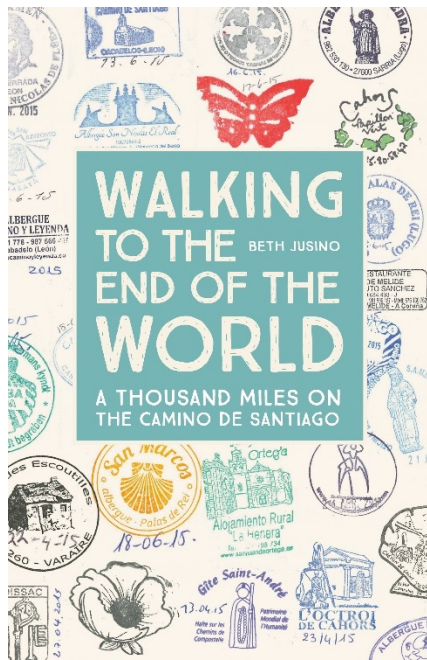


Walking to the end of the World: A Thousand Miles on the Camino de Santiago

By Beth Jusino

Reviewed by Danny Bernstein



By her own admission, Beth Jusino was not an outdoor person. Yet, this writer and editor walked about a thousand miles on the Camino de Santiago, from Le Puy-en-Velay in France to St. Jean Pied de Port at the foot of the Pyrenees to Santiago in northwestern Spain, and then to Finisterre, believed to be the end of the world in Medieval Times. Whew! I too walked this route, but it took me three trips.

She and her husband Eric, mid-career professionals in Seattle, needed a radical change in their life. Unlike many pilgrims who seem to just hop on a plane, she researched, read blogs and books, while she finished her client projects.

Pilgrims have been walking to Santiago for more than a thousand years. The remains of St. James the Apostle supposedly are buried in Santiago. St. James had spent some time evangelizing in Spain but was beheaded by the Romans

when he returned to Rome.

Miraculously his body was returned to Spain, buried and forgotten. His grave was discovered and authenticated in the ninth century and a cathedral was built over the site of the tomb. A scallop shell has come to symbolize the Way of St. James pilgrimage, probably because early pilgrims brought back seashells as souvenirs. Now thousands trek to Santiago, some walking for months, others covering only sixty miles (a hundred kilometers), the minimum needed to get a certificate.

Beth's first walking days were difficult. She didn't speak French, carried her own pack, and just couldn't keep up with Eric. Her feet hurt and she was thinking of quitting. But Eric didn't argue with her.

"We'll stop in the closer town," he would say. She walked through the pain, enjoying the gites (French hostels), the friends she made and the food – oh that French food – wonderful, even in the hostels.

"You need new boots and orthotics," I kept thinking. And finally, in the middle of her agony, she listened to me. Once Beth took a day off the trail to buy new boots, she became a new and enthusiastic hiker. They stopped in almost every open church and noted World War I memorial.

Beth was not afraid of walking alone. She also was a social hiker who enjoyed making friends and keeping track of them.

Beth's writing is funny, relaxing, and honest. The book doesn't harp on her past or her childhood. She obviously kept a journal but also included some backstory of her life.

Then they reached St. Jean Pied-de-Port and the Pyrenees. It was both a wall to climb - the highest climb they would do on the trip - and a wall of people. More walkers, mediocre food, wake-up music in the albergues (Spanish hostels) but no breakfasts – the Jusinos adjusted, practiced acceptance, and noted the difference in culture.

Finally, Santiago. When she went up to get her Compostela, her certificate of completion, the volunteer behind the desk asked,

“Did you walk for religious, spiritual or recreational reasons?”

“For cultural reasons,” Beth answered. Yeah!! It was exactly like I answered after both my Caminos. But their walking wasn't over. They continued to Finisterre, the end of the world.

The book includes just the right amount of history and culture, so that the reader understands the significance of her journey. A highly recommended read!