

CYCLING THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

THE WAY OF ST JAMES – CAMINO FRANCÉS

by Mike Wells

CICERONE

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Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/969/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: The Alto del Perdón, where ‘the path of the wind crosses that of the stars’ (Stage 3)

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refreshments). Continue ascending past **Valdelafuente L (48km, 867m)** (refreshments) then turn L at crossroads and pass between industrial units to reach N-601 main road. Turn R and bear R on track beside road and ascend past roundabout L to reach **Alto de Portillo summit (901m)** overlooking León. Follow track turning L on footbridge over main road and continue on other side. Bear R, passing roundabout R and follow track beside road over motorway. At next roundabout, turn L and R over first exit then continue ahead beside main road. Where track ends, join main road (Ave Madrid), following this into **Puente del Castro (52.5km, 815m)** (albergue, refreshments).

Opposite San Pedro church R, fork L (Calle Victoriano Martínez) to reach T-junction. Go ahead over crossroads and cross río Torio by pedestrian bridge. Turn R at T-junction and L to regain main road (now Ave Alcalde Miguel Castaño) into suburbs of León. Continue ahead over first roundabout, then at second roundabout (with Santa Anna fountain in middle) bear L ahead (Calle Rollo Santa Anna, fourth exit, sp centro urbano). Pass small

Parque Santa Anna R and fork R (Calle Barahona, one-way street). ► Go ahead over crossroads through line of city walls and continue ahead (Calle Puerta Moneda, becoming Calle la Rúa). Emerge into Plaza San Marcelo, with Gaudí designed Casa Botines ahead, and turn R (Calle Ancha) beside Guzmanes palace to reach Plaza de Regla in front of cathedral in **León (55km, 840m)** (accommodation, albergue, youth hostel, refreshments, camping, tourist office, cycle shop, station).

The route described here goes the 'wrong way' along a series of one-way streets: walk your cycle or use the road route described below to reach the cathedral.

LEÓN

San Isidoro basilica houses the mausoleum of the kings of León



During the Roman occupation, León (pop 126,000) was the military capital of Spain and home city of the VII legion for almost 350 years. After the Romans left (AD476) the city went into decline and was captured by the Moors in AD712. Although reconquered in AD754, its position near the

fighting line meant it was not repopulated until AD856. By the beginning of the 10th century the kingdom of León was dominant in north-west Spain and a golden era had begun, enhanced by union with Castile in 1230. Two of the city's four iconic buildings – Santa María cathedral and San Isidoro basilica – date from this period. The cathedral, which was based on Reims cathedral and is the leading example of French Gothic style in Spain, was built between 1205–1301. Inside it has one of the greatest collections of medieval stained glass in the world. San Isidoro basilica, in Romanesque style, which houses the mausoleum of the kings of León, has been described as 'the Sistine chapel of Romanesque style'.

San Marcos monastery, begun in 1515 as headquarters of the military order of St James, has one of the finest Plateresque façades in Spain. Nowadays it houses a parador, one of a chain of state-owned hotels inside

rejoin road with parallel tree-lined senda and follow this ahead ascending gently through fields. Pass under motorway and railway to reach edge of **El Burgo Ranero (17.5km, 880m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, station).

Dogleg R and L to follow Calle Real through centre of village. After village, rejoin shaded track and follow this through fields. Pass turn-off for Villamarco (25.5km, 864m), then cross Canal alto de los Payuelos irrigation canal and pass under railway. Continue winding through fields, descending gently to **Reliegos (30.5km, 825m)** (albergue, refreshments). Fork L (Calle Real) through village then continue on track crossing motorway. At end of shaded track, fork L to cross bridge over Mansilla de las Mulas bypass. Follow road over irrigation canal into **Mansilla de las Mulas (36.5km, 801m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, camping, cycle shop, station).

