stage like milestones to guide our way.



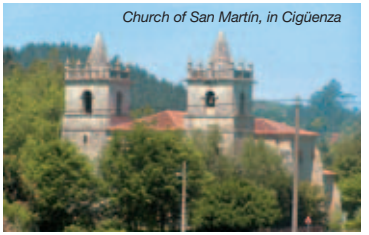
Santillana del Mar

Santillana

Pop. 1,081 / The town of Santillana arose in the shadow of the mighty Abbey of Santa Juliana, where the relics of this martyr were kept and venerated. During the Early and High Middle Ages, its domains extended along central and west Cantabria, controlling numerous churches and chapels within its jurisdiction. It is known worldwide for conserving the appearance it had in the Modern Era, with two main streets forming a Y axis. At the ends are the Collegiate Church and Main Square, with the 15th century Merino Tower. The first is a fine example of Romanesque architecture in the north of the peninsula, and its cloister is particularly worthy of mention as it has a superb collection of elaborate capitals. Other interesting buildings are the 15th century Tower of Don Borja; the Houses of Águila and La Parra, from the 16th-17th centuries; or the 18th century Palace of the Marquis of Benemejís, among many others. The Regina Coeli Diocesan Museum dedicated to the Cantabrian religious heritage is also situated in the town centre. If we are talking about museums, we really should go 1.5 kilometres further south to visit the replica of the Cave of Altamira and its museum, situated next to the original. This cave was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, and is one of the finest examples in the world of prehistoric cave drawing. Its polychrome chamber is considered to be the Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic art.

Cigüenza

Pop. 90 / Alongside the traditional houses that make up the small district of Cigüenza, we find the Church of San Martín, with its characteristic two towers on the main façade. It is one of the best examples of Cantabrian Baroque; its construction was paid for by an *indiano* midway through the 18th century, with strong colonial influences.



Church of San Martín, in Cigüenza

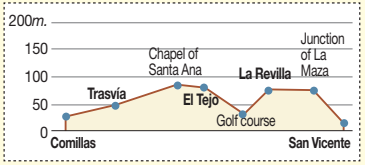
Cóbreces

Pop. 596 / Although the origin of this village goes back to at least the 10th century, when it is mentioned as Caopreces in the Cartulary of Santillana, the history of Cóbreces is joined to the history of the Cistercian Abbey of Santa María de Viaceli. This monastic complex was built in the early 20th century in a neo-Gothic style, and has a church, monastery, dairy and hostelry. It is home to one of the few communities of Cistercian monks in the north of the peninsula. The Parish Church of San Pedro Ad Vincula was also built in the same style.

Cóbreces

The estuary of San Vicente

Between Comillas and San Vicente de la Barquera, the road runs entirely through the Natural Park of Oyambre, with 5,800 hectares of protected land of high ecological value. The landscape blends meadows and grasslands with the wetlands associated with inlets: from the marshlands of Zapedo and the River Turbio to the La Rabia estuary; from the marshlands of Rubín and Pombo to the San Vicente estuary; not forgetting its spectacular beaches, such as La Rabia, Oyambre and Merón, to name but a few. The journey through the nature reserve is not only a pleasure because of the beauty around us, but it also acts as a transition between two completely different monumental complexes, both unique in their own style: on one hand, the cosmopolitan and modern face of Comillas, represented by El Capricho, the University and the Palace of Sobrellano; and on the other, the seafaring, mediaeval image of San Vicente, with its fisherman's houses, Gothic church and its castle. The branch of the route that crosses the Cantabrian Mountains, through Liébana, sets off from this town, in search of the French Way.



Comillas

Pop. 1,943 / The relationship between Comillas and the Way of Saint James goes back a long way. As far back as the 16th century, a hospital was built on the route for the pilgrims on their way to Santiago. The town began to thrive towards the end of the 19th century, thanks to the patronage of the first Marquis of Comillas. This boosted the construction of more emblematic buildings: the Pontifical University building, converted into an international centre for Spanish language study; the Palace of Sobrellano, a neo-Gothic building with modernist influences; the nearby Chapel-Pantheon, where the remains of the Marquis and his family are kept; and, above all of them, the Gaudí-designed El Capricho, in a style of transition between eclecticism and modernism, and one of the town's symbols. The cemetery is also worth mentioning. It was built around the ruins of a Gothic church, with its monumental gate and crowned by a spectacular statue of the angel of Llimona. As well as being filled with monuments, Comillas is also the gateway to the Natural Park of Oyambre.

Cemetery and University, in Comillas

El Tejo

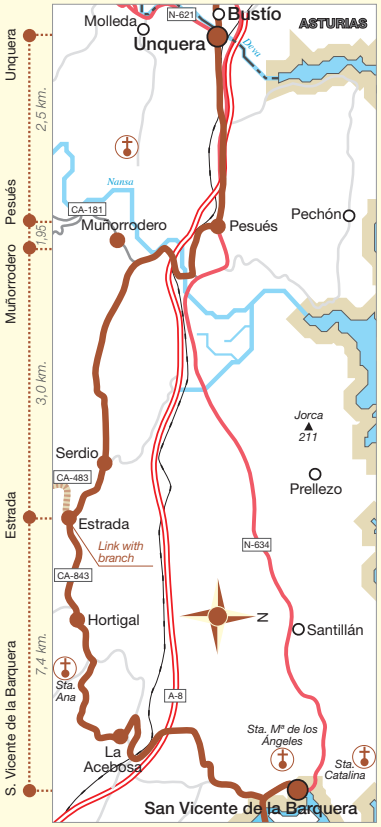
Pop. 63 / El Tejo is located within the Park, and it was in this village in the 11th century that the Premonstratensian Monastery of Santa María was built, and which is today a parish church of the same name, conserving some of the Romanesque and Gothic elements in its structure.

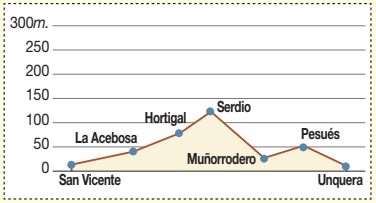
Hillside and coast, from El Tejo

San Vicente de la Barquera

Pop. 3,446 / This is the most western town of the Four Coastal towns and its glorious mediaeval past is still present today, despite the growth it has undergone in recent years. Awarded the status of charter by Alfonso VIII in 1210, it belonged to the *Hermandad de la Marina de Castilla*, and during the Middle Ages it stood out as a major maritime centre, having important trade, whaling and deep-sea fishing activities. The oldest part, with a central road running lengthways with the Parish Church of Santa María de los Ángeles on one end and the King's Castle on the other, was once surrounded by a wall, but today only some of these sections and gates still remain. One of these gates, opening south, is the Pilgrims' Gate, recalling the walkers' passage through here on their way to Santiago. Other testimonies were the hospital that was built in the 15th century next to the church, and the sculpture of Saint James that has been conserved in its interior. The lower part, born out of the mediaeval suburbs, has traditional fishermen's houses that give the village its famous image. This is the image that is forever bound to the Bridge of La Maza, that crosses the estuary with almost thirty eyes.

San Vicente de la Barquera





Coastal hills

The last stage in Cantabria leaves the Way parallel to the coast as it leaves San Vicente de la Barquera to head inland along the western coastline. It runs through rough landscapes, with small hillside meadows and limestone mountains, many of which are tree-covered. When the route once again heads north and approaches the banks of the Nansa, it comes across the great flat-topped coastal hills that are typically found in this part of Cantabria and eastern Asturias: the hills of Jerra and Pechón, lining the estuary of Tina Menor. We leave behind the coastal Val de San Vicente, with its wild looking coves and small cliff-lined peninsulas. The beach of Berellín and the cape on which the Iron Age *castro* of Castillo stands, in Prellezo, are two fine examples. From the right bank of the Deva, in Unquera, you can see the Asturian town of Bustio on the other side of the bridge. The route through Asturias starts at that spot. The journey through Cantabria ends here.

Tower of Estrada

Estrada

Pop. 19 / Presiding over a junction, on a limestone outcrop, we find the Tower of Estrada. This late-mediaeval fortified building from the 14th century is made up of a three-storey tower, its own chapel and a wall with battlements all around it.

Area around the Cave of Fuente del Salín, in Muñorrodero

Muñorrodero

Pop. 108 / A few dozen metres to the south of the Way, sticking closely to the banks of the Nansa, is Muñorrodero. The traditional houses in its square, and the rows of houses in the same style in the district of La Tesna, a little further away, are some of its endearing features. Close to here, in the cemetery, there are still the remains of the mediaeval Church of the Virgen del Hayedo, with Romanesque and Gothic elements dating back to between the 13th and 14th centuries. Back on the road, where the Way passes through this village but on the northern side, is the cave of Fuente del Salín, whose galleries are partially flooded for much of the year. There is also a significant archaeological site here, including several panels of Palaeolithic cave art.

Pesués

Pop. 379 / Pesués lies beside the estuary of Tina Menor. This town has an interesting array of typical houses, such as those in the district of La Aldea, and the ancestral homes of El Valledal, from the 18th century. Yesteryear, the estuary was crossed by boat, which has given its name to a place on the left bank. The biological richness of Tina Menor meant that a pioneering company working in aquaculture set up business here in the 1970s, and they are still there to this day.

Estuary of Tina Menor, in Pesúes

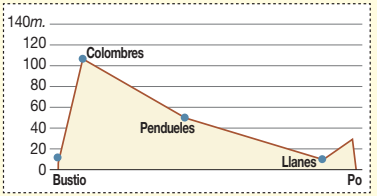
Unquera

Pop. 911 / The last stop of the Way on Cantabrian soil is Unquera, on the right bank of the mouth of the Deva, the estuary known as Tina Mayor. It has major road and rail communications, as the roads running along the coast from east to west met here with the access route towards the Valley of Liébana, which has set the tone for its town development. It has a modern-day appearance, developed along the axis formed by the N-634 road and with some examples of late 19th century/early 20th century buildings. Its development has come hand in hand with tourism, with a growing hotel and catering offer, along with adventure activities companies, encouraged by the natural conditions around them.

Bridge of Unquera

Old Inn at Santiuste Llanes

The Way of Saint James enters Asturias via the interregional bridge over the Tina Mayor estuary, where the Deva River makes its last stand before sinking into the sea. Bustio is the beginning of the Coastal Way in Asturias. The municipalities of Ribadedeva and Llanes clearly illustrate the effects of widespread emigration to Mexico and Cuba. Peculiar colonial houses and *indianos*' residences dot the way along a stage where we find rivers, beaches and a characteristically green coastline, with typical limestone cliffs and the nearby Sierra del Cuera guarding the southern flank. The little villages around Llanes and the town itself are important attractions on this stretch. Undoubtedly spectacular are the *bufones* (vents pierced by the sea in the rocks along the coast), the cave paintings at the Cueva del Pindal (Pimiango) or the prehistoric idol at Peña Tú (Puertas). Features of this area are a particular Asturian dialect, with aspirate j sounds, and many ancestral traditions, such as dances, costumes and popular festivals with *ramos* (flower offerings) and *hogueras* (bonfires).



Bustio river port

Bustio

Pop. 215 / This village on the left bank of the Deva River, close to the Tina Mayor estuary, at the limit between Asturias and Cantabria, was an obligatory stop along the Way of Saint James. It has a fishing port slightly off the actual village, at the foot of the Sierra Plana mountain range, where Pimiango lies.

Museum of Emigration, Indiano Archive

Colombres

Pop. 1,135 / This quiet village, a stop-off point for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V during his first visit to Spain, is the capital of the Ribadedeva parish council. It is set on a small promontory and has some spectacular examples of *indiano* architecture, such as the 19th-century Plaza del Ayuntamiento (Town Hall square) and the Quinta Guadalupe, which houses the Indiano Archive. This house and its beautiful garden belonged to Íñigo Noriega Laso, who emigrated to Mexico and then, in 1906, had the residence built and named after his wife. Also important is the Church of Santa María, which features solid towers and pinnacles. Colombres concentrates the majority of the public services offered by the parish council.

Pendueles

Pop. 249 / The main attractions in this small village are a lovely beach, the Parish Church of San Acisclo, with a Gothic portal and a Neo-Romanesque tower, and the Palace of Santa Engracia (1870).

Church of San Acisclo

Llanes

Pop. 4,643 / Llanes was granted a Charter of Privileges back in the 13th century and grew around its fishing and whaling port. It was well known as a stop along the route to Santiago, as evinced by the hospital that existed outside the city walls, of which only the chapel has survived. It has a rich heritage. In the Romanesque-Gothic Church of Santa María, the main portal has archivolts decorated with figures of Saint James and a series of pilgrims. Nearby we can see buildings dating back to the 15th-17th centuries, such as the House of the Cercau, the Gothic Chapel of La Magdalena, the Palace of Gaztañaga and the Palace of the Dukes of Estrada.

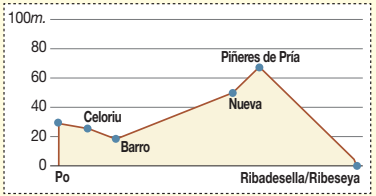
The distinguishing mark of present-day Llanes is The Cubes of Memory, an art intervention by the painter Agustín Ibarrola over the gigantic concrete cubes in the port of Llanes. It is a great example of public art and combines essential elements of the artist's work with the historical and cultural past of the town of Llanes.

Llanes at night

Church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores (Barru)

Between Llanes and Ribadesella/Ribeseya there was an old mediaeval road which, though now for the most part covered by tarmac, is still visible on a small stretch between Naves and La Venta. On this stage, we will have the company of another mountain range along the way: the Sierra del Sueve. On the coastline that runs parallel to the Way, green is the predominant colour and we will find ample, golden-sand beaches and disperse limestone formations.

If you have time, we recommend visiting the prehistoric cave of Tito Bustillo, a world-class "cathedral" of Palaeolithic art. At the end of this walk awaits Ribadesella/Ribeseya, a town that has grown protected by the large and safe estuary formed by the River Sella before meeting the Cantabrian Sea. Here is the finishing line for the International Descent of the River Sella, a yearly, world-class kayaking event. The cliffs of this parish council are the centre of the Asturian Jurassic Route, with its famous dinosaur footprints.



Beach of Barru

Barru

Pop. 432 / A small village on the banks of an estuary with beautiful seaside landscapes. We recommend visiting the 18th-century Neoclassical Church of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, of impressive appearance and built on a sand beach peninsula.

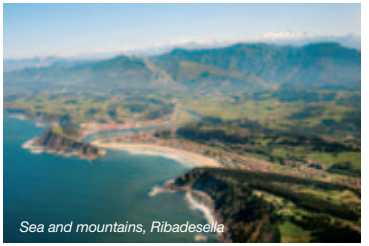
Church of Nueva

Nueva

Pop. 752 / This village is remarkable for the beauty of its colonial houses and palaces, most of them built in the late 19th century and early 20th century. There are also numerous *indiano* houses and we recommend visiting the chapel of the old hospital. The Palace of the Count of Vega del Sella (17th and 18th century) had within its walls the Tower of Aguilar de San Jorge, one of the oldest mediaeval towers in the parish council (there are documents dating it back to 1032). On the seaside we find the beach of Cuevas del Mar, named after the veritable caves cut into the rock by the Cantabrian Sea. Today, the parish council of Nueva boasts a great range of tourist services (hotels, village houses, holiday homes, restaurants and tourist apartments) where the pilgrims can refresh themselves and get their strength back.

Ribadesella/Ribeseya

Pop. 3,147 / This town was one of Asturias' main ports in the Late Middle Ages. Many pilgrims and merchants entered the region through it. It was founded in the 13th century, and during the Middle Ages it had the Hospital of San Sebastián near the Church of Santa María Magdalena, which was built over a primitive Romanesque temple and had a very interesting main altarpiece. The historical quarter and old fishermen's district, recognised as a historic-artistic site, still includes houses bearing their coats of arms, such as the one where the Impressionist painter Darío de Regoyos was born. Another important building is the Renaissance Palace of the Cutre, which has a Plateresque façade and is now used as the Town Hall. From the upper district of the village we can enjoy a splendid view reaching from the Picos de Europa to the horizon of the Cantabrian Sea. The beach of Santa Marina, also known as "the beach of the Picos de Europa" because a mere 35 km separate it from the National Park of Picos de Europa, is next to the estuary of the Sella River and forms a wide shell with golden, very fine sand. It is surrounded by early 20th century villas.



Sea and mountains, Ribadesella

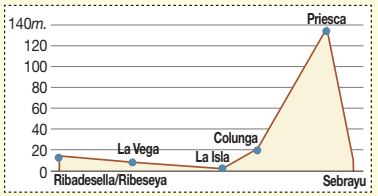
20 | Ribadesella/Ribeseya → Sebrayu (31.4 km)

Santiago at Gobiendes

This stage has two clearly defined stretches. The first one, up to La Isla, is genuinely coastal. It runs through meadows and cliff sides, always protected by the shade of El Sueve. This mountain range is the home of a significant number of indigenous *asturcón* horses. The villages and hamlets in the area are paradigmatic of the eastern-central coastline of Asturias.

The second stretch veers slightly away from the coast, through inland valleys and quiet paths of soothing rusticality. Along the way we will see mountains, fertile plains, rivers and brooks, and monuments big and small where one can feel the heartbeat of the Way of Saint James's history.

A few steps from the route we can also find pre-Romanesque temples such as the Church of Santiago at Gobiendes, splendid ethnographic elements, such as the group of houses and *hórreos* (raised granaries) at La Riera, and indisputable evidence of Celtic heritage in the area, like the Celtic-Asturian stele in Duesos.



Beach at Vega

Church of San Cristóbal

Vega (Ribadesella/Ribeseya)

Pop. 93 / Huddled on a hill, halfway between the beach and the mountains, this hamlet has very interesting rural buildings and good examples of Asturian *hórreos*. The Chapel of La Magdalena dates back to 1772. On the beach we can see the remains of the mediaeval bridge that used to cross the Regatu del Acebu brook, and nearby is the Gorge of Entrepeñes, an impressive formation of sharp quartzite rock pinnacles dating back to the Ordovician. Both the beach and the gorge have been recognised as a Natural Monument in Asturias.

Colunga

Pop. 1,167 / One of the traditional roads between Ribadesella/Ribeseya and Villaviciosa passed by the Church of Santiago at Gobiendes and in fact stopped at Gobiendes. In this village we can find the Chapel of Santa Ana, which was built in the second half of the 16th century and used to have an adjacent pilgrims' hospital. The village dates back to the 13th century and the first historic record of the parish council appears in the "Colunca" parchment, the oldest one from the Asturian Middle Ages. Today, it is the biggest and most commercially active town in the area and has all convenient amenities. The historical quarter, with houses huddled together and irregular street patterns, has preserved an important monumental heritage, including beautiful Asturian colonial houses, such as the house of the Pablos family (Modernist building from 1910) and that of the Alonso de Covián family, an example of Asturian Renaissance architecture. It is said that Carlos V stayed in the latter after disembarking at Tazones in 1517. Other important sites are the 17th-18th century houses with arcades on the way up to the Calle Real, and the Chapel of the Virgen de Loreto, founded in 1662.

Priesca

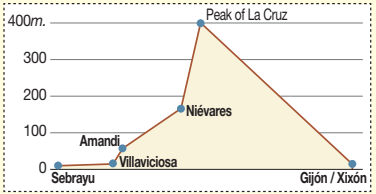
Pop. 98 / This small hamlet deserves a visit to see the pre-Romanesque Church of San Salvador, consecrated in 921. It has preserved a floor plan typical of pre-Romanesque temples and has mural paintings similar to those that we will find later on in churches of the same period in Oviedo. Priesca reveals another detail: the proximity to the Asturian capital means the Way begins to be populated with pilgrim-related signs and symbols. Temples, monasteries and other religious establishments betray the fact that we are entering the area where the former Asturian royal court had the most influence.

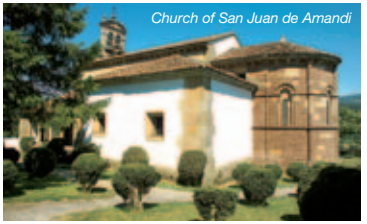
Church of San Salvador de Priesca

We now enter the central coastal area of Asturias. Villages and hamlets with *hórreos* punctuate the mounts and valleys of the parish council of Villaviciosa, where we can find old river mills. Following that are the gentle flat terrains of the Gijón/Xixón coast area, always with the sea as a backdrop.

It is at Casquita where the Way branches out to either Gijón/Xixón or Oviedo. On the route to the former we will go through villages like Pion, with its Parish Church of Santiago, and Deva, with remains of a pre-Romanesque temple. We will also admire the Universidad Laboral, a college built in the 20th century, which boasts a tower of Graeco-Latin inspiration and proud figure. We must also pass through the residential district of Somió. After that, once we have crossed the Piles River, we will get to the beautiful beach of San Lorenzo and follow the promenade to its very end, which will see us into the Cimavilla quarter, both a fishing port and the original population centre of the town. In Gijón/Xixón, the most populated town in Asturias, we can enjoy a vast array of services.

Fork in the road at Casquita





Church of San Juan de Amandi

Amandi

Pop. 531 / This village is just outside Villaviciosa and has a temple that is especially delicate and beautiful in comparison with the abundant number of Romanesque buildings in the area: the Church of San Juan de Amandi. Its apse is magnificently elegant, as are the columns, imposts and bays, beautifully decorated with mouldings. The interior has a set of great mural arches supported by adjoining columns which, in turn, are supported by smaller columns rammed into the ground.

Chapel of Deva

Deva

Pop. 636 / A few kilometres away from Gijón/Xixón is this village where the Church of San Salvador stands out. The only elements remaining from the original temple are the arches, the consecration stone plaque and a sparsely decorated capital. This monastic church was founded around the year 1000. But, aside from the artistic interest, this temple offers the visitor the added value of its location in one of the most beautiful rural spots in the whole of the Gijón/Xixón parish council.

Gijón/Xixón

Pop. 264,093 / The Cantabrian Sea has been the key element in the history of Gijón/Xixón and its surroundings for more than 5,000 years. Its Roman and pre-Roman past is evident in the Campa de Torres (which dates back to 490 BC or earlier and was one of the main fortified settlements in northern Spain) and the Campo Valdés baths (a late 1st-century AD public building). The fishing village which occupied the valley in the 15th century was a base for whale fishing and smaller fish trade, and also had a primitive hostel. The biggest development drive came in the 18th and, above all, 19th century, with manor houses, palaces such as Revillagigedo (18th century) and Valdés (17th century), and chapels such as Los Remedios and La Trinidad. Among the numerous museums in the town, the most relevant are the Jovellanos Museum, the Barjola Museum and the Nicanor Piñole Museum. We should also highlight the Laboral Ciudad de la Cultura creative community on the site of the former Universidad Laboral de Gijón/Xixón. This grand mid-20th century building was designed to offer the best in vocational training to working class children and has now been revamped for use as a cultural space in permanent transformation. Gijón/Xixón's leisure offer is complete with an Aquarium and the Atlantic Botanical Garden.

Gijón/Xixón Marina

Gijón/Xixón

Pop. 278.242 /

Gijón/Xixón is the biggest town in Asturias. It is a modern, dynamic city, open to the sea and surrounded by rural and natural landscapes of exceptional beauty and environmental value.

The city of Gijón/Xixón has a long history which at least dates back to the *castros* period, when an Astur settlement was built at Campa de Torres, very close to the Way of Saint James. It was inhabited between the 7th century BC and the 1st century AD. When the Romans conquered the region, the settlement moved to the Cerro de Santa Catalina, a peninsula which is now the location of the traditional fishermen's quarter of Cimadevilla, generally considered as the origin of the modern Gijón/Xixón, which gradually developed and, from the 19th century, thanks to its port and industrial activity, became the driving force of the Asturian economy.

The Way of Saint James crosses the parish council of Gijón/Xixón from east to west. This gives us the opportunity to discover the charms of its rural area and the vibrant nightlife of a city which has been focusing for years on promoting a high-quality type of tourism with world-class cultural, sports and natural attractions.

1

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① Cimadevilla quarter

This typical fishermen's quarter is the original nucleus of the city. It has been recognised as a historic site and has many cultural heritage elements, such as the Roman baths of Campo Valdés (1a), the Baroque palaces of Valdés and Revillagigedo (1b) (now used as an art centre), the 19th century Town Hall building (1c), and the birthplace of the famous Enlightenment-period writer and politician Jovellanos (1d), now a museum. Its streets and small squares have an unmistakable seaside flavour and are full of vibrant restaurants, cider bars and terraces. In the upper part of the quarter is the Cerro de Santa Catalina park, which offers spectacular views over the Gijón/Xixón coast and is dominated by Eduardo Chillida's sculpture "In Praise of the Horizon" (1e).

② Beaches

Gijón/Xixón has five urban beaches and a further five in the rural part of the parish council. The most outstanding of the urban beaches is the 3-km long San Lorenzo, a favourite tourist spot offering all manner of services. Also important are the Poniente and El Arbeyal urban beaches. Crossing the coast of Gijón/Xixón is a very pleasant coastal walk. Of special interest is the section linking the Cimavilla quarter with the La Ñora beach. This stretch is 10.3 km long and offers spectacular views of the coast and a surprising collection of modern sculptures.

③ Laboral Ciudad de la Cultura

The former Universidad Laboral de Gijón/Xixón, built in the 1950s, is the largest 20th century Spanish construction in terms of surface. After comprehensive refurbishment, it now hosts the innovative Laboral Ciudad de la Cultura complex, with a Centre of Art and Industrial Creation, a monumental theatre and several educational spaces. Other interesting spaces are the gardens and the old church, now an exhibition hall with an exceptional elliptical dome. The tower offers an excellent view of the city of Gijón/Xixón.

④ Atlantic Botanical Garden

Using the North Atlantic as a *leit motiv*, it allows us to discover the flora of the Cantabrian Sea region. It has integrated the Jardín de la Isla, a historical garden more than 150 years old, and La Carbayeda del Tragamón, an exceptional natural forest with trees more than four hundred years old.

