

Walking the Camino

BY MAVIS AIREY

I have walked the Camino de Santiago
More times than I can tell -
Only once physically
But since then, many times in my dreams.
That's the sort of effect
This thousand-year-old pilgrimage trail
Has on people.

Unlike many pilgrims
I had no expectations of religious revelation
Or absolution from sin -
And received none.

But there is a meditative quality
About long-distance walking;
A pleasing, simple rhythm to the day.
And it feels a privilege to be following in the footsteps
Of so many.

I think of those who got injured, sick or died along the way -
Shrines remind us, it happens still.

In my dreams
I relive the snow, the wind, the rain, the mud -
And the welcome sun, when it chose to shine;
I see the long and winding road;
The mountains, villages, and vineyards;
The rich, red soil; the marble rocks;
The woodland trails; the cities filled with history.

I revisit the pilgrim hostels
With their volunteer *hospitaleros*
And bunk beds crammed together -
I remember the snoring, yes,
But also the camaraderie of shared meals
And shared stories.

I recall with pleasure
The conversations with fellow pilgrims -
From Korea, Puerto Rico, Ireland, England, Finland, Spain...
The courage of the blind woman from the Netherlands
And an Aussie bloke walking his way back to health -
Both so positive and cheerful.
They inspire me.

The Camino de Santiago has given me
So much.

