

A Walk to Remember

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The Rev. Paul Hruby and two companions walked 520 miles from Hendaye, France, to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, traversing old Roman roads, still intact, crossing cow pastures, mountain passes, small fishing villages and deserted beaches, walking along the blue coast. They explored ancient Catholic churches and the prehistoric Altamira cave paintings.

For seven weeks they were pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, which means the way or path of St. James, a Catholic saint whose remains are said to rest at the St. James Cathedral in the city of Santiago de Compostela, where countless pilgrims have gathered since the destination became popular in the Middle Ages.

Their journey began Sept. 19 and ended according to schedule on Oct. 31, in time for Hruby to celebrate Mass with the Spanish city's bishop and archbishop on the Nov. 1 Feast of All Saints.

Hruby, a pastor at St. Julie Billiart Church in Newbury Park, parishioner James Olson and his friend Ricky Baum, walked 12 to 16 miles a day for up to eight hours. Some days they walked up to 22 miles.

"For me, a little over a year from turning 60, I just wanted to consider in my life where I've come from, where I'm at now, what it is that God wants of me over the next several years in life," said Hruby, who has been a priest for more than 30 years. "Part of it was just to find that center of life that sometimes gets lost in the hustle and bustle of the busyness of life at home. For me, as a priest, that center has to be the relationship with God."



COMPANIONS—Paul Hruby, at left, was joined by friends James Olson and Ricky Baum on his trek of the Camino de Santiago in Spain.



Wearing scallop shells on their backpacks, a symbol of the pilgrimage, the three travelers were greeted by well-wishers along their way. Sometimes they met other pilgrims, including a man walking to Santiago from Amsterdam.

"When people see you walking through the villages, they would all be shouting at us, *buen camino!*" Hruby said. "Have a good walk, a good way. The people were just very, very welcoming, warm. It was just such a wonderful experience.

"It's probably right at the top of the list for me, personally, in my 59 years, of anything I've ever done."

Most of their journey wound through small towns with not more than 200 inhabitants.

In those seven weeks they saw more animals— sheep, cattle, pigs and chickens—than people. At night they slept in modest lodgings. They stopped to eat at restaurants or bought salami, cheese, bread and apples and ate their meals on the side of the road.

They traveled during the low season when few St. James pilgrims are on the road, particularly this road: they chose the most challenging route, descending and ascending steep terrain "the equivalent of climbing Mount Everest and Mount Kilimanjaro," Hruby said. By the end of the trip, the men had lost weight. Olson, who trained for the strenuous walk, lost almost 100 pounds.

"I knew I was strong enough, but I had to push mentally to finish the longest days," Olson said in an email from Spain, where he's still traveling with his wife, Connie. "Sometimes it felt like we would never reach our destination for the day."

Despite their aches and pains, they continued on.

"There was never a day that I didn't believe that we weren't all going to make it to the end," Hruby said. "There were some days that were very physically taxing because of distance and topography. Some of these trails were not easy at all, steep descents on the way down. Your feet just felt pummeled by the end of the day."

Each day the three travelers recited the Pilgrims Prayer from the 12th-century Codex Calixtinus before starting their trek through roads marked with bright yellow arrows to guide the way.

“One line of the prayer asks for God ‘to be our guide at the crossroads,’” Olson said. “I can’t believe how often we arrived at a crossroads uncertain about which way to go when seemingly out of nowhere someone would show up and point us in the right direction! Believe me, this gave me a lot to think about as we made our way across Spain. It seems like maybe there are no coincidences in life after all.”

Hruby often walked behind or ahead of the others for hours at a time while praying the rosary. About 500 people followed their photographic journey on Facebook, where Hruby posted reflections about his trip.

“Being on a pilgrimage is a break from ordinary life. It’s an opportunity to meet God and be refreshed spiritually,” he said. “The goal was to feel renewal and emptying out of myself of all that I didn’t need to be carrying with me in life, metaphorically as well as physically.”

Olson reflected on the purpose of his life.

“Has the pilgrimage changed me? Yes, but I’m not exactly clear on how,” he said. “I think it will take years to discover all of the ways in which my life has been impacted.”



DAILY ROUTE

Date	Day From	To	Km	Cum	
Fri Sep 19	1	Irún	San Sebastián	18.9	18.9
Sat Sep 20	2	San Sebastián	Getaria	25.9	44.8
Sun Sep 21	3	Getaria	Deba	19.3	64.1
Mon Sep 22	4	Deba	unknown	22.5	86.6
Tue Sep 23	5	unknown	monastery near Bolibar (Colegiata Parroquia Zenarruza)	5.7	92.3
Wed Sep 24	6	monastery near Bolibar	Gernika	18.7	111.0
Thu Sep 25	7	Gernika	Zamudio	24.0	135.0
Fri Sep 26	8	Zamudio	Bilbao	9.0	144.0
Sat Sep 27	9	Bilbao	Bilbao	0.0	144.0
Sun Sep 28	10	Bilbao	Pobeña	23.0	167.0
Mon Sep 29	11	Pobeña	Islares	21.1	188.1
Tue Sep 30	12	Islares	Santoña	29.1	217.2
Wed Oct 1	13	Santoña	Galizano	19.8	237.0
Thu Oct 2	14	Galizano	Somo	6.4	243.4
Thu Oct 2	14	Somo (ferry)	Santander	5.0	248.4
Fri Oct 3	15	Santander	Santillana del Mar	29.0	277.4
Sat Oct 4	16	Santillana del Mar	Santillana del Mar	0.0	277.4
Sun Oct 5	17	Santillana del Mar	Comillas	17.0	294.4
Mon Oct 6	18	Comillas	Serdíó	15.7	310.1
Tue Oct 7	19	Serdíó	Llanes	30.5	340.6
Wed Oct 8	20	Llanes	Nueva	16.8	357.4
Thu Oct 9	21	Nueva	Ribadesella	11.0	368.4
Fri Oct 10	22	Ribadesella	Berbes	9.0	377.4

Date	Day From	To	Km	Cum	
Sat Oct 11	23	Berbes	Colunga	12.0	389.4
Sun Oct 12	24	Colunga	Villaviciosa	18.0	407.4
Mon Oct 13	25	Villaviciosa	Pola de Siero	25.3	432.7
Tue Oct 14	26	Pola de Siero	Oviedo	16.5	449.2
Wed Oct 15	27	Oviedo	Molina	14.0	463.2
Thu Oct 16	28	Molina	Grado	14.4	477.6
Fri Oct 17	29	Grado	Salas	20.7	498.3
Sat Oct 18	30	Salas	Tineo	21.1	519.4
Sun Oct 19	31	Tineo	Pola de Allande	22.0	541.4
Mon Oct 20	32	Pola de Allande	Berducedo	20.0	561.4
Tue Oct 21	33	Berducedo	Grandas de Salime	20.0	581.4
Wed Oct 22	34	Grandas de Salime	A Fonsagrada	26