Turn L at T-junction and R onto main road (N-601, sp León), passing through town. Continue through gate in city walls and across bridge over río Esla. Go ahead to T-junction and turn L on N-601.3 ◀ Go ahead over roundabout and continue through **Villamoros de Mansilla (41km, 801m)** and **Villarente (42.5km, 801m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments), using service road R. Ascend steadily, passing under A-60 motorway and continue through **Arcahueja (46.5km, 843m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments) and **Valdelafuente L (48km, 867m)** (refreshments). Go ahead over roundabout, where road becomes dual carriageway, to reach **Alto de Portillo summit (901m)**. Start descending, with views of León ahead then follow main road ahead over roundabout (second exit). Cross motorway bridge and go ahead again at next roundabout (second exit) into Ave Madrid descending through **Puente del Castro (52.5km, 815m)** (albergue, refreshments).

Cross long bridge over río Torio and continue on Ave Alcalde Miguel Castaño into suburbs of León. Continue ahead over first roundabout, then at second roundabout (with Santa Anna fountain in middle) bear L ahead (Calle Rollo Santa Anna, fourth exit, sp centro urbano). ◀ Just

before Parque Santa Anna R, turn R into pedestrianised Calle Santa Anna. Pass yellow Santa Anna church L and fork R on one-way system. Cycle through Plaza del Riaño, passing through bollards uphill on cobbles, then turn R (Calle de la Santa Cruz) and follow this bearing L into Plaza Mayor. Continue ahead along L side of square into Calle Mariano Domínguez Berrueta and pass seminary and Episcopal's palace R to reach Plaza de Regla in front of cathedral in **León (54.5km, 840m)** (accommodation, albergue, youth hostel, refreshments, tourist office, cycle shop, station).



León cathedral is the leading example of French Gothic style in Spain

The N-601 is a busy main road with a wide hard shoulder providing a good cycle lane.

The route avoiding one-way streets starts here.

ASTORGA



Ruins of Roman Astorga, a wealthy mining town

Astorga (pop 11,200), known to the Romans as Asturica Augusta, grew prosperous due to its position near to Roman gold mines. The city had paved streets, some covered with porticos, while a system of canals brought fresh water down from the mountains and underground sewers took the waste away. Part of the walls that surrounded the Roman city still stand and ongoing excavations are uncovering other Roman buildings and artefacts including baths, sewers and mosaic floors. All this ended with the collapse of the Roman Empire and similar levels of urban development did not reappear for over 1000 years.

The city went into a prolonged period of decline. Tribal overlords came and went and for 50 years the city was controlled by the Moors. After they were expelled, it was another 100 years before Christian repopulation began. A cathedral was built (Astorga had been a bishopric since Roman conversion to Christianity) and churches, convents and pilgrim hospitals were founded to care for the growing number of pilgrims on their way to Santiago. Astorga became an important stopover on the Camino as pilgrims spent several days preparing for the hard crossing of the Montes de León.

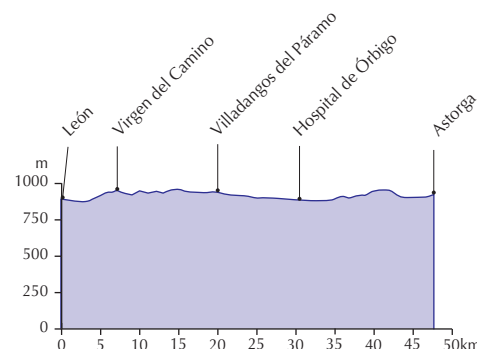
The cathedral of Santa María was started in 1069 with much later rebuilding and extension giving a mix of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles. Across the road from the cathedral, the Episcopal palace is a relatively recent addition to the cityscape. After the old palace was destroyed by fire

in 1886, Antoni Gaudí (an old friend of the bishop) was commissioned to design a replacement. Built in neo-Gothic/modernist style using grey granite, the building is a cross between a castle and a palace. As one of the architect's early commissions it is rather plain compared with some of his later works in Barcelona, but nevertheless it is a spectacular building. Despite it being intended as both administrative building for the diocese and home for the bishop, it was never used as a residence and nowadays holds a museum.

end turn L (Calle Cid) and immediately R (Calle de los Pilotos Regueral). Go ahead over crossroads, passing Gaudí-designed Casa Botines L to reach Plaza de Santo Domingo roundabout.