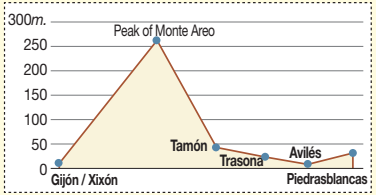
⑤ Gijón/Xixón Network of Museums

At the Museum of Campa de Torres (5a) we can learn all about the *castros* culture and the nearby castro, and there is another modern exhibition hall dedicated to the Roman settlement of Veranes (5b). The Railway Museum (5c) and the Museum of the Capua Citadel (a working class district) (5d) show how important industrial activity was in the development of the present-day city, whereas the Museum of the People of Asturias (5e) gives us the opportunity to find out about traditional Asturian societies. Finally, local 19th and 20th century artists like Nicanor Piñole (5f) or Evaristo Valle (5g) have museums specifically dedicated to them

This stage starts off at the biggest town in Asturias and crosses the third biggest (Avilés). The Xixón districts of El Natahoyo, Cuatrocaminos and La Calzada mark the beginning of the route.

We will then reach the heights of Monte Areo, between the parish councils of Gijón/Xixón and Carreño. Here there is an important burial mound necropolis where we will find funeral elements (e.g. dolmens) dating back three to five thousand years. The La Llana mount is the entrance point to Carreño.

Along the way we will cross villages and hamlets with *hórreos* typical of this parish council, as well as old palaces and churches. As we pass the Trasona reservoir and gradually approach Avilés, we will be accompanied by the large factories that are characteristic of a historic town.



Avilés estuary

Llano Ponte Palace

Avilés

Pop. 79,320 / This town, originally populated by sailors and peasants, once had a hospital (originally located on Calle Rivero) where mediaeval pilgrims could rest a while. In the 18th century, it had less than 1,000 inhabitants and only one textile mill. We can get a clear picture of this by visiting its old quarter, recognised as a historic, artistic and monumental site. In it we will find the Palace of Ferrera (18th century), the fountain of the seven spouts (17th century) and the Church of San Francisco, which was once part of a 13th century Franciscan convent and underwent successive transformations over the years. Also outstanding are the Church of San Nicolás and the Old Church of Sabugo, both originally Romanesque. Other significant buildings are the palaces of Llano Ponte, Valdecarzana and Camposagrado. Particularly characteristic of Avilés are the houses with arcades of the Ferrería, Galiana and Rivero streets. It was here that Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Military Governor of Florida (16th century), had his residence.

Avilés is now a modern town. In the first half of the 20th century, it underwent a spectacular population growth linked to an industrial boom which made it a reference in the European steel industry.

Piedrasblancas

Pop. 9,544 / This is the most populated town in the municipality of Castrillón. It has grown considerably since the 1970s. Its most important buildings are the 19th century Old Town Hall, the parish church and the early 20th century schools. Within the parish council and close to Piedrasblancas there are two temples with pre-Romanesque remains: San Martín de Laspra and the Church of San Cipriano at Piarnu. The first record of San Martín de Laspra's foundation can be found in King Alfonso II's testament. On one side of the façade, it has a pre-Romanesque window which can be dated to the 9th or 10th century. The modern temple is the product of renovation works in the 18th century. The tower, built in 1787, is one of the most important examples of Asturian rural architecture.

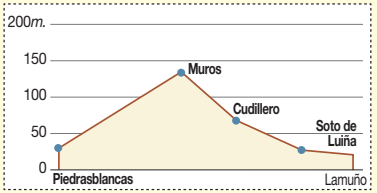
The only element remaining from the original San Cipriano temple is a double-arched window which, although not dated, is undoubtedly pre-Romanesque and was probably made in the 10th century. Its geographic origin is also uncertain, but it may have come from one of the Early Middle Ages temples nearby.

Street in Piedrasblancas

Church of El Pitu, Cudillero

On this stage we will go back to a seaside setting, as the route runs parallel to the western Asturian coast. Pilgrims will see quite a variety of landscapes and places. Towards the end of the stage in Soto de Luiña, you will need to wade past small rivers, such as the Aguilar and the Esqueiro. But you will also have the opportunity to cross the bridge over one of the most important rivers in Asturias: the Nalón, which, at its mouth, meets the San Esteban estuary.

One truly surprising little village is Somao, where one can see some beautiful Modernist villas and colonial houses, an example of what is nowadays known as "*indiano* architecture". At El Pito, just outside of Cudillero, is the 19th century Palace of Los Selgas, which hosts an important collection of paintings, including works by Goya and El Greco. Beautiful beaches and small mountain ranges will accompany us on both sides of the road until the end of the stage.



Cliffs from viewpoint

Muros de Nalón

Pop. 1,322 / This lovely village owes its name ("Walls") to the ruins of a Roman building (which no longer exists) in the area now occupied by the parish church and the main square. It used to have a hospital, now also disappeared. It is worth mentioning the remains of the 16th century Plateresque Palace of Valdercarzana. There is also an 18th century parish church with interesting Baroque altarpieces. Muros de Nalón has splendid viewpoints over the sea. From Espíritu Santo, perched on a cliff, we can see from Cape Peñas to Cape Vidio. This village also has a number of very beautiful and peaceful beaches.

Cudillero

Cudillero

Pop. 1,622 / Probably one of the most picturesque fishing villages in Asturias. It has grown around the port with the houses layered up on the hillside. It was founded by fishermen coming from other ports in the Cantabrian coast or even more distant seas to escape Norman attacks. The location of the village is well protected by land and sea, so the original inhabitants chose it as a temporary settlement before moving somewhere else. However, as they realised the area had fish in abundance, they decided to settle there permanently and were forced to build their houses on the slopes of two mountains. The town centre is rather interesting, with steep and narrow streets always looking over the sea. The Chapel of Humilladero (13th century), which is the oldest construction in the village, and the 16th-century Parish Church of San Pedro, are particularly noteworthy. We can also stroll to the lighthouse and sample typical Asturian seafood in one of the many food bars along the port.

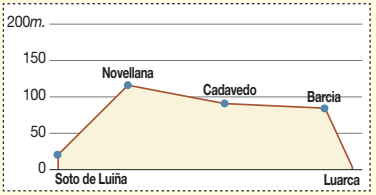
Soto de Luiña

Pop. 477 / This small village has one of the best Asturian Baroque sites. It consists of the Parish Church of Santa María (18th century), with five Baroque altarpieces, and the Presbytery House, also one of the former pilgrims' hospitals still existing in Asturias. If we follow the way to the coast we will get to Cape Vidio, offering an impressive view of the Asturian coast.

Church of Santa María

Ruins of the Church of Santiago just outside Luarca

This stage of the Way of Saint James is characterised by the constant contrast between mid-range coastal mountains and valleys. We will cross the Esva River, a typically large clear Asturian river, perfect for trout and salmon fishing. We will also have a chance to see a different, heretofore unseen face of Asturias: the villages of the western coast, where the predominant colours are the white and blueish grey of the slate rock. Towards the end of the stage we will arrive in Luarca, a village combining both a stately and a seafaring tradition. To a great extent, its social and cultural life revolves around the latter. This area is heavily influenced by the practice of cow transhumance. In the houses up in the *brañas* (summer pastures in the hills) people lead a different way of life with deeply rooted traditions. An ethnographically important feature is the cattle trail running through the Sierra de Las Palancas, on the border between between Cudillero and Valdés. Part of the route will go along this trail where the seafaring and cattle herding traditions meet.



Campo de la Regalina

Cadavedo

Pop. 537 / Cadavedo had a very important role in the economy of the Asturian western coast during the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. Back then, it was one of the main whaling ports of Asturias and had particularly strong links with the Coastal Way of Saint James. The natural setting of the village is one of great beauty. The Campo de la Regalina, between the beaches of La Ribeirona and Churín, hosts one of the most typical *romerías* (local pilgrimages) in Asturias. It has been held every year since 1931 on the last Sunday of August. Cadavedo is also noteworthy for its beautiful *indiano* houses dating back to the late 19th century and early 20th century.

Barcia

Barcia

Pop. 828 / The village of Barcia has a privileged position on a flat terrain between the coastal plains, the communal mountain pastures, and the peak of San Antonio de Concilleiro, where we find an old chapel and a viewpoint offering a great sight of the coast and some of the nearby villages. Barcia is the official toponym of the quarter of El Hospital (a former pilgrims' hospital). Not far away from the village we can enjoy some of the beautiful and less crowded beaches of the Valdés parish council.

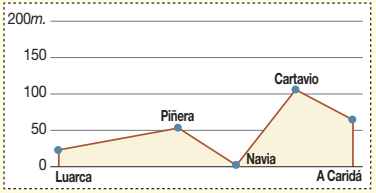
Luarca

Pop. 4,314 / This old mediaeval village was originally a small whaling port that remained active until the 17th century. The village gradually grew around that port, in terms of both population and importance. Luarca is the capital of the Valdés parish council and can be divided into different zones: embracing the port, the mediaeval fishermen's districts, such as La Pescadería, La Carril and El Cambaral; more inland, the bourgeois Luarca, with its 19th century palaces. The hospital used to be located near the Old Church of Santa Eulalia, where beautiful Baroque altarpieces have been preserved. But the star monument here is the Palace and Chapel of the Marquis of Ferrera, dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. It is more commonly known as the Palace of La Moral and comprises three buildings connected via passages. Old *indiano* houses and stately houses bearing their coats of arms are dotted all over this beautiful village, a well known tourist destination in the western coast of Asturias. Luarca has two very natural and very charming urban beaches. From there we can see the marina and fishing port of the village. The latter was an important fish trading centre in the past.

Luarca

Palace of Camposorio in Piñera (Navia)

The landscape on this stage of the Way of Saint James is typical of the inland areas near the Asturian western coast, tempered by the flat coastal plains. It is a land of beautiful beaches and rich architectural heritage. The beach of Barayo and its surroundings offer an image of nature at its purest. The Navia estuary leaves a peculiarly beautiful mark on the area and acts as an element vertebrating the landscape. In Navia we can also sample the *venera*, a typical almond-based dessert created as a homage to pilgrims. Along the way we will find a series of very charming fishing villages, such as El Porto/Viavélez. We will also have the opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of the *castros*, fortified settlements which concentrated the population of this region before the Romans occupied it.



Navia and its estuary

Navia

Pop. 4,101 / Navia is located on the estuary of the same name. It was granted a Charter of Privileges by King Alfonso X the Wise around 1284. It was an obligatory stop, a place to rest and a river-crossing point for travellers to Santiago. This is yet another village originally created as a whaling port. There are various and very interesting vestiges of its mediaeval past, such as the remains of the former city walls or a number of emblazoned manor houses, like the House of the Marquis of Santa Cruz or the House of Coaña, both from the 17th century. In the urban expansion area, built on reclaimed marshlands, there are numerous late 19th century and early 20th century palaces and colonial houses, like the Palace of Arias and the Casino. There is a rather interesting promenade and a coastal path that starts in the village itself, leads to the beach of Navia and then continues along the coast of the Navia municipality. There is also a very beautiful natural space in the beach of Frexulfe.

Coaña

Pop. 413 / This parish council concentrates a wide variety of interesting sites. Aside from its beaches and mountains, there are important archaeological remains like the *castro* of Coaña (a walled settlement on a hill on the left bank of the Navia estuary), the *castro* of Mohías (at the top of a 70 m high hill on the right bank of the Ortiguera brook) or the Discoid Stele. In the mid-18th century, pilgrims travelling to Santiago arrived in Coaña crossing the Navia estuary by boat, more specifically into the area around Barqueiros (El Espín). This service was employed by foot travellers, horse riders and carriages. It cost four *maravedíes* per person and eight per horse and rider (one *maravedí* would be equivalent to approximately 0.10 EUR of present-day money). In 1370, Álvaro Pérez de Coaña founded a hospital dedicated to Saint Anne in the village of Jarrio (parish council of Folgueras).

'Castro' of Coaña

Cartavio

Pop. 589 / This village is halfway between the rivers Navia and Porcía.

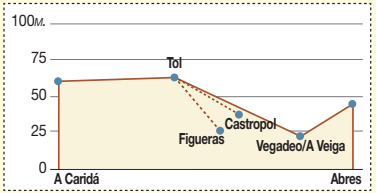
For centuries, it was an obligatory stop on the Way of Saint James. The Parish Church of Santa María was founded in the 10th century. The only original elements remaining are two inscriptions dating back to the 10th and 12th centuries, respectively. It also has very interesting Baroque altarpieces.

Church of Santa María

26 A Caridá → Figueras (17 km) / Castropol (19 km) / Abres (31.5 km)

Cape Blanco (El Franco)

And so we come to the end of the Northern Way in Asturias. The coastline around Tapia and the Eo estuary give shape and personality to this stage of the Way of Saint James. If we cast our thoughts back to the landscapes of the Asturian Coastal Way, we will observe one of the most nuanced landscape units in Northern Spain. We are back to the beautiful landscape of the western Asturian coastline, dotted with small, sometimes hard to reach coves, pretty meadowlands open to the Cantabrian Sea and fishing villages with steep, narrow streets and lots of charm. At Valdepares we can visit the *castro* of Cabo Blanco. It is one of the largest in Asturias and has fantastic views over the coast. At Tol, we will have three optional routes. The first two involve continuing towards either Castropol or Figueras, where travellers used to cross the river by boat to Ribadeo. The third option is to go down to Vegadeo/A Veiga following the road leading to Abres, the last Asturian village in the route to Santiago before entering Galicia.



Castropol

Castropol

Pop. 533 / It is the capital of the parish council and is located on a promontory on the banks of the Eo estuary. Its white, slate-roofed houses are huddled close together. It was originally a castro type of settlement, and then founded as a *puebla* or village (Pola de Castropol) by the bishop of Oviedo in the early 14th century. In the Middle Ages, it housed a hospital. Castropol has a pretty town centre where we can admire the 15th century Parish Church of Santiago Apóstol (which holds a nice set of Baroque and Neoclassical altarpieces) and palaces such as Santa Cruz de Marcenado and Valledor, with rich 17th century façades. From the village, we can get a boat to cross the estuary to Ribadeo, like the pilgrims of days of yore.

Figueras

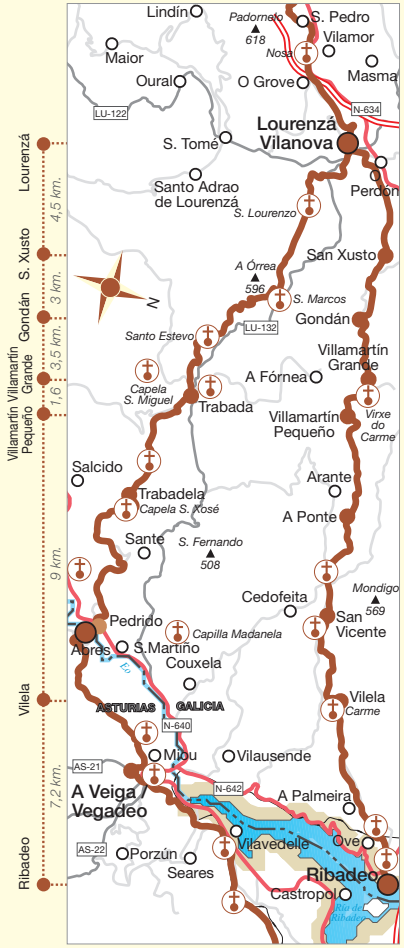
Pop. 709 / The village of Figueras is the most populated centre in the municipality of Castropol, but not its capital. This fishing village has a beautiful setting on the Eo estuary which makes it an important tourist attraction. The most defining image of its silhouette is the Palace of the Pardo de Donlebún family, an impressive building that rises majestically over the port and the estuary. In the town centre there are two early 20th century Modernist villas designed by a disciple of Gaudí. We can find clues of its strong ties to the Way of Saint James in several place names that make reference to the Apostle: the Santiago quarter, the Santiago brook, the Parish Church of Santiago...

Palace of Peñalba

Vegadeo/A Veiga

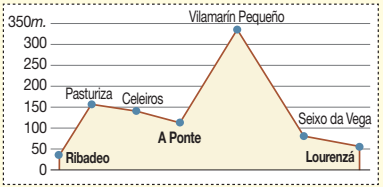
Pop. 3,033 / This town used to be very important for pilgrims, as it was easier to take a detour and head here than it was to cross the estuary. It still has splendid houses of noble origin, such as the Town Hall (dating back to the second half of the 19th century) or the House of Villamil, which has a beautiful façade with symmetrical balconies and balustrades. In the Town Hall square there is an 1881 fountain with a statue of the goddess Ceres. At Piantón we can find the Church of San Esteban (which was originally founded in the 12th century and has a set of Baroque altarpieces) and a stone bridge built to replace a previous Roman bridge.

Vegadeo



Hostel. Ribadeo

The northernmost route of all those that have historically been travelled is the Way that entailed putting a foot on Galician soil, in the port of Ribadeo, and then seeking out the gentle old mountains inland, and so the route continued, up hill and down dale, without any major obstacles but with plenty of forests (nowadays mostly eucalyptus and pine), until ending the day at dusk in the town of Lourenzá. However, not everyone did, or does, all this: there were small groups of people that did not like to set sail on the Asturian shore and cross the estuary, and so, to avoid this, they would leave the Principality of Asturias at Vegadeo and continue heading upriver along the comfortable banks of the River Eo, which is wide at this point and has many reed beds. This is how they would reach San Tirso de Abres and then they would turn west and gradually make their ascent, currently asphalted and with a very different landscape to yesteryear. They would stop at Trabada and then they had to prove their worth, overcoming the gradients that led to Lourenzá.



Plaza España. Ribadeo

Ribadeo

Pop. 6,624 / Ribadeo was born and grew up as a town looking out over the sea, slightly into the estuary that is formed by the Eo as it flows into the Cantabrian. At this point, you could even go around this estuary and spend a day doing so (going via Vegadeo) or, alternatively, pay the ferryman. There are written testimonies stating that they used to be terrified crossing this stretch of water, as they said it was never calm. Today this is hard to believe.

Ribadeo has an old quarter by the sea that goes up the hillside and reaches the centre, to the Plaza de España, the square that, apart from the tourist information office, also houses the bandstand, a noble building that is the Town Hall, and the tower of Moreno. On one side, we have the convent of Clarisas, well known for their confectionery.

A Ponte

Pop. 9 / After a long climb that leads us to small, charming hamlets, such as Vilela, the route crosses A Ponte. Before doing so, it passes in front of the Chapel of Carmen. A Ponte could be described as just another hamlet if it was not for the fact that, apart from its fine bridge and interesting Church of Nosa Señora das Virtudes, this place is steeped in history: it was here that the rural population fiercely stood up to Napoleon's invading troops.

Lourenzá

Lourenzá

Pop. 240 / The Pilgrims' Way passes before two more rural churches, San Xoán Degolado and Virxe do Carme, with an attractive fountain and *hórreo* [raised granary]. Two Ways pass through Lourenzá: the Northern Way itself, and a secondary branch that comes from Asturias via San Tirso de Abres, a small town by the River Eo. Both will arrive at a great town that was born and grew up in the shadow of its monumental monastery of San Salvador, considered one of the most beautiful in all Galicia.

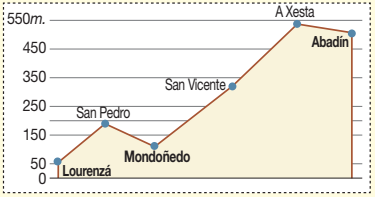
Abres bridge. Trabada

Trabada

Pop. 474 / Those who chose San Tirso de Abres, passed by Igrexa, with its rest area and playground, and before the simple chapel of San José to get to Trabada, a small town in a valley that is characterised by its huge *castro*, church and *pazo*, or ancestral home (today used for rural tourism). It is a peaceful place where you can take advantage to have a rest, as after this valley, the climb beyond is pretty tough. With the Chapel of Santo Estevo behind us, and the bandstand at its side, the ascent comes to an end when the church dedicated to Saint Mark appears before our eyes. Make sure you don't miss the fine examples of popular architecture on the downhill slope, in Órrea.

Mondoñedo

The hardest ascent in the entire Northern Way through Galicia is found here, in this second section. Actually, only a few hundred metres will be flat in the valley where Mondoñedo is situated; the rest is either uphill or downhill. This makes this stage particularly tiring. Points to bear in mind are the hamlet of Arroxo, as it is on the other side of an impressive *castro*, and the route under an *hórreo* beside the Chapel of Nosa Señora de Guadalupe. There is a special cake made in Mondoñedo with a sweet pumpkin filling that is unrivalled anywhere in the world. Another historical note about this city: it was here that the marshal, Pardo de Cela, was beheaded. In the hard times of the Middle Ages, he had become a leader and symbol of Galician resistance against central power.



Mondoñedo

Mondoñedo

Pop. 2,084 / There is an uphill and a downhill between Lourenzá and Mondoñedo. However, hikers have nothing to fear, as the slope is milder and longer on the downhill than on the uphill. So the entrance to Mondoñedo is also calm, despite the fact that access is gained from the main road. The city was one of the seven historical provincial capitals of Galicia, and the presence of the Catholic Church has left its mark here more so than in many other places, particularly regarding the amount of outstanding buildings it commissioned. The most important of these is the cathedral, with its mixture of styles, and it was in front of this church that Pardo de Cela was beheaded. The bridge of O Pasatempo and the seminary are also particularly recommended. La Alameda grove, otherwise known as the Campo de los Remedios, lies next to the church of the same name, construction of which began in the 16th century. This is an excellent spot to take a break. In the town centre, there is an interesting Northern Way Interpretation Centre.

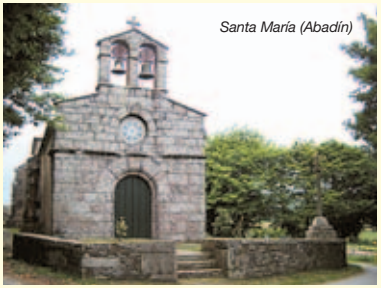
A Xesta

Pop. 12 / After Mondoñedo, the route turns into a long, relatively hard but beautiful climb through a forest replete with many indigenous species. We leave behind buildings such as the Chapel of San Vicente. Thus we arrive at the heights of A Xesta, and the distinct shortage of houses here makes it an ideal place to take a well-earned rest. At this point, we must be careful, as we have no choice but to cross the main road and follow it for a few metres before turning right onto a dirt track. Fog is a frequent occurrence at the top of A Xesta, so visibility can often be limited.

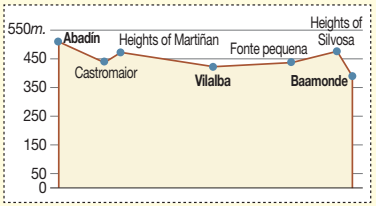
Abadín

Pop. 284 / From the small enclave of Tifos, the Way comes down a wide dirt track with sufficiently signposted crossroads, and even with paving stones at those crossroads, which not only have ornamental value, but they also protect the Route from wear and tear. We go around the Chapel of Virxe de Fátima and our eyes are offered a treat as we gaze into the clear waters of the River Gontán. The next stop is Abadín, a village reached without having to use the main road for more than a dozen metres; from the village centre, where the post office is situated, the route goes into a beautiful and dense tunnel of trees that acts as a corridor up to the Church of Santa María, with its rose window and cross.

Gontán Hostel. Abadín


Santa María (Abadín)

After Abadín, the great plain. At this point the Way enters A Terra Chá (meaning flat land), one of the few plains in Galicia. The stage is long, but not difficult or monotonous. The route goes through small villages (except Vilalba) such as Castromaior, Albá and Fontefría, all merely hamlets with no services, but the people who live there will always show you the way and help out if necessary. The two most significant monuments are the Chapel of Fátima with its cross (before arriving at Vilalba) and further on, the Chapel of San Benito, as well as several interesting bridges. A long straight stretch leads up to Baamonde.



Vilalba

Vilalba

Pop. 5,945 / The Way enters Vilalba through an industrial estate, where the hostel is located, after leaving behind the 17th century bridge of Martiñán with its granite parapet. A large, busy roundabout means we have to take the long way round to get to the bridge. In Vilalba, the capital of A Terra Chá, the entire route is marked with bronze shells on the ground, indicating the Way along narrow streets up to a square, which is actually the heart and soul of the town. On the left there is an impressive tower that once belonged to the then powerful house of Andrade; today it is one of the buildings that houses a Parador hotel. In front we can see the unfussy Church of Santa María, and the ground is paved all over. The whole ensemble appears in complete harmony. The Way then follows one of the neighbouring streets downhill to a delightful stroll by the river in the shade. Further on, a completely abandoned hamlet gives the area an almost ghostly feel.

Baamonde

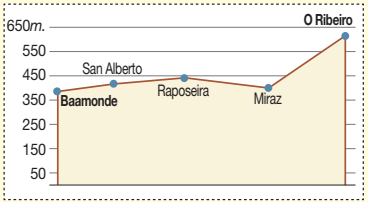
Pop. 370 / That is the end of the ups and downs. The Way tends to go downhill, but this is hardly noticeable. Meadows, small woods, peaceful places, no major population centres... all these are the name of the day while the Way makes its way south, repeatedly entering and leaving the municipality of Guitiriz. The magnificent bridge of Saa, in Vilalba territory, has been restored without changing its original mediaeval layout: two semicircular arches and a dozen *"aliviadoiros"*, or type of spillways, were constructed so that the pressure of the rainwater would not affect the bridge's stability.

Baamonde comes under the municipality of Begonte and is the typical town that sprung up around a crossroads. It continues like this to the present day, with a hostel now occupying a stagepost building where the stage coaches stopped. The area around the church is a main element of the town, with its unquestionable Romanesque origins (construction began in the 9th century, its only nave is rectangular and from the 12th century, and the main chapel is from the 16th century), which can be seen along with the Calvary and a hollow tree. Interesting facts about the pilgrimage: no traveller ever stops without visiting this tree, as a talented local sculptor has carved out the Virgin Mary inside it, and nobody ever leaves without having their picture taken with her.

