

Camino

04/18/2022: 1:30 a.m. I wasn't sure I was going to journal about my trip to Spain and, specifically, about my wanderings on the Camino Finisterre. But here it is: 1:30 a.m. and I'm wide awake, so I guess I'll jot down a few random thoughts.

I've been in Spain less than 24 hours but am now safely ensconced in the Compostela Hotel after a rugged day of traveling. While I don't mind flying, per se, I really hate turbulence and we had three bad bouts of it on the plane – enough to make me want to crawl out of my skin and pull a Vivien Leigh. Lots of deep breathing, holding of thumbs, and repeating the Bert Lahr mantra of "I do believe in spooks" got me through until I landed in Madrid – which looks a lot like Dallas from the air.

The flight to Santiago de Compostela was uneventful although the aircraft looked like it was picked up cheap at a garage sale. Kind of dingy and well used. The pilot looked like he just got out of high school. But it was worth the trip.

Santiago is lovely. It was a beautiful sunny day. An Easter remembrance kind of day from when I was little – warm sun, cool air, wisteria, tulips, and daffodils in abundance. The drive in from the airport reminded me of the Hudson Valley.

My hotel is in on the edge of the shopping district and about a 10-minute walk from the Cathedral. I was content to just wander aimlessly through the winding streets until I arrived at the place I've aspired to visit for about 15 years.



The streets were packed with pilgrims. For some reason I didn't expect that. In retrospect, I guess I should have as I suspect many folks timed their Camino to arrive in Santiago de Compostela on Easter Sunday. The plaza was thronged with Peregrinos lying on their backpacks and lolling in the sun.



I wondered how commercial the atmosphere would be. I need not have worried as capitalism is not only alive and well, but thriving in and around the Cathedral. Every conceivable type of Camino merch is on display. I personally glommed onto the scallop shell bikini briefs being hawked by a guy dressed up as ... as... I really don't know except to say that he looked like a cross between Guy Fawkes and Harpo Marx.

Couple of tips: Learn some Spanish. English is not as widely spoken as I thought it would be, and I'm glad I've been taking those Pimsleur courses since last summer. While I doubt I'm going to engage in meaningful Kantian dialectical discourse with anyone, I can get around, order food, ask questions, get directions, etc. Besides, isn't Spanish the language with which one speaks to God? Seems so as I entered the Cathedral.

Here's the deal: it's really old. Really Old. If you go in for that sort of thing, it is where St. James the Apostle is entombed – at least part of him as he was beheaded. Well, maybe some of him. Who knows? Who cares? That's not really the point, is it? I think the point is it doesn't matter how one gets to God. Or, for that matter, if one even gets to God. Rather, isn't the journey to God the point? But what do I know?

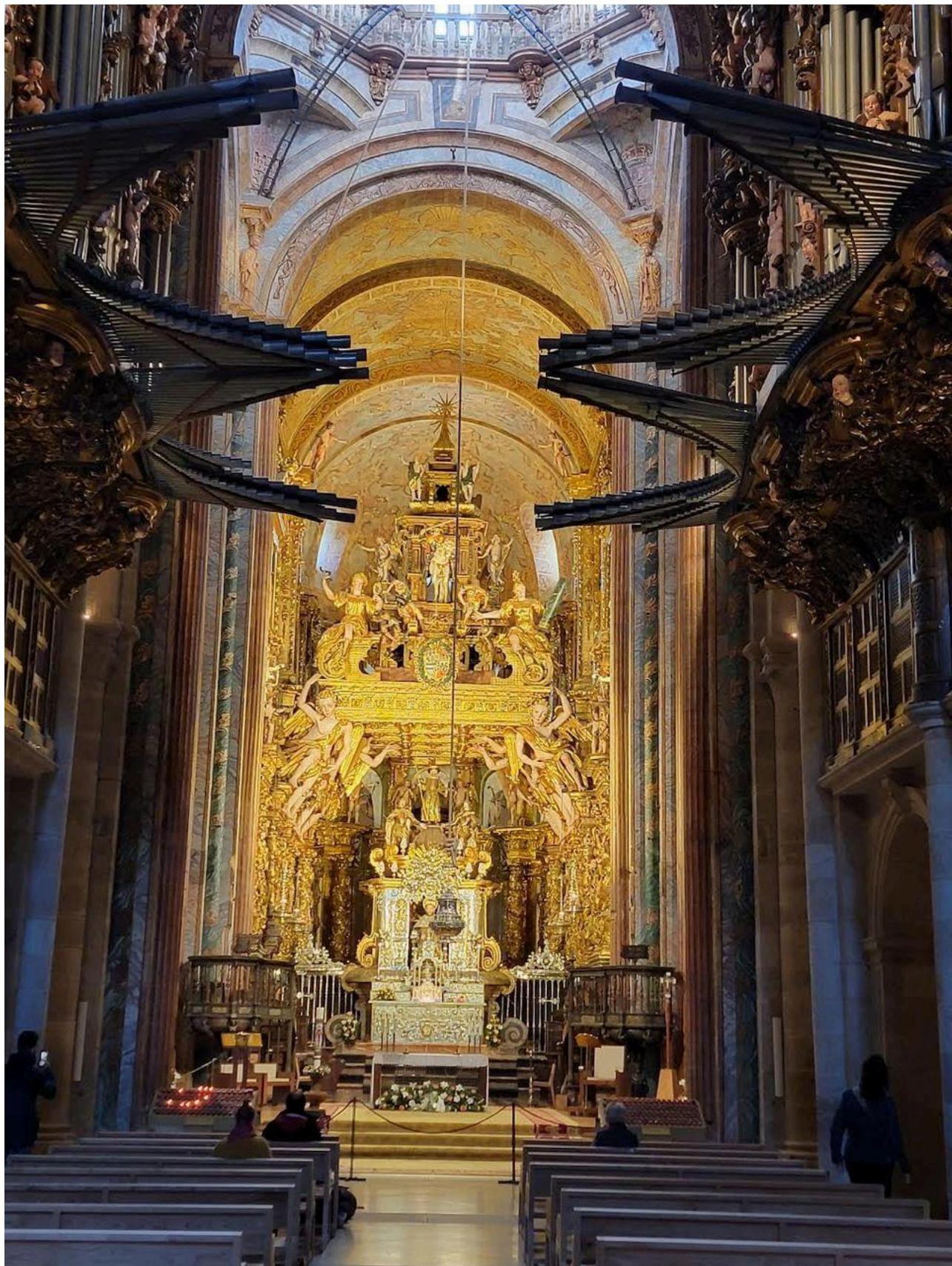
Quite by accident, I stumbled upon St. James' tomb by taking a door that leads downstairs. It's smaller than I thought it would be. People can leave offerings inside the tomb by reaching through the protective bars. There was a large Ukrainian flag with the exhortation (in English) for St. James' intercession in the war with prayers of peace. I think I'll leave some of my mom's ashes when I return next week.

SEPULCRUM
SANCTI IACOBI
GLORIOSUM





The altar, while impressive, was overdone for my taste. By a lot. I assume it's all gold. If so, it's value must be incalculable. Otherwise, the Cathedral is standard issue. A lot of the stonework has been eroded. I guess that's what a thousand plus years of millions of people touching everything will do.



By the time I finished up in the Cathedral, I was hungry. Another tip: if you want to eat in the afternoon – do it before 5 or you have to wait until 8. Fortunately, I found a place that was open (Cocina Lento) and had a simple and terrific meal of mariscos y ajo con pan. The nearby busker was pretty terrible as he kept screwing up the words to “Across the Universe” and the guy with the misshapen arms was actually comical in his verbal assaults on the passersby. Never underestimate the comic power of a guy with thalidomide arms trying to smack an overweight American tourist while cursing in Spanish.

After being awake for about 30 hours, it was nice to take a hot shower, meditate a little and fall asleep. For a while, anyway. As I write this, it's 2 a.m., my window is open, and I cannot hear a sound – no city noise, no late-night revelers, no night sounds. Just silence. That seems strange to me as I rarely hear nothing at all. And with that, maybe I'll try to catch a few Zs before I take the bus to Muxia in a few hours.



04/18/2022: SIMPSON SHOW

As beautiful as yesterday's weather was, today began grottily. Cold and drizzly as I made my way to the bus station to catch the bus to Muxia. The bus station looked exactly as depicted in the YouTube video, so I knew what to expect. Thank God for the World Wide Interwebs.

Travel tip 1: Schedules here are approximate. The Monbus website for today says there are 2 buses to Muxia. One at 9:45 and one at 10:45. My bus left at 9:15 and it was the only one for today. Good thing I'm chronically early for stuff.

Travel tip 2: Nothing in Galicia is "high speed." Not the internet, not the bus, not people's gait. The bus was supposed to arrive in Muxia at 11:00. It arrived at 12:30. No worries though as the ride was great, the scenery was terrific, and I got a sneak preview of most of the towns I'll be seeing as I begin my Camino tomorrow.

Muxia and the part of my Camino I'll be walking is in Galicia – northwest Spain near Portugal. Indeed, lots of Portuguese words and spellings have made their way into the local dialect. One sees many words that contain the letter X and, for example, the word for "Street" is not "Calle" as I was taught in Sra. Morales' 8th grade Spanish class, but, rather, "Rua."

PORTO XACOBEO

de MUXÍA

“

Conta a tradición que a Virxe María recalou nunha barca de pedra no que hoxe é o santuario da Barca para dar ánimos ao Apóstolo Santiago na súa predicación. De aí parte a significación xacobea de Muxía e a súa inclusión nas rutas xacobias desde o medievo.

Tradition has it that the Virgin Mary reached this spot in a stone boat today the -Shrine of A Barca- to spur on the Apostle Saint James and his preaching. This is the reason why Muxía has close ties with the Apostle and the pilgrimage to Santiago, and has been included in the Pilgrims' Ways since the Middle Ages.



Portos
de Galicia

XACOBEO 2010
Galicia

XUNTA
DE GALICIA

The countryside through which we drove this morning is semi-rural, semi-agricultural – everyone seems to have a truck garden – and somewhat hilly. The wild fields are in full bloom with lots of rampion for you Rapunzel fans out there and the odd wee patch of heather for those of you missing the bonnie lochs. It does not look particularly prosperous.

The bus was only partially filled - a mixture of Peregrinos and locals. Not a lot of young people. No wonder. It doesn't look like there is much to hold a young person in this part of Galicia. No big cities, not much industry. A little boy led his blind mother to their seats and chirped along, telling her about the scenery as we bounced around the Costa da Morte. At one point, he became very animated. Then, his mother smacked him. O-kay.

Two curiosities: 1. There seems to be an inordinate number of pharmacies in Galicia. It seems like there is one on every block. I can just picture the great Galician druggist turf wars, battling each other for all the sick people. Galician: "But I'm not sick!" Druggist: "Yes you are, drink this."

2. Almost every house has an elevated outbuilding that is accessible only by steps or by a ladder. These buildings all look alike – about 20 feet long by 10 feet wide with one or two crosses adorning the outer points of the roof line. At first, I thought it was a family columbarium, but such a building is on almost every property, so I don't think that's it. Then I thought it might be a family shrine, but I rejected that idea as there are so many. Then I thought it might be a granary that is elevated to keep out the critters. But I didn't see any wheat fields or other grain crops growing and it's being elevated wouldn't keep out the rats anyway, so I don't know what it is. Somewhere along the line, I shall find out and make a report.

So, Muxia. The bus couldn't make it up the street to the bus station. One car inappropriately parked can really screw things up. The bus had to back up about two blocks, downhill, with a quasi-turn thrown in for luck. Solution? The bus driver said the trip was over and we all got our stuff and got out. Fortunately, there was a sign for my hotel nearby. So, I jauntily followed the sign and started up the hill. The problem is, there seemed to be only one sign and none of the streets are perpendicular to each other. Signs containing the names of the streets are intermittent or non-existent and the streets serpentine with each other throughout a maze worthy of Theseus. "No worries," thought I. "I'll just check Google Maps or Waze." Not. No internet connection. God damn you, World Wide Interwebs.

After deciding not to go in a circle for a third time, I asked a cat if it knew where my hotel is. The cat didn't understand my question, I guess.



I then saw an old guy who appeared to be a local and asked him if he knew where my hotel is. Luckily for me, I boned up on enough Spanish during the last few months that I understood his directions and made it just fine – See yesterday's travel tip re learning some Spanish.

When I got to my hotel, a FedEx delivery was waiting for me. “Hmm,” think I. “Not even gone for two days and someone’s trying to sue me.” But no. It was merely my document package from the company that is taking my suitcase from place to place. “Cool,” think I. “They’re really on the ball.” The documents are in German. “Scheiße,” think I.” Maybe I’ll put a change of clothes and my toothbrush in my daypack just in case my stuff goes to Dusseldorf.

Travel tip 3: If you’re an early riser like me and you drink coffee while you check your email in the mornings, bring some with you. Breakfast doesn’t start around here until 8 or so.

Travel tip 4: Make sure you always have snacks. There’s not much in Muxia and I couldn’t find an open café to get lunch as it was siesta time by the time I returned from la Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Barca.

“What is la Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Barca,” you ask? It’s a church.





It's also the main prayer point for sailors who successfully navigate the Costa da Morte (more Portuguese linguistic influence). The Costa da Morte is translated as "The Coast of Death," which sounds like the title of a cheesy Vincent Price movie. But it's no joke. One would have to be Captain Ahab to try to land a boat on this coast.





I pretty much had the place to myself. Unfortunately, the sanctuary wasn't open, but one can see through the bars.



And speaking of Moby Dick, la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Barca is a Spanish version of the Seaman's Bethel (a real place, btw, located in New Bedford, MA). Like the Seaman's Bethel, la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Barca is heavy on the nautical themes as you can see from the replicas of the boats that didn't make it hanging in the sanctuary.



I didn't mind the solitude as I was able toss some of me mum's ashes into the Atlantic without it being a show. If you've seen the movie "The Way," some of her is floating around near the lighthouse near which Martin Sheen spreads his son's ashes.



I've decided that I'll toss some bits of me mum at various cool places to which I get to travel as I think it's weird and not a little creepy to keep her in a box in my kitchen. I think she would have liked the idea, so now there's some of her in the Grand Canyon, in a bluebonnet field, and now, in the Atlantic. Kind of like Where in the World is Carmen San Diego.

After a siesta, I walked along the quay looking for a place to eat.



The Yin: The sun came out. The Yang: It's cold as butt. The wind came in off the Atlantic and it is bone chilling. Good thing I brought an extra T-shirt. Yikes.

Not to be deterred (don't put de cart before deterred), I did have a nice meal. Veal with a salad. Sorry Beauregard. And yes, I tipped my waiter. I'm here all week.

Now I get it. One can't get a meal in Galicia between about 3 and 8. Note to self. See above re bringing snacks.

On the briskish stroll back to my hotel, I saw the Gypsies dismantling the last of yesterday's carnival. By tomorrow, they'll be on their way to another venue, and I'll be on my way to Lires.

I bid you all a good night and leave you with this parting image:



04/19/2022: GOT YOUR BULLET, BARN?

9:18 a.m. and I'm all tricked out like Bob Denver in the opening credits of Gilligan's Island. And awaaaaaay I went.





But before I left Muxia, perhaps forever, I had to see a man about a horse.