Take third exit (Gran Vía de San Marcos) then continue ahead over next roundabout (fourth exit). At end cross dual carriageway into Plaza de San Marcos and continue across square passing in front of monastery of San Marcos (now a luxury hotel) R. ▶ Continue over río Bernesga on Puente de San Marcos bridge. Pass Parque de Quevedo R, then go ahead at roundabout into Ave Párrco Pablo Díez. Just before second roundabout, join cycle track R and follow this crossing first exit and continuing over railway bridge into **Trobojo del Camino (4km, 841m)** (accommodation, refreshments, cycle shop).

The camino route is joined here.



Where cycle track ends, turn R (Pl la Ermita) before small chapel. At end, turn L and R (Calle de la Fuente) then first L (Calle la Para). Go ahead over three cross-roads then turn L (Dr Vega Fernández) at fourth. At end turn R and follow main road bearing L, then turn R uphill (Camino la Cruz) beside house 358. Pass between grass-covered old wine bodegas and follow road past Leclerc hypermarket L to reach N-120 main road. Bear R onto service road then join main road ascending into **La Virgen del Camino (7km, 909m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments).

Pass modern concrete church with tall spire R then continue on road, using hard shoulder, to pass through complicated motorway junction following sp N-120 Astorga. ◀ Stay on main road through **Valverde de la Virgen (11km, 891m)** (albergue, refreshments) and **San Miguel del Camino (12km, 899m)** (refreshments).

Pass extensive factory developments R before reaching roundabout at beginning of **Urbanización Camino de Santiago** housing development (accommodation, refreshments). Join service road R of main road, passing through petrol station, then at next roundabout turn L across road to join service road on opposite side. Follow this to beginning of **Villadangos del Páramo (20km, 899m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, camping).

Rejoin main road, then fork second R (Calle Real) through village. Turn third L (opposite house 44) into Travesía Calle Real, then R at end to rejoin main road. Continue to **San Martín del Camino (24km, 869m)** (albergue, refreshments). Cycle on main road for 6km, then turn R at crossroads (sp Puente de Órbigo). Bear L beside brick watertower then go ahead over crossroads onto cobbled road (Calle de Paso Honroso) across 'Roman bridge' over río Órbigo to reach **Hospital de Órbigo (31km, 821m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, camping).

Cycle through village on Calle Álvarez Vega, then go ahead at crossroads and turn L (Calle Cortes de León) at T-junction. ◀ Continue to main road (N-120) and turn R. Start ascending and at first roundabout, bear R (sp Santibáñez de Valdeiglesias) onto old course of main

road. Ignore turn R, keeping ahead uphill beside N-120, then at second roundabout with orange bus shelter, cross N-120 to join old course, now L of road. Where road comes close to motorway at top of hill, rejoin N-120. Go ahead over side road then follow main road round sweeping bend L and fork R (sp Astorga centro urbano) continuing downhill with view of Astorga ahead. Pass through **San Justo de la Vega (43.5km, 851m)** (accommodation, refreshments).

After village, cross río Tuerto then go ahead over roundabout to reach railway line. ▶ Turn L up zigzag ramps to cross railway and descend back to road. Turn L before second railway line, then turn R at T-junction and cross disused railway. Turn L at roundabout (Travesía Minerva, third exit), then turn L (Calle Perpetua Socorro) at T-junction. After 80 metres, turn sharply R (Calle Puerta del Sol) steeply uphill into beginning of Astorga. Turn R (Calle de los Padres Redentoristas) past Santa Vera Cruz chapel R to reach Plaza Mayor. Cycle diagonally L across square to leave by narrow street on opposite corner. Go over crossroads, then fork L (Calle de Postas) and R (Calle de Santiago). Turn R at end in front of Colegio Santa Marta and L into Plaza Eduardo de Castro, passing Episcopal palace R, to reach cathedral in **Astorga (48km, 870m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, tourist office, cycle shop, station).