Baamonde

Calvario. Baamonde

A pilgrim once wrote about the following two stages: "When you leave the main road, you enter the nothingness, and you continue like that until you reach Sobrado dos Monxes". He was not talking about absence, but about the presence of nature above all things. That is precisely what defines it. We cannot even use the sentence filler of saying that we will be passing through small hamlets: there are almost none, and yes, as in the whole of Galicia, the odd house appears here and there, but they are far more few and far between than is usual to see in the north-west of the peninsula. The path does not pass too far from the Church of Santa Leocadia de Parga, so if you have time and energy, we would recommend a short detour (once past the tiny hamlet of Raposeira). In any case, a little before this, the route does pass a school that is over half a century old, and which the locals are keen to conserve and use for other purposes.



Church in San Alberte

San Alberte

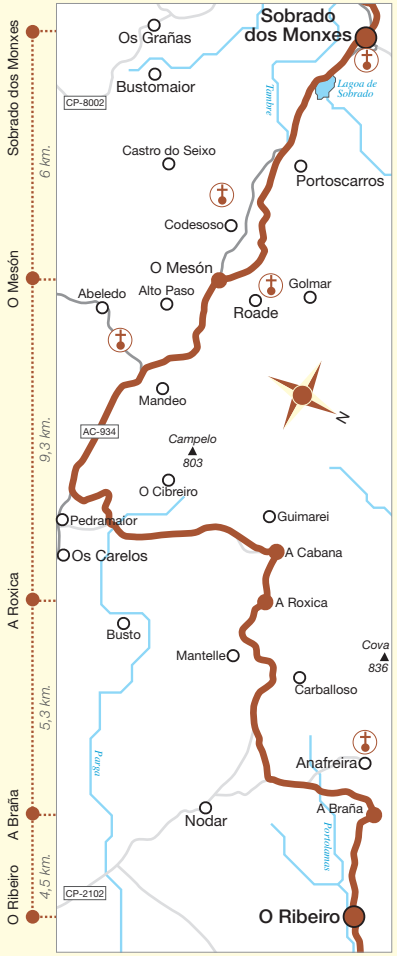
Pop. 0 / After several kilometres along the main road, and leaving behind the milestone that tells us that there are 100 kilometres to go until we reach Obradoiro square in Santiago de Compostela, the route turns 90 degrees to the left, goes over the railway and crosses a bridge that historians and architects agree is small but almost perfectly constructed. Consolidation works have been carried out and the complex excavation work carried out on its interior (an example of balance as not one single stone fell into the river) left a stylish, elegant, perfect example of how buildings were made in mediaeval times.

The bridge leads to a fountain that is said to have miraculous properties. Next to the fountain there is a Romanesque church, another example of how a rural church in poor condition was restored so that it could be used by the nearby San Breixo and everyone who passes by here. There is a recreational area next to it, which is small but sufficient for a rest before continuing the Way.

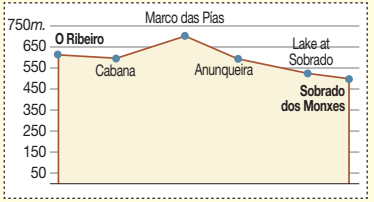
O Ribeiro

There is another rest area in Miraz: we recommend you use this opportunity, because a long and striking climb begins just a few metres further on. The ascent is spectacular in itself and in the landscape that leads to a practically inhabited hamlet (there are only people here in certain months of the year) that was built in such an unusual place.

O Ribeiro



The Way leaves O Ribeiro behind, passing over huge blocks of granite embedded in the earth. There are only 85 kilometres to go until the end of the journey. Animals can be seen grazing freely in this area, under threat during the winter from the ever evasive wolf, an animal that is a frequent visitor to the area but who would never attack a human; quite the contrary, it would run away. The Northern Way first becomes a track and then further on it transforms into a much wider road, so asphalt or tarmac could be considered the main characteristic of this stage, the first part of which runs through Lugo territory, and the second, through A Coruña.



Lake at Sobrado

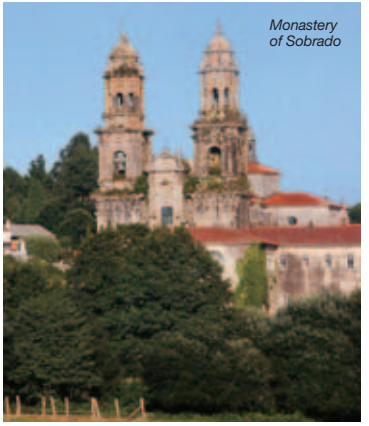
Laguna de Sobrado

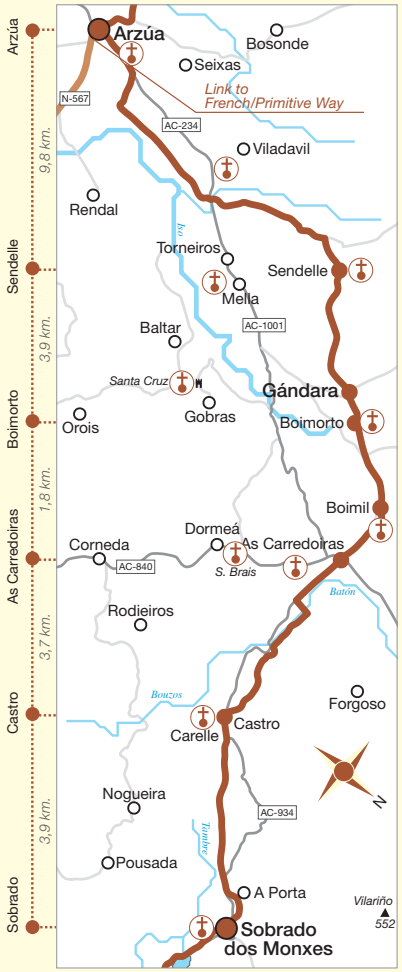
Pop. 0 / After a long stretch in which unrefined nature borders the Way the whole time, an enormous artificial lake measuring 10 hectares appears in sight. To be more exact, this is the work of the religious community at the local monastery, who built it between the years 1500 and 1530. For almost five hundred years now, it has stored water there from several brooks, with a depth of between 1.5 and 4.5 metres. Today it is a major ecological refuge (dragonflies, frogs, ducks and even otters turn up here, surrounded by willows, alders, birch and ash trees) and a delight for the eyes. We must add to this that it is the only place in Galicia where you will find an endemic species of algae, the *Nitelle flexilis*. The locals claim that one of the most important and historical Galician rivers, the Tambre, is born out of this placid mass of water. Although this claim is not strictly accurate, there is some truth in it.

Sobrado dos Monxes

Pop. 320 / The lake announces the arrival at Sobrado dos Monxes, a village that was born and grew up in the shadow of a huge monastery dedicated to the Holy Saviour in the 10th century and to Saint Mary after that. It used to be the most important monastery in Galicia in mediaeval times, after having been abandoned in the early 12th century. In more recent years, general decline and the confiscations of the 19th century have left it in ruins. A regiment of soldiers fighting off the Carlists at the nearby mountains of O Bocelo had to seek refuge here. One of the walls even suffered a cannonshot during the conflict, which lasted several days. Obviously there are no marks of that combat except in documents, as in the middle of the last century, the religious community returned to Sobrado, they rebuilt the monastery from 1954 and it is still there (formally since 25th July 1966) as a cultural and devotion centre. Its three cloisters are quite interesting, as is its church, which was finished at the end of the 17th century and consecrated in 1708.

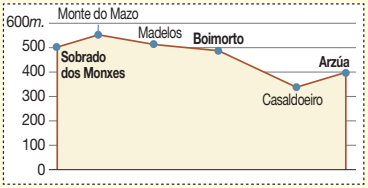
The monks today did not turn their back on the Way, quite the contrary, and they prepared the meeting house as a place for accommodation. Practically all those who arrive here on the pilgrimage enter by the main building, as there is a pretty and well-stocked shop at the entrance selling all kinds of products: from books about meditation and reflection, to wine made by the monks and delicious jams.


Monastery of Sobrado



Monastery of Sobrado

The Northern Way approaches Arzúa with imperceptible uphill and downhill slopes. It is a particularly shady section, always travelling through forests or along the edges of the woods, and it has two clearly defined parts: before arriving at the Corredoiras crossroads, there is an equal mix of dirt tracks and tarmac, whereas the second part is mostly tarmac. Three small churches are worth mentioning here. The first of these is Cardelle, which was restored not long after the Holy Year of 2004, and where people who have made a promise to Our Lady go to, as there is still a tradition of walking round the outside of the church on one's knees, whilst praying. The second is the Church of San Miguel de Boimil, which has a beautiful belfry. The third is the well-kept, simple Sendelle. And now a warning for this stage: traffic is very busy at the Corredoiras crossroads, so you really have to be careful.



The Way in Boimorto

Boimorto

Pop. 485 / The Northern Way leaves behind the monastery at Sobrado, heading in a south-westerly direction. Soon afterwards, at Pontepedra, there is a recreational area beside a water source. From there on, the Way is excellent and very easy to walk, until you reach the Church of Cardelle. There is nothing particularly amazing about it, but every last corner is a pleasant and charming image. There is another, bigger, recreation area before Corredoiras. The crossroads warns us that Vilanova, where we find Boimorto, is near. This town offers all types of services and a milestone that tells us that a Roman road once passed through here.

Arzúa

Pop. 2,665 / The home straight in more sense than one: because the Northern Way is about to merge with the French Way at Arzúa; and because the curves and bends are few and far between from Boimorto onwards. In the last few kilometres, you will come across a pretty little hamlet, O Viso. After this, you enter Arzúa, which has a small park, known as the gardens, where hikers from the two pilgrims' routes often meet at sunset to exchange experiences. Someone from the village will almost certainly bring up that this was the home of Alonso Pita da Veiga, who in 1525 imprisoned the French king, Francis I, during the battle of Pavia.

There are two places of worship next to the gardens. One of them is the current parish church that was built in the 19th century and dedicated to Saint Mary. It is tall and solid, with a basilica-style layout and two church bells from 1825 and 1869. Inside it has a high altarpiece dating back to 1872.

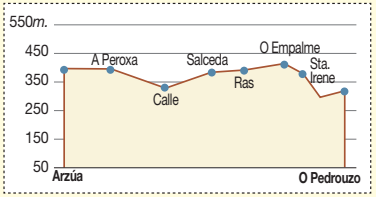
The other is more modest in size: the Chapel of A Magdalena, which used to belong to a hospital run by the Augustinians, and which has since been converted into a 21st century cultural centre. The Augustinians had already gone to Santiago de Compostela in the 17th century, although the chapel continued to fulfil its religious duties up until the confiscation of Mendizábal in the 19th century.

It is worth pointing out that Arzúa is also the cheese-producing capital with its own designation of origin: Arzúa-Ulloa.

Arzúa

Salceda

A short stage, so much so that some prefer to go the extra mile and go straight to Monte do Gozo. This enclave, just outside Compostela, is that typical place that is somewhere between symbolic and magical, from where you catch your first glimpse of the cathedral towers, and where in bygone years, he or she who saw them first would be named "king of the pilgrimage". Monte do Gozo has the largest hostel in Galicia. It is a spacious complex with all amenities, including a place for macro-concerts! Whatever you do, at this stage of the Way, tiredness is inevitable and clearly visible, and adding almost forty kilometres extra to your journey today may not be advisable if you are not sure you can do it, particularly because after Pedrouzo there is a steep climb. You will not really see any villages as such in this stage; the route passes by the odd cluster of houses, some of which make up one of the thousands of traditional hamlets in Galicia.



Salceda

Pop. 165 / The Way reaches Salceda, a group of houses that stretch all along the road. Up until now, we have mainly travelled through rural areas, but at this point we are getting closer and closer to the asphalt roads. The route does not run along the road itself, but in parallel to it, on another level, along a dirt path. This is the prelude to a small climb into the forest once more, where the eucalyptus trees reign supreme, and which is generally considered to be a stopping-off point for a deserved rest.

O Empalme

O Empalme

Pop. 83 / The path follows a gentle, shady ascent and then you go down again almost without realising it, with the main road just a few hundred metres away. At some point you have to cross the busy main road, but be careful as there are no traffic lights or zebra crossings.

Following this route, we come to a small recreational area that has a little windmill with a weather vane. This place is ideal for a rest before tackling the short climb up to O Empalme, which is essentially a group of houses situated at the junction (*empalme*) between this asphalt road and the road to Touro. From that point on, some prefer to continue along the main road, but this is a mistake: the Way means you have to pass over to the other side of the tarmac (be careful, there is a crossroads on a slope) before entering another forest. The time has come when you have to make a decision: continue straight ahead, in the direction of the Santa Irene hostel (that can be seen in the distance), or go into the tunnel and come to a fountain with a very pretty church. The second option has the inconvenience of having to cross back over the main road again later on, to get back to the hostel. It also has an advantage: this is the historical Way, the traditional Way.

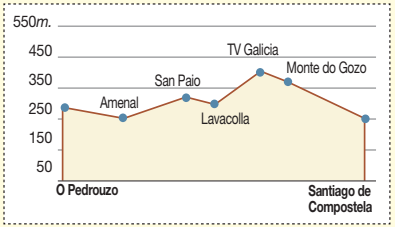
O Pedrouzo

Pop. 597 / The Way now passes by another hamlet that is well known on the French Way: Arca. Houses dotted around the rural landscape, peace and quiet in the air, and in the distance we have Pedrouzo, the capital of the municipality of O Pino. The Way approaches it through a dense forest, but the fact that it has a hostel is a reason for many people on the Way to take this short detour.

Church at Pedrouzo

Monte do Gozo

This stage is characterised by a first stretch that drops gently until it reaches Amenal. From there on, the Way climbs through a steep slope amid an industrial estate that was built on what used to be a dense eucalyptus forest. We reach the highest part of the mount, where the Lavacolla airport is situated, and after going round the airport along a path, and crossing the old road, we once again start a descent.



Lavacolla

So, continuing gently downhill, the Pilgrims' Way comes to Amenal (there is a small tunnel to protect hikers who no longer have to cross the main road) and once again starts the ascent that will lead it to Lavacolla. The detour around the airport leads to the friendly little Church of San Paio, a former parish church that was built in stone and refurbished not that long ago. Its next stop is the new church at Lavacolla, situated beside a lovely bandstand with well-cared for surroundings; this is a very good place to get your breath back and, as custom makes law, most people stop here on the church steps for at least a minute or an hour. From here on, the final descent begins along the left flank of a main road with very little traffic, and along a path on which you will have to walk single file. You can almost smell Santiago in the air.

Chapel. Lavacolla

Monte do Gozo

Monte do Gozo

There are records of Mount Monxoi or Monte do Gozo since the Middle Ages. It has been mentioned in thousands of documents related to the pilgrimage, and it had never been inhabited. Not, that is, until the Jubilee Year of 1993, when everything changed and a huge reception complex was built there for the hundreds of thousands of people who were expected to make the pilgrimage, something which back then still seemed to be a somewhat Utopian idea. But Utopia came true, and hundreds of thousands of hikers did, in fact, come to this complex where they found shelter, a place to sleep and good service. The hostel is the largest in Galicia and is a hive of activity, even in low season.

The city's expansion has meant that hotels and buildings are now very close to Monte do Gozo. So the last stretch up to the Cathedral of Santiago travels through a built-up area, crossing the motorway over a bridge and entering Santiago de Compostela, our goal.

Santiago de Compostela

Pop. 78,824 /

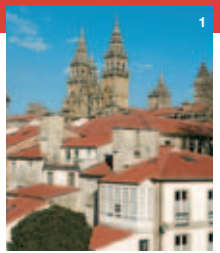
Our goal is Santiago de Compostela. They say that you arrive at Obradoiro square, where the cathedral's Baroque façade rises up over the *Pórtico de la Gloria*, with your strength at its lowest level and your spirits at their highest. In just the Holy Years, over 35 million pilgrims arrived here throughout the 20th century, moved primarily by faith, and then considering other non-religious motives since the Jubilee Year of 1993 put the Way on everyone's agenda.

The road enters Compostela along the street of San Pedro, on the outskirts, and reaches the Porta do Camiño, leaving behind two contrasting buildings: the old monastery of San Domingos de Bonaval, which is today the Museo do Pobo Galego (Museum of the Galician People), and the avant-garde Galician Centre of Contemporary Art.

Now inside what were once the city walls (the Mazarelos gate has survived to the present day, and this is where the wine entered the city), the route climbs along Casas Reais to reach the highest point, the Plaza de Cervantes square, in which the Town Hall occupied a building that is there to this day. Then it goes down again, because at just a hundred metres or so from here, we will find the small Plaza de Azibecharía square, on several levels. That is, the Cathedral, with a huge building of granite stonework on the right, housing the seminary, San Martiño Pinario, the great Galician monastery without which the history of this land would have no meaning.

If we continue straight ahead, we will pass under an arch that belongs to the only civil Romanesque building in Galicia: the Palace of Gelmírez. He was the first archbishop of the city who, in the 12th century, turned the city into a point of reference for Christianity. A capital has been conserved in this palace with the oldest known representation of the *empanada gallega* (traditional Galician pasty), and the guided tours also lead to the cathedral roofs.

Once past this little tunnel, you come out at Obradoiro square. On the right, the great hospital that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel ordered to be built to serve the pilgrimage, is today a hostel of the same name, Reyes Católicos. In front there is a French-style palace by the name of Rajoy, as it was commissioned by another powerful man in the Catholic church, Bartolomé Rajoy y Losada; today it is the site of the Town Hall. On the left is the college of San Xerome, the university vice-chancellor's office. A great end of stage and end of pilgrimage.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① Cathedral

One of the best known churches in the whole world, since the tomb of Saint James the Apostle was discovered in the 9th century. Construction started on the current building in 1075, but work later came to a halt and it was not until 1168 that the prestigious Maestro Mateo started work again. The cathedral was consecrated in 1211. The addition of a Renaissance cloister and the construction of the Baroque façade, which is actually a stone curtain from that era that practically encircles the whole building, have changed its original appearance. It holds the greatest ever Romanesque sculpted work of art: the *Pórtico de la Gloria*, by the aforementioned Maestro Mateo.

② Monastery of San Martiño Pinario

Founded by the Benedictine monks in the 10th century, it went through a thousand and one vicissitudes until it became the most important monastic centre in the whole of Galicia. It occupies 2.2 hectares, no less, and its ensemble is a blend of Baroque and Neoclassical, with Renaissance elements. Its grand façade, compared with the cathedral's Acebechería façade, does not go unnoticed. Inside, there are two cloisters. Parts of the monastery can still be visited.

③ Hostel of the Reyes Católicos

Seeing the avalanche of people who were arriving in Santiago, the Catholic Monarchs commissioned this building to be constructed in 1501. This is what the Latin inscription above the door says. Also from the 16th century is the massive chain that joins the building with the rest of the Obradoiro square, a legacy of a dispute between the Town Hall and the hostel's managers. Inside there are four courtyards and an overhanging Gothic capital that was declared a national monument in 1912.

④ Palace of Gelmírez

It is situated to the north of the cathedral, very nearby. It was ordered to be built by the then powerful archbishop Diego Gelmírez for his own purpose. Since the first stone was laid in 1120, it has undergone a number of changes (it only had two storeys up until the 18th century), but they have not marred its magnificence in the slightest. Particularly worthy of mention are its mediaeval kitchen and synodal hall (13th century) with its unusual vault: its corbels, the architectural elements that hold up the ribs of the arches, are decorated with scenes from a mediaeval banquet.

⑤ Alameda

Although the great 19th century park with its array of monuments, and set beside the old quarter, goes by the name of Alameda, it is actually made up of three very different parts: the Alameda pass itself, the A Ferradura walk, and the oak grove of Santa Susana. It is the main city garden and the views of the cathedral from here are stunning. The chapel of Santa Susana, the church of Pilar, the bandstand, and the dovecot, are just some of the most distinguished components

Primitive Way

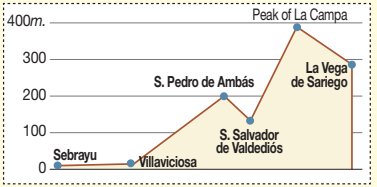
The Asturian King Alfonso II inaugurated this previously existing way from Oviedo shortly after the remains of Saint James were found. It therefore sowed the seeds for millions of pilgrimages. The Primitive Way starts in the Asturian capital and enters Galicia through the mountains of the Lugo province. It is the oldest route to arrive at the Apostle's tomb. Pilgrims will find little hamlets where time seems to have stood still, and an endless variety of silent, solitary landscapes with deeply rooted rural traditions. One of the constant features from the moment we leave Oviedo to the moment we enter Galicia will be the typically mountain-region cuisine: stews (usually with the local butter beans known as *fabes*), top-quality beef…

Sebrayu → Vega (Sariego) (23.7 km)

Landscape and church at Narzana

From Irún and up until now, the Coastal Way has been running parallel to the Cantabrian Sea, but past Villaviciosa the pilgrims' path will branch out into two routes. One will continue along the coast to the Eo estuary (which marks the limit with Galicia) and will then go down to Santiago. This is the Northern Way. The other branch will steer away from the Cantabrian Sea and go up the mountains heading for Oviedo, a key city in the Way of St James. This is the so-called Inland Northern Way or Primitive Way. The stretch between Sebrayu and Oviedo serves as a link between both.

This is one of the most important areas of the Asturian Middle Ages. The valley of Valdediós and its surroundings are exceptionally rich in historical and artistic elements. Even the smallest hamlet has preserved some artistic treasure of historical vestige of past eras. The history- and art-packed landscape of this region is further enhanced by the mountains and valleys that guard it as if it were a huge reliquary looking up at the skies from the road.



Villaviciosa town centre

Villaviciosa

Pop. 6,043 / In 1270, Alfonso X the Wise founded the Puebla de Maliayo, which in time would be known as Villaviciosa, meaning "fertile village". In 1517, the young prince Charles of Ghent (the future emperor Charles V), came to take over the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, anchored his ship opposite the fishing village of Tazones, made it up the estuary, disembarked at Villaviciosa and stayed in the village for four days before pursuing his travel by land to Valladolid. The old port village had walls to protect the houses with their coats of arms, and the narrow cobbled streets where the hospital was situated. The "Fertile Village" still preserves the 13th century Church of Santa María de la Oliva (featuring two Romanesque portals), the 17th century Old Convent of San Francisco, a number of Renaissance palaces and numerous examples of *indiano* architecture. The estuary of Villaviciosa is an important environmental site. It has been recognised as a Natural Reserve and serves as a refuge for many waterfowl species. *La Villa*, as it is commonly known in the region, is also the heart of Asturias' cider country, and we must not leave without having a drop of that lovely Asturian cider.

Valdediós

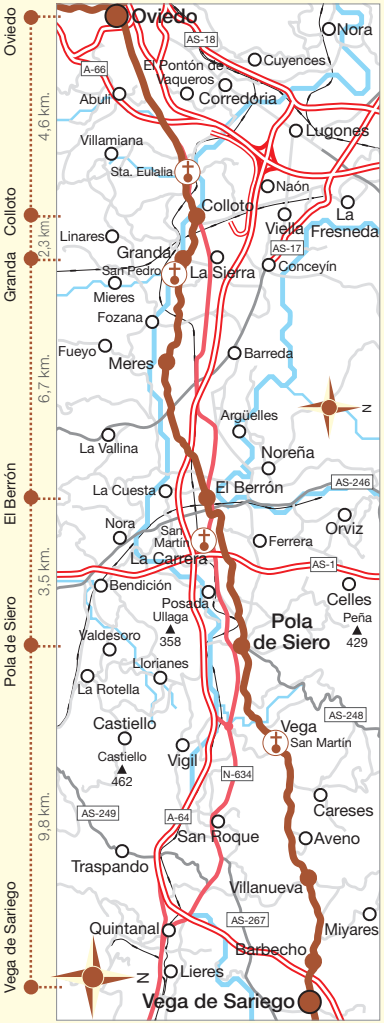
Pop. 32 / In this tiny hamlet between the mountains is the must-visit Cistercian Monastery of Santa María de Valdediós, founded in 1200, and next to it, the small but delightful pre-Romanesque temple of San Salvador, also known as *El Conventín* ("The wee convent"). It was founded under the patronage of Alfonso III and consecrated in 893 by seven bishops, according to an inscription in a marble plaque embedded into the outside part of the chevet. This temple is particularly relevant because it was the last great example of a style about to give way to new, powerful tendencies, namely Romanesque art. The latter would soon prevail and pave the way for the first European fusion style, one which Asturias would heavily contribute to.

San Salvador de Valdediós

Vega

Pop. 87 / Although the mediaeval Way did not go through this village, but through San Martín de Vega de Poja, Vega has two Romanesque churches: Santiago and San Román. At Narzana we find La Fuente del Romeru, "The pilgrim's fountain", whose name brings echoes of the Way, and the Church of Santa María de Narzana, a late 12th century Romanesque building.

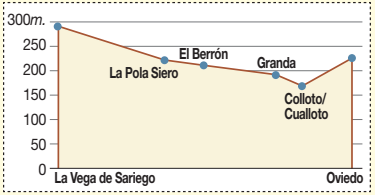
Vega



General view of Oviedo

After passing Sariego, pilgrims will cross the municipality of Siero through surprisingly flat and accessible lands in comparison with the otherwise mountainous Asturian landscape. As is usually the case when we approach a big town (in this case Oviedo, the capital of Asturias), the landscape becomes increasingly less pretty and more urban and industrialised.

However, in the old quarter of Oviedo, travellers will feel they have gone back in time to the Asturian Middle Ages. The phenomenon of pilgrimage was crucial for the cultural and demographic growth of Oviedo, as well as for the creation of new services and for the transformation of a royal and ecclesiastical town into somewhat of a universally known urban centre. Let us not forget that the Cathedral of San Salvador and its Holy Chamber were a major pilgrim destination in the Middle Ages (not as massive as Jerusalem and Rome, but almost as important as Santiago de Compostela).



Palace of the Marquis of Santa Cruz de Marcenado

La Pola Siero

Pop. 12,185 / This town was built over the old Hostel of San Pedro for "pilgrims and paupers" and founded with the authorisation of King Alfonso X in the 13th century. It has had an important role as a trading post ever since the 18th century, when the Baroque Palace of the Marquis of Santa Cruz de Marcenado was built. We must also mention the increasing significance and activity of its cattle market, nowadays considered the most important establishment of its type in Spain and one of the most important in Europe.