The horse decided he didn't need to see me, seeming to much prefer munching grass against a backdrop of the Costa da Morte.



That backdrop changed from dramatic to bucolic about two miles into today's walk as I left the coast and headed inland.

Today's walk was mostly a hilly affair through moderately forested terrain. For all you wildflower fans out there, there were many to see – mostly rampion, as 'tis the season, and some bluebells. I did not walk through any towns as today's walk was strictly RFD.





I did get to see a great variety of local wildlife, though, and had a nice chat (in Spanish) with a local lady about her four dogs. Of course, no dog can be as good as my Sophie because she's the best dog in the whole world, but Senora's dogs were perfectly nice.











And speaking of rural, remember yesterday how I described a building whose purpose I could not ascertain? Well, thanks to alert reader Deborah Steed, I've learned the buildings are called "horreos" and they are indeed purposed for storing crops out of the reach of the local ratones. Let's see what Wikipedia – the most trusted name in information delivery – has to say about horreos:

"An **hórreo** is a typical [granary](#) from the northwest of the [Iberian Peninsula](#) ([Asturias](#), [Galicia](#), where it might be called a [Galician granary](#), and [Northern Portugal](#)), built in wood or stone, raised from the ground (to keep rodents out) by pillars [pegollos](#) in [Asturian](#), [pegoyos](#) in [Cantabrian](#), [esteos](#) in [Galician](#), [espigueiros](#) in [Portuguese](#), [abearriak](#) in [Basque](#)) ending in flat [staddle stones](#) ([vira-ratos](#) in Galician, [muelas](#) or [tornarratos](#) in Asturian, or [zibiluzea](#) in Basque) to prevent access by [rodents](#). Ventilation is allowed by the slits in its walls."





I think I need one in my back yard to keep out the squirrels. Or, perhaps, to store a body. Should the need arise. Uh . . .



Saint Calixtus wrote the first Camino guidebook in 1240. No, I'm not kidding. Those were in the days when Pilgrims followed The Way to the tomb of St. James with nothing but a staff and a scallop shell with which to beg for food and water. Well, those days are gone, and "good riddance" say I. I'm glad I have GPS at my disposal. First, because I can get lost before I turn the corner of my block, and second, because I hate getting lost. I have to think there are more than a few Medieval Peregrinos whose bones lie blanching in a Galician ditch somewhere because they zipped when they should have zagged. But not so in the new millennium! We can push a button on our smart phones and never get lost, right? . . . Right? . . . Hello?

Remember when I said yesterday that nothing is high speed in Galicia? Well, you can add intermittent GPS to that list. Like a good little modern-day Pilgrim, I downloaded my map to my phone for today's journey. Turn by turn directions. It's a miracle!

Except GPS doesn't always work here in the Galician countryside. About halfway into the trip, my GPS done give out. In a grove of pines. In the Spanish countryside. Where there are wolves. And did I hear a faint sound of banjos – with a flamenco rhythm – somewhere in the distance? What to do?

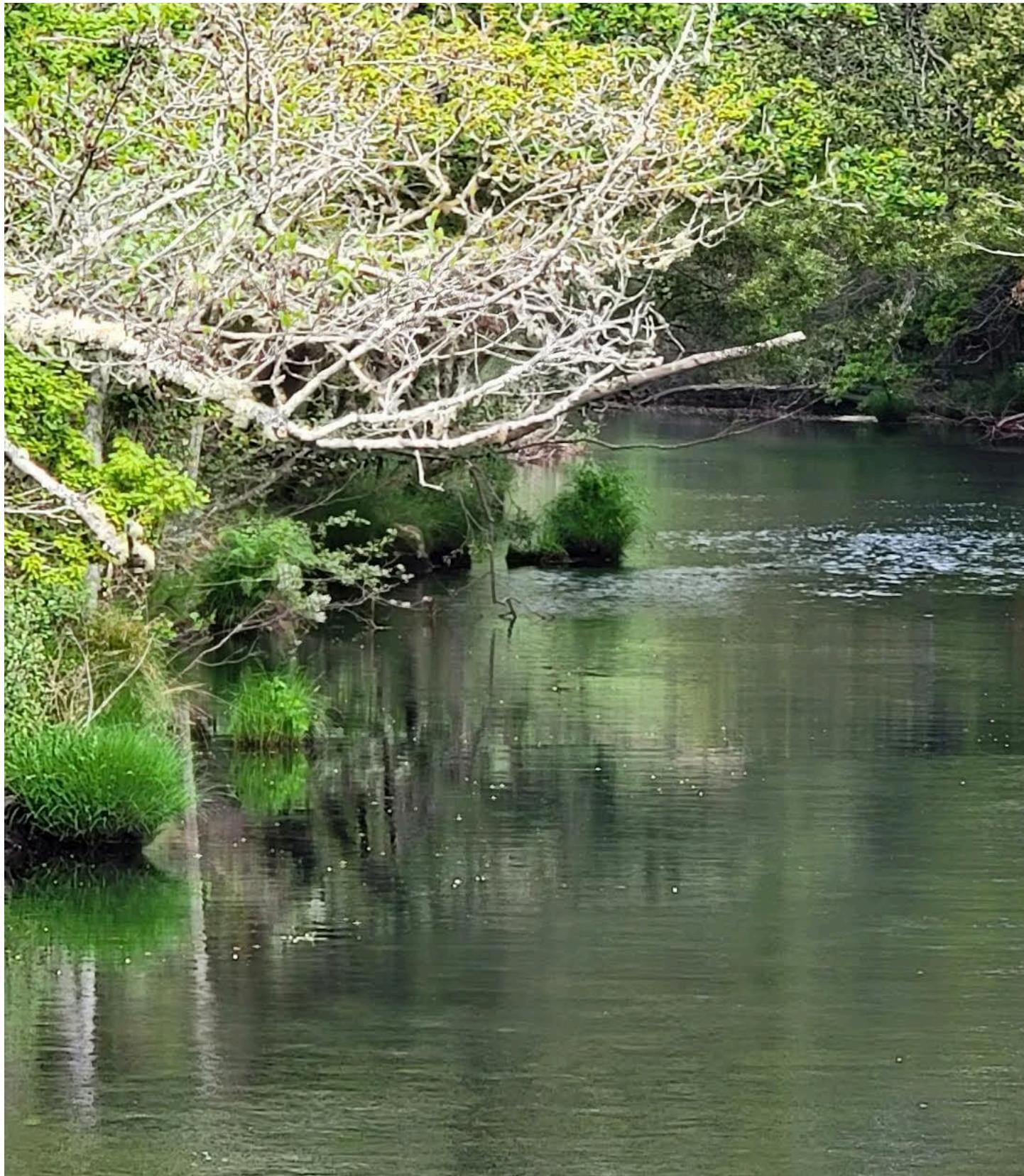
Today's quiz: What is the motto of Scouting USA? That's right, all you Tenderfeet! Be Prepared! And prepared I was.

With my (fka) Boy Scout standard issue compass, I headed out cross country until I finally saw the trusty Camino marker putting me on the home stretch to Lires.





The path into Lires crosses a pleasant little stream. I had been lucky all morning in that I was able to make my way without any rain. As if in a movie, it began to pour right as I got into town. Fortunately, I found my hotel within a couple of hundred yards, so only the back of me was soaked. After a shower, a meal, and a siesta, I headed out to see the sites of Lires. After those five minutes were over, I came back to my room to write to you.



Lessons learned today: My stuff didn't end up in Dusseldorf, so I don't need to tote my laptop to Finisterre tomorrow. Use walking poles when going uphill. Don't fill the water bladder all the way. You won't drink that much, and water is heavy. Pack your raincoat at the top of your pack, not at the bottom. Wash cloths are not standard in hotels. Bring one with you along with a plastic bag you can put it in the next morning.

I deliberately chose to walk the Camino Finisterre for a reason you will learn tomorrow. It is the least traveled pilgrimage route, with only about 1500 Pilgrims a year, compared with about 15,000 on the main route between St. John Pied de Port, France to Santiago de Compostela. Today, I did not see a soul from the edge of Muxia until I was about 3 miles from Lires. All the people I saw were traveling in the opposite direction. In groups. No solo walkers. Every conversation I heard was in Spanish. Disregarding more trusty Bert Lahr wisdom, I shall press on tomorrow and, hopefully, regale you with more tales from the trail. Until then, *dulces suenos*.



04/20/2022: MADE IT, MA! END OF THE WORLD!

No, I didn't blow myself up real good like James Cagney.



Instead, I made it to Finisterre, which in Medieval cosmology was thought to be the end of the world.



FISTERRA

Concello Turístico Galego

Cabo Finisterre, Patrimonio Europeo

Festa do Cristo, declarada de Interés Turístico

Fin da Ruta Xacobea



I'm sure Kyrie Irving could explain better than I why people, or, more specifically, the Catholic church, held on to the notion that the earth was flat for so many centuries when the Chinese and the Egyptians knew the earth was round before Herodotus. Oh well. Those wacky medieval guys. And it spread into the Camino ethos during the Middle Ages. Hence, Finisterre was where western "civilization" thought the world ended back in the days when Peregrinos begged for food and drink with a scallop shell. As weird as the notion is, I kind of like the idea. It captured my imagination many years ago and is the main reason why I decided to walk this particular Camino. Plus, I can do it without spending a month on the road.



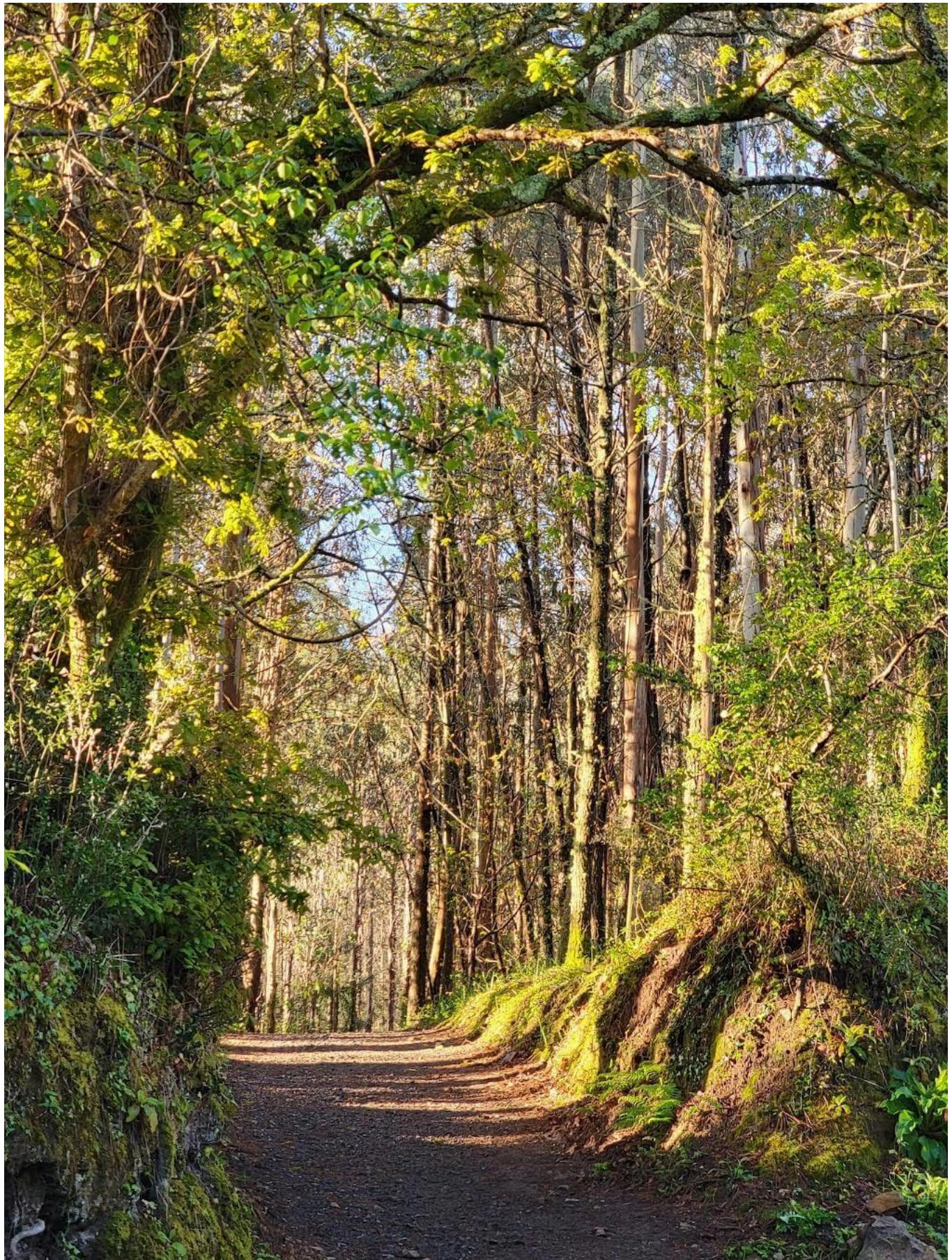
For some reason I can't figure out, I made really good time today. I left Lires in the cold and rain at 9 and by 1:30 I was at the sunny Atlantic.

I decided to forego downloading a map today as it did me so much good yesterday. The way to Finisterre ("Fisterra" in the Galician dialect – more Portuguese) is well marked. I only took one wrong turn which I rectified within about a half mile. The rugged parts were more rugged than yesterday, but there were less of them so that may have contributed to my faster time today. The most rugged part was from the town of Finisterre to the end of the Camino. It's only two miles but it's all uphill and the road twists all the way up. More wacky Medieval shenanigans. Those nutty guys must have really wanted los Peregrinos to be serious about getting to the end.

When I got there, the first thing I saw was the merch stand. Oy. If I had bothered to stop, I bet I would have seen a T-shirt that said either "Estoy con Stupido" or "I walked the Camino and all I got was this f*cking T-shirt." If only there had been food trucks! Not to be deterred, I continued the last hundred yards or so and looked out toward the Atlantic. The moment moved me more than I expected it would as I thought of how scared those poor sailors must have been when they sailed into the great unknown.



Like yesterday, there were no Peregrinos heading in my direction, although I saw more Pilgrims going the other way than I did yesterday. I could have taken the route that went along the beach, but I chose to go through the several small villages on the way as I wanted to see what life is like in small town Galicia. A photo array appears below. n.b. I wasn't sure what the deal was with the chicken, and I didn't want to ask.

















A highlight of today's walk was a little way station near a lumberyard. Fruit, coffee, and water was set out for Pilgrims. It was very touching to see that. It's the kind of thing my wife, who is a much better person than I am, would do.



A couple of imponderables: Why do you suppose all stop signs in Galicia say “Stop?”



How do you think line persons climb the poles? I thought having footholds molded into the pole was a good idea, but they look too shallow to be of use.



During my lunch - a comida tipica of garbanzo beans and clams in a garlic broth - I was watching the TV in the bar. Man, I tell ya, them Spaniards got them some racy commercials! In one, there was a group of cut, shirtless sailors being all sailory when ... cut to a buxom babe in a Merry Widow strutting down the dock. The least gay looking sailor literally bounces off the wall, runs after the Merry Widow girl, takes her in his arms, and they start smooching. Turns out the product being advertised was a woman's perfume. I hope Erykah Badu doesn't get any ideas.