There is a disused level crossing here which has been closed permanently since the line was upgraded to take high-speed trains.

The Episcopal palace was designed by Antoni Gaudí for his friend the Bishop of Astorga

Cycles are allowed on the N-120, but not on any other part of the junction.

The camino route goes ahead here on a gravel track.

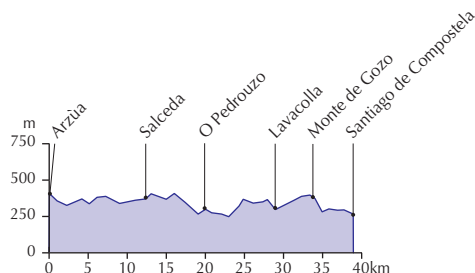


The first view of Santiago cathedral, seen from Monte do Gozo

The new motorway under construction when this guide was being written will greatly reduce traffic on the N-547.

Road route

From road junction in centre of **Arzúa**, follow N-547 W (R of tourist office), then continue downhill to cross río Brandeso and undulate past new motorway junction. ◀ Continue through **Burres (6km, 377m)**, **Salceda (12.5km, 371m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments), **Brea (14.5km, 372m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments) and **Empalme (16km, 408m)** (albergue, refreshments). Descend steeply past **Santa Irene L** (albergue) and **A Rúa (18.5km, 283m)** (accommodation, refreshments) to **O Pedrouzo (20km, 284m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, tourist office).



Continue to **Amenal (23km, 249m)** (accommodation, refreshments) then ascend steeply through woods to reach roundabout. Turn L (second exit) and follow road bearing L beside motorway. Continue past end of **Santiago airport** runway L then bear L away from motorway on quiet road. Go ahead over next roundabout (N-634, sp Lavacolla) and continue through **Lavacolla (29km, 301m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments).

Continue on main road and after 3km pass turning L to TV Galicia studios. Take next turn L (sp Vilamaior). Keep R at fork past campsite L (camping) to join camino route. Turn first R and continue through fields to T-junction. Turn R and after 100 metres turn L through **San Marcos (33.5km, 368m)** (accommodation, albergue, refreshments, camping, cycle shop). At end of village cross small ridge with first view of Santiago cathedral in distance ahead and complex of buildings L on **Monte do Gozo**.

Cycle ahead downhill, then where road turns sharply R, continue ahead onto concrete ramp that snakes down hillside. At bottom emerge beside road and continue over motorway and railway bridges using track behind barriers L. Go ahead over three roundabouts then fork L downhill (Rúa do Valiño) by obelisk-style monument L. Continue into Rúa das Fontiñas, becoming Rúa da Fonte Concheiros. Continue ahead over major crossroads (Rúa dos Concheiros, now cobbles) to reach Cruceiro San Pedro crossroads. Continue ahead onto Rúa de San Pedro to reach Porto do Camiño where Camino enters old city. ▶ Go ahead on pedestrianised Rúa das Casa Reais winding through old city and bear L into Praza de Cervantes. Turn R (Rúa da Acibecheria) to reach Praza da Inmaculada by N transept door to cathedral L. Bear R (Travesa das Dúas Portas), dropping downhill, then turn L (Rúa de San Francisco) past Hostel dos Reyes Católicos (now a parador) R to reach Praza do Obradoiro square in front of cathedral in **Santiago de Compostela (39km, 259m)** (accommodation, albergue, youth hostel, refreshments, tourist office, cycle shop, station).

This is a one-way street with cycling prohibited so walk your cycle for 400 metres.