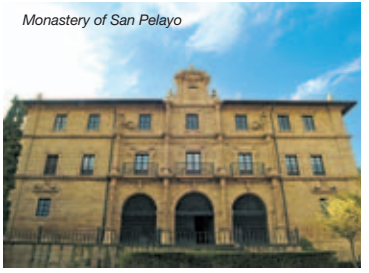
Bridge at Colloto

Colloto/Cualloto

Pop. 3,207 / It used to be on the old mediaeval road from La Pola Siero to Oviedo, and it is the last village we will find before entering the Asturian capital. A mediaeval bridge originally built by the Romans will help us cross the Nora River. Another noteworthy site is the Church of Santa Eulalia, with a Romanesque triumphal arch.

Oviedo

Pop. 208,313 / The capital of the Principality of Asturias was not just a stop, but also a destination, in the large-scale pilgrimage phenomenon that got a large part of the European population on the road. In the Late Middle Ages, going on a pilgrimage to the Cathedral of San Salvador de Oviedo and its Holy Chamber, where several sacred relics were kept, became a reason to visit the capital of the Asturian kingdom. Many of those pilgrims followed the French Way and, after visiting the remains of San Isidoro in León, took a detour up the Pajares mountain pass and down to Oviedo before following their way to Santiago. In the 9th century, the Asturian King Alfonso II the Chaste travelled from his court in Oviedo to a place called Iria Flavia (in the present-day village of Padrón) to visit the recently discovered tomb of the Apostle Saint James. This was surely the first pilgrimage to Compostela. News of the discovery of Saint James's tomb echoed throughout Europe, and the "Field of Stars" or "Campus Stellae" that Santiago de Compostela was named after, and in which the Asturian monarch ordered that a church be built to hold the saint's relics, became one of the most important pilgrimage centres in the Christian world.


Monastery of San Pelayo

Oviedo

Pop. 208,313 /

Oviedo, the capital of the Principality of Asturias, is nowadays an open, modern town of great international significance. Some of its main tourist attractions are the old quarter, including the Cathedral/Holy Chamber and the Campoamor Theatre, the venue of many important cultural events. It has an impressive monumental heritage with World Heritage sites like Santa María del Naranco, San Miguel de Lillo and San Julián de los Prados.

There are records of the foundation of Oviedo dating back to 761, when the presbyter Máximo and his uncle the abbot Fromestano settled on a hill called Oveto and built a basilica dedicated to Saint Vincent. Asturias forged the first links with the Way of Saint James in the early 11th century, with the pilgrimage of King Alfonso II the Chaste to Compostela. This was the beginning of the oldest pilgrimage route to Santiago, the one that connects Oviedo and Santiago through the inland regions of western Asturias.

This route was frequently used between the 11th and the 13th century, and later. During that period, the cult of San Salvador de Oviedo was a powerful magnet attracting numerous pilgrims who took a detour from the French Way at León and came to Oviedo to venerate the relics kept at the Holy Chamber. There is a popular saying that goes like this: "He who goes to Santiago but not to San Salvador, visits the servant and forgets the lord."

← Oviedo 0 km | → 315.4 km

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① Church of San Julián de Los Prados

The pre-Romanesque Church of San Julián de los Prados, built during the reign of Alfonso II the Chaste (791-842), is the oldest and biggest pre-Romanesque building still standing. Its most striking features are the stucco paintings based on Roman-inspired motives, which decorate the inside walls and vaults, the blind arches along the central apse, and the latticework covering the bays.

② Pre-Romanesque monuments of the Naranco mountain

Santa María del Naranco: The Palace of Ramiro I (842-850) in the Naranco mountain is peculiar in that its function is not certain (it may have been a palace, a church, a royal pavilion, a hall for meetings with royal advisors…). It is also the most significant building of European pre-Romanesque art.

San Miguel de Lillo: This church was ordered to be built by Ramiro I and approximately a third of the original construction has survived. During the Late Middle Ages, part of it collapsed and the chevet was reconstructed to its current appearance. The primitive portal and one stretch of the original nave have survived.

③ Cathedral of San Salvador and Holy Chamber

The origins of the Cathedral of Oviedo are in a basilica that King Alfonso II the Chaste (791-842) ordered to be built and dedicated to San Salvador. In the 14th century, the pre-Romanesque/Romanesque basilica was demolished and the building works of the Gothic style cathedral started. The last element to be completed in the mid-16th century was the late-Gothic style tower. The only remaining original element is the Holy Chamber, dating back to Alfonso II the Chaste.

④ La Foncalada

This 9th century fountain was built during the reign of Alfonso III the Great (866-910). It is the only remaining example of a civil building for public use from the Early Middle Ages. It surrounds a spring of drinking water that flows from the very ground. The water falls into a pool covered by a stone structure. In the pediment there is a bas-relief of Alfonso III's Victory Cross with the alpha and omega symbols hanging from its arms.

⑤ Old quarter

This historic and monumental site is one of the most dynamic parts of the town and comprises the Cathedral, the Town Hall, the Church of San Isidoro, the Church of San Tirso, the Monastery of San Pelayo, the Convent of San Vicente (which houses the Archaeological Museum of Asturias) and squares such as Plaza de Alfonso II, Plaza de Trascorrales, Corrada del Obispo and Plaza del Paraguas. We can also see the Fontán market, built in 1882.

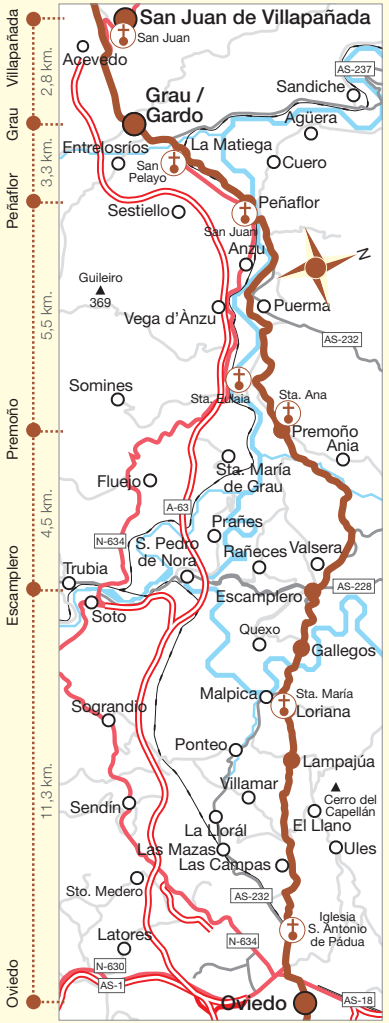
⑥ Archaeological Museum of Asturias

It is housed in the 16th century former Benedictine Monastery of San Vicente. This building is very much part of Oviedo's history. For example, it was here that local priest and man of letters Benito Feijoo (1676-1764) wrote his entire corpus of works. Not surprisingly, the museum focuses on archaeological findings in Asturias.

⑦ Asturias Fine Arts Museum

It houses the largest public collection of art in Asturias, comprising paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings, photography, and applied/industrial arts. It occupies three buildings in the Oviedo old quarter, right by the Cathedral: the Velarde Palace (1767), a masterpiece by the architect Reguera, the House of the Oviedo-Portal family (1660), designed by the Cantabrian architect Melchor de Velasco, and a 1940s building.

1 Oviedo → San Juan de Villapañada (27.4 km)

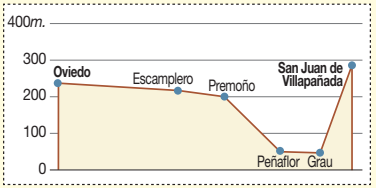


Chapel of Carmen, Llampaxuga

This stage starts by the image of El Salvador at the Oviedo Cathedral, with urban landscapes (Oviedo's old quarter) and country landscapes (the southern slopes of the Naranco mountain) both in view.

We will cross the Nora River via the mediaeval Gallegos bridge. This is documented to have existed in the 13th century, but the present-day structure seems to date back to the 15th century. We will then enter the parish council of Las Regueras, which became independent from Oviedo in 1380. On the road to Grau/Grado we will see the typical landscape of central Asturias and the Nalón River valley: fertile plains and hills, brooks, villages and hamlets that go back in time and show us a glimpse of the past.

At the end of the stage we will reach San Juan de Villapañada (traditionally known as *Lleñapañada*), where we will find a hostel, a successor of the hospital that the Order of Malta had here in the Middle Ages.



Chapel of Santa Ana

Premoño

Pop. 87 / This hamlet, nowadays sparsely populated, used to have a hospital that operated up until the 18th century. The remains of that hospital are the 15th century Chapel of Santa Ana and the actual building housing the hospital, the so-called House of La Portalada.

Peñaflor bridge

Peñaflor

Pop. 283 / The parish of San Juan de Peñaflor has a Romanesque bridge over the Nalón whose existence is recorded in documents dating back to 1144. It connects the parish councils of Candamo and Las Regueras and has had great strategic importance, as it is the natural pass between the central and western parts of the region. Heavy battles to secure its control took place between the Spanish and French troops in the early 19th century, during the Peninsular War.

Grau/Grado

Pop. 7,519 / The first historical and archaeological evidence of Grado date back to Roman times. It is a typical example of a village designed along an important route, and in the 10th century it started to grow as the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela became increasingly more important. Despite its protracted history (which we could consider as starting in the 13th century, when King Alfonso X granted Grado a Charter of Privileges), there are few architectural remains attesting to the past splendour of the village, although it has preserved the primitive, unmistakably mediaeval street pattern in the old quarter, and fragments of the former 13th century city walls.

Grau/Grado has a rich trading tradition. Its markets are well known and appreciated throughout Asturias due to the quality of the products being sold, (vegetables, cheeses, spelt bread), the jovial yet businesslike atmosphere and the variety of arts and crafts available (basketry, wood-carving, jet…).

In the San Pelayo quarter we can visit the Ethnographic Museum, where we can get acquainted with the traditional culture of the central-western region of Asturias. If we cross the old quarter, we will find the 17th century Palace of Valdecarzana and the 18th century Baroque Chapel of Dolores.

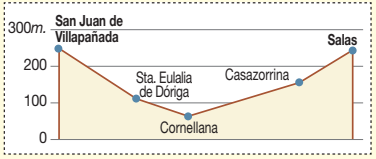
Palace of Valdecarzana and park

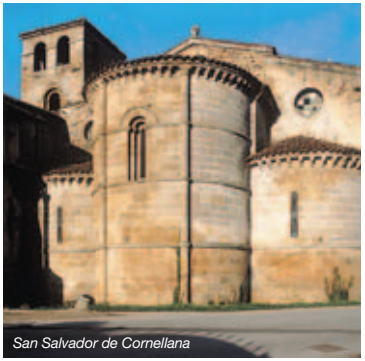
Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora del Freisnu

This area has a strong pilgrim tradition, as it is a crossroads for the inland route to the coast. In El Freisnu we find a sanctuary visited with great devotion by the locals. Fierce fighting took place nearby during the Peninsular War, as the area was an important junction where two routes met: the Way of Saint James and a branch line of the Vía de la Mesa (a traditional road between Asturias and northern León).

On this stage we will see palaces and colonial houses typical of rural Asturias, as well as *hórreos* and bread silos in the peculiar style of the central regions of Asturias. It is a peaceful route with hills, valleys and fertile plains along the rivers of Cornellana and Salas.

Salas has a significant monumental heritage, including Neolithic burial mounds and Bronze Age remains. The Romans occupied these lands too, as evinced by the numerous gold mines.



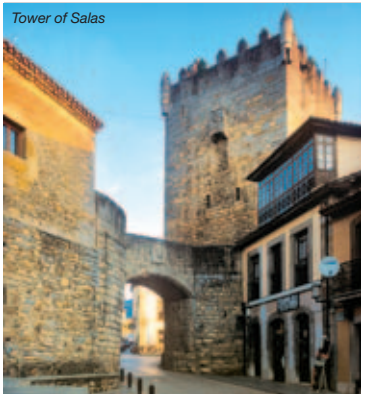

San Salvador de Cornellana

Cornellana

Pop. 585 / In this village we will find one of the most important monasteries of Asturias: San Salvador de Cornellana. It was founded in 1024 by the infanta Cristina, King Bermudo II and Queen Velasquita's daughter, who retired to the convent after her husband Ordoño died. When she passed away in 1122, her descendants donated the monastery to the Cluny monks so they could found a Benedictine establishment. Throughout the centuries, the monastery acquired vast amounts of land in the parish council of Salas, and kept them until the monks had to abandon it in 1835. The architectural site of San Salvador de Cornellana includes the church and the adjacent monastery. The Romanesque Church of San Salvador, reformed in the second half of the 17th century, has a basilica ground plan with three naves separated by cross-shaped pillars, a three-apse chevet and a square, two-floor tower attached to the right-hand side. The interior is decorated with excellent 17th century altarpieces. The rest of the monastic buildings were completed in the early 17th century and early 18th century, respectively. A very elegant split-level façade was built, with mouldings on the bottom-level windows and ironwork balconies on the top level. The central section is decorated with typical Baroque motives: columns, balconies, a split pediment and a large coat of arms. During the Baroque period, a new cloister was built to replace the original mediaeval one. It has a square layout, two floors, and combines arcades in the lower floor and mouldings for decoration in the top-floor balconies. Two Romanesque doors have also survived from the original building.

Salas

Pop. 1,641 / This beautiful village was recognised as a historic site in 1994. Its heritage includes a series of buildings located in the very centre of town, such as the Collegiate Church of Santa María (built in 1549 and one of the main examples of Renaissance Asturian architecture), the 15th-16th century Tower and the mid-16th century Palace of the Valdés family. Just outside Salas we find the pre-Romanesque temple of San Martín. A number of valuable stone plaques and archaeological remains originally found in the temple are now kept in the Tower Museum, a must-visit place for art lovers. We also wholeheartedly recommend a little stroll around the peaceful streets of this lovely village, where colonial houses and small noble palaces are abundant.

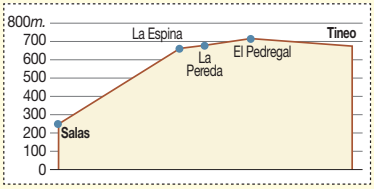

Tower of Salas

3 Salas → Tineo (19.1 km)

Santa María de Bodenaya

The Way of Saint James enters a cattle herding zone full of colonial houses, manor houses, watermills, junction crosses and chapels attesting to people's devotion in the past. All these elements have had a great deal of importance in the western regions of Asturias.

The first part of the ascent to La Espina is thick woodland, whereas the final, flatter stretch will offer splendid views of Tineo. The traditional search for gold in the rivers of the Tineo parish council is nowadays more a leisure activity than a way of life. The true riches of this parish council are in its oak and beech forests. Centennial trees, legends and roads to Compostela are some of the gems in this municipality.



The Way at La Espina

La Espina

Pop. 512 / This is the last village of the Salas parish council that the Way of Saint James runs through. It was originally a *braña* (or fell) where cattle herders went up in the summer, and a crossroads traditionally considered as the entry point to western Asturias. In the Modern Era it had a hospital founded by the general inquisitor Fernando Valdés Salas. Nowadays it boasts a good number of renowned catering establishments.

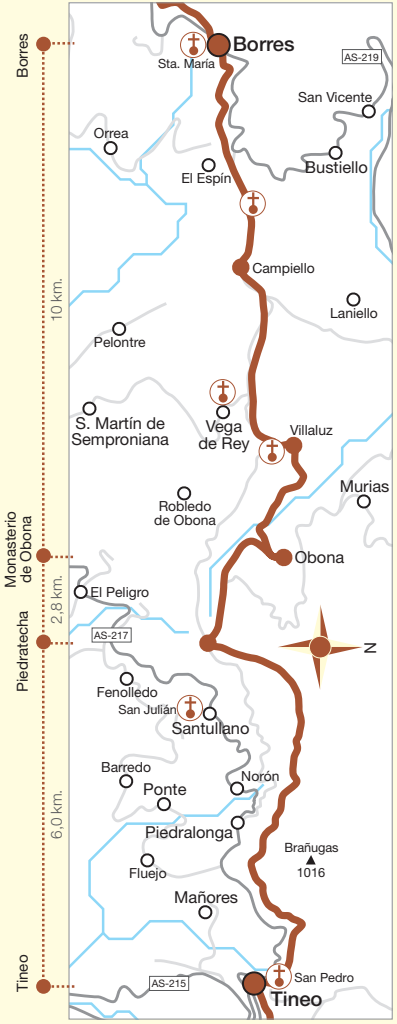
Tineo

Tineo

Pop. 3,682 / Tineo is one of the oldest towns in Asturias (it dates back to the Bronze Age castros period), and one of the most important in western Asturias. Tineo was founded as a village during the reign of Alfonso IX, who established it as an obligatory stop on the pilgrims' route between Oviedo and Santiago de Compostela. The town of Tineo is a typical example of a hill settlement designed along an important route, although its present-day aspect is significantly different to the original one.

Tineo can be divided into three different urban spaces: the lower quarter (Fondos de la Villa), the upper quarter (El Pico or Cimadevilla) and, in between them, an urban district combining mediaeval and 19th century buildings. The lower and upper quarters are both typically rural, with numerous service structures such as *hórreos*, bread silos, stables, barns and mills. The urban district used to have an important Franciscan monastery dating back to the 13th century, but nowadays the only remaining part is the church, which serves as the Tineo parish church. It also houses a very interesting Museum of Sacred Art with religious artifacts from several nearby churches. Also noteworthy are the Palace of the García de Tineo family and its circular tower (both date back to the 13th century) and the 16th century Palace of the Merás family.

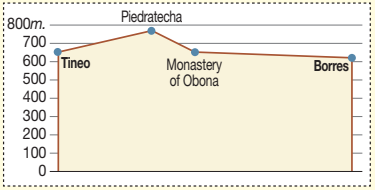
The present-day hostel has replaced the historic Hospital of Nuestra Señora de Mater Christi, founded in the 13th century. There are still remains of it in the Calle Mayor. It is thought that it was the most important Asturian hospital along what we nowadays refer to as the Primitive Way.



El Espín

This stage is dotted with chapels which evidence the pilgrims' devotion for Saint James. The entire route runs through mountain ranges and hillsides, as we enter the heart of traditional western Asturias. The peaceful, solitary route and the mid-range mountain landscapes, with numerous hamlets and country houses along the way, invite the traveller to stop and soak up the scenery.

In this area, people speak a distinct western variety of the Asturian language, and we will also find a very peculiar popular architecture with specific characteristics: big *hórreos* and bread silos, water fountains to help travellers quench their thirst... We will also be entering the Sierra de Palo, rich in folklore and ancient legends about Asturias' mythological beings. This is a land of mist, dolmens and ancestral traditions where we must be particularly careful to follow the road signs.



Monastery of Santa María la Real at Obona

Obona

Pop. 227 / In this village we find the Monastery of Santa María la Real at Obona. Its origins are uncertain and doubts have been raised about the authenticity of the foundation document, which states that the monastery was established in 871 by Adelgaster, King Silo's son. Other documents certify it existed in the 10th century and in the 12th century it was an important Benedictine centre. Alfonso IX visited the monastery and immediately conferred upon it the privilege of being an obligatory stop for pilgrims heading to Santiago. This caused the official route to be altered and increased the monastery's economic and cultural control over the area. In its heyday, the Obona monks employed very innovative agricultural and livestock farming techniques and taught Philosophy and Theology.

In the 12th century, the monastery comprised the church, the cloister, the convent buildings and a hostel. It has undergone several alterations over time and the oldest remaining building is the church, a 12th century Romanesque temple which has been preserved more or less intact. Its structure combines Benedictine architecture and Cistercian aesthetics, with no decoration and absolute austerity on the walls. It has a basilica ground plan with three five-section naves and a three-part chevet preceded by a single straight section. The main chapel is much larger than the side chapels. Alteration works started in the 17th century. It is divided into two floors, each of them with a different conception: profiles with mouldings and long pilasters on the lower floor, and quadrangular bays on the upper floor. The founders of the monastery were buried in the original cloister, but in the 16th century their remains were moved to the inside of the temple. Obona was very important in the past as a hostel and as a place of meditation and prayer. It also used to house numerous works of art; all of them are now gone, except for a peaceful-looking Romanesque Christ carved in wood.

Borres

Pop. 109 / This village has the former Casa del Hospital, which is the oldest recorded hostel along the Way of Saint James. It is mentioned in a document from 889 whereby the Asturian King Alfonso III donated it to what was then the basilica of Santiago de Compostela. Borres currently has no services whatsoever, so any supplies must be purchased at Campiello.

Church of Borres

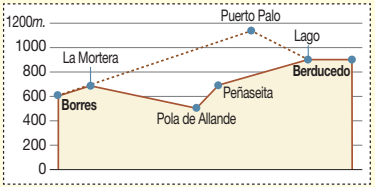
5 Borres → Berducedo (28.5 km)
Borres → Berducedo (alternative route: 27 km)

Samblismo

The Way branches out at this point. The left-hand branch line goes to Pola de Allande and the right-hand one, to the Fonfaraón mountain range, also known as Los Hospitales. Both lines converge 12 km later at the Palo mountain pass.

If we choose the first option, the landscape is somewhat more civilised, with hamlets and country houses dotted along the way. *Hórreos*, colonial houses, manor houses and old chapels can be seen throughout this stage. This area bears witness to the important contribution of *indianos* who emigrated to America and then returned to Asturias. A few kilometres away from Pola de Allande we will find remains of the *castros* culture in the *castro* of San Chuis, on a hill over the village of San Martín de Beduledo.

Those who opted for the Los Hospitales route must bear in mind that they will not find any hostels or inhabited places along the way. It is a very tough route, but it is also considered one of the most beautiful areas in any of the Spanish sections of the Way. To take it, we must go down the right-hand branch line at the Samblismo bifurcation.



La Mortera

La Mortera

Pop. 57 / This village has preserved significant heritage sites, such as the remains of the Palace of La Mortera and the Chapel of San Pascual. It has a bar/shop where we can purchase supplies before setting off again, or stop and enjoy a meal of local produce.

Pola de Allande

Pop. 747 / Pola de Allande was founded at some point between 1262 and 1268. Until the 19th century, it was a small village concentrated on the left bank of the Nisón River, next to the Way of Saint James. Its monumental heritage includes the impressive Palace of Cienfuegos or Peñalba, located on a hill that dominates the village. It was originally built in the 15th century, but it has undergone subsequent refurbishment works and the only remaining Gothic elements are in the lower level.

It has an L-shaped floor plan and three robust towers without battlements which confer a monumental air upon the whole structure. *Indiano* architecture takes up a significant part of the urban landscape in Pola de Allande. The best examples are the House of Las Veigas or the Ramos-Valledor Villa, designed by the architect Ignacio Álvarez Castelao; the Cantabrian-style Villa Rosario; the Neoclassical Villa of Ramos Ron; and the Olalla-Valledor family manor house, inspired by Basque countryhouses. We must not forget the Parish Church of San Andrés (completed in the 16th century, but with clearly Romanesque reminiscences from the original building) and the Town Hall building (1907).

Palace of Cienfuegos

Lago

Pop. 27 / This hamlet has an interesting church with a 16th century belfry and is located next to a yew tree, a very common species in Asturias. This one in particular is literally attached to one side of the church and has been recognised as a Natural Monument. It is 9 metres high and its trunk has a perimeter of 5.6 metres.

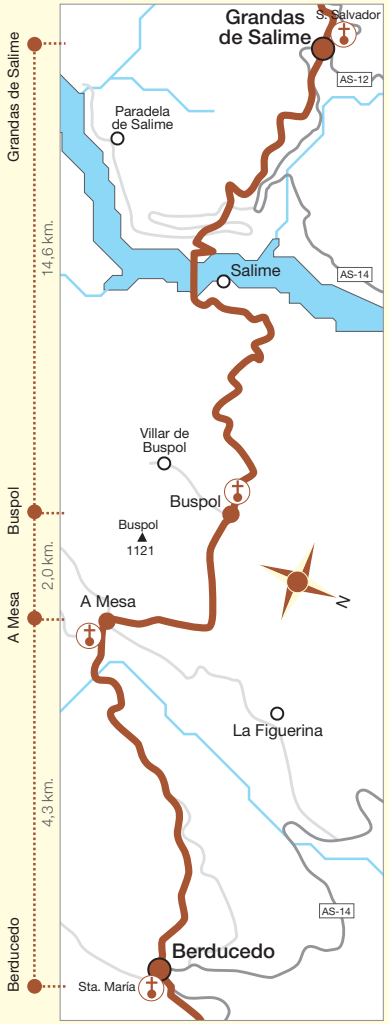
Montefurado

Pop. 1 / This village was originally a hospital and in its chapel there is a peculiar carved-wood image of Saint James, a fine example of popular handicraft.

Berducedo

Pop. 167 / This village had a hospital house until 1980. A slate plaque from that building can now be found on the façade of the local doctor's house. The parish church dates back to the 14th century. In the vicinity of the Way of Saint James route we will find the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Bedramón. It is at the top of the Peak of Bedramón (on the Berducedo crest, altitude 940 metres), in the parish council of San Martín del Valledor. It was rebuilt after the Spanish Civil War with a rectangular floor plan, a raised chevet and a pillar-supported portal. It has many devout followers.

Nuestra Señora de Bedramón

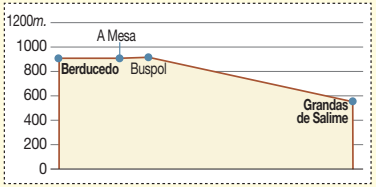


Santa Marina, Buspol

On this stage we will feel like we are in a supersized world. The high mountains, the valley of Navia and the vastness of the Salime reservoir will give pilgrims a feeling of silence, pleasant isolation and universal peace.

The route includes the ascent to the Palo mountain pass, with a distinct zig-zag section at the beginning. The reservoir can also become an obstacle: if we are not certain that we can cross it by boat, we must take a detour in the last downhill section and head towards Murias down a trail. This is an alternative route to the one that used to run through Salime and will give us a chance to walk over the Salto de Salime, an exceptional work of modern engineering built in the mid-20th century.

This is one of the richest sections ethnographically. Aside from the rural heritage, there is also the Ethnographic Museum of Grandas, which is singularly important in its field.