The next commercial I saw involved a group of attractive young men applying makeup to each other. Man, I tell ya, after them two commercials, I felt like a swinger!

Also, during lunch, I heard what may possibly be the weirdest mix I've heard in a long time. A cheesy crooner doing his lounge rendition of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" followed by "Muskrat Love."

By the time I ran the gamut from the sublime to the ridiculous, it was time to find my hotel – the Hotel Rustico Prado da Vina. I saw a sign "Hotel Rustico 300 mm." Woo hoo! I'm hot, sweaty, and tired. Soothing shower coming up! Remember what I said about schedules being approximate around here? So are distances. After about a half mile, there was no Hotel Rustico to be found. Moreover, "Hotel Rustico" is apparently a chain. Therefore, one must know which Hotel Rustico one is looking for. I finally figured it out and after making friends with the innkeeper, who apparently thinks my Spanish speaking skills far exceed reality, I've had a nice shower and am going to go downstairs for a rustic cocktail and supper, and then, perhaps, some slumberizing; provided the flock of chickens and roosters outside my window allow for such. Hope you all are well. I am content.

04/21/2022: RODE HARD. HUNG UP WET.

Very tough day. Only 12 miles from Finisterre to Cee, but they were 12 hard miles; mostly uphill. In fact, it seems all I did today was climb hills. Before it was all done, I expected to see Hannibal and bunch of elephants. To top it off, the weather has been poor all day. Rainy, windy, cold, yucky.



It all began when I attempted to leave the Hotel Rustico Prada da Vina. I asked the lady at the front desk which way to Cee. She said she didn't understand me. Harumph. It was a simple question and I know I asked it correctly, so I asked her if she spoke Spanish. "Si," she says. I ask the question again. She says she doesn't understand me. I ask her if she speaks English. "No." French? "No." By this time, I'm looking for Alan Funt, so, for grins, I ask if she speaks German. She says she doesn't. Italian? "No." I say "Buenos Dias." She says she doesn't understand me. Oy.

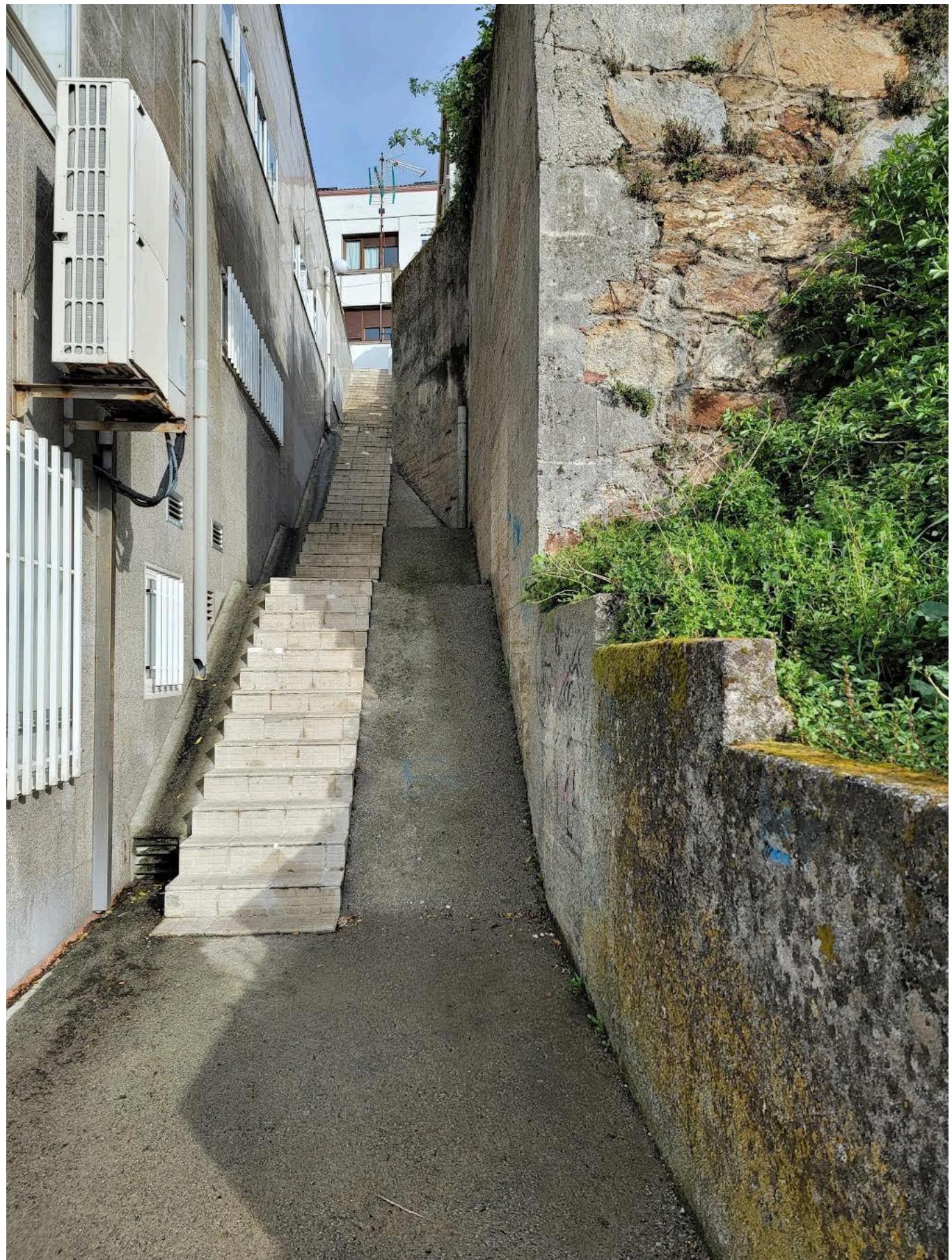
So, of course, there is no GPS to help me get out of Finisterre and find the Camino toward Cee. The first sign I passed did not bode well.



But.... (fka) Boy Scout compass to the rescue again. I walk to the harbor, figuring there must be a trail in the general direction of where I want to go. Lo and behold, there is. For about a hundred yards. I only find this out after tromping along the harbor trail that is overgrown with wet vegetation. So back I go.



Then I see some stairs. A lot of stairs. But I figure how much worse can it get, right? Heh, heh, heh.



I finally find a path to the beach and what looks like a pretty good trail. The rain is lashing. The wind is whipping. But what care I for the wind and rain? (10 points if you can correctly name the Shakespeare play in which the previous sentence appears). I'm making it. Part of the deal. After a mile or so, it occurs to me that I haven't seen any Peregrinos. Hmm, think I. But I figure I'm on a pretty good trail and I know I'm at least headed in the right general direction, so on I go.

Eventually, I see a yellow arrow with "SC" spray painted on a pole. Having read Steinbeck I'm familiar with Hobo symbolism, so I surmised that all I need to do is follow the yellow arrows when I see them, and I'll be headed toward Santiago de Compostela, my ultimate destination.



So far so good. Until..... the highway.

At the highway, there is a yellow arrow that directs the accursed to walk along a utility service path. I should have known something was up when I saw the bundles. The bundles. *El Proyecto de la Bruja de Blair!* For my sins, I disregarded the signs and portents and embarked upon the March of the Damned.



For the next 5 miles I built me a stairway to paradise. Five miles in the wind and rain and weather, Mariah. No Peregrinos. No yellow arrows. No cool and refreshing forest glades with dappled sunlight filtered through the alder trees. Nope. Hills, Hills, and more Hills.

After two hours of playing Sisyphus, I decided to get off the road and head through the woods toward the coast because anything was better than what I was doing. Eventually, I come to a town. That is not marked on a map. Admitting defeat, I come to a motorcycle repair shop and tell the chap that I'm lost, and could he kindly tell me where Cee is. The guy starts laughing and tells me to go to the end of the road, turn right and in a hundred meters, I'll be in Cee. I followed his directions and when I came to a commercial thoroughfare, I looked up and saw a sign for my hotel on the side of a building. One hundred meters later, I was headed for a shower and a meal.

That's the second time something like that has happened to me on this trip.

The weather is still yucky, so I'm staying in. But will I be ready to push on in the morning? Why coitanly!



Rest well, all.

04/22/2022: AS I WAS WALKING THAT RIBBON OF HIGHWAY

The Yin: Except for the first hour or so, when it poured, today was lovely. Sunny and cool and fresh. Today was the first day I hiked in a T-shirt, without additional layers.

The Yang: About two thirds of today was spent either being lost or walking along the side of a highway facing oncoming traffic. And guess whether the highway twisted and turned uphill or downhill. Right! Uphill! I knew you'd get it! As a result, a thirteen-mile hike became a twenty-mile hike. Imagine my delight.

The day started out pretty good. Yeah, it was raining. A lot. But I expected that would happen somewhere along the line, so no big deal. I put on the rain gear, strapped the rain cover over my pack and off I went. And the path back to Santiago was just where the lady at the hotel said it would be.







I'm thinking today is going to be a better day than yesterday. I'm trucking along, got out of Cee in good time, . . . and then I come to a crossroads. And there, in a nutshell, is the problem with the Camino signs. There aren't any. I had a choice of three paths; none of which gave any

indication of which was the right way. So, in true Uncle Billy fashion, I chose the one in the middle.

After about a half mile, scouring the landscape for some kind of marker telling me I was on the right road, self-doubt crept in. So, I chickened out and went back to the crossroads. I could have sworn I saw an old man with a guitar standing there as I approached, but it must have been a mirage. This time, I choose the path on the right. It takes me through some little suburb of Cee. I come to a road. There's a sign with a yellow arrow and the "SC" legend underneath. While I'm pretty sure the letters still mean "Santiago de Compostela," after today, they may well have stood for "Satan Cares." I sure don't think anyone else did.



I follow the arrow to ... a highway. I'm thinking maybe the path is just up ahead. Self-doubt again. I see the road start to climb uphill in a few hundred yards and I'm thinking I don't really want to go through that again as I had more than enough yesterday. A taxi comes by. I hail it. It

stops. What do you think I did? Did I get in and tell the driver to take me to Olveiroa so that I can play guitar with that old man at the crossroads?

Nah. I asked the driver if he knew where the Camino was. He didn't. So, what did I do? I walked back to the crossroads and took the road I thought I should take in the first place. And damn if that old man with the guitar wasn't still there.

When I went down that path, I ended up at the exact same place as where I stopped the taxi. After that, I decided not to go see the man with the guitar again and started up the first hill of many more to come.

I was on that highway, walking against traffic, for seven kilometers. If such a thing is possible, that leg was worse than yesterday.

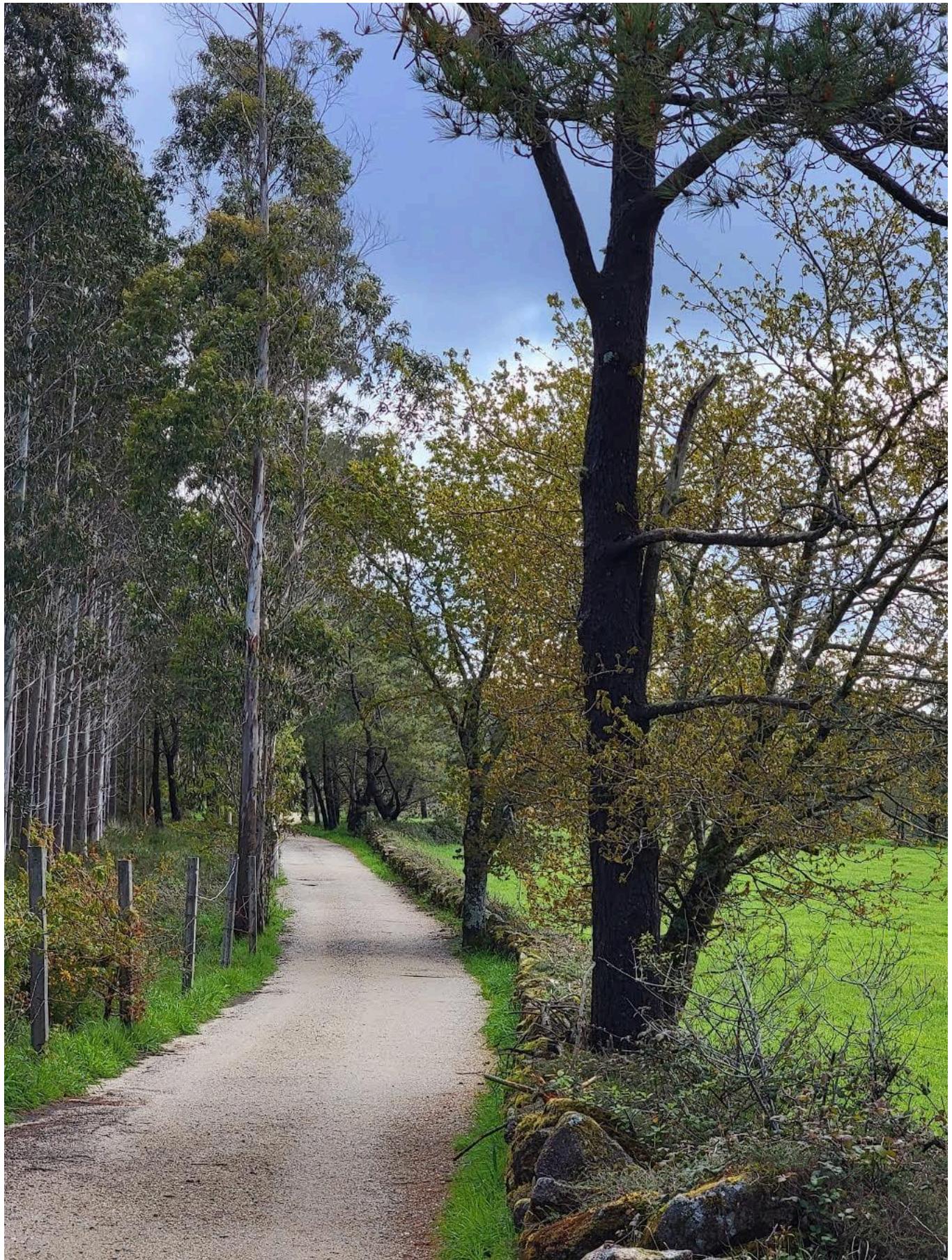
At one point, I saw an older couple on bikes. I knew I could take them, but I'd have to kill them both. Disposing of the bodies wouldn't have been a problem, as Galicia is chock full of horreros as we learned the other day. But I only needed one bike. So, I didn't kill them.

One thing I've noticed during my time in Galicia is that it's very clean. One doesn't really see a lot of trash. In fact, the side of road I was on was immaculate. Nothing like the usual array of cigarette boxes, aluminum cans, fast food containers, and the other assorted detritus one usually sees on the sides of American roads. No roadkill, either. Except for frogs, for some reason. I saw a lot of smushed frogs. I also saw a spent shotgun shell. I thought that was odd. Probably some Peregrino perdido pulled a Hemmingway because he couldn't take another hill.

I became pretty well resigned to just walking the highway all the way to Olveiroa. In fact, I was just about ready to approach a group of vineyard workers to try to organize them into a union when I saw a landmark I recognized from the so-called "map" I have in my little Camino book. When I checked the book, I saw the landmark was right on the edge of the Camino. So, I go into the little town and ask a couple of guys if they know where the Camino is. The older guy told me, and quicker than you can say "Bob's your uncle" I was on The Way again. Lesson: Always ask an old guy. We're always so pathetically grateful when anyone asks us for assistance that we're eager as heck to oblige. It's our way of fighting against the ever-increasing irrelevance of our existence.