A Mesa

A Mesa

Pop. 32 / This village has an interesting late 17th century parish church dedicated to Santa María Magdalena. It also has a hostel.

Grandas

Grandas de Salime

Pop. 524 / The structure of this village follows the layout of our route, which proves how important the Way of Saint James has been throughout its history. It was recognised as an obligatory stop in the Charter of Privileges granted in 1222 by King Alfonso IX. Civil architecture buildings include the 16th century House of Román, in the Calle del Carmen. It is divided into different sections and volumes joined together by a majestic central courtyard. The building shows two clearly differentiated outside sections: to the left, two arched portals, one of them with the family coat of arms embedded at the top; to the right, the chapel, with a decorative three-sided slate roof at the entrance.

An interesting sight in Grandas de Salime is the Church of San Salvador, originally dating back to 1186, although it has Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque elements. The most noteworthy aspects of the church are the portal and the 18th century main altarpiece. The other main focus of interest in the villlage is the Ethnographic Museum, a pioneering venue in the Principality of Asturias located in the former Presbytery House. It houses an exceptional collection of typically rural Asturian objects and painstakingly recreated models of commercial spaces such as a grocer's, a barber's and a tailor's, or the various rooms in a traditional peasant's house.

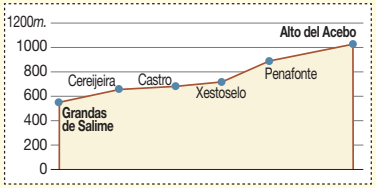
7 Grandas de Salime → Alto de El Acebo (14.2 km)

Peñafonte

The last Asturian stage of the Primitive Way to Santiago starts at Grandas de Salime and for the most part follows the main road, although it occasionally veers off on to small but well signposted paths and trails.

During the ascent to the Alto del Acebo, pilgrims will pass Bustelo del Camín, the last Asturian village before reaching the summit of the mountain pass (1,030 metres). Abundant archaeological remains, including megaliths and cave paintings, have been discovered in this area. There was also a significant population in the *castros* period, as evinced by the ruins at the *castro* of Chao de San Martín (4th century BC).

The landscape is mountainous, very rural, and very much steeped in the past. The buildings are those typical of western Asturias and almost invariably have slate roofs. Along the way, pilgrims will be able to contemplate rural churches, chapels, oratories, country houses and *castros*.



Castro

Castro

Pop. 49 / Near this village is the *castro* of Chao de Samartín. Because there are long-term excavation works in progress, the site is covered by canvas, but underneath lie the remains of a society that two thousand years ago reached the highest level of urban sophistication recorded so far in the area. It is well known that the *castro* was already a fortified settlement in the 4th century BC. The huts, protected by solid walls, had a single room, were roofed with vegetable materials and the construction was sometimes circular, sometimes rectangular with curved corners. Outside the walls, a deep moat protected the whole perimeter, but a gap was left on the southern flank for the gates. The inhabitants of the settlement were farmers who prepared their food with pottery utensils made without a potter's wheel. They also made iron and copper tools (metalwork remains have been found on the site). When these lands were conquered by the Romans, the way of life of the people at Chao de Sanmartín changed radically. Their privileged location near the gold mines of the region meant lots of trade and activity. The drive to sanitise the streets and squares led to the installation of piping and sewers. The story of this community came to a sudden end in the 2nd century, when a violent earthquake devastated the settlement. It was never occupied again.

Padraira

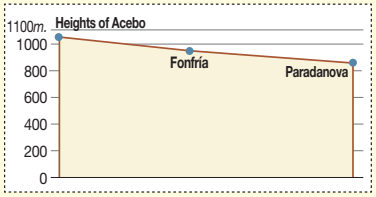
Pop. 13 / As we leave this village, we will see the Chapel of San Lázaro, the remains of a former lepers' hospital.

Padraira

8 Alto do Acebo → Paradanova (12.1 km)

A Fonsagrada

The Autonomous Community of Galicia starts just where you commence your descent from the heights of O Acebo, which has most probably been quite difficult: a small, symbolic plaque says so. Whoever walks this route will travel through an extensive wind farm, and from that point on, the descent is gentle and continuous, with small inclines that break the monotony on the way to A Fonsagrada, our point of reference along with Lugo. It is not hard to deduce that this is real mountain country, and there are times when you have to walk in single file, still others when the path widens to become a comfortable track. On the pilgrimage through this stage, both the landscape and the small towns and villages take pride of place. There are no hostels or great monuments, but there are many small churches and chapels in which you can still breathe the devotion of past centuries.



Fonfría

Fonfría

Pop. 29 / The uphill (rare) and downhill (more common) pace that characterises the Primitive Way in this first stage leads to a small hamlet called Fonfría. The name means that you should only refresh yourself with water from its fountain in summer, as it comes from deep into the ground and is notable for two things: for being pure and crystal-clear; and for the fact that the water is freezing cold, which gave the hamlet its mediaeval name of Frigidam Fontem [cold fountain]. There was once a hostel in Fonfría, and people habitually point to a group of ruins as being the place where travellers stayed in bygone times. Today it is worth mentioning for two reasons: for its beautiful entrance, at 166.956 kilometres from the tomb of the Apostle, and for the chapel of Santa María Madanela, a fine example of simplicity and with one single nave, which belonged to the Order of Saint John. An interesting fact: to protect it from the sun and rain, but above all from the cold, its narthex ended up being completely covered, so the modern belfry is somewhat isolated in the middle of the building.

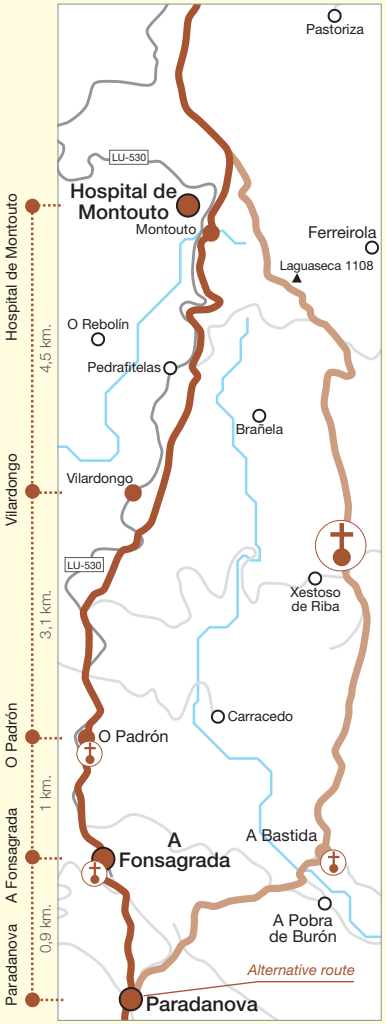
Paradanova

Pop. 19 / The Way reaches Paradanova, leaving behind the mount of Penoucos (999 metres above sea level) and the hamlet of Silvela (with its chapel of Santa Bárbara do Camín). To get to this point, the path has to travel through a dense mount, and cross the main road on more than one occasion. Another lovely and tiny temple awaits us at Paradanova: the Chapel of Santa Cruz. At that point, the pilgrims' way splits in two: one branch continues to the left in the direction of A Fonsagrada, and the other follows the right hand road (the main road) only to leave the tarmac just as it enters that town, heading for the heights and then descending. It is advisable to bear in mind a couple of points to this respect: If you choose the left hand route, there will be a hostel for you to sleep at. If, on the other hand, you choose the right, there are no hostels, so the stage will be long and you will either need to spend the night under the stars or flag down a taxi at dusk to take you to the hostel and then back again in the morning to pick up where you left off. The same could be said about places to eat, as if you go the Fonsagrada route, there are restaurants on the way, but the traveller will find no such establishment on the other route.

However, the landscapes on the right are undoubtedly more breathtaking, with the Ancares mountain range as the ideal backdrop; besides, if you choose this second option, you will only walk on tarmac for barely a hundred metres.

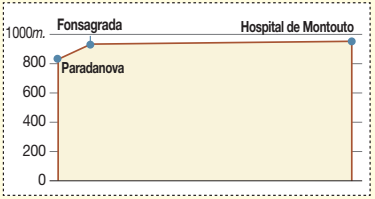
Paradanova

9 Paradanova → Hospital de Montouto (9.5 km)



Paranova

The second stage of the Primitive Way in Galicia, traditionally known as the Oviedo Way, is designed to meet hikers' requirements. Along the A Fonsagrada route, the uphill and downhill slopes will be more gentle (except the first) than if you choose the old and sparsely populated A Pobra de Burón, as in the latter case, you first have to descend considerably before climbing a beautiful but long slope uphill, which in turn has two phases: the first section is much longer and has a lower gradient; and the second section is much shorter but it requires greater effort due to the sloping terrain. In any case, whoever walks these highlands of the province of Lugo has to accept that there are not going to be many people about, wherever they go. Moving on, the street names in A Pobra de Burón do not leave anyone indifferent, as they recall people associated with the former Soviet Union.



A Fonsagrada

A Fonsagrada

Pop. 1,124 / If you choose to take the Fonsagrada route, which can already be seen from Paradanova, you have to continue along the dirt track on the left, and then take on a short but steep ascent that will enable you to stop in front of the Fonte Santa fountain that gives the town its name, next to one of the sides of the huge parish church. It was in that fountain that the Virgin Mary appeared on numerous occasions, expressing a desire for there to be a town built on that spot, to the detriment of A Pobra de Burón, which had been the main population centre up until then. So says local legend, but there is another, particularly in A Pobra de Burón, claiming that their neighbours' ancestors stole their image of the Virgin Mary and moved it to the fountain at the top of the mount.

A Fonsagrada is one of those typical towns that grew up around a main road, a stop-off point for those going from one place to another. Today, as you leave the town, you can enjoy its delightful park where you can take some time out before continuing your walk. Moreover, this is the place where you will find the ethnographical museum, which is a fine example of what neighbours can achieve together, as it was actually their neighbours who had the idea, assumed the task and financed it.

Hospital de Montouto

Pop. 15 / The two branches meet at Hospital de Montouto. In other words, at what is still left standing of a place that, in mediaeval times, received people who were walking the Way, and which remained open until well into the 20th century. What is still visible are several consolidated buildings with a Neolithic dolmen at the back, and a burial mound that presumably had another dolmen inside at the front. There are some splendid views here, and it is a good place to rest because from here on, the route is long and leafy until it reaches Paradavella.

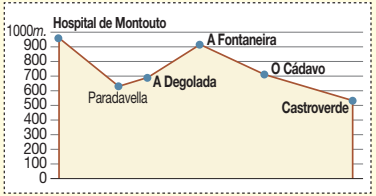
Hospital de Montouto

A Pobra de Burón

Pop. 130 / If, at Paradanova, you choose to continue along the main road, a few metres away you will see a plaque that suggests you turn right and go around A Fonsagrada, and once at the top, you will then go downhill for three kilometres along a lovely path in the direction of a deep valley. There you will see A Pobra de Burón, the former main population centre in these mountains of Lugo, which gradually lost its influence despite it having two churches: the Parish Church of Santa María Madanela and the small Chapel of San José, and the remains of a mediaeval castle that has since been restored, particularly its tower. Nearby there is a *castro*, which is a sign that these lands have been inhabited since prehistoric times.

A Degolada

The excellent views continue in this stage, except at the very beginning, when the route runs through a dense forest. There are still very few outstanding villages or towns, except the small service centre of O Cádavo, capital of the municipality of Baleira, with a lovely, well-looked after hostel. So those who are walking the Way have no choice but to continue going uphill and downhill constantly, on a stage that can be hard, but always pretty. As the route passes through many shady areas, even in the hottest days of the year, the sun never hits too hard, as the way travels almost always through small forests. As for vegetation, scrubland and indigenous trees abound, with a large number of *carballos* (oak trees), although the area has also been reforested with pine trees. An interesting piece of historical data: Napoleon's troops came here in the early 19th century, unusually far from all communication.



A Degolada

Pop. 37 / After the great downhill slope to Paradavella (do not miss the Church of San Juan with its Neoclassical altar) at the entrance to which the road has already become merely a path, the route heads for the mountains of A Lastra, passing the hamlets of Calzada, A Degolada (with its chapel) before crossing the main road. The name of A Degolada is unusual, and in English it means something on the lines of 'cut-throat'. In fact, verbal tradition has it that this was the place where executions were carried out by beheading.

Lastra

Pop. 79 / Now with the downhill slope in full swing, we arrive at the hamlet that shares its name with the mountain range. The most interesting thing about this hamlet is its church, which was immaculately restored not that long ago, with a beautiful coffered ceiling and sculptures dating back to the 17th century. Outside, it has a slate-tiled roof and a belfry.

A Fontaneira

Pop. 109 / Down the mountain we come to A Fontaneira, another small village that awoke with a start one morning in 1809 when Napoleon's soldiers marched in. It has another church that was restored practically at the same time as the church in Lastra, with just one nave and two icons: one of Saint James on horseback and another of the Divine Shepherdess, which is particularly worshipped in this area.

A Fontaneira

O Cádavo

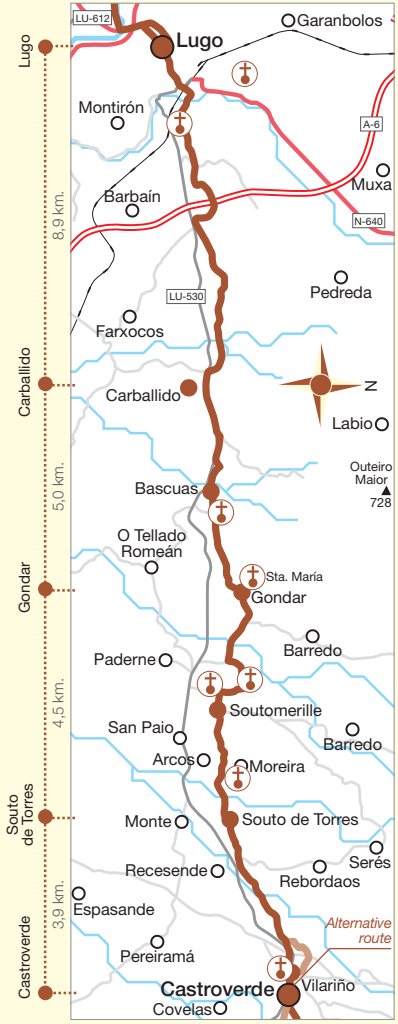
Pop. 342 / One of those prolonged descents leads to O Cádavo, capital of the essentially rural municipality of Baleira. This is a small village, with amenities and a very friendly hostel. Nearby is the Killing Field, the place where legend has it that a great battle took place, which ended up staining not only the fields but also the rivers with blood.

Castroverde

Castroverde

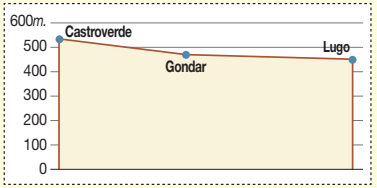
Pop. 386 / Another prolonged ascent and then another similar descent to first come to a recreational area and then the centre of Vilabade. The Way of Saint James comes right up to the square in this well known hamlet. On one side there is a mighty country house, and perpendicular to that, we find the stunning church. The church is all that is left of an old Franciscan convent and it was declared a national monument. It is a rare example of a rural Gothic church dating back to the 15th century, with a single nave and a presbytery that was covered with a ribbed vault.

From this point, there are just ten minutes to go until reaching Castroverde on the other side, where its slender mediaeval tower is situated, and which was built in the Norman tradition surrounded by a low wall covered with vegetation.



Castroverde

From Castroverde onwards, the gradients cease, at least until the city of Lugo, and all that is left ahead of us is a path, generally a wide one, going in and out of woods. After leaving Castroverde behind, the route passes through a small tunnel on the right, and the tarmac ceases when there is slightly more than 124 kilometres left before arriving at the Apostle's tomb. Before Gondar lies Nadela, a hamlet that would go unnoticed if it was not for the interesting cross beside the Way, and which tradition has converted into a stop-off point and photo opportunity for hikers. A little before Vilar de Cas, the road turning off to the church of Soutomerille appears, but the Way as it is currently signposted does not pass this way. However, the detour is worth it, provided you make sure that the church is open beforehand, in the nearby hamlet. This is the only way you will be able to admire its fabulous stone altarpiece.



Gondar

Gondar

Pop. 84 / After a climb, you reach what in Galicia is known as a *"corredoira"*, a traditional path whose width originally matched the cow wagons. The *corredoira* leads to the Church of San Tomé, with a graceful floor plan and a lovely stone cross facing the church. Finally, we can say farewell to the slopes until the route reaches Lugo. Now what we mostly find are small hamlets, with the main road at just a few hundred metres on our left. Thus we leave Gondar and its crystal-clear waters flowing from its fountains, one at the entrance and another at the exit, although the latter is considered the finer example.

Lugo

Pop. 87,918 / From Gondar, the Way travels a further 14 kilometres until it arrives at Lugo. This city is situated on a high plain, on the banks of the Alto Miño river. It is the natural communication channel between the Galician coast and the Castilian plateau. Lugo was founded by the Romans fifteen years before our era, under the name Lucus Augusti, and it has conserved its city walls that UNESCO has included in its list of World Heritage monuments. This fortification covers more than two kilometres around the city, and it is the only Roman wall in the world that has been conserved in its entirety. The walls embrace the whole of the historical quarter, and you can follow along its ramparts some 12 metres from the ground.

From Lugo, the Pilgrims' Way continues until Santiago de Compostela, following the course of the Roman road that joined Lucus Augusti with Iria Flavia crossing inland Galicia. These sections of the route that run through the province of Lugo are blessed with spectacular hundred-year-old chestnut trees all along the route, the last vestiges of the chestnut forests that have existed in Galicia for over 2000 years.

One of the sections of the Way near Lugo

Lugo. Gate of Santiago

Lugo

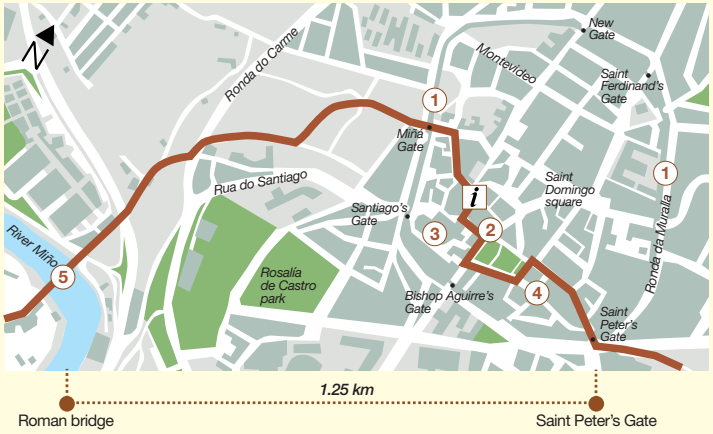
Pop. 87,918 /

If any city has a strong, solid and long-standing relationship with the Way of Saint James, that city is Lugo. King Alfonso II crossed the old Roman camp of Lucus Augusti when he was marching from Oviedo on the way to Compostela. You will even find that the gates where pilgrims arrived and left are clearly identified.

In fact, the capital of the province is defined by its numerous Roman remains, the most important of which are the city walls that stretch over almost three kilometres, and which have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A walk up through land that now forms part of the urban environment leads to the wall, before going through Saint Peter's gate, the very same gate that Alfonso II the Chaste passed through in his day, as a plaque beside the boundary stone recalls.

The route through the old quarter is signposted and leads us along a quaint, busy street (on which we will find the post office) to the Plaza de España, the square that houses the Town Hall. We then go down a few steps dedicated to the memory of Luis Pimentel, the poet, leaving the episcopal palace on the right, and arriving at a square dominated by the cathedral with its Neoclassical façade. The cathedral is actually Romanesque, and work began on its construction in 1129 under maestro Raimundo de Monforte, but both the Baroque and Neoclassicism have left their mark. In addition, both the ambulatory (the passage that runs behind the high altar so that visitors do not pile up and to ensure the tour goes in the same direction) and its chapels are considered Gothic art, with a clear influence from the Cathedral of Burgos. In other words, from the 14th century.

In front of the cathedral we see another gate in the city walls, the Gate of Santiago, and we move towards the River Miño, which is crossed by means of a Roman bridge.



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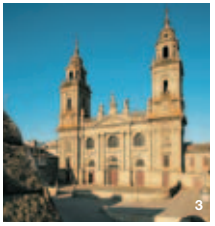
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① Roman walls

They were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000, and measure over two kilometres long. You can walk along the entire walls on the top section, arriving and leaving at the same point, given its circular nature. They were built in the second half of the 2nd century in a city that was then considered to be strategic, so this was intended to be a defence system against the so-called barbarians. There are ten gates in the walls that give access to the historical quarter of Lugo, five of which are contemporary.

② Wall Interpretation Centre

It was opened in 2008 in a four-storey building dating back to the 18th century, and forming part of the historical quarter. Each floor is dedicated to a different period, so it is clearer to see how the city grew from the Walls.

③ Cathedral

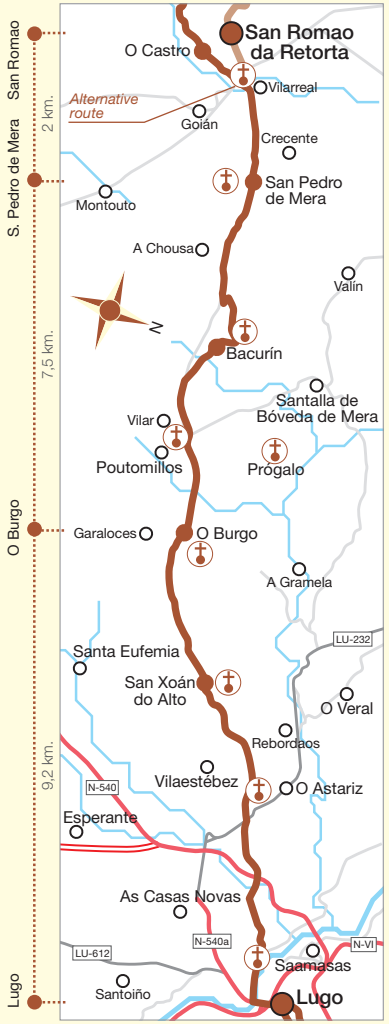
Construction work began in the year 1129, replacing another temple dating back to the times of the famous bishop Odoario (8th century). It is situated within the Roman walls, and is a blend of several architectural styles, with a Romanesque and Gothic interior, and a Neoclassical main façade. The same Romanesque style can be seen at the north door, with an icon of Christ in Majesty. Inside there are three naves on a Latin cross-shaped floor plan. The high altarpiece has four veined pilasters crowned with bronze capitals. Among its chapels, we should particularly mention the Baroque style of Nosa Señora dos Ollos Grandes, the much venerated San Froilán and Santa Lucía.

④ Casa do Concello

This is the Town Hall, a fine example of Galician Baroque, heir to another building dating back to at least the 16th century, although its origins probably go back even further. Records have it that the current building was commissioned to be built in 1736 and the old building to be demolished, which was already in a state of ruin. The split level façade has a colonnade below and was finished in 1744. A curious fact: in 1865 documents have recorded that a clock needed to be installed in that same façade because, as the records state, the cathedral clock "was always fast"; furthermore, it was believed that this object would give the city a certain status. That clock has been in place since 1874.

⑤ Roman bridge

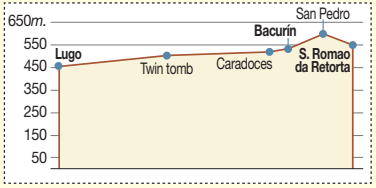
Although the bridge has undergone modifications in the 12th, 14th, 18th and 20th centuries, much of this bridge over the River Miño was built by the Romans. It formed part of what was known as the Vía XIX, the Roman road that connected Lugo with Bracara Augusta (Braga, in Portugal). It measures four metres wide and 104 metres long, and has fine ashlars and shale.



Bacurín

A flat stage, except for a small climb between modern housing developments once we have left the River Miño behind us. It is flat and completely monotonous.

The destination is an ancient crossroads that is reached from San Romao da Retorta, a small population centre. In general, the Primitive Way runs along a very narrow path at the side of the main road, so even if there is not much traffic, you still need to be careful.



Bacurín

Bacurín

Pop. 66 / After Lugo, we reach the small Church of San Matías, with its single nave and built with ashlars in a wonderful spot to take a rest. The next stop is the hamlet of Seoane, followed by a lovely fountain with benches that was restored in early 2005 and called Ribicás. However, perhaps the most noteworthy place in this area is the church dedicated to San Vicenzo, with its tall belfry and skylight. There is another interesting church on the left, just a few hundred metres from the Route: the Church of Poutomillos. They all announce the hamlet of Bacurín, with a pleasing entrance gate.

San Romao da Retorta

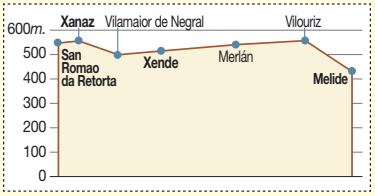
Pop. 102 / There is a small church in San Romao that is undoubtedly Romanesque (13th century), and which underwent major architectural changes in the 18th century, Galicia's golden age in which thousands of churches and chapels were restored. San Romao is also the burial place of a woman who died very young in an accident in 2004. Her tomb is slowly becoming a stopping-off point for those walking the Way.

Not far from here is a life-size reproduction of a Roman milestone that reminds us that one of the roads from the times of the Roman Empire passed through here.

San Romao de Retorta

San Romao de Retorta

This stage starts as the previous one finished, with no gradients, and it will continue like that for many kilometres. However, once past the single-arch Roman bridge, almost 75 kilometres from Santiago, everything changes and walkers will be required to climb the steep O Careón mountain, replete with windmills. When you reach the milestone that tells you there are only 65.224 kilometres left, at this point you will be entering the province of A Coruña. The path goes down to Melide along a dirt track with gorgeous views, and passes in front of an outstanding *hórreo*. It runs past the small Church of Santo Estevo de Vilamor that has been kept in very good condition, and crosses the rivers Furelos and Grande at A Ponte de Pedra and Lamela, respectively. One more interesting note: shortly before arriving at Melide, you will pass by a hamlet that has not much to say for itself... except its name: it is called Compostela.



Xanaz (Guntín)

Pop. 5 / A bit further on from San Romao we come to Xanaz, a hamlet of pretty, well-kept houses, with a fountain from 1928 and an interesting church at the exit: the Church of Santa Cruz da Retorta, which has a marvellously decorated north door. It also has a roof made with local slate, and an excellent cross. Furthermore, it has an architectural element that could go unnoticed, but it is interesting because this is increasingly hard to find: a stone wall raised according to traditional methods, enclosing the asphalt on the left.

Xende

Pop. 13 / After passing Seixalbo, a hamlet at the other side of a small wood, we have to cross the Bieita brook. We have to be careful here as if it has rained a lot, it would be better to make a small detour along the main road, in fact, there are now yellow arrows painted here by anonymous hikers who recommend this alternative route. Something similar happens when we reach milestone 76.660, as farming in the area has modified the way. Further on, simple churches at Aguasantas and Merlán (the latter with a lovely atrium held up by columns and pillars), salute the route.

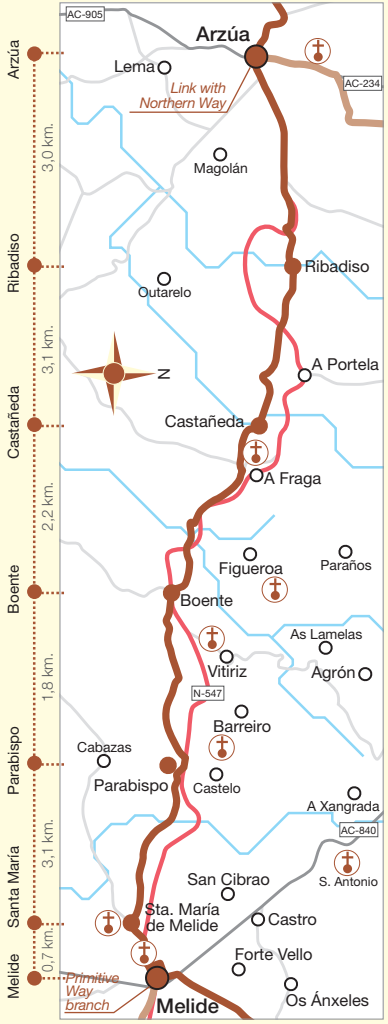
Melide

Pop. 4,729 / Melide is a small town touched by two Ways: the Primitive Way, known here as the *Camiño de Oviedo*, and the French Way, which usually has more hikers. Born in the shelter of an old *castro* (which went on to be a castle), it was first mentioned in documents from the 10th century. In the year 1212, a year after the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was consecrated, Alfonso IX, the king of Galicia and León, granted these lands to the Archbishop of Santiago. There is now nothing left of its castle and walls, as they were both brought down by the peasants who rose in arms in the second half of the 15th century, leading a social movement known as Os Irmandiños. The ashlars from the fortress were, actually, used to raise the Church of Sancti Spiritus, which still conserves the sepulchres of Leonor de Mendoza and Inés de Castro, both wives of the most powerful and feared lord in the region at the time, Lope Sánchez de Ulloa (15th century).

Interesting elements to point out are the Romanesque gate of the Church of San Pedro (moved at the time and literally crammed into the Chapel of San Roque, at the entrance of the French Way), the Gothic cross beside it and which is considered to be one of the oldest in Galicia, the aforementioned Church of Sancti Spritus or Santo Antonio and, on the outskirts, the Church of Santa María de Melide with its impressive wall paintings. Not forgetting, of course, the old hospital, which was recovered and reconverted into an excellent local museum of ethnography and archaeology.

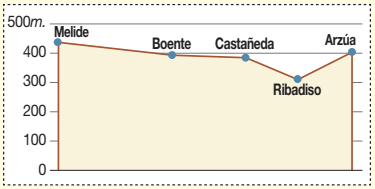
Church of Sancti Spiritus (Melide)

14 | Melide → Arzúa (13.9 km)



Ribadiso

At Melide, the number of pilgrims per kilometre increases considerably at any time of year; it is not surprising to find that the Primitive Way joins the French Way here, the latter being better known and more used, turning this spot into a major connection point with the rest of Europe. There is no great distance between the aforementioned town and Arzúa, which means the walk is more relaxed and you can take in the splendid landscape around you at your leisure. It is still an area of rolling hills, with no real flat sections, but none of the slopes should cause any great problem to any kind of walker. There is very little tarmac, a lot of dirt track, and plenty of shade, which your feet will thank you for, as will the rest of your body. There are two particularly interesting points on this path from a historical point of view: one is the hamlet of Castañeda, and the other is the enclave of Ribadiso.



Church of Santa Marìa

Boente

Pop. 147 / The Way leaves Melide, rising to what used to be a castro (a prehistoric fortified village) that was Christianised with a small temple. It then drops, crosses the main road and passes by the beautiful Church of Santa María. From there on, we enter a forest that we will not leave until we reach a fountain and once again walk on asphalt, which we then have to cross. The Way reaches Boente which, following a deep-rooted Galician custom, is divided into two: Arriba and Abaixo (or Upper and Lower), although both parts are practically joined together. The church here is worth a visit.

Castañeda

Castañeda

Pop. 154 / Nowadays, Castañeda is just another village, but in mediaeval times it was a well known place because this was the site of the lime kilns that worked day and night to build the Cathedral of Santiago. As we pass it, we can see two beautiful country houses on the right, one at the same level as the Way, and another up the hillside. Both are in immaculate condition.

Ribadiso

Ribadiso

Pop. 10 / The Way rises again through a forest, and then comes down amid trees and pastures where the cattle will no doubt be grazing. The River Iso runs below. There is a bridge over the river that was built hundreds of years ago and which leads to a small cluster of buildings that make up one of the last old hostels to close its doors, well into in the 20th century. The spot is truly idyllic.

Arzúa

Arzúa

Pop. 4,729 / From Ribadiso there is a tough climb of three kilometres. The Way keeps away from the main road at all times, and enters the town of Arzúa along a parallel path to the asphalt.

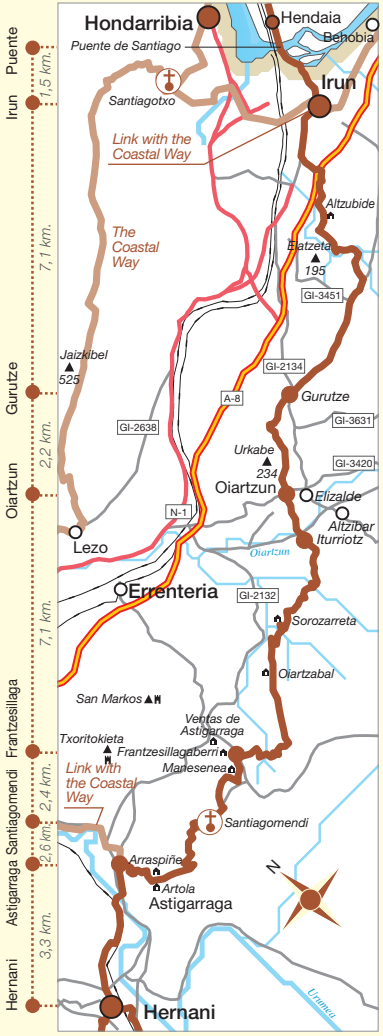
See stage 32 of the Northern Way (page 89)

Inland Way

(Bayonne route, Alavés Way, San Adrian Tunnel route)

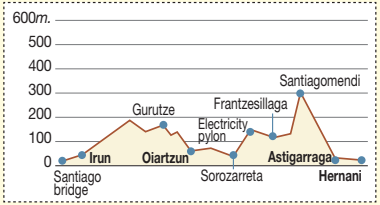
Those who were aiming to cross the feared Pyrenees by the only pass on the coast, would go to the French town of Bayonne, and from there, they would follow the coastline until arriving at the frontier of the River Bidasoa. Then they had to cross the mountains and dales to then go through the epic San Adrian tunnel in the mountains of Aizkorri. Before joining the French Way, those who were on the pilgrimage would stop at the Old Cathedral in Vitoria, whose restoration works inspired Ken Follett in the follow-up to his best seller 'The Pillars of the Earth'. On the plains of Alava, the landscapes change 180º, the green meadows give way to dry fields, and then when we reach La Rioja territory, they change again, making this route a highly varied one. This is also evident in its cuisine: meat is king and the vegetables are first class (the Gipuzkoa towns of Ordizia and Tolosa have important weekly markets), not to mention the wines of Álava and La Rioja.

1 Irun → Hernani (26.2 km)



Astigarraga Town Hall

The mouth of the River Bidasoa in the bay of Txingudi will be the walkers only contact with the Cantabrian Sea. The route starts here that will lead us through the inland villages and towns of Gipuzkoa, cutting through valleys and climbing small mounts, such as the Santiagomendi, which offer us fantastic views over the Basque countryside. The walk will oscillate between the rural innocence of the old farmhouses set amid the pine forests and pastures; the newly-built industrial estates, and the access roads to the main city in the historical territory, San Sebastian. Although the hiker will find numerous appealing distractions, such as the Peñas de Aia (rocky crags that point southwards), several megalithic monuments and, from January onwards, the Astigarraga cider breweries, the promise of even more impressive landscapes will spur them on.



Church of Ntra. Sra del Juncal (Irun)

Irun

Pop. 61,103 / Irun was one of the main focal points of the Romanisation of the Basque Country. Its privileged situation, beside a natural corridor that overcomes the Pyrenees by sea, has been a determining factor in the history of this frontier city. The Chapel of Santa Elena, built in the 10th century but transformed in the 14th, is particularly special as it has been a place of worship for over 2000 years: inside, the foundations of a Roman temple are buried underground, along with several tombs from the same period. The Parish Church of Nuestra Señora del Juncal is another of the essential references for those on the pilgrimage.

Church of San Esteban (Oiartzun)

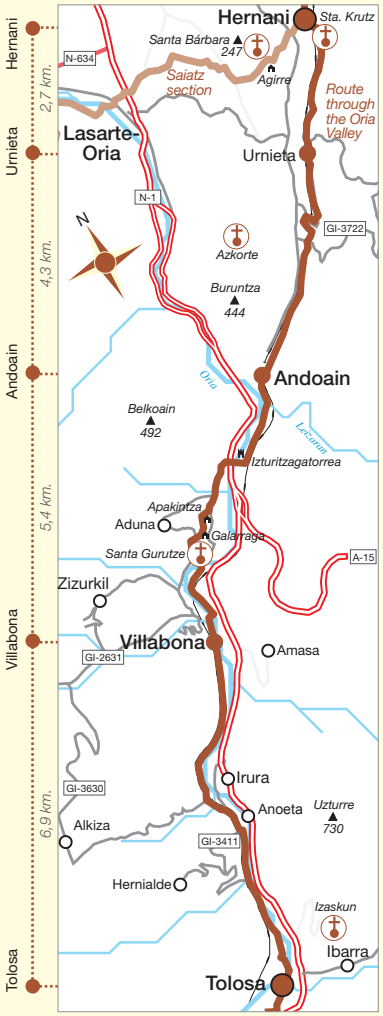
Oiartzun

Pop. 9,840 / The Arditurri mines, situated in the lands of Aiako Harria (Peñas de Aia), were one of the most powerful reasons why the Romans settled in the bay of Txingudi. The iron ore hidden deep within them was patiently extracted until very recently. Oiartzun is the town that lies at the foothills of Aiako Harria (Peñas de Aia), a pretty little rural town in an important residential enclave, which has some noteworthy buildings, such as the Church of San Esteban, a typical example of a monolithic Basque Gothic style that appears to be impregnable. Those on the walk will also come across the 17th century Town Hall building, or tower-house of Iturriotz, in the district of the same name, which is a fine example of a stately building in a rural environment.

Chapel of Santiagomendi (Astigarraga)

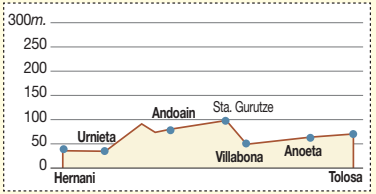
Astigarraga

Pop. 4,640 / The areas around Oiartzun and Astigarraga are populated by over five hundred enigmatic megalithic monuments. The cromlech of Oieleku (in Oiartzun) or the menhir of Txoritokieta (Errenteria) are perhaps the finest examples of these prehistoric structures. Shortly before arriving at the cider-making town of Astigarraga, the route climbs up Mount Santiago, crowned by a modern-looking chapel (although its origins are mediaeval) of the same name. In the town itself, it is easy to see the gems dotted around its pedestrianised old quarter, such as the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, the Palace of Murgia or the Ergobia bridge, which was built over the River Urumea.



The Leitzaran and Oria rivers meet at Andoain

As we leave Hernani, we have to choose between the section described below (which we shall call the Oria route), that starts off gently, or the Saiatz option, which is more beautiful but also more demanding. If you choose the Oria route, you will travel from valley to valley, and from river to river (Bidasoa, Oiartzun and Urumea) until you reach Andoain, where another two main rivers meet: the Leitzaran and the (larger) Oria rivers. Traces of the latter will follow us for a couple of days. From here on, we will be seeing some historical villages and towns associated with the Royal Road, that path that was the main point of connection between the Castilian plain and Europe for centuries. The marks of progress and industrial development will be more than evident along this route.



Town Hall and Church of San Juan Bautista (Hernani)

Hernani

Pop. 19,246 / Following the course of the River Urumea, but going upriver, the profile of the Parish Church of San Juan Bautista will soon be visible, in the heart of Hernani. The historical quarter of this town that was once heavily enclosed by city walls, is set on a hillock. The Baroque front of the aforementioned church stands out for its beauty, as does the Town Hall, an unusual building dating back to the late 19th century, whose façade bears the mark of several different architectural styles, from Romanesque to Renaissance.

Urnieta

Pop. 6,067 / The last stop before leaping into the valley of the River Oria is Urnieta, a town surrounded by green pastures and permanently under the watchful eye of Mount Adarra. The Church of San Miguel is located in what was the original town centre, and the passing of pilgrims had a lot to do with the foundation of this church. It has a portico dating back to mediaeval times. The Chapel of Santa Leocadia must have been constructed around the same time: throughout the centuries, many people walking the Royal Road have slept the night under its portico.

Andoain

Pop. 14,712 / The importance of this town lies in its location beside the River Leitzaran that reaches this spot from Navarre, passing through a dense valley before giving its waters to the Oria. At its high point, enclosing one of the sides of the Goiko square, we find the Baroque-style Church of San Martín de Tours, which, together with the Chapel of Santa Kurutz (with its beautiful Gothic sculpture of Christ), is the town's most treasured heritage.

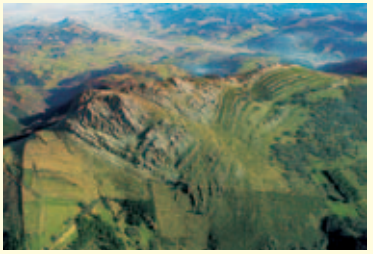
Church of San Martin de Tours (Andoain)

Villabona

Pop. 5,688 / Once the heights of Aduna and the Chapel of Santa Gurutze are behind us, we once again meet up with the River Oria at the Zubimusu bridge.

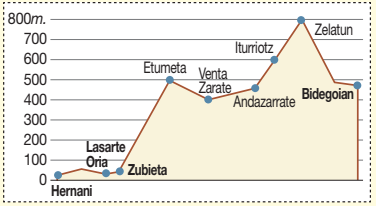
Irura-Anoeta

Pop. 3,319 / The Way stays close by the course of the river, leaving the Church of San Martín de Tours at Amasa far in the distance, and passing by Irura before throwing itself wholeheartedly into Anoeta, another rural town that is arranged like most towns that grew up alongside the old Royal Road. It has a splendid 16th century church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist.



Aerial view of the Hernio mountain

The other alternative, the Saiatz option, which leads us towards the Aizkorri mountain range, the natural frontier between Gipuzkoa and Álava, climbs the mountains that enclose the Oria Valley on the west. What is most spectacular about this route are the views, both of the Cantabrian coast in the distance, and of the main natural landmarks in the historical territory, such as Mount Hernio or Saiatz. After the digression of the first towns, such as Hernani or Lasarte-Oria, for several kilometres the route will abandon the built-up areas to plunge into pine and oak forests, paths that are always in the half-light, and green hills with just the odd lonely farmhouse. There will be several kilometres along which the typical Basque landscapes will take the place of the monumental heritage, which is fairly modest in these inland domains.



Hernani

See second stage

Lasarte-Oria

Pop. 17,841 / Lasarte-Oria, a town with a weighty history but which did not gain autonomy until the late 20th century, hides a Baroque surprise under its industrial exterior. We are referring to the Convent of Las Brígidas, a pale-coloured religious complex that was founded in the late 17th century. In the town centre, we can also see the 16th century Church of San Pedro, which is modest but has a charming colonnade.

Convent of Las Brígidas (Lasarte)

Zubieta

Pop. 400 / The Aizpurua farmhouse was the meeting place for the leaders who would go on to agree on the reconstruction of San Sebastian after the fire that destroyed the city in 1813, during the War of Independence. The Church of Santiago is proof of this residential enclave's pilgrim connection, here in the foothills of Mount Andatza.

Zizurkil

Pop. 2,763 / After travelling through the pine forests of the Andatza, we reach the Venta Zarate inn, a traditional meeting place on the transhumance routes that used to run along this historical territory.

Aia

Pop. 1,938 / At the spot where Aia meets Asteasu, we will find the Iturriotz inn, a beautiful 16th century farmhouse with a gabled roof and wooden framework.

Errezil

Pop. 623 / Always under the watchful eye of Mount Ernio, on whose rocky peak we will find a cross-filled cemetery, the path leads up to the Chapel of San Juan de Iturrioz, in the lands of Errezil. This simple chapel, with its rectangular floor plan, is praised for its fresh spring waters (some even believe they are miraculous) and it is here where the community meetings known as the *Juntas de Saiatz* took place, in which the decisions were made that affected the nine villages in the Union. The bare fields of Zelatun will be the next and most demanding goal, before starting our descent.

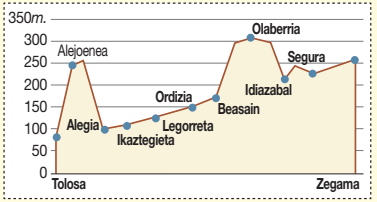
Errezil

Bidegoian

Pop. 499 / Born out of the union of two municipalities, Bidania and Goiatz, those on the Way will find a lovely little farmhouse here dating back to the 16th century. This is known as the Goienetxe house and it bears the coat of arms on its façade. Other interesting buildings for the hiker to take in are the impressive Tower of Goiatz and the Parish Church of La Asunción or the Church of San Bartolomé, where the steps up to the choir take most people's breath away.

Segura, with Mount Txindoki in the background

It is hard to find so many historical villages and towns in such a short distance anywhere on the Way to Santiago. Tolosa, Ordizia and Segura make up an irresistible trinity in a day's walk that will be marked by the ups and downs of the most active valley in Gipuzkoa. The path runs parallel to the River Oria and the N-1 road, with a couple of tough climbs that will always be compensated with fantastic views of the valley. Food will always be present in the many lively traditional markets and in the typical high quality products from the region, such as Idiazabal cheese. There are also some surprises here that appear to have been stuck in time, such as the Igartza complex in Beasain. Wherever the walker chooses to spend the night, he or she will undoubtedly experience a wealth of sensations.



El Tinglado on the banks of the River Oria (Tolosa)

Tolosa

Pop. 17,822 / Centuries ago, Tolosa was the perfect fortress: a walled-in island situated in the centre of the River Oria. If you arrive at this town on a Saturday, you will see its traditional market. Its old quarter has kept its ancient appearance, along with a wide variety of charming little palaces and, of course, the Parish Church of Santa María, whose walls protected the town.

Alegia

Pop. 1,717 / Alegia was also sculpted to the whims of the River Oria, giving it a half-moon shape. It has kept the Gothic portico of its Church of San Juan Bautista. Inside, the walker will find a sleek Gothic statue of Christ, one of the best of its kind in Gipuzkoa.

Legorreta

Pop. 1,469 / Bridges were one of the main pillars on which the old Royal Road was built. An example of this is found in Legorreta, where the bridges are the backbone of the town and the surrounding area, giving access to the main religious landmarks, such as the Parish Church of San Salvador or the Boundary Cross of Santa Cruz.

Ordizia

Pop. 9,523 / This town goes back more than 700 years, and to this day has kept the style that mediaeval town planners designed for it, along with its narrow streets. It is also worth mentioning the classical architecture of the main square, the Plaza Mayor, where the Town Hall is situated, and where the traditional market is held every Wednesday.

Beasain

Pop. 13,428 / Despite the growth it has undergone in the last fifty years, Beasain still maintains the marvellous architectural complex of Igartza, a small monumental district that has been conserved just the way it was conceived in the 16th century.

Monumental complex of Igartza (Beasain)

Olaberria

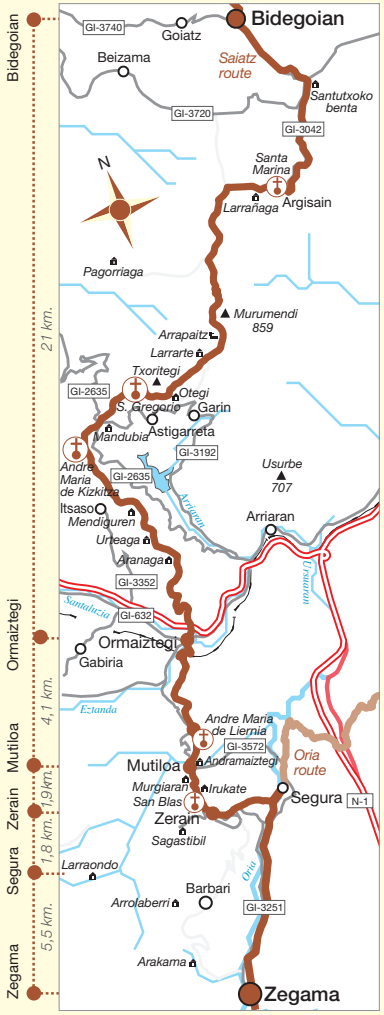
Pop. 954 / Those walking the Way will almost definitively leave the course of the River Oria to approach Olaberria, which offers unbeatable views of the two giants that mark this region: Mount Txindoki (1,348 metres) and Aizkorri (1,528 metres).

Idiazabal

Pop. 2,239 / Situated at the foothills of the Etxegarate pass, this town is famous for its cheese, which bears a Designation of Origin of the same name, as well as a magnificent Romanesque portico at the Church of San Miguel.

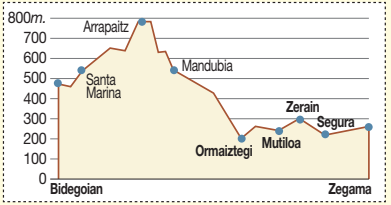
Segura

Pop. 1,379 / The historical town of Goierri is a real gem in itself, with its almond-shaped centre and its huge Gothic Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción.



Calcination kilns in Zerain

You will need plenty of energy on this stretch to climb Murumendi, one of the most important geographical features in the Gipuzkoa section. The paths will continue to show the most rural side of this historical territory, keeping away from the villages in the Oria Valley and approaching country districts that are unmistakably Basque. The importance of chapels in giving shape to such rugged and dispersed regions will also be evident. There are many references to magical Gipuzkoa, in Ezkio-Itsaso, the land of controversial Marian apparitions; to mining, in Zerain and Mutiloa; or to idyllic Gipuzkoa, that can be felt in the air in this almost purely natural environment. Soon the green meadows will give way to the yellow cereal fields on the other side of the Aizkorri mountains. Zegama rests at the feet of this rocky giant.



Santa Marina

This idyllic concentration of farmhouses is a district that comes under Albiztur, situated next to an old transhumance route that left from the Aralar pastures. Its association with the Way is evident in the Santa Marina Haundi farmhouse, which since its creation in 1558, was a hospital dependent on the Church of Santa Marina. Traces of its Romanesque front can still be seen today.

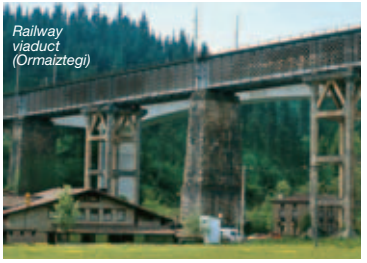
The route enters the municipal area of Beasain through the old village of Astigarreta, passing next to the Chapel of San Gregorio and the Church of San Martín.

Ezkio-Itsaso

Pop. 573 / Coming down Murumendi, you will soon see the Andra Mari de Kixkitza chapel, a simple place of great worship. The Church of Santa Lucía, situated in the fields of Anduaga, recalls the Marian apparitions of the early 20th century. The Igartubeiti farmhouse in the Ezkio district is a lovely 16th century construction that has been restored and converted into a museum, which reveals the secrets of the Basque farming exploits.

Ormaiztegi

Pop. 1,314 / The birthplace of the Carlist General Tomás de Zumalakarregi still remembers him, over a century and a half after his death. The Iriarte Erdikoa farmhouse in which he lived has been converted into a complete museum that tells of his life and achievements. Very close by we will find the Parish Church of San Andrés, with its interesting mediaeval front and baptismal font dating back to pre-Roman times. As you leave the town, you will discover the spectacular iron viaduct that was built midway through the 19th century by Alexander Lavaley.



Railway viaduct (Ormaiztegi)

Mutiloa

Pop. 224 / The Andra Mari de Liernia Chapel, associated with fertility rituals, is another of the magical references that this part of Gipuzkoa makes to pilgrims. In the past, Mutiloa excelled in mining activities and the railway that connected the mines with Ormaiztegi. The village's horizontal profile is only broken by the tower of the Church of San Miguel, with its interesting altarpiece, the work of Felipe de Azurmendi.