So, I'm back on the Camino and everything is going along swimmingly.









For about five kilometers. Then, a road. No more Camino. It just disappeared. No path, no sign, no nothing. Back on the highway I go. For six more kilometers. Mostly uphill. Gosh darn it and gee whilakers (those of you who know me can probably guess what I really said). But I

made it. I'm still fighting the good fight. I got to my pension, had a meal and a shower, and now I'm hanging out with you.



Speaking of showers, another Spain imponderable: Spanish faucets are all uniflow; not separate faucets for hot and cold water. So, why is it that sometimes one must nudge the faucet to the left to make the water hot and sometimes one must nudge it to the right? Also, I've noticed that hotel floors are split into two wings, but there is only one elevator servicing only one wing. If one's room is not on the wing with the elevator, one must take the elevator, get off, and go through a door to the other wing to get to his or her room. Why do you think that is?

Tomorrow is my penultimate day on the Camino. It will also be my longest leg, even if I don't manage to lose the path. Wish me luck! Or maybe just tell that old man with the guitar to have the taxi waiting.



04/23/2022: ARE YA READY, BOOTS? START WALKIN'

I walked over 20 miles yesterday, from Olveiroa to Negreira. For those of you keeping score at home, that's more than 50,000 steps. It was worth it as yesterday was the first day on my trip that I felt like I had a typical Camino experience.



53,310

I got away early. Check. I like the places that serve breakfast at 7:30, instead of 8:30. Even though I have to say yesterday's breakfast was pretty spare compared to every other day on the trip – toasted pan (which is country bread, much like pain de compagnie in France). That was it. Dang.

But off I went, all jolly and looking forward to the day. The weather was sunny and warm enough. I'm on the trail. Life is good. Until the first crossroads. "Oh, shucks", I think. "BOHICA."



I'm standing there with a pissed off look on my face, pondering which way to go, when, seemingly out of nowhere, a voice says, "where do you want to go?" God? The Man with the Guitar? No. Balasz. My newest friend from Hungary. I stuck to Balasz all day like gravy on rice because Balasz knew where he was going.



Balasz is soon to start a new life in Vienna as a mechanical engineer. I won't go into detail about why he is walking the Camino, as it is personal to him. Suffice it to say that we had a great walk and talked about many things of depth during our 9 hours on the road. He's been on the road for 30 days, having done the big Camino from St. John Pied de Port to Santiago de Compostela, plus the Muxia/Finisterre route (the one I'm walking). We met a number of people he had come across earlier in his trip – Leah the Tarot Card reader from Marseilles, John the professor from England, two other Hungarians with whom I had a nice chat about the Grand Canyon, Marco, the Italian rascal. I don't want to get too artsy fartsy about it all, but my chief impression of the people I've encountered while walking the Camino is that most are on a search for something they may not be able to define, with the hope that it will be revealed. I don't know if that description fits me or not. Maybe.

After our ramble through the Galician countryside, we arrived at Negreira and said our farewells.



Perhaps I'll see Balasz in Santiago tomorrow. Perhaps not. Regardless, we had a lovely day together and I'm grateful I met him. I will never forget him.

04/24/2022: YOU'RE OUT OF THE WOODS, YOU'RE OUT OF THE DARK, YOU'RE OUT OF THE NIGHT!



Did it. Officially, 113 kilometers in 6 days. Unofficially, more than that after the extra wanderings trying to find the path.

I got to Santiago at 3:30 pm after a lovely day's walk in the sun (mostly) and only two instances of losing the trail (quickly re-gained). At one point, the trail literally stopped at a stone wall in a little village. Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.

If any Spanish (fka) Boy Scouts are looking for a good Eagle project, a great one would be to re-paint the arrows in sections where there are no monuments. As you can see in the pictures, a Peregrino often must look for a yellow arrow, with "SC" (usually) below it. Only sometimes, the arrow is so worn that one can't tell which way it points. At other times, there is no "SC." Sometimes, there's an "SC" or an "F." I came from "F" and was headed for "SC." As one gets closer, the "SC" changes to a symbol whose significance I will show you in tomorrow's posting.









The OZ moment occurred about 3 km from Santiago. There is a place where the trail turns from dirt to blacktop. When I arrived, there was not a soul in sight – just the sound of birdsong and the feel of a cool breeze. I lingered at that spot for a few minutes and was just present. Nothing more. It was the best moment of my Camino. I won't tell you what the worst moment was.



Random moments from the last day: Fisterra Bovine World. No clue. I saw no bovines. There was a sign that invites passersby to come in and take photographs. Uh...no.



I passed the church you see in the picture just as mass was getting out. Everyone was walking home. No cars.



A little way up the road was a community center. As I approached, I heard what I thought were bagpipes. However, what I really heard was “gaitas”, which are Spanish oboe-like instruments that are native to Galicia and other northern Spanish provinces. A group of men were practicing

their gaitas as I passed. I didn't take a picture out of respect as I didn't think they would want to be treated like a tourist attraction.

Just about the time I was getting hungry, I passed a roadside orange juice stand operated by three little kids, supervised by their father. The kids were hand squeezing oranges and pouring the juice into a pitcher. The littlest guy, wearing a Hot Licks T-shirt, shouted "Peregrino!", ran up to me and put an orange in my hand. I asked him if I could pay him, and he said Peregrinos didn't have to pay. Needless to say, I was very touched. I thanked Mick and went on my way to a little kid chorus of "Buen Camino!"

Upon reaching Santiago, I was struck by the traffic noise. I had, of course, seen cars during the past week, but the traffic sounds of a large city made me realize how quiet last week was for me.

The Way ends at the plaza of the Cathedral. When I arrived, there were throngs of people – laughing, taking pictures, hugging – all in sight of a building that was built more than a thousand years ago. That moment, for me, was one of the few times in my life when I actually got the concept of "it's the journey, not the destination." And who should I run into in the plaza? Leah, the Tarot Card girl from Marseilles. She pointed me toward the office where one gets his or her certificado, then started off in the opposite direction. I asked her where she was going. She said, "the frontier, then we'll see." I watched her yellow coat disappear into the crowd. Then I turned and headed for the Oficina de los Peregrinos.

Holy moly, they take their job seriously. No one expects the Spanish Inquisition! Even though Spain lifted its mask restrictions on Wednesday, I had to be masked. Good thing I had one. The lady asked me all sorts of verifying questions to be sure I actually walked the whole way. My swollen ankles, broken big toenail, and blistered middle toe can attest I did.

She then asked me why I hadn't gotten a stamp in Santiago. I told her I had just gotten there and besides, she had a stamp. She smiled, stamped my credencial, and filled in my certificado. She spelled my name incorrectly, but who cares.

Breviario de Miranda, siglo XV



apiculum huius
Almae Apostolicae

et Metropolitanae Ecclesiae
Compostellanae, sigilli Altaris
Beati Iacobi Apostoli custos, ut
omnibus Fidelibus et Peregrinis ex toto terrarum
Orbe, devotionis affectu vel voti causa, ad Limina
SANCTI IACOBI, Apostoli Nostri, Hispaniarum
Patroni et Tutelaris convenientibus, authenticas
visitationis litteras expediat, omnibus et singulis
praesentibus inspecturis, notum facit: In unum

Wilhelmum A. Rigg

hoc sacratissimum templum, perfecto Itinere
sive pedibus sive equitando post postrema centum
milia metrorum, birota vero post ducenta pietatis
causa, devote visitasse. In quorum fidem praesentes
litteras, sigillo eiusdem Sanctae Ecclesiae munitas,
ei confert.

Compostellae die 24 mensis Aprilis

Anno Sancto Domini 2022

Segundo Pérez López
Canonico Deputatus pro Peregrinis

Segundo L. Pérez López
Canonico Deputatus pro Peregrinis



Capitulum

I then went to my hotel. Camino tip: If you complete the Camino, treat yourself to a nice hotel. You'll have deserved it.

After a really long shower to wash off the funk of 40,000 years, I wanted to be alone and savor the day. I found a little hole in the wall café with a table in the sun. Senora fed me well and told me she and Senor have lived upstairs and operated that café for 55 years. I tried to imagine what they looked like in 1967 – opening a little café in the time of the European student revolts.



By the time I finished my second glass of Rioja, I knew it was time for rest. I found my hotel again and collapsed into bed. Exhausted but fulfilled.

A rest day in Santiago tomorrow. I think my feet will need it. Then, south. To the frontier? We'll see, won't we?



04/25/2022: REST AND REFLECTION

Layover day in Santiago. I had trouble sleeping as my late middle-age body was causing me “discomfort.” I don’t know how those Medieval Peregrinos did it in sandals – although I did see a guy on the trail yesterday wearing sandals. At any rate, the bruises on my feet and ankles are fading, the blister on my middle toe is better than it’s been, and a day just hanging in Santiago has been much needed.

The best time to go to the Cathedral is early morning. It was great. The sun was out and there was hardly anyone in the plaza.



I had the cathedral mostly to myself and felt at leisure to wander in the quiet. There was no one at the tomb of St. James and I was able to leave some of me mum's ashes in peace. I took a few snaps before the Pilgrim's Mass, and you might recognize one of them as being the same as one of the yellow markers pointing to "SC" that I talked about yesterday. It adorns the very top of the altar.



As people were congregating for Mass, I could hear the murmuring of the Rosary coming from an older lady sitting with a group of other older people. The sound of the Rosary in that particular setting was very comforting.

The Mass was in Spanish. I kept up okay as the priest was pretty old and spoke slowly. There were about 30 of us there. The big censer stayed stationary, so we didn't get that little bit of theatre as you may have seen in "The Way", but it was okay as the proceeding had an intimacy about it, even though we were in a massive cathedral.



After Mass, I was content to wander the streets of Santiago a bit. I really do enjoy just wandering aimlessly through the Medieval streets and seeing all the life going on. After lunch, I went back to the hotel for a siesta before packing for tomorrow's early departure.



Reflections on the Camino: Was it worth it? Yes. Those of you who know me well know that I am fascinated by Antarctic exploration and the exploits of not only Amundsen and Shackleton, but especially of Scott; precisely because the wonder is not that he and his crew died, but that it took them so long to die. Imagine day after day after day being cold and hungry, seeing the same thing, wearing the same clothes – the sweat freezing to your body, your feet turning black with frostbite, knowing your food supply is ever diminishing and that your strength will fail you at some point. Your dreams of glory dashed and facing 700 miles back to base, man-hauling a sled that weighs a ton, knowing that when you get there, if you get there, you'll face your self-conceived sense of humiliation and the shame of failure. And still persevering. And I whine because my cell phone has no GPS signal. The human spirit is a remarkable thing. I think it's good to test one's own spirit once in a while.

Would I do it again? Not by myself and not the route I took. I did what I needed to do with this one and I no longer have a need to prove anything to myself regarding walking the Camino. However, I have two cousins who have done the Camino Frances. While I don't want to spend 30 plus days on the road, if one of them asks me to do the Camino Primitivo for a week or so, I'd consider it as I'd like to see more of the Roman legacy in Spain.

What lessons did I learn? 1. Try to trust the universe. That's a hard thing for me and I don't do it enough. It was good to be reminded that the universe will give me what I need when I need it. 2. Try to be present. I feel like I'm at my best when I don't try to force things. I had a few moments of being present on my Camino. I will try to continue to apply the lesson. 3. Try to make progress. Every day. The Camino is an apt metaphor for that.

Thanks for taking the ride with me. Tomorrow, the tenor of my posts is apt to change, but I'll keep you in the loop as I head to Andalusia.

Buenas noches.

04/26/2022: PLANES, TRAINS, AUTOMOBILES, FEET, STILTS, UNICYCLES, VELOCIPEDES, VESPAS, RICKSHAWS, DOG SLEDS, etc.

In "The Innocents Abroad," Mark Twain said "Memories . . . someday will become all beautiful when the last annoyance that encumbers them shall have faded out of our minds." Sam better be right or I'm going to go to wherever he is buried and pour a glass of whiskey on his grave. Here's how my day went:

Got up and went to the airport in Santiago. The airline's computers were down (at 7 a.m. "Didja try turnin' it off and turnin' it back on again?"), so they manually processed us. No worries, though. Made the flight to Madrid A-OK. That was the last A-OK thing of the day.

When I landed at Madrid, I had 45 minutes to make my connection to Seville. I check the monitor and it tells me which gate I'm to go to. It is a 15-minute walk away. Still, no worries, though. Plenty o'time. I get to the gate, get in line with the other suckers, and, after about 5 minutes, the sign changes from Seville to Santiago. Boing! So back I go to the monitor. The

monitor tells me I am to go to a new gate – 5 minutes in the opposite direction. I’m a little worried, but not terribly so. At worst, the flight will have started to board, and I’ll make it.

I get to the gate. There’s no sign indicating a destination, but there are people in line. There’s only one plane at the jetway, people in the lines that say Groups 1 and 2 are doing their thing. So, I head for Group 4 because I’m in steerage, clog dancing my way across Spain in hopes of wooing Kate Winslett.

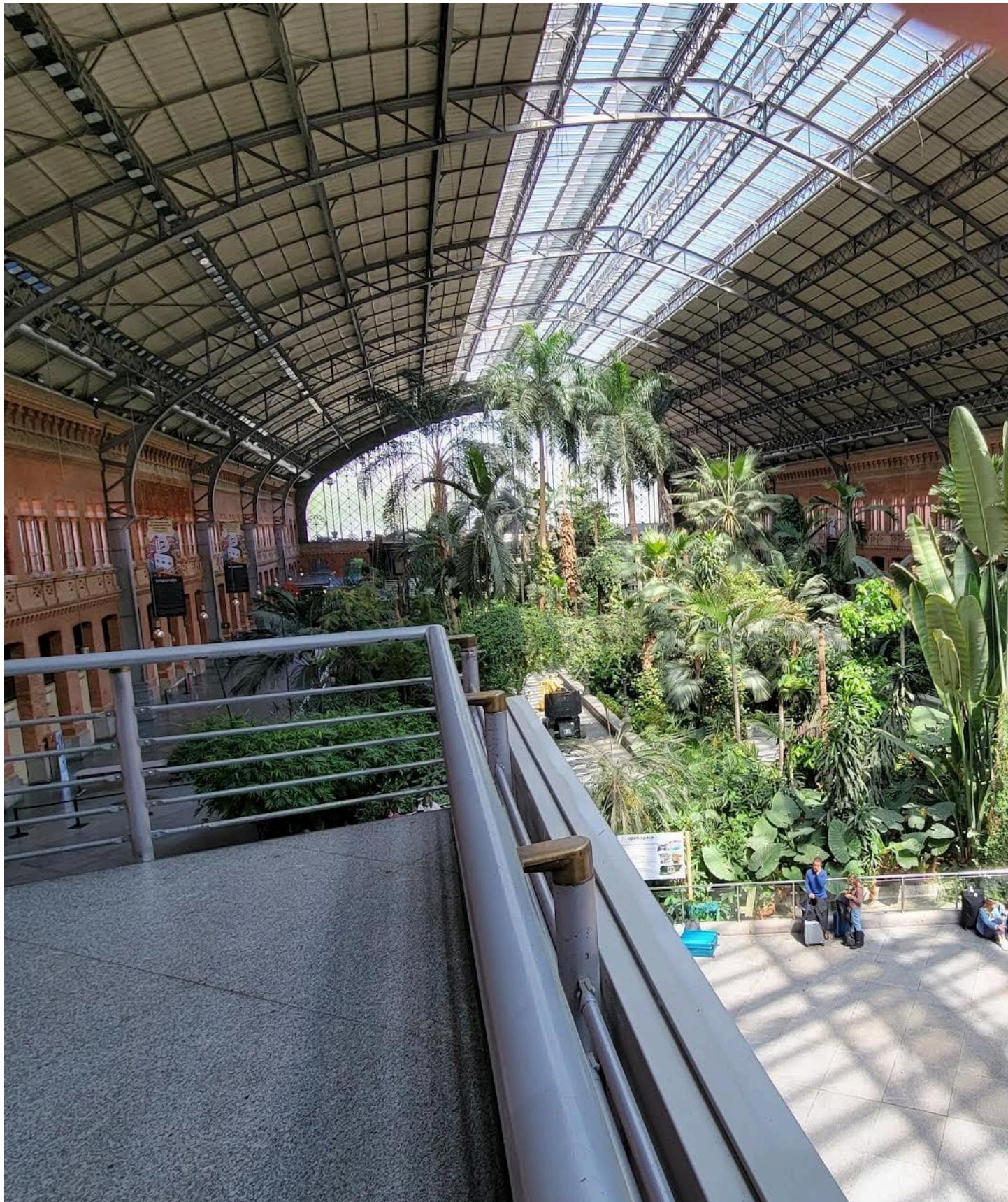
The lines move slowly. Seems to me like a lot of time is going by, but I figure the flight will be a little late. No biggie.