Zerain, with the Jauregi farmhouse in the foreground

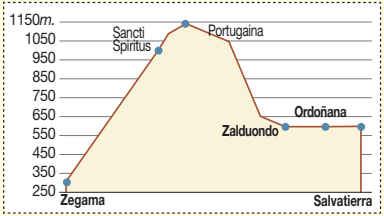
Zerain

Pop. 247 / Also associated with iron ore in the past, Zerain has been revived thanks to an initiative put forward by the young people living there. The Church of Santa María, with its enigmatic baptismal font, and the Jauregi farmhouse are just two of its most outstanding monuments.

4 | Zegama → Salvatierra-Agurain (22 km)

San Adrian Tunnel or Lizarrate

Gipuzkoa bids us farewell; Álava welcomes us, and both territories bring out their finest. There are few frontiers as stunning as the San Adrian Tunnel, a cave that has been dug into the rock by water and the passing of time. For almost ten centuries, it was a popular place for travellers and merchants who were coming and going from Castile. Now it is hikers who climb the Aizkorri peak or passers-by on their way to the Alava plains. Once you have made your way through the shapely mediaeval roads, you arrive at a completely different environment. The Alava plains have little relation to the voluptuous valleys of Gipuzkoa. Here the terrain is tame, there are dry crops in abundance, and the villages slip dozily into the landscape, dotted with Baroque and Renaissance mansions.



Altarpiece at the Church of San Martin de Zegama

Zegama

Pop. 1,410 / The last stop before taking on the Aizkorri mountain range is this town that is closely linked to its neighbouring Segura and to the economic benefits of the Royal Road. The Church of San Martín de Tours is like a lighthouse for pilgrims arriving from Arrolaberri, and inside it houses General Zumalakarregi's mausoleum. An array of modest chapels, such as San Bartolomé and Sancti-Spiritus, accompany the climb that gradually seeks out the highest point of this section.

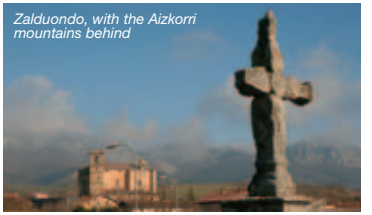
Parzonería de Altzania

The hillsides that rise up to the Aizkorri ridge are communal lands shared by several municipalities in Gipuzkoa and Alava. In these frontier enclaves, the San Adrian Tunnel (or Lizarrate) arises as one of the most spectacular natural monuments in the entire Pilgrims' Way. Used since the 10th century, and inhabited by a hermitage of modern construction, the cave was for centuries the main passing point for those travelling to France from the plateau, and vice versa.

The mediaeval road at San Adrian

Zalduondo

Pop. 196 / Once through San Adrian, a mediaeval stone path passes amid a lovely beech grove, managing to climb just a few metres more before starting the definitive descent towards Zalduondo. This town is similar in importance to Zegama, above all for those pilgrims and merchants who were going to cross the mountain range. It stands out for its Palace of Lazarraga, a shining example of Renaissance art that today houses an ethnographic museum, and for being a regular stop-off point for those on the Way. The Baroque altarpiece at the Church of San Saturnino de Tolosa also pays homage to the pilgrims' apostle.

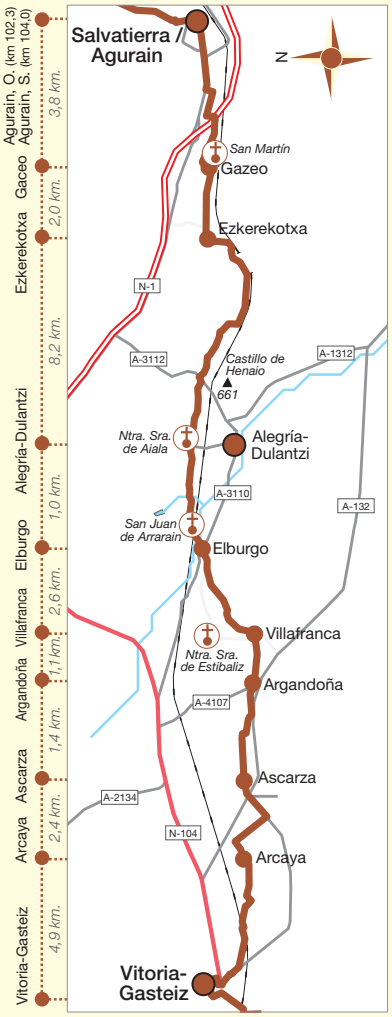

Zalduondo, with the Aizkorri mountains behind

Ordoñana

Pop. 45 / The lovely walk amid the gentle outlines of the plains leads us to Ordoñana, where you can continue to trace the marks left here by Romanesque art, as is the case with the front of the Parish Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción. An interesting fact: the Chapel of San Millán bears a distinctly Baroque Castile & León coat of arms on its façade.

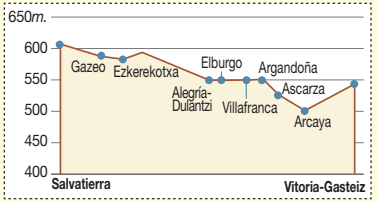
Alava plains landscape

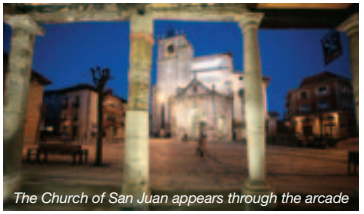
5 Salvatierra-Agurain → Vitoria-Gasteiz (27.4 km)



Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Estibaliz

Walkers can breathe easy here: the Alava dales continue for around fifty kilometres on a completely tame terrain. No slopes, no mountain passes, the journey to Vitoria-Gasteiz is a pleasant walk with very few urban concessions, just a drop of solitude and some enchanting places of worship. This corner of the Basque Country bears more resemblance to the open fields of Castile. We are also passing through one of the most versatile areas, artistically speaking: the plains have a place for prehistoric representation, such as the dolmens, Sorginetxe has one of the most fascinating examples in the Basque Country; there are Roman traces, such as in Arcaya; mediaeval, as in the Sanctuary of Ntra. Sra. de Estibaliz; or Renaissance, for example the small palaces in Salvatierra.





The Church of San Juan appears through the arcade

Salvatierra-Agurain

Pop. 4,809 / Visibly the most important town in the region, Salvatierra was, and still is, an important mediaeval borough, whose identifying features have survived over time. There are two churches, San Juan and Santa María, that were both also fortresses; an arcaded square; a wall that still shows some traces of its existence; and a main street that the hikers will walk along, just as the pilgrims did seven centuries before.

Gazeo

Pop. 32 / Modest enclave in the Alava plains that has somehow managed to save some beautiful Gothic pictures in its Church of San Martín de Tours, which date back to the 14th century and which remained hidden for centuries.

View of the paintings in the apse.

Ezkerekotxa

Pop. 49 / The paths on the Way are practically the same as those of the Roman Astorga-Bordeaux road. Ezkerekotxa has the Church of San Román, a collage of several mediaeval trends offering Romanesque (on the front), Gothic (most of the building), and a Renaissance stone altarpiece.

Alegría-Dulantzi

Pop. 2,710 / Although the Way goes round the town of Alegría-Dulantzi, the tower of the Neoclassical Church of San Blas can still be seen in the distance. It passes alongside the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Aiala, from the 13th century, with its magnificent statue of Our Lady dating back to the 14th century and a lovely four-arched portico on the outside.

Detail of the corbels at Ntra. Sra. de Aiala.

Elburgo

Pop. 539 / The roots of the Chapel of San Juan de Arrarain go back to the 12th century, which makes it one of the oldest in the historical territory.

Argandoña

Pop. 50 / Another of the villages associated with the historical "Roman Way" is Argandoña, which displays its mediaeval Church of Santa Columba, with its lovely capitals. Close to the village, up on a hillock, we will find the Sanctuary of Virgen de Estibaliz, the patron of Álava. Its Romanesque door, as well as the sculpture of Andra Mari (12th century) and the baptismal font are particularly worth the visitor's attention.

Arcaya

Pop. 81 / The Latin mark can be seen in the old thermal baths set beside the Pilgrims' Way. On the horizon, we can now see Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Vitoria-Gasteiz

Pop. 234,740 /

Vitoria-Gasteiz has been watching people travelling past for centuries. Its privileged location has encouraged this situation, as it is in the heart of the Alava plains and next to a commercial corridor popularised by the Romans: the Bordeaux-Astorga road. Those on the Way will find a modern, cosmopolitan and innovative city, famous for its quality of urban life. This is evident in its extensive pedestrianised areas, a whole world of green spaces both inside and outside the town (there is good reason why the European Commission has awarded Vitoria-Gasteiz the title of European Green Capital 2012), new means of public transport, such as the revived tram and a whole network of museums.

Beyond this new city, the capital of Alava is steeped in history. It has the most valued mediaeval quarter of all Basque towns, an almond-shaped layout and wayward streets that stand to attention as they pass by the Cathedral of Santa María. Restoration work on the cathedral has been going on for over a decade, but this has not had a negative effect at all, quite the contrary. One successful initiative going by the name of 'Open for Works' has enabled thousands of people (Ken Follett among them) to see the ins and outs of this charismatic temple, and the image of the city has been portrayed way beyond its own city limits. It is in places such as this, the Church of San Miguel, or the La Burullería square, where you can really feel that there are still some parts of the Basque Country in which time, fortunately, has not changed anything.

① Cathedral of Santa María

This glorious Gothic cathedral was raised on the foundations of a primitive Romanesque church. The portico, whose figures have conserved the original 15th century polychromy, is one of its most prized features. The restoration works are open to the public, and this provided a source of information for the writer, Ken Follett, when he was writing 'World Without End', the sequel to his best-seller 'The Pillars of the Earth'.

② Virgen Blanca Square

It is in this spacious square, dominated by a group of sculptures recalling the War of Independence, that the two faces of Vitoria meet: the Gothic mediaeval quarter, and the urban expansion zone of the 19th century. To the north, the streets are mostly narrow and winding, bearing the names of the trades that were practiced there: *Cuchillería* [knifemakers], *Herrería* [blacksmiths]... To the south, an orderly grid of pedestrianised streets and a lively commercial area.

③ Fray Francisco de Vitoria Walk

Next to the La Florida park, we find the Walk of the same name, and this will turn into the La Senda Walk, until it passes the railway line, and then it becomes the Fray Francisco de Vitoria Walk. This is one of the most personal and attractive walkways in Vitoria, lined with trees and stately houses, such as the Palace of Ajuria-Enea, the Lehendakari's residence.

④ Church of San Miguel

It presides over the Virgen Blanca square and houses the venerated sculpture of the patron of Álava, as well as a stunning Baroque altarpiece by Gregorio Fernández.

⑤ España Square

The ideas of the Age of Enlightenment left a deep mark on the city, and we can see evidence of this in the Neoclassical space provided by the España Square, the square that houses the Town Hall; or Los Arquillos, a curious architectural solution to hide the imbalance between the mediaeval hillock and the new city.

⑥ Casa del Cordón

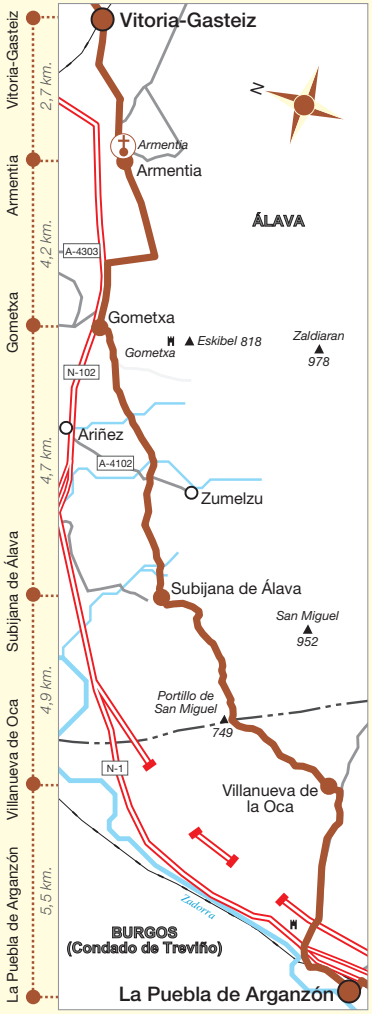
This "rope-house" is the most emblematic of all the Vitorian palaces. The Gothic style building proudly displays a Franciscan rope on one of the doors, hence the name. Do not miss the star-shaped vault in its noble hall.

⑦ El Prado park

The Alava capital is one of the cities with most square metres of green space per resident in the whole of Europe. Its Green Belt has almost 50 kilometres of paths for pedestrians and cyclists, and in addition, it has wooded areas like El Prado, a park that has been tended to lovingly since 1832.

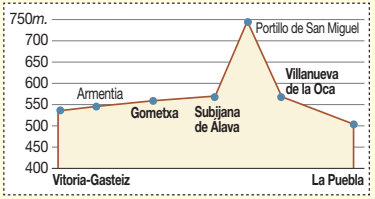
⑧ The Wall

Next to the Cathedral there is a stretch of the old wall that surrounded and protected the small hamlet on which what is now Vitoria-Gasteiz would go on to be built.



The Way between Gometxa and Subijana

The gentle, peaceful landscapes of the Alava plains come to an end. After more than fifty kilometres amid gentle landscapes, the mountains of Portillo de San Miguel indicate the change in pace. Once we say farewell to Vitoria-Gasteiz and leave behind its urban and industrial frame, the path plunges once more into cereal fields alongside the N-I, passing humble, friendly villages as it has on previous days. The Romanesque art in this corner of the Basque Country still has a few surprises in store in Armentia and Villanueva de la Oca. We are close to leaving the Basque lands, but before we will go through Treviño county, an enclave of Burgos in the heart of Álava.



Basilica of San Prudencio, in Armentia

Armentia

Pop. 852 / Integrated in the lands of the Alava capital, and bordered by a lovely residential area, Armentia has one of the most important Romanesque monuments in the Basque Country. The Basilica of San Prudencio (also the patron of this Historical Territory) was built in the 12th century, although it underwent serious refurbishment in the 18th century. The most prized mediaeval treasure is found in the atrium, where all kinds of tympanums, chrisms and effigies were carried.

Gometxa

A modest style town next to the N-I, it has a noteworthy Church of the Transfiguration, a Neoclassical and monolithic construction in which it is still possible to trace elements dating back to the Middle Ages, such as its baptismal font.

Gometxa

Ariñez

Pop. 116 / Without leaving what was once the Roman road of Ab Asturica Burdigalam, running between Astorga and Bordeaux, then the Royal Road, and currently the modern N-I motorway, we come to Ariñez, presided over by the Church of San Julián & Santa Basilisa.

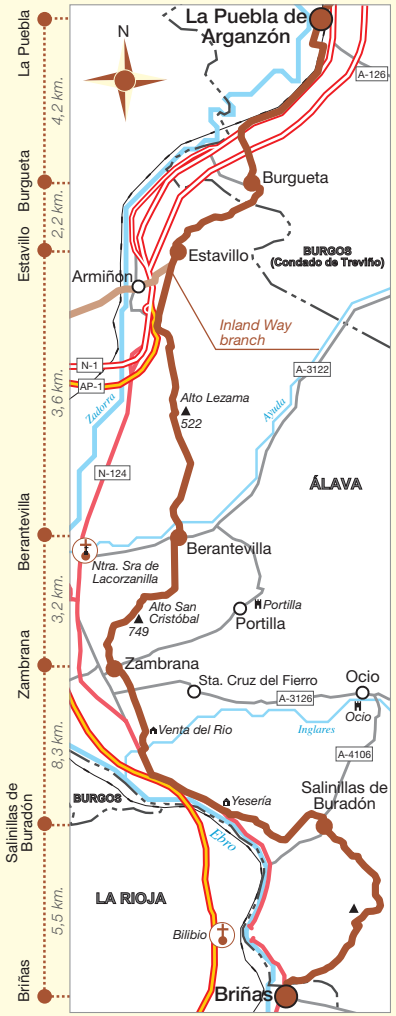
Ariñez

Subijana de Álava

Pop. 44 / Built in the foothills of Mount San Miguel, Subijana de Álava was the birthplace of Simón de Anda y Salazar, former Governor of the Philippines. The palatial house where he was born is still standing. It was built in the Baroque style in the 18th century with an eye-catching elephant carved into the main plaque. Another of its outstanding elements is the Church of San Esteban from the 15th century, which is easily recognised by its characteristic belfry.

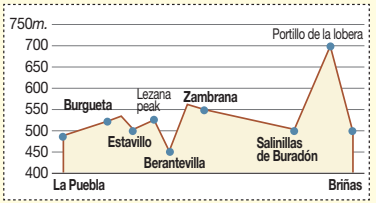
Villanueva de la Oca

Pop. 8 / Once past the Portillo de San Miguel, we enter Burgos territory through the County of Treviño, a Castilian island that geographically forms part of Alava. Villanueva de la Oca is set in a sheltered dale and it is the first village we see after our descent. The fresh spring at the entrance, decorated with the quintessential pilgrims' emblem, the scallop shell, tells us that the village is open to hikers, which is reiterated in the Romanesque portico on the Church of San Pedro.



Berantevilla and Portilla countryside

The continual ups and downs of the early days on the Way are once again the main feature of this long stretch of almost thirty kilometres. We once again travel through the valley on the route south, in search of the French Way, which can also be reached by Armiñón through Miranda de Ebro. Once we arrive in Briñas, we will be taken aback by the image of four rivers that have a bearing on the day's hike: the Zadorra, Ayuda, Inglares and lastly, the mythical Ebro. There will be villages and towns with walls around them, set at the bottom of valleys, modest hill passes, and a rather tough peak when we leave Salinillas de Buradón, the Portillo de la Lobera mountain. At the end, the landscape suffers another radical transformation: here we see La Rioja Alavesa, a land of tidy vineyards that calm the landscape.



La Puebla de Arganzón

Pop. 529 / On its way south to pass onto the Ebro, the River Zadorra passes by a village with a wall around it, La Puebla de Arganzón, which was built on what was once a busy crossroads. Its Gothic Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción is a fine example of the importance of this village in the Late Middle Ages.

Burgueta

Pop. 48 / The final digression of the County of Treviño comes with this village, where the houses are arranged around the main road. The Church of San Martín, although it was built according to rural Baroque principles, has a mediaeval front with beautiful Romanesque capitals.

Estavillo

Pop. 72 / Raised up on a hillock, Estavillo is slightly away from the Pilgrims' Way, which does not prevent us from seeing the outline of its church, also dedicated to Saint Martin. This church is from the 15th century and has a spectacular altarpiece created according to Renaissance styles.

Front with the basket-handle arch at the Church of San Martín

Berantevilla

Pop. 471 / There are a number of palatial houses with splendid coats of arms in this village, similar to the one in Zamudio. The Church of Asunción de Nuestra Señora is an interesting element, particularly due to the size of its belfry.

Berantevilla

Zambrana

Pop. 374 / Another geographical feature, San Cristóbal, serves as a prologue to the village of Zambrana, a major commercial hub between Castile, La Rioja and the Basque Country. Its urban layout leads directly to the Church of Santa Lucia, with clear Romanesque influence

Salinillas de Buradón

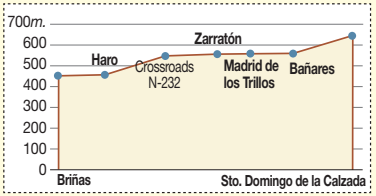
Salinillas de Buradón

Pop. 107 / A chance to catch your breath before tackling the ascent of the Portillo de la Lobera mountain. This village, set in the foothills of the Toloño mountain range, is protected by a beautiful mediaeval wall. Particularly interesting sights in this village are the noble ruins of the mansion belonging to the Count and Countess of Oñate, the Tower of Los Sarmientos and the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, famous for the Baroque sculptures of the Guevaras' tomb.

8 | Briñas→ Sto. Domingo de la Calzada (23.6 km)

Briñas, with the Toloño mountains behind

A day of changes and transformations for the Way, which leaves the Basque Country and enters La Rioja. Passing by Conchas de Haro does not merely mark a change in territory, but also a change in landscape and even climate. The endless vineyards, the crops in the fields, and the delicate profiles that accompany the River Ebro, these are all ahead of us. We will leave behind a mountain range, Toloño, which serves the Cantabrian range, and we will set off for the south, towards Demanda and a far-off horizon. A journey of transition awaits, without severe sections, and where the main enemy will be the sun, as after passing through the wine-growing town of Haro, the lack of shade can make it tough on the hiker. The dust from the track, sometimes ochre, sometimes pale, will stick to your boots until you link up with the French Way.



Briñas

Pop. 260 / Bordering the playful meanders of the River Ebro, and next to the spectacular Conchas de Haro pass, Briñas is a pretty little town set in the shadow of the imposing Baroque Church of La Asunción. A few kilometres after leaving Briñas and following the Ebro, we will see a mediaeval bridge that was the main link between the village and Haro for five centuries. It has Gothic arches and once over it, you can start to sense the importance of the fruit of the vine.

Plateresque front of the Church of Sto. Tomás in Haro

Haro

Pop. 12,291 / Considered to be the wine capital of Spain, Haro has barely 12,000 inhabitants but despite its modest size, it bears the title of "city". The wine fever that broke out towards the end of the 19th century played a part in this, and made it possible to set up the district of La Estación, today inhabited by world class wine cellars. The La Paz square is the heart of Haro and the place where old and modern meet. Of the old part, we should mention the Church of Santo Tomás, with its narrow Renaissance tower and a portico in which Saint James the Apostle appears amid the pious figures; of the modern, the area called Herradura, an ensemble of streets and squares with many tapas opportunities.

Zarratón

Zarratón

Pop. 328 / Soon we will see the Parish Church of La Asunción which, like so many others in the area, was built in the 16th century with Plateresque influences and a fine Flamboyant Gothic portico. Zarratón was renowned for its dances, which were among the oldest in La Rioja, and its chapels and hermitages. The Way of Saint James will pass before one such chapel, the Chapel of San Andrés, heading for the next stop.

Parish Church of Santa Cruz and Chapel of Santa Cruz (Bañares)

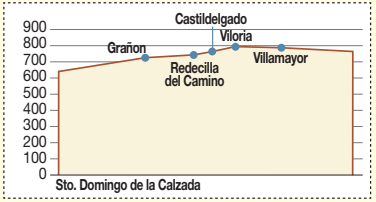
Bañares

Pop. 324 / Another village breaks up the mild profile of this plain in La Rioja Alta and it does so to show us a Romanesque masterpiece that appears to be a prelude to what we will find on the French Way. The Chapel of Santa María conserves its beautiful front and chrism from the 12th century bearing the figures of the bull (Saint Luke) and the lion (Saint Mark).

9 | Sto. Domingo de la Calzada → Belorado (22.7 km)

Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Those who have been on the Way and arrived from northern lands must get used to a new status from this point on. The shadows of Basque forests, the days of sulky skies and the solitude of the Basque and La Rioja branches are all behind us now. The changes are substantial on the French Way: both the number of people and the services are multiplied. From now on, the compass marks only one direction: west, always west, and it will do so in the first few kilometres amid fields of potatoes and sunflowers, at times accompanied by the motorway joining Logroño and Burgos. The paths are wide and the trees are scarce: it is better to start off early in the morning to avoid the hours when the sun is strongest.



Cathedral interior, started in 1158.

Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Pop. 6,780 / The most popular of all the pilgrim walks is now a reality. The link is made in this town that, by its own merits, has become one of the most famous towns on the whole Way to Compostela. It is famous for the popular saying: "Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where the hen crowed after being roasted", coined after a famous local legend with miraculous undertones. In memory of the event (rather long to be given in detail here), its Cathedral is the only church in the Christian world that has a chicken coop with a bird inside. The magic of Santo Domingo de la Calzada (or Saint Dominic) is also felt in the old quarter, which has been declared a historical-artistic heritage site; in its walls, the greatest defensive structure in La Rioja; in its pedestrianised main street; and in the beautiful porticos of the 18th century Town Hall.

Grañón

Pop. 323 / Those who left Logroño and have been true to the French Way for several days now, will have become accustomed to this monotonous landscape that announces the proximity of Castile. No major gradients, but no major stimulus either. The road to Montes de Oca, in Burgos, sometimes feels remiss as regards ambience. For now, the path leads to Grañón, the last village on the La Rioja frontier, as typical as many others we have found (and will find) along the way, towns and villages that were born and grew along with the Way. Its Parish Church of San Juan Bautista was built between the 15th and 16th centuries, and is set on a prior tradition, a mediaeval monastery inexorably associated with the Way of Saint James. The church currently conserves the beautiful baptismal font from that period, dating back to the 12th century. The streets in this village, particularly the Mayor and Santiago streets (yet another reference to the apostle), owe their layout to the religious monument. Before leaving the village, we recommend you stock up on their typical sweetmeats, called *tortas*. Once you leave Grañón and climb a small hill, you will see Castile, the community that will accompany you until you reach Galician soil.

The Grañón landscape announces Castile

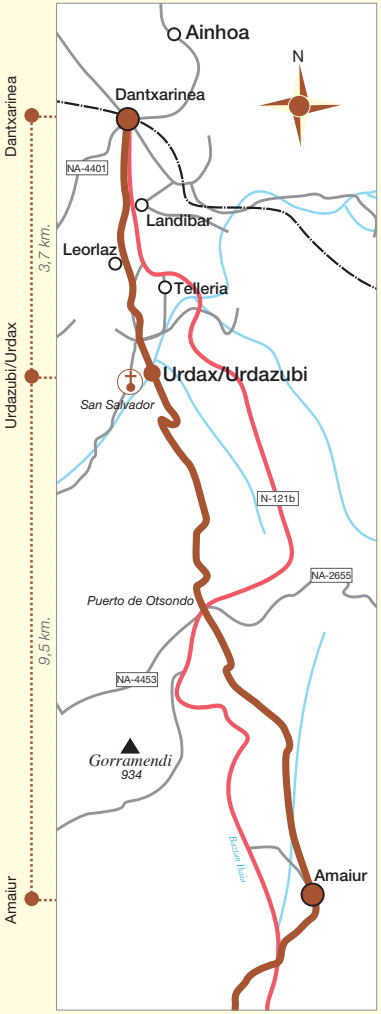
Baztanés Way (Navarre)

Although the Baztanés Way begins in the French town of Bayonne, it enters Navarre through the district of Dantxarinea (Urdazubi-Urdax). This pilgrim's route originally followed the traditional commercial routes that had travelled between Bayonne and Pamplona since Roman times, at least, and takes its name from the first valley it passes through in Navarre: Baztán.