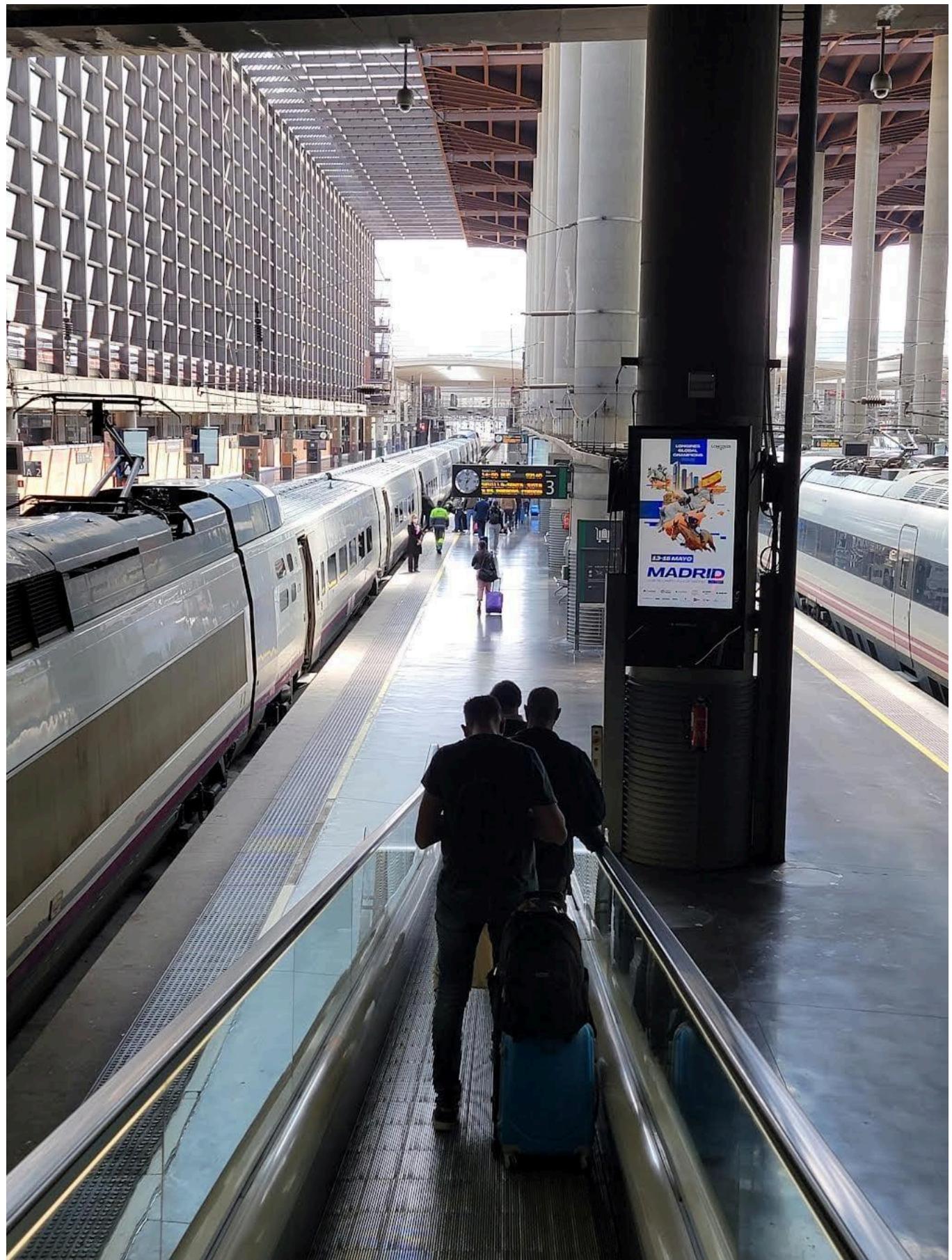
I get to the place where they scan my boarding pass. It was as if *The Andromeda Strain* had been loosed. Red lights, buzzers, the works. I thought Interpol was going to put a bag over my head and give me the Lorca treatment. But I’m being overly dramatic. The ticket lady merely says, “this flight isn’t going to Seville; this is the Lisbon flight.” WTF? The Lisbon flight!?! I gently inquire of the lady what happened to the Seville flight? Her response: “I don’t know,” and she shunts me out of line. I say, “what do I do?” She says, “you need to talk to someone” and goes on merrily boarding the other suckers for the Lisbon flight. Well, by this time, one of three things has happened to my flight: a. It’s in the air and almost ready to land in Seville; b. It’s crashed somewhere and the survivors will soon start cannibalizing each other; or c. It’s on a CIA island somewhere with Malaysia Flight 370. Regardless, I’m not on it.

But my suitcase is.

I go downstairs to the airline that shall remain nameless and discover about a hundred people in line waiting to speak to a customer service rep. As I stand in line with the other chumps, it occurs to me to check and see if there are any other flights to Seville today. There aren’t. So, what does an intrepid Peregrino who conquered the Camino Finisterre do? He checks the train timetables and discovers there are trains going to Seville almost hourly all afternoon. “Taxi!”

30 Euro later and I’m at the Madrid train station. 80 Euro after that, and I’m holding a train ticket to Seville. Man, you’d think I’d won a mink coat from Dicker and Dicker of Beverly Hills.







JULY AVE 14:00
08 ados en la
SEVILLA



Beautiful train ride through the Spanish countryside. I get to Seville. 30 Euro later, I'm at the Seville airport. I just walked through the Security checkpoint without so much as a by your leave. I could have been Mohammed Atta for all they cared. Nonetheless, I scope out the airline who shall remain nameless' unclaimed baggage office. It's closed. I go upstairs to Puerta 20 and find a place to ask questions. In line ahead of me is a bedraggled Irishman wearing a suit jacket with no shirt. He is sweating profusely. His torn pants and droopy drawers are living proof why we should all say no to crack. I decide not to wait.

I find a rep for the airline that shall remain unnamed at Puerta 20. She takes my baggage claim check and disappears behind door number 3. A few minutes later, she comes back, only she isn't holding a box like Jay Stewart. Instead, she tells me the baggage office is closed. Closed at 4:30 p.m. Closed in the third most populous city in Spain. I gently inquire as to when the baggage office might be open at some point in the future. She gives me phone number and tells me to call it at 8:30 in the morning, when, hopefully, the airline that shall remain nameless will deliver my bag to my hotel. Assuming my bag is actually in Seville.

Well, as the mooks in Mean Streets would say, "whaddayagonnado?" I went to my hotel, got the lay of the land, scoped out the "Apotheosis of Alfalfa" (more on that tomorrow), had a meal and I am now going to wash this day right out of my hair.

Opening impressions of Seville: 1. I won't need warm clothing. It feels like Dallas, hot during the day but still cool at night. 2. People in Seville must eat a lot of ice cream. There's an ice cream shop about every 30 feet. 3. There's a lot of bookstores. There's a cool one right around the corner from my hotel. 4. Everyone seems to have a dog – more medium and smaller sized ones here than in Galicia, where every dog seemed to be Baskerville sized. 5. The people walk slower. 6. The largest treated cardboard sculpture in the world is here. Why treated cardboard? I have no idea. But it's here. It's apparently very popular. 7. Circuses seem to be popular – replete with creepy clowns to torment small children's nightmares.

So that's about it for my day? How was yours? Better than mine, I hope. Hasta manana.



04/27/2022: ALFALFA AGONISTES

Strophe: Sarcinae

I know you all went to bed last night on pins and needles wondering if I did or ever will get my luggage back. Put your minds at ease. Per the instructions I received yesterday at Puerta 20 in the Seville airport, I promptly called the number on my boarding pass this morning at 8:30 to inquire if: a. The airline that shall remain nameless has my bag; and b. If so, will it deliver my bag to my hotel. The response: "Call back at 10:30. We have many bags here from yesterday." Upon hearing that response, a couple of things occurred to me: 1. I must not be the only dunderhead who missed his connection yesterday; and 2. If I call back at 10:30, I will be told to come to the airport to sort out the problem. I decided to beat the rush and I went to the airport.

Like yesterday, I walked right in. I could have been carrying a TOW Missile and I don't think anyone would have batted an eyelash. Unlike yesterday, the FBO ("Fangooloed Baggage Office") was open. There was a lady somewhere in there, surrounded by a stack of luggage that looked like a parapet on the Somme. Guess where she told me to go? Yup. Puerta 20. My bag was at Puerta 20. The circle remains unbroken. I felt like calling Mother Maybelle.

After returning from the airport – before 10:30 I might add – I decided to wander before my 1:00 tour of the Alcazar and the Cathedral. I get the feeling that Seville is a good city for wandering. I would like to have more time here to really get the feel of the place, but I have a tour this afternoon, the Apotheosis of Alfalfa this evening, and an all-day tour tomorrow to Granada and The Alhambra, before braving the airline that shall remain nameless on Friday in hopes of I and my luggage arriving in Madrid at approximately the same time.

Antistrophe: Castellum Deperditarum Animarum et Cathedralium

Seville is really old. Three Roman Emperors of note came from here – Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. Why Spain for these guys? Because their fathers were military men. If one was a Roman Legionnaire and managed to live for 20 years, the Empire would retire that Legionnaire and his family in the vicinity of his last posting. Hence, Seville for the fathers of these guys (technically, "Itallica", about 30 km from Seville).

Before the Romans, it was the Greeks. Before the Greeks, it was the Ibericos. They were around at least since the 6th century B.C. and are referred to by the Greeks and the Romans. Once they were driven out by the Romans, they sort of morphed into the Celts. That's why there's such a heavy Spanish influence in Celtic culture (remember the gaita that sounds like a bagpipe? Ever heard the expression "Black Irish?" Si, si. Tienes Razon! The Iberian influence on Celtic culture!). After the Romans, it was the Visigoths and their tribal offshoots for about 400 years, then the Moors for about 800 years more until la Reina Isabella and her crew drove them out. Nothing like a good old genocide to keep the "true religion" pure.

And speaking of Isabella, she must have been a humdinger. Her sigil is a bunch of arrows because she said arrows are like women - they are more direct and can kill quicker than a sword.

Expounding, she said a group of women, like a group of arrows, cannot be broken; unlike a sword and a man, which can.



And speaking of Game of Thrones, some of it was filmed at the Alcazar, which I visited today. Like all that kind of stuff for me, GOT went in during my viewing of it and was promptly forgotten as soon as the credits rolled.



The Alcazar is simply too big and too eclectic to try to capture effectively in this blog. Suffice it to say that it's a mishmash of Gothic, Baroque, and Moorish architectural styles, dating from (mostly) the 11th through the 16th centuries. A representative group of photos appears below.











What I found more interesting than the architecture, was the stories of its inhabitants (the last one flew the coop in the 1920s). For example, that Pedro the Cruel. What a card! It's not everyone who can convince an archbishop that repeatedly banging the head of one of his bastard sons against a marble column resulted in that bastard son's accidental death. That crazy knucklehead, Pete.

Great stories notwithstanding, I found the Cathedral more impressive than the Alcazar. It's the third largest Cathedral in the world and it is truly massive. The pillars are larger than anything I've seen in any other religious edifice. The altar simply must be seen to be believed. A sheet of gold many stories tall. I guess it helps when your main business is bringing back precious metals from the New World.



And speaking of the New World – Cristobal Colon – or at least some of him – is entombed in the Cathedral. Apparently, his head is still in Havana and the bulk of his body is in Santo Domingo, but DNA testing with the remains of his brother (Hernan Colon), who is also buried in the Cathedral, have confirmed that some of old Chris is in the box being toted by the four Kings who united to form the single country of Espana.



Hernan Colon was Chris' brother and money manager once Isabella gave Chris the dough for his first voyage. Hernan and his brood were great benefactors of Seville. One of his passions was books and he charged Chris with bringing back books from wherever he went; which explains why Seville is such a book loving city. Who knew?

Epode: Apotheosis Alfalfa

To those of you who know me, you didn't really think I'd go to Seville, Spain and not get a haircut at Figaro's, the Barber of Seville, did you? Camino. Check. Haircut and shave and Figaro's in Seville. Check. The life goals just keep toppling.



My barber was Ivan. He did a magnificent job, transforming me from a Camino ragamuffin into Paul Newman. Kudos to you, Ivan!





And while we're on the subject, it is time. . . more than time - for us to acknowledge the courage of Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer for persevering through "the Barber of Seville" in the face of incalculable odds. His courage, fortitude, and sheer (dare I say it?) GUTS are what made this country great.

Carl, this is for you.



04/28/2022: MOOR, MOOR, MOOR! SAY, HOW DO YOU LIKE IT? HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?

I went to the Alhambra today. I went on a bus that must have been built for the Singer Midgets (sorry, the Singer Little People). I have two words for the bus. Shock. Absorbers. We left at 6 a.m. and got there at 10. In my group, I was the only American. Notable group mates included 2 French women who were snotty about everything, a Peruvian couple with the husband apparently used to having everything done for him as his wife catered to his every whim, and a young Austrian couple – hipster guy and prim girl who looked like she had had just about enough of hipster guy for one lifetime. Ah, love.

The tour was in Spanish and English. Our guide, Gustavo, was great. On a side note, the name for Kermit the Frog on the Spanish version of Sesame Street is Gustavo. Our Gustavo lamented his childhood torment at continuously being called a frog. He doesn't look like a frog. He looks more like the late great Rick Ocasek.