It runs in a north-south direction, and most of the road passes through lush green landscapes, with deciduous forests reminiscent of Galicia, and valleys where time seems to have stopped still, dotted with hamlets and houses proudly bearing their coats of arms. The traditional cattle farming of cows and sheep, along with the family-run vegetable fields, are the basis for the rich cuisine on offer at its restaurants and inns, where desserts such as exotic chocolate are taken to new heights.

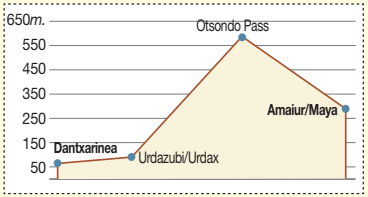
This itinerary runs gently downhill through Navarre, always heading south like migrating birds, until it meets its elder brother, the French Way, at the bridge and hospital of Trinidad de Arre, just a few kilometres from Pamplona. The pilgrimage continues along this main road up to the Cathedral of Saint James the Apostle.

1 | Dantxarinea (Urdazubi/Urdax) → Amaiur/Maya (13.2 km)



Route signs

The first stage of the Baztanés Way of Saint James in Navarre, after passing through the French town of Ainhoa, goes deep into the Pyrenean valleys that come out onto the Cantabrian Sea, following the course of the Ugarana River. This ancient, eroded land has an abundance of oak and chestnut trees, bracken, green pastures and farmhouses dotted around, some even forming small districts coming under a main town. These picture-postcard small villages boast whitewashed houses (except on the corners and door and window frames, which leave the stonework proudly exposed), with their gabled roofs and overhanging eaves to protect them from the rain. They are the prelude to what are known as the "Peaceful Valleys" of Baztán. The Way from Dantxarinea goes up until it reaches the Otsondo pass, which at just over 580 metres high, is the highest part of the stage, before it quickly descends until arriving at Amaiur-Maya. The Cesáreo Soule-made stone signs that guide the Way all through the Baztán Valley are particularly worthy of mention.



Shops in Dantxarinea (Urdazubi-Urdax)

Dantxarinea

The first populated area we come across is a district of Urdax on the border between France and Spain. The N-121 road runs through it, which was built on the former trade and pilgrim's route. Today, the area is awash with shops, some of which also operate as restaurants.

Urdazubi-Urdax

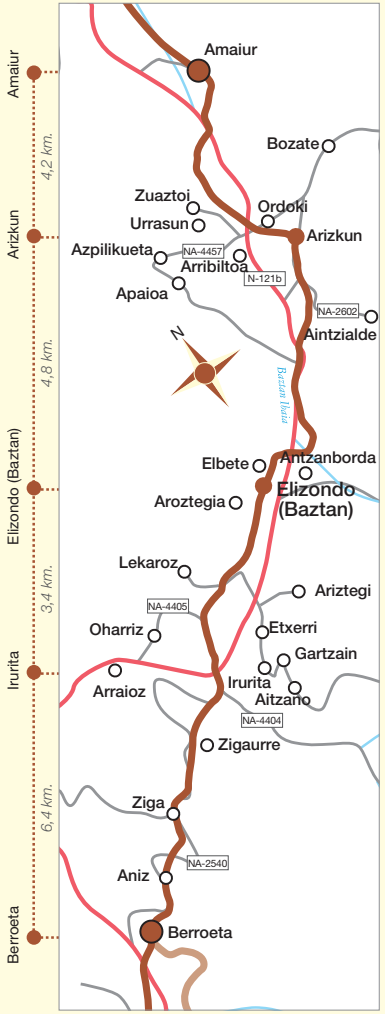
Urdazubi-Urdax

Pop. 420 / The last stop before taking on the heights of Otsondo is this small town that has built up in the shadow of the San Salvador hospital and monastic centre, which is mentioned in records dating back to the 12th century. Its damp, rainy climate means the natural vegetation surrounding it is made up of oak woods, ash trees and chestnut groves, although the clearly defining features of this landscape are the green meadows and ferns. It grew as a town, thanks to the monastery's mills and ironworks, as the religious centre was a major source of culture and of Navarre's resistance to the kingdom being incorporated into Castile in the 16th century. The monastery was razed to the ground in 1793 during the War of the Pyrenees, and although it was later restored, the ecclesiastical confiscations of the 19th century were to bring about its ruin. The old monastery is now the parish church and houses a hostel for those walking the Way of Saint James, along with a museum and antique shops.

Amaiur-Maya

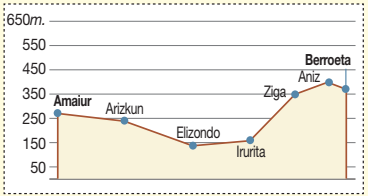
Pop. 211 / Once over the Otsondo pass, we come to this village at the end of the stage, complete with hostel. This is the first village in the Baztán Valley, and its urban structure is typical of the villages along the route, as the Way of Saint James has passed through this village since days of yore, as did the so-called *estrata* or road from the Baztán Valley to Bayonne. Here we can see buildings with their coats of arms, a fine example of which is the 17th century Palace of Borda, a church of mediaeval origin that is dedicated to the Assumption and which was refurbished in the 17th-18th centuries, and a marvellous 17th century stone cross. The ruins of the castle that defended the kingdom of Navarre's independence against its incorporation into Castile are kept in this village. There used to be a customs house here that collected the tolls for produce entering or leaving the kingdom.

Stone cross in Amaiur-Maya



Convent of the Assumption, Arizkun

This area, in the very heart of the Baztán Valley, has a mild climate due to the influence of the sea. Its oak and beech forests have served the numerous ironworks in the region since the Middle Ages. The villages and towns are known for their ancestral homes bearing their coats of arms on the façades, the armoury palaces, the castle keeps, the impressive *indiano* palaces, and a multitude of farmhouses surrounded by lush green meadows. The route is pleasant, with many brooks and irrigation channels, small bridges crossing them, a number of corn mills and legends of *lamias*, mythological beings said to be half woman/half fish. This is a land of dolmens and menhirs, and the Romans also passed through here to mine the gold in the Arizkun ravine. The peculiar layout of the land has often forced its inhabitants to emigrate, even to this day. The mark of Saint James lives on in its churches and chapels, and in the local festivities on 25th July.



Arizkun

Pop. 638 / Of particular interest in this village are the Convent of the Assumption, founded by Juan Bautista Iturralde, who was Chancellor under King Philip V of Spain, several 16th century armoury palaces, the origin of important Navarre lineage, such as the Ursúa, Lizarazu or Bergara families, and two chapels: one dedicated to Saint Michael, and the other to Saint Anne. Juan de Goyeneche, the founder of Nuevo Baztán in Madrid, was also born here. The district of Bozate was one of the most important settlements of the Cagots, an ethnic-religious minority that dates back to the mid-15th century.

Elbete

Pop. 228 / A village close to Elizondo where, from the Middle Ages up to well into the 19th century, the Hospital of Santa Cruz de Ascó was situated for those people with no resources who were walking the Pilgrim's Way. It has two stately buildings, the Armoury Palaces of Jarola and Ascó, a 16th century parish church dedicated to the Holy Cross, which has a curious abbatial house attached, and an interesting wash house.

Elizondo

Pop. 3,460 / Administrative capital of the Baztán Valley [Valle y Universidad del Baztán], Elizondo also had a hospital for people with no resources who were on the pilgrimage, undoubtedly the most significant testimony to Saint James. It is more of an urban than rural setting, with a strong services sector and numerous commercial and banking establishments. Its layout is split in two by the Baztán River, and it has a large number of noble houses, particularly dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries, the Arizkunenea, Arrechea and Elizalde, among others. In 1416 a fire devastated the town, and the early church dedicated to Saint James, which was situated in the town hall square, was destroyed by a major flood in 1913. From time immemorial it has held two cattle fairs, it has a Basque pelota court and trinquete, and a hostel for people on the Pilgrim's Way.

Elizondo

Irurita

Pop. 840 / This historical village is arranged around the main square and the 18th century Church of El Salvador (18th century). Testimony to its noble past are the two armoury palaces or tower houses, and the palatial *indiana* houses, such as the Iriartea.

Ziga

Pop. 277 / A gorgeous little village set on a hillside in the shadows of the imposing 16th-17th century Herrerian Church of San Lorenzo, offering views over the whole valley. This village includes the district of Zigaurre and is possibly the most photographed and painted village in the entire valley. The palaces of Maiora and Egozcue are particularly worth mentioning, whose families were feuding in the 16th century.

Aniz

Pop. 65 / This hamlet is set on a small hillock and is built following the typical constructions of the Baztán Valley. It has an 18th century palace, several noble houses with their coats of arms, and the Church of the Assumption, a building of mediaeval origin that was modified in the 16th and 18th centuries. The landscape here starts to become more rugged, announcing the proximity of the Belate mountains.

Berroeta

Pop. 130 / Apart from the 16th century Parish Church of San Martín, and its noble buildings dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries with their coats of arms, there is a small fairly new hostel.

Belate Road

The stage passes through the last Baztán lands, the Belate mountains, the most important geographical feature along this route, and which accompanies the pilgrimage for six kilometres until it comes to the Ultzama Valley, the first in the Mediterranean area. Those walking the journey can do so on the road or Royal Road from Pamplona to Bayonne, passing through Baztán, which was built in the 18th century using cobblestones and vertical milestones to mark the way. The route is surrounded by beech groves and natural grasslands for sheep and pottokas [Basque ponies] to pasture. The pilgrim references in this stretch of the route are the old hostel and hospital of San Blás, situated at the start of the Belate pass, the chapel of Santiago on the pass itself, and the hospital and monastery of Santa María once into the region of Ultzama. As the Pilgrim's Route moves further away from Lantz, with its Roman mines and its carnivals inspired by the legendary bandit, Miel Otxin, the landscape becomes an alternating scene of beech trees, oak, pine, cattle pastures and the first abandoned fields of crops. The next stop with a hostel, and the end of the stage, is Olagüe.

Venta de San Blás shop, Almándoz

Almándoz

Pop. 215 / After crossing the Marín irrigation channel, there is a steep climb up to Almándoz, the last village in the Baztán Valley. There is documented evidence of this village dating back to the 13th century, and it is arranged around the demolished Pre-Gothic Church of San Pedro, although part of the original construction elements were saved and reused in the current parish church in 1956. In 1969 it was given the prestigious National Beautification Award but its green landscape of woods and pastures is somewhat tainted by a nearby open marble quarry.

Old Belate Hospital

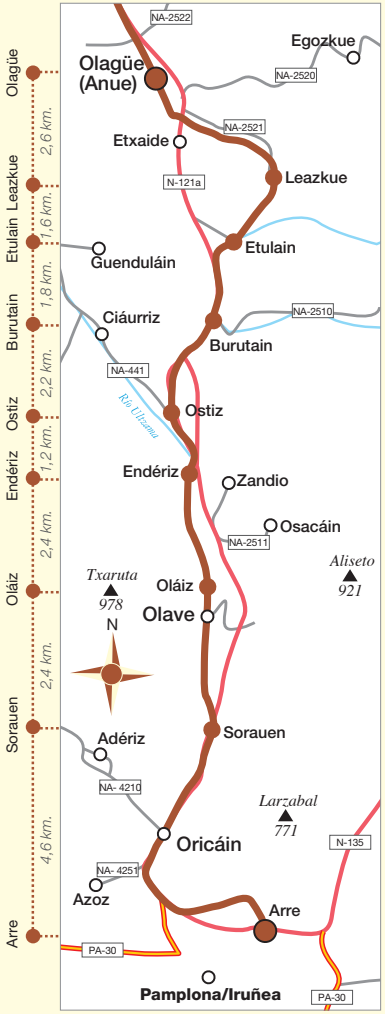
Lantz

Pop. 122 / Part of the Saioa-Loiketa dolmen site is located in this area, and there are records of an iron mine dating back to Roman times, which means their town would have been located on the site of the current village. In the Middle Ages, it was under Crown dominion, and suffered a major fire in 1422. What is most remarkable about the centre is the arrangement of the farmhouse on both sides of the road and the large 17th and 18th century houses, some of which bear their coat of arms on the façades. The village of Lantz has kept up one of the oldest traditions in Navarre: the rural carnival.

Lantz

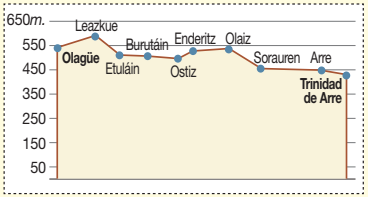
Olagüe

Pop. 203 / This village, on the banks of the Ultzama River, and capital of the Anué Valley, has an interesting Parish Church of San Juan Bautista, whose considerably large building is in the Baroque style. The village is long and compact, with houses that were mostly built in the 18th century, although beyond the centre, you will find the Tower of Echaide, which was erected at the end of the Middle Ages, protecting the road to Leazkue. Those on the pilgrimage will find rest and shelter at the recently established hostel in the former parish house.



Old Hospital at Trinidad de Arre

With only gentle slopes and no mountain passes, the route across Olagüe up to the mediaeval hospital complex of Trinidad de Arre is a pleasant walk through the valleys of Anué, Odieta and Olaibar, dotted with small villages and peaceful scenery, where the oak and beech trees give way to the natural (or reforested) pine forests. In the last few kilometres of the stage, in Ezcabarte, the walk (that swings between villages of mediaeval origin surrounded by new districts, cereal fields, industrial estates, and access roads to the main city of Pamplona) runs along the "river path" following the Ultzama and Arga Rivers, which leaves Sorauren and reaches as far as the capital city of the region, also known as "the first city on the French Way". At the bridge (of Roman origin) at Trinidad de Arre, the Baztán section joins the French Way on this main road where pilgrimage and services combine and flourish just a few kilometres from the former *Pompelo*.



Leazkue

Pop. 20 / Continuing along a narrow, lonely path, amid the green fields and the odd farm, we come across this small village. One of its most noteworthy buildings is the Church of the Assumption, dating back to mediaeval times but which was redesigned in the 18th century.

Etuláin

Pop. 25 / A modest but well-kept village in which two noble houses dating back to the 18th century, with their respective coats of arms are the most outstanding features. The Church of San Esteban is from modern times.

Burutáin

Pop. 53 / An old village that belonged to the King of Pamplona, Sancho Garcés III, known as the Great (1004-1035), in which a mediaeval single-span bridge exists to this day, to cross the River Mediano. It has some fine examples of houses built in the late 18th century, a period of time which also saw the construction of the current Parish Church of San Pedro Apóstol.

Ostiz

Pop. 91 / Route village next to the Ultzama River, records of which have been found dating back to the 11th century. It has a Romanesque-Gothic church, several houses with mediaeval features, and typical 18th century housing. Some historical theories place the Ontikes Iberian Mint on the site of this village.

Endéritz

Pop. 66 / Although it has been greatly modified by the proliferation of newly-built homes, this village still conserves some testimony of its past, such as a Gothic tower and the Church of San Nicolás from the early 13th century, with an interesting 15th century altarpiece painted on the apse.

Olaiz

Pop. 27 / The name "Ospitalekoa" and the presence of a shell in the decoration of a house's keystone, are proof that the Way of Saint James passes through this small village, with its 18th century buildings and the keystones of the ornate entrances.

Mediaeval bridge at Sorauren

Sorauren

Pop. 152 / The bridge over the River Ultzama is the oldest and finest architectural feature of this beautiful country village that dates back to mediaeval times. A large number of the 17th and 18th century buildings make up the picturesque ensemble, where bread ovens can still be seen attached to the houses to this day. In 1813 a battle was fought in this village against the French troops.

Arre

Pop. 993 / The Roman inscriptions found in the 20th century are evidence of the age of this last town in the Baztanés Way. Arre also has important Historical Heritage buildings. Apart from the Church of San Román and a bridge over the River Ultzama, both built in the Middle Ages, the Trinidad de Arre hospital and bridge, also date back to Mediaeval times, and are located just one kilometre from the town centre. At this point, those who were walking the Baztanés Way will join those who were walking the French Way, to continue together as far as Pamplona.

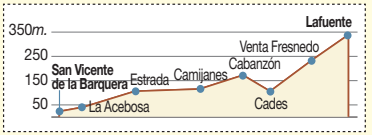
Lebaniego Way (Cantabria)

The history of the arrival of a fragment of the Holy Cross at the monastery of Santo Toribio has been lost in the mists of the Early Middle Ages, although it was probably brought here by the Hispano-Goths fleeing the Arab-Berber invasion of the year 711. The relic very soon became a major attraction for all kinds of visitors, both those passing through on their way to Santiago, and those expressly travelling to Liébana, which gave rise to a pilgrimage that received official status in the year 1512, when Pope Julius II awarded Santo Toribio Jubilee privilege. The route to venerate the Lignum Crucis splits from the Coastal Way at the village of San Vicente de la Barquera, beside the sea, to move further into the heart of Liébana, crossing much of the western part of Cantabria. From the hills and coastal mountain ranges, dotted with fields and pastures, woods and forests, to the edges of the huge Picos de Europa mountain range, the path towards Mount La Viorna is a complete tour of inland Cantabria. This route has the additional incentive of the superb cuisine offered in the regions it passes through, with beef specialities, and bean and chick pea stews, all washed down with a drop of eau-de-vie.

1 | San Vicente de la Barquera → Lafuente (33 km)

Entrance to Cabanzón

The first few kilometres on the route, until it reaches El Hortigal, run through the Oyambre Natural Park, amid small hills and meadows where the cattle graze. At this point, the route comes to a fork in the road and, while an alternative branch heads south until it reaches Bielva along small mountain roads, the main route continues west, dotted with the stately towers of Estrada and Cabanzón, until it embraces the Nansa, whose course will not leave us until past Cades. A little further on, before entering the great gorge that the River Lamasón has carved out between the limestone masses of the Peñarrubia massif and the Ozalba mountain range, we recommend you turn east to visit the nearby underground complex of El Soplao, a geological wonder and top tourist attraction in the region. After overcoming the sheer ravine, another turn to the west will lead us to Lafuente, and the end of the stage in the shadow of the rocky crags of Arria.



Tortorio bridge over the Nansa, in Camijanes

Camijanes

Pop. 102 / On arrival in Camijanes, on the right bank of the River Nansa, the route turns east to cross the river over the Tortorio bridge, leaving behind the traditional mountain houses all grouped together in rows and facing south. The hump-backed bridge dates back to the late 18th century and has one arch.

Cabanzón

Pop. 131 / Apart from the Baroque Church of Santa Eulalia, with its 18th century Solomonic altarpiece, this village is known for having two remarkable elements that rise up to the skies: the Encinona and the Tower of Cabanzón. The first is a magnificent hundred-year-old specimen of Quercus ilex L. (holm oak) measuring 10 metres high. The tower is a defensive construction from the end of the Middle Ages, bearing witness to the area's stately past, and associated with the old Rábago lineage. Both are a fine example of how nature and history merge to form one harmonious whole in this part of the route.

Bielva

Pop. 211 / The alternative branch, which runs between Hortigal and Puente el Arrudo, goes through Bielva before crossing the Nansa and leading into the main route. This village dates back to early mediaeval times, which is shown in the remains of a necropolis that is situated next to the parish church. It is famous for its Chapel of Santo Cristo de los Remedios, where the "Bielva Christ" is kept, an object of great devotion in this region. During its feast day, on 14th September, hundreds of people congregate in the chapel to offer promises to the patron in exchange for favours.

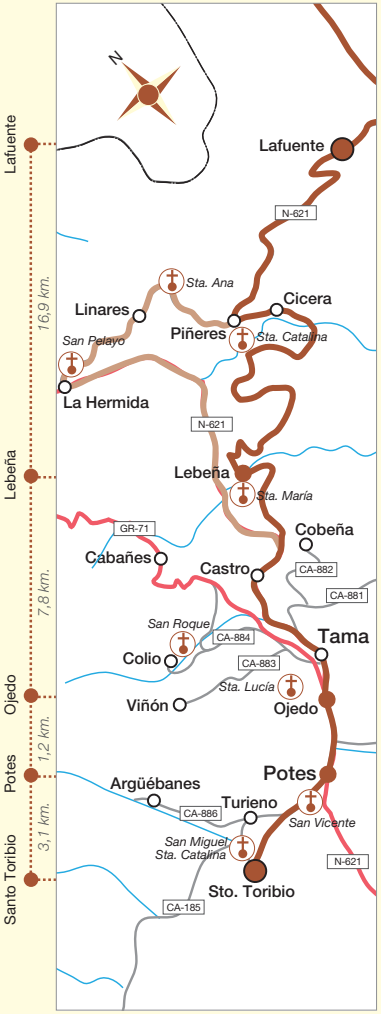
Cades

Pop. 73 / Cades is synonymous with metalwork and the ironworks that gave their name to the valley and municipality through which this section of the route passes: Herrerías. There, beside the Nansa, feeding on its waters, we will find an interesting palatial estate dating back to the 18th century, with a stately home bearing its coat of arms, a chapel, *hórreo* or granary, mill and blacksmith's. This last component has been completely restored and is open to visitors. It is a joy to be able to see how the iron is worked, just as it was in the pre-industrial world of the Modern Era.

Lafuente

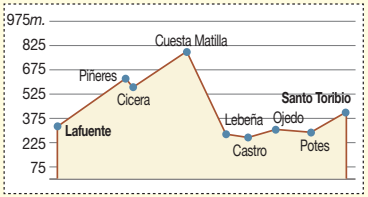
Pop. 31 / After crossing the River Lamasón and moving further into the valley of the same name, the road reaches Lafuente, where the first stage ends. There, the Church of Santa Juliana, which was built next to the road, has been watching over the Way since the late 12th century. Very near to this rural Romanesque gem we will find an inscription dated 1625 under one of the sculptures that make up the *Pareja de Lamasón*, or "the Lamasón Two", reminding visitors of the fleetingness of life, with its unsettling phrase "so many pass that do not return"

Church of Santa Juliana, in Lafuente



Interior of the church at the Monastery of Santo Toribio de Liébana

After leaving Lafuente, the route arrives at Piñeres, where once again we have two options. The main route goes down to Cicera and continues across the hills, going through stunning forests until it reaches Lebeña, where we will find the magnificent Church of Santa María, an essential visit for art and architecture lovers. From there, again through country roads carved into the rocks, the route continues until it joins up with the alternative branch near Castro. We have arrived at this point by following the spectacular road along the La Hermida gorge, first passing by Linares and the town of the same name. Castro, the Visitors Centre of the Picos de Europa Natural Park in Sotama, Tama, Aliezo and Ojedo, these are all landmarks along the way before arriving at the historical town of Potes, whose past is closely linked to the pilgrimage, as documents have recorded the construction of a hospital at the end of the 17th century "for the poor pilgrims on their way to Santiago in Galicia". Following the ascent up to the monastery of Santo Toribio, in the foothills of La Viorna, the route comes to an end.



Tower of Pontón, in Linares

Linares

Pop. 81 / The Middle Ages are ever present in Linares, situated in the shadow of Mount Santa Catalina, on whose heights we find the ruins of an old 9th century fortress, the "Bolera de los Moros" (literally meaning "the Moors' bowling alley"). The 13th century Gothic church and the three late-mediaeval towers in the village, one of which is named Pontón and houses an interpretation centre, complete the ensemble that those who choose to follow this alternative route will find.

Lebeña

Pop. 93 / Legend has it that, at the start of the 10th century, the Count and Countess of Liébana, Alfonso and Justa, had the Church of Santa María de Lebeña built to hold the remains of Santo Toribio, which had been kept at the monastery that today bears his name and where they are still kept to this day. The divine rage at the profanation of the saint's sepulchre blinded the noble couple and the servants entrusted with digging him up. They only recovered their sight when they stopped what they were planning and handed over all their possessions in Liébana to the aforementioned monastery, including the church. This gem of Preromanesque art in which the triple influence of Hispanovisigoth, Asturian and Andalusian can be seen, is an essential stop on the route towards Mount La Viorna.

Ojedo

Pop. 583 / The Late-Romanesque front that adorns the entrance to the parish church of Ojedo, situated next to the route but having been built in fairly recent years, acts as a reminder of the village's mediaeval origins. Its lost Monastery of San Salvador is mentioned in writing as far back as the 11th century.

Potes

Pop. 1,523 / Where the River Deva and River Quiviesa meet, there lies the town of Potes, at the centre of Liébana and the site of an important regional market, which has its origins in the 13th century, and which is held every Monday. Its historical quarter was almost completely destroyed during the Spanish Civil War and was not restored until years later. It has numerous examples of important civil and religious heritage, among which we should mention the Tower of Infantado and the Church of San Vicente. The first is the permanent site of the "The Cosmos of Beatus of Liébana" exhibition, about the figure and era of the famous monk; while the second is used as an exhibition hall and is the venue of the Don Desiderio Gómez Señas Pilgrims' Attention Centre.

Monastery of Santo Toribio

Pop. 4 / The final point on the route lies on the hillside of Mount La Viorna and is eternally joined to the Lignum Crucis, the fragment of the Holy Cross that has been kept at the monastery since at least the 8th century. This relic's fame began as far back as the Middle Ages with the first pilgrimages to Santo Toribio, converting the monastery into an obligatory visit for those travelling through the area on their way to Santiago. The origin of this monastic community has to be found in the chapels that are dotted around the hillsides, some of which, like the Cueva Santa, former hermitages in which the solitary monks would remove themselves from the world. The one monk who stands out above them all is Beatus of Liébana, a key figure in the ecclesiastical history and early-mediaeval culture of the Iberian Peninsula.

Market day in Potes

EUSKO JAURLARITZA
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GOBIERNO de CANTABRIA
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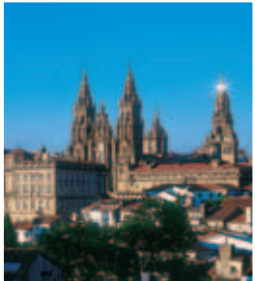
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