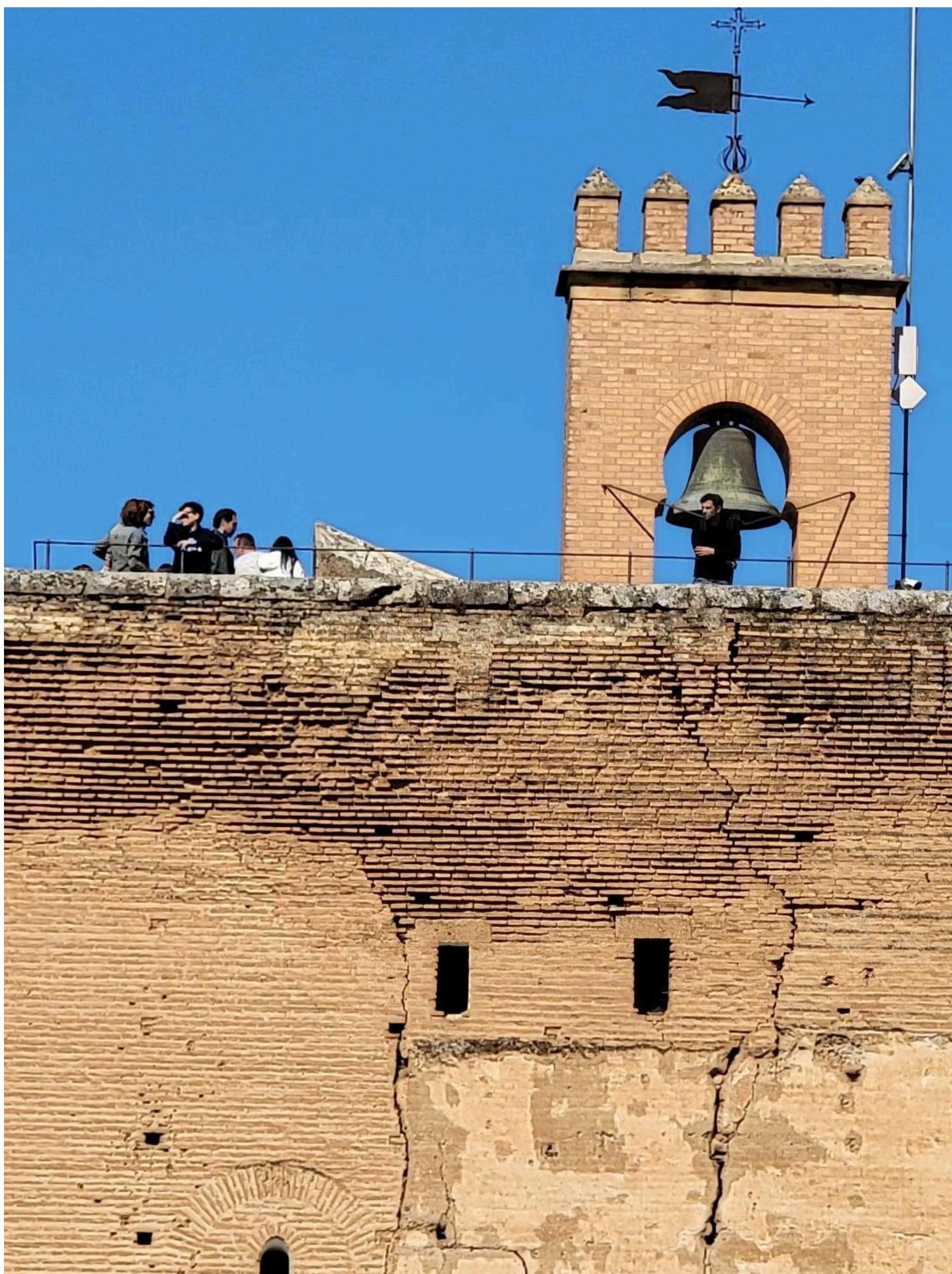
A few quick takes: 1. The Alhambra is not a palace. It's a town with 3 palaces in it. 2. It was built by the Moors beginning in 1238. The Moors practiced Islam. 3. The Moors come from a desert, so what do you think is the single most important thing to desert people (and don't say "the sandwiches there"). Right! Water! 4. Los Reyes Catolicos – Ferdinand and Isabella – put a can of whup ass on the Moors in 1492 and drove them out of Spain. 5. The Alhambra overlooks the city of Granada, because the Spanish royalty didn't trust the Granadans,

The signature fruit of Granada is the pomegranate. Hence, "Granada." The original name of the city translated from the Arabic is the "Pomegranates of the Jews." See, the Jews and the Muslims lived together in peace in Granada until Ferd and Izzy drove them both out of the newly United Kingdom of Spain. One method they employed was the Spanish Inquisition. How unexpected.

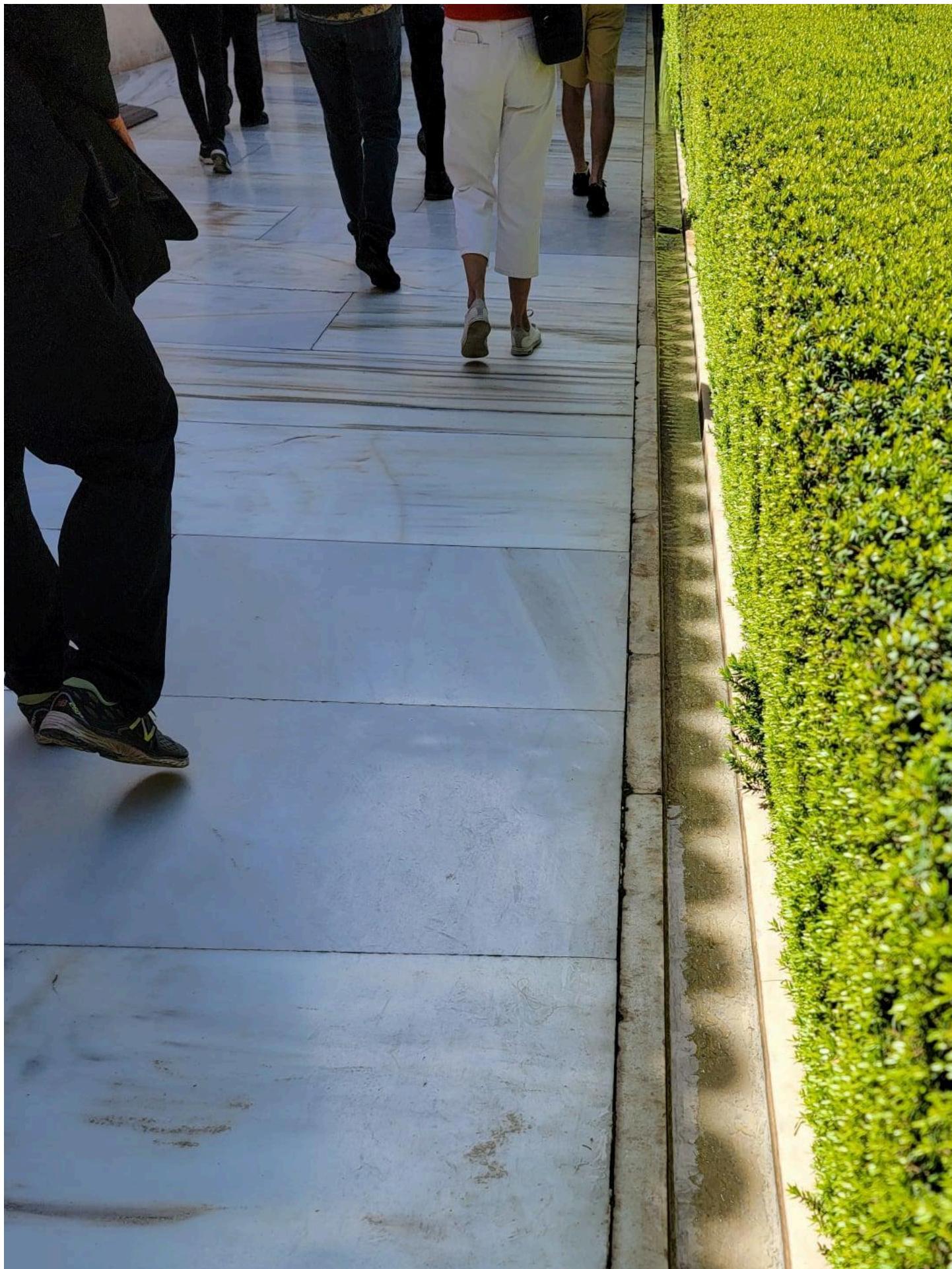
The Spanish royalty always slept in the Alhambra because it was fortified with a double set of walls and a prefab moat that could be flooded at a moment's notice. 28 Spanish kings lived at the Alhambra. It was never attacked.

The "Generalife" was the summer palace built by Charles I of Spain/V of the Holy Roman Empire (he of the Hapsburg weird chin). He hung out there because it was pretty and cool, being just up the hill from the Alhambra. But he didn't sleep there because it isn't walled.

The Alhambra is kind of nondescript on the outside. That's because the Moors didn't want to be ostentatious, lest it rile the neighbors. Bland on the outside, rich on the inside. Kind of like all those subdivisions you see in Orange County, CA where the HOA won't let you paint your house any color but beige or beige.



So, water. The Alhambra sits in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range – just like Alhambra, CA sits in the foothills of the San Gabriels. Do you see where I'm going with this? The whole area looks and feels like SoCal. And water is the primo thing. The water system was the first thing built by the Moors and that water system is still in use today. It takes the runoff from the Sierras and bathes a paradise. But I don't want to gush. Forget it, Bert. It's the Alhambra. Seriously though, little water canals run all over the place.



You can tell which parts of the Alhambra were built by the Moors and which were built by the Reyes Catolicos from the architecture. Christians had noisy fountains and open walkways. Muslims had quiet fountains and enclosed walkways.





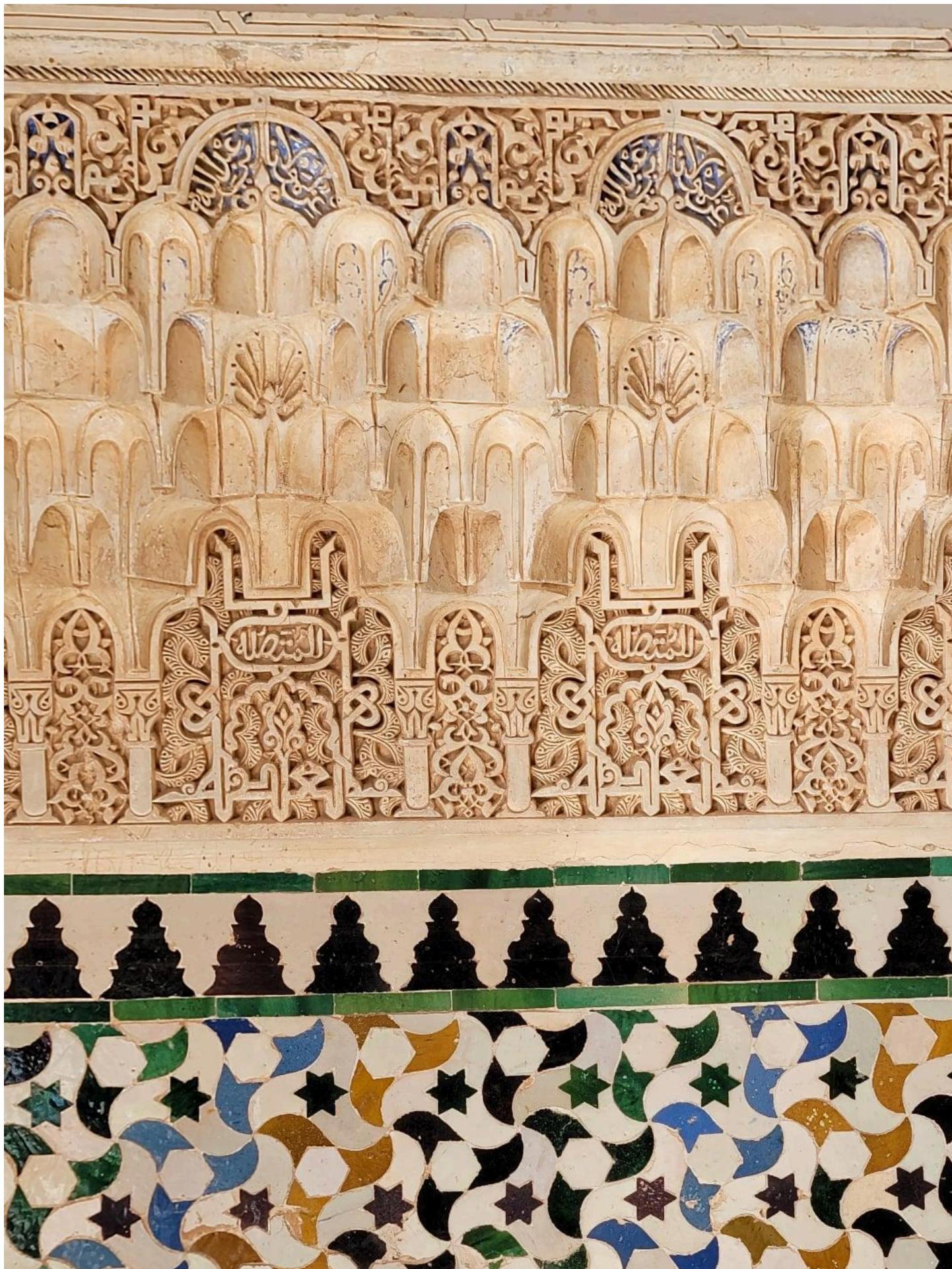




The weird thing I noticed both at the Alcazar yesterday and the Alhambra today is that even though the Christian kings seem to have hated all things Moorish, they really didn't seem to mind the Moorish architecture and, indeed, kept it all intact, even with all the "Allah is the only victor" written in Arabic all over the place. And it truly is all over the place. The Christian kings added on to the joint with ugly Gothic stuff, but they still kept the Moorish influence; even to the point of having all the altars in the chapels facing east.







An example of the Moorish influence is the amount of the number 5 one sees – 5 windows, 5 walkways, 5 steps, etc. Anybody know why? Brush up on your basic Islam and you'll go, "Doh!" Also, the Christian kings kept the Moorish color scheme throughout – white, blue, and green. White for purity, blue for heaven, and green for paradise (because of the sandwiches there. Not. Because of water).





A lot of the Alhambra got blowed up by Napoleon. He was a real butt wad. He blowed up a lot of stuff all over the world. Hmm. Sounds familiar, don't it? When old Nap was leaving Spain, he ordered the Alhambra to be blowed up and leveled. A soldier named Jose Garcia (I'm not making this up) said "Okie Dokie, Nap. I'll blow it up once you're safely out of range." Nap, thinking that was a good idea, went somewhere else to blow something else up. Jose didn't blow up the Alhambra. And that's the reason why 8,000 people a day pay 20 Euro a piece to see the Alhambra.

A LA MEMO
DEL
CABO DE INVAL
JOSE GARCIA
QUE CON RIESGO E PERDE
SALVO E LA RVINA LOS A
Y TORRES E LA ALHAMBRA
EL CVERPO E INV

And speaking of blowing up things, don't eat the oranges. They are not for drinking/eating. They are too bitter. Instead, they are used to make marmalade and gunpowder. Go figure.



One other thing of note about the Alhambra. In the picture below, you'll see all the white buildings – that's the Arab quarter (remember the ostentation thing from above). Further up the hill, along the wall, was the “gypsy” quarter. I know I'm not supposed to use that word anymore; so, I'll refer to that particular group as “Roma”. I learned today that the Roma have their origins in India and that linguistically and genetically, most of the Roma throughout the world (more in the U.S., btw, than in Spain or France) come from a particular province of India. I verified it in Wikipedia – the most trusted name in information delivery.



After the Alhambra, we went to Granada to have lunch. It was kind of a tack on for which I didn't see much point, but I did see parts of the original Moorish wall that predates the Alhambra by about 400 years.







Por
al
Arte



I also saw the dog's prayer, which I shall leave you with. You can probably suss out the gist, even if you don't have a lot of Spanish.

ORACIÓN DEL PERRO

Oh Señor de las criaturas, haz que el hombre, mi amo, sea como yo soy para él.

Haz que ame su familia y sus hijos como yo les amo. Haz que los bienes que tu has concedido como honestamente

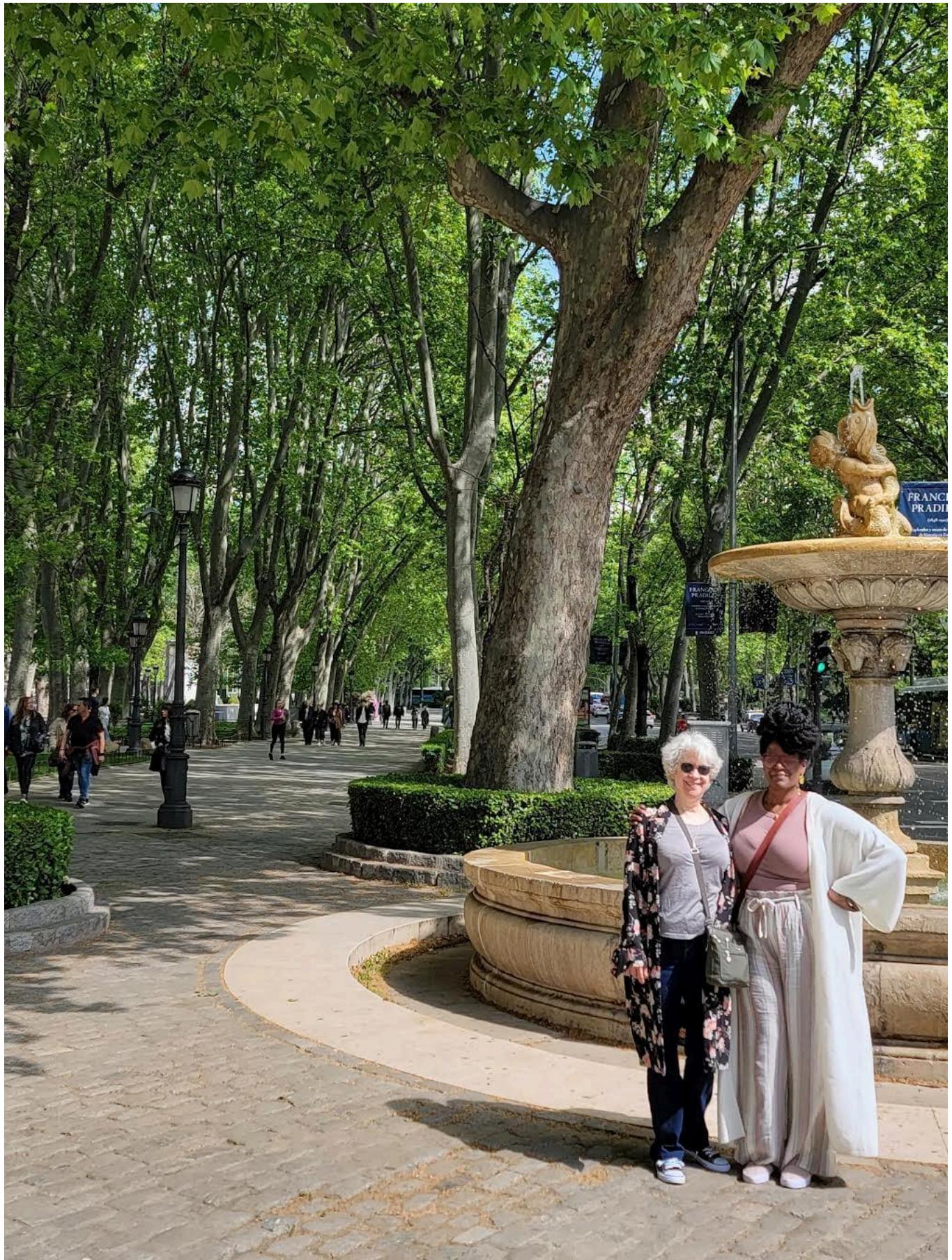
Dale, Señor una sonrisa fácil y espontánea, como la de mi rabo. Conserva en él mi juventud de corazón y mi

Oh Señor de todas las criaturas, del mismo modo que haz que mi amo sea siempre verdadero hombre y r

Tomorrow, Madrid, on the airline that shall remain nameless. If you never hear from me again, know that I went down smiling and with a shave and a haircut from the Barber of Seville. Buenas Noches.

04/29/2022 – 05/03/2022: AQUEDUCT'S MY FRIEND

Hello, there. Thought I'd check in with you all today. It's been a whirlwind lately. I got to Madrid a few days ago and was able to stay in a very swanky hotel con mi familia for a couple of days.





After a couple of days, we transferred to our Airbnb apartment near the Plaza Callao. It's a very handy location as most of the Madrid attractions are within easy walking distance.

Madrid is much like any big city. Although I have to say, I can't really figure out when people go to work. Stuff doesn't seem to open until 10, lunch starts at 11, siesta at 4, and closing at 8.

Much different hustle and bustle vibe here than in the States. Maybe that's why people smile here.

Apparently, there used to be bears in Madrid. Until some guy killed them all in the old timey days.





Speaking of old timey days, during the time of the Moors, some guy climbed up a wall armed only with a dagger and captured the Moorish flag. The Moorish Commander was impressed and compared the guy to a cat. Hence, Madrilenos are called “gatos.”

On a related note, I have had good luck since I arrived, although I remain ever vigilant.



SUERTE
ES TENER
UN BARRIO
LIMPIO

OSO

The weather was terrific when I arrived, but the last two days have been cold as butt (for you, Holly Rudin Ingram). Nonetheless, some of us intrepid travelers went to Avila and Segovia yesterday.



You may recall that Avila is the home of St. Teresa. No stigma if you didn't know that.

Avila is a walled city. 2.5 kilometers if you walk your dog around the perimeter. The first stop was the Cathedral of St. Vincent. I can't figure out why he's a saint other than he managed to get himself and his sisters executed in a most gruesome manner during the time of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. The sisters didn't even get the payoff of having their names included in the Cathedral. Nonetheless, their story is depicted in graphic novel form on a cenotaph.





The Cathedral is significant in that its construction was begun during Roman times and not completed until Gothic times. You can tell by the shapes of the arches – rounded for Roman, pointed for Gothic.





And speaking of Cathedrals, do you know what the difference is between a Cathedral and a Basilica? I learned what the difference is yesterday.

Avila is on one of the Camino routes. I wish I had had as good directions as are included in Avila.

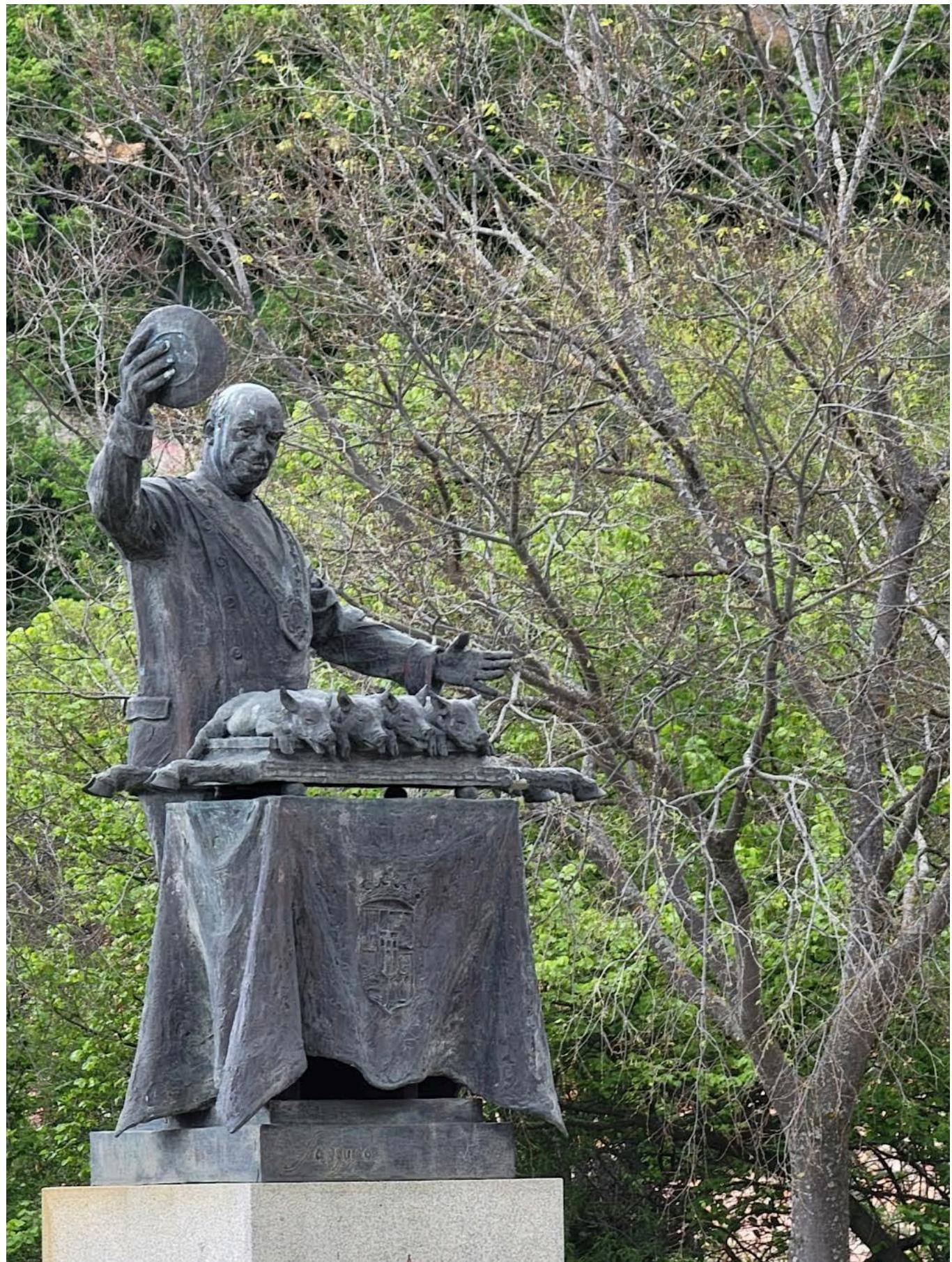


Next stop, St. Teresa's birthplace, which is enclosed by a church. I guess. I really didn't see anything that looked like a birthplace, but that's what I heard. What I did find impressive was the disco where I assume St. Teresa went to unwind after a hard day reforming the Carmelites.





After lunch in Avila, we went to Segovia which is, apparently, the birthplace of eating suckling pig. Well, everybody's gotta be somewhere, I guess. There's a statue of the guy who invented it. He looks a lot like Nikita Kruschev.



We then went to the castle. It was cool and all, but most of it burned down in the 1860s, so very little was authentic. What didn't get burned up was the chapel of Juana Loca, the nutty Princess of Los Reyes Catolicos and sister of Catherine of Aragon (who had to deal with Enrique Ocho Loco). What a family! But her mom knew how to rock the PR, as evidenced by the wall size mural of her coronation.







We then went to the Cathedral, but it's a lot more impressive on the outside than it is on the inside. Of note was the life size replica of dead Jesus that the Segovians parade in the streets every Good Friday. Apparently, JC's teeth are noteworthy. I gave it a miss.

Our last stop was the Aqueduct. It was built more than 2000 years ago and was in use until 1907. It is truly marvelous. It starts 16 km away in the mountains and lets gravity bring water into the city, where it transitions to an underground delivery system; finally terminating in a well at the castle. But what did the Romans ever do for us?







So that's what I've been up to lately. How's by you?

I'll check in again before I head back to reality.

05/04/2022 – 05/05/2022

The Prado. It ain't just cupids, fruit, and nekkid women. There's some purty good pitchers in there, too.

To my 3rd through 6th grade art teachers: You really sucked and had no business being loosed upon impressionable children. Your crankiness and ill will turned me off the fine arts until I was in my 30s. But I have made up for it since. So, nanny nanny boo boo to you!

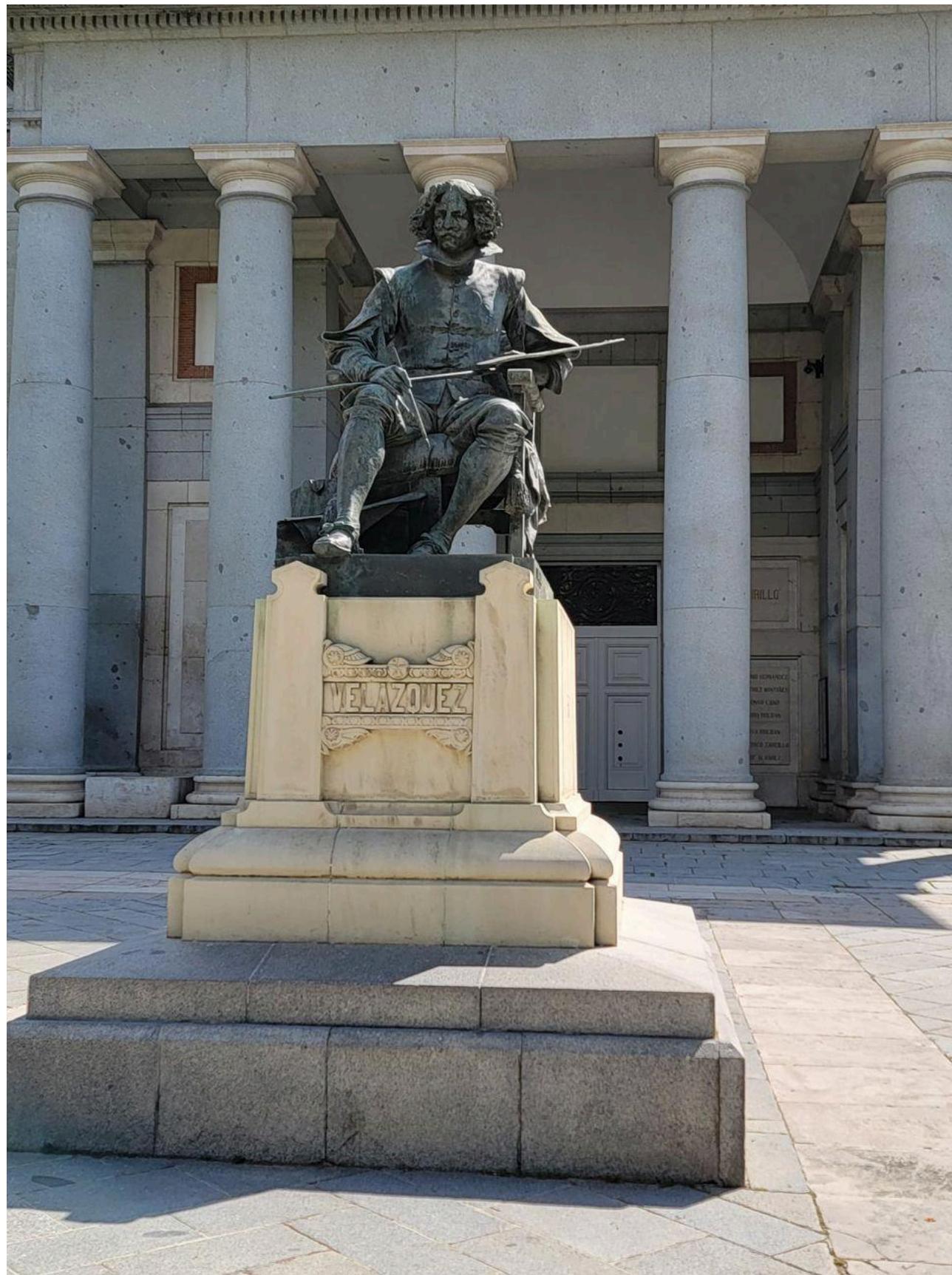
The Prado has over 75 rooms devoted almost exclusively to painting. It has the most extensive Titian collection I have seen in one location and the Bosch collection is comprehensive and most impressive. Bosch was really popular during and just after his lifetime. I find that odd as his paintings are really allegorical and heavy on symbolism that has largely become indecipherable; but I guess what Medieval people lacked in literacy, they made up for in imagination. Before I discovered I was not allowed to take pictures, I got a snap of St. James about to be beheaded and a snap of my all-time favorite painting, which is Las Meninas, by Velasquez. If you go to the Prado, spring for the extra 5 Euros when you buy your ticket. You'll get a really great guidebook that will help you remember your romantic Spanish holiday as you leaf through it on a cold and blustery winter evening.



Execution of Socrates, 347 BC
by Jacques-Louis David, 1787



Speaking of Velasquez, nobody knows where he is buried. Apparently, that's a thing in Spain. The graves of many of its famous authors and artists, including Cervantes, are unknown as their bodies were pitched after a time to make room for the newly dead (although there is unconfirmed speculation as to where Cervantes is buried; unlike Lorca who got shot and dumped during the Civil War). Ask not for whom the bell tolls.



After the Prado, I went to the Parque Nacional and had some lousy paella. But the Parque itself was lovely, and not a little reminiscent of the Tuileries. I had to take a picture of the boats as it satisfies my Chinatown paranoia, wondering if there's some PI taking pictures of an older man and a younger woman sailing along on Moonlight Bay. There was a saxophonist nearby who kept playing Tico-Tico. I'm glad to see someone in Spain appreciates the light classics.



That evening, we all went to see a flamenco performance. While it had vast cheesiness potential, it was actually a great exploration of an art form I know nothing about. While I do know something about Tango culture, I don't think the two are comparable as Tango is grounded in the natural world and Flamenco seems to be grounded in cultural expression – the varied rhythms and different ports de bras of the male and female dancers appear to be symbolic of a culture that does not necessarily rely on the written word. Of course, I may be wrong. If I am, please let me know as I'm interested.



On the 5th, a few of our brood went to Toledo. We met our bus at Las Ventas, which was built in 1929. That means it wasn't around when Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, but it was cool to see nonetheless – even though bullfighting sucks.



Toledo is way old and was a settlement long before the Roman occupation. It is built on a bluff overlooking the Tagus River and there are ruins dating back to the 5th Century BCE. A Roman-built bridge is still in use.





Toledo is famous for steel, silver, and gold. In fact, the USMC ceremonial swords are and have been manufactured in Toledo since the Halls of Montezuma.

Toledo is also in La Mancha. Man, there's fertile countryside all around. No wonder it was a prosperous location on which to found a city.



Toledo got hit hard by the Medieval plague in the 1300s. Prior thereto, three dominant cultural groups had co-existed peacefully in Toledo for hundreds of years – Muslim, Jewish, and Christian. When the plague hit, guess which group got hit the hardest? Hint: the group that didn't wash regularly, ate pork, and didn't practice hygienic food preparation. Ding! Ding! Ding! The Christians! Guess what they did? They got rid of all the Jewish people. Not only did that not abate the plague, but it also wrecked the Toledo economy as the Jewish merchants were the middlemen for Toledo's trade with the rest of the world. Those wacky Medieval Christians. Good thing Christians don't do that sort of thing today.



The highlight of the visit was a trip to a replica of El Greco's house. His paintings of the 12 Apostles were worth the trip right there and the gardens were lovely. Whenever I see portraits, I always think about who the models were and what their lives were like. El Greco's painting of the Burial of Count Orgaz, on display in Toledo, provides some clues as almost everyone in the painting is modeled on a prominent person of the day. BTW, a self-portrait of El Greco appears as the guy in front standing just to your left of the guy center stage with the red cross on his tunic.





I have noticed that Spain is very LGBTQ friendly and apparently has been for centuries if the detail of the below carving is any indication. However, while I'm sure Dick Waffles are simply scrumptious, I'm not sure I could order one with a straight face.



@lapolleriademadrid



dick waffle

La pollería de Madrid



So that's been the last couple of days for me. I think I'm going to catch a play tonight and I still have Guernica on the agenda before going home, so it looks like you're likely to hear from me again. Hope all of you are doing well.

05/06/2022 – 05/08/2022: NOT WITH A BANG

The 7th is my wife's birthday. We had a big family dinner planned – 10 of us at one of Madrid's finest restaurants. Michelin rated, no less. However, one of our crew came down with COVID. He will have to stay in Spain for another week. The rest of us are fine, but there was a lot of scrambling to get earlier flights back to the U.S. Consequently, our dinner for 10 turned into dinner for 4, and as I write this early Sunday morning, everyone has left, except for us and Typhoid Mary. This is the way the trip ends, this is the way the trip ends....

On Friday, I tried to get tickets to see La Casa de Bernarda Alba. However, it was sold out, so I had to settle for a statue of Lorca, instead.



I spent the rest of the afternoon in a café under an umbrella watching the world go by.

On Saturday, we went to see Guernica. I hadn't seen it since its days at MOMA when Franco was still alive. It's still as overwhelming as I remember it and seemed a fitting end to my little Spanish excursion.

A few concluding observations:

I didn't see any homeless people until I got to Madrid. The homeless people I saw in Madrid were all male.

Spanish people are nice and friendly without being annoying about it.

I never saw a kid throw a tantrum.

An inordinate amount of people I saw were smiling.

Beggars were shy and supplicating. People trying to sell you useless garbage trinkets are overly aggressive (why socks?).

Francisco Franco is still dead.

Street buskers are, to a person, extremely untalented.

Preferred walking attire for women seems to be low top Chucks.

There you have it. I've enjoyed my time in Spain, but it's time to go home. By the end of the week, I'll be back in my routine, no one will be interested in hearing about my past few weeks, and it will all be as if it never happened. But I'll remember. Mi Camino. Thanks for coming along with me.

As you scroll through the pictures, hear the last 16 bars of "A Day in the Life" in your head.

Wherever your Camino de Vida takes you, may it be full of wonder and fulfillment.

Buen Camino.

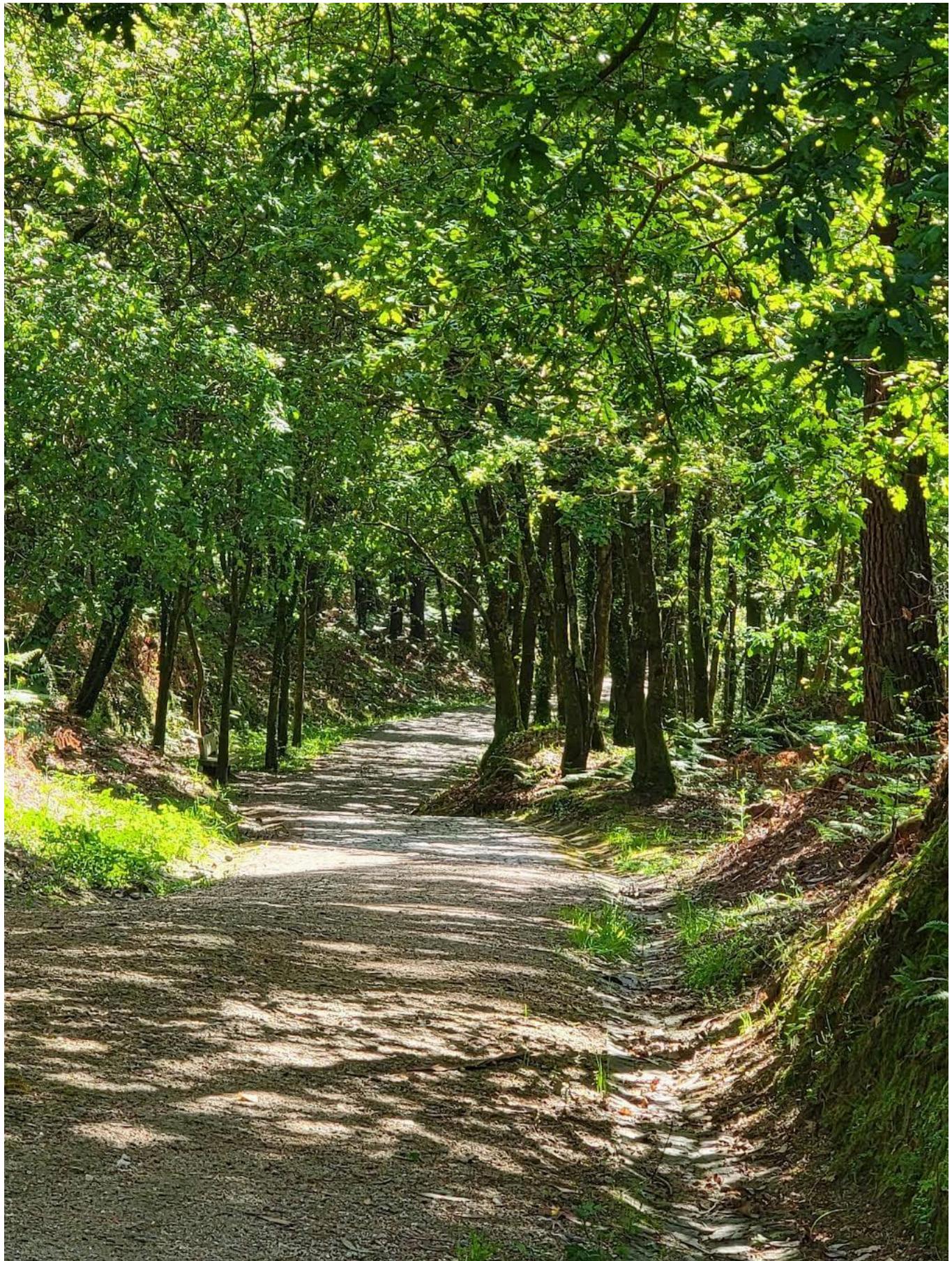












4 TAPIA
8 PORTOMOURO

ROXOS 3
SANTIAGO 9



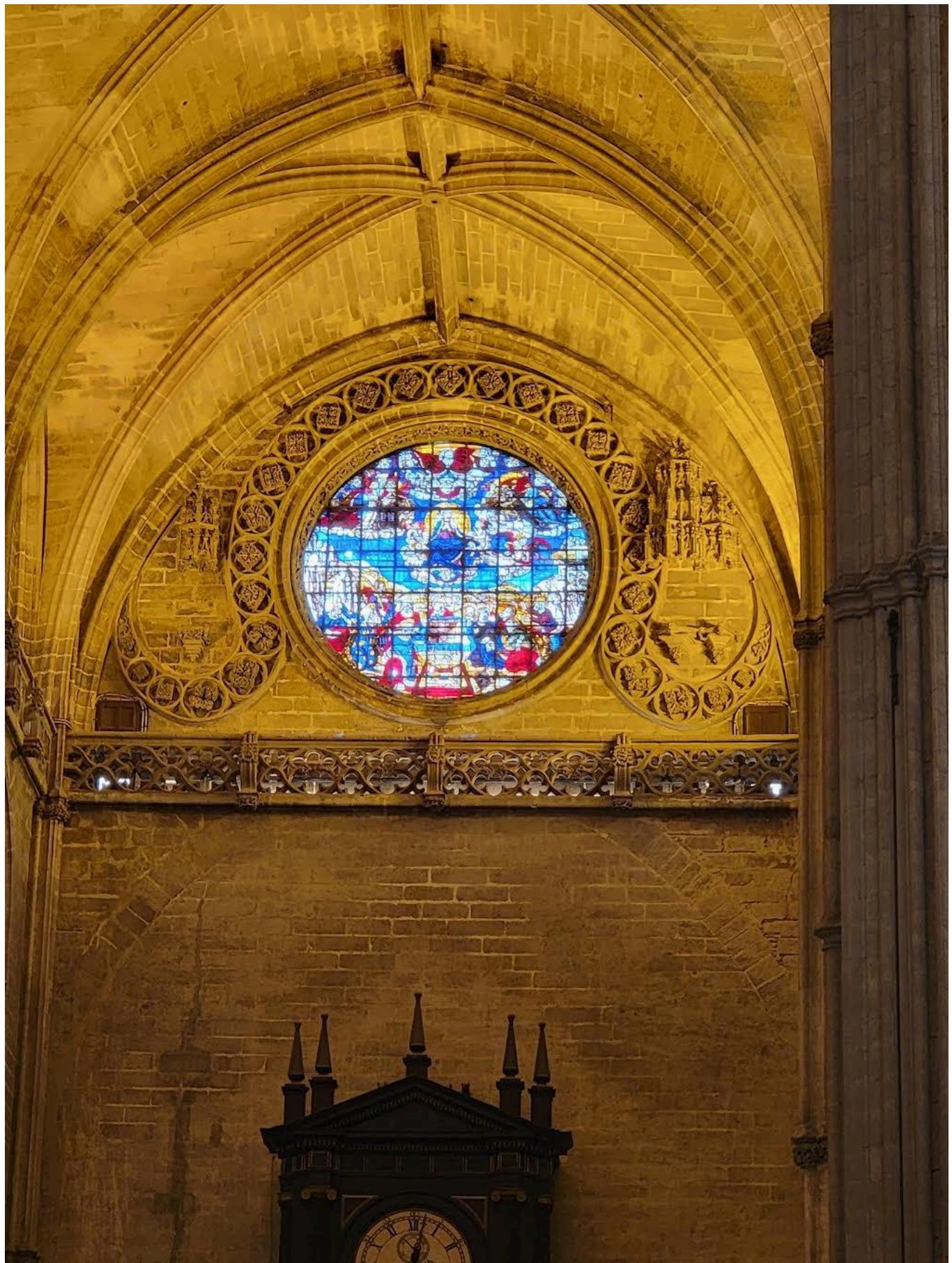
























OFICINA 42

all day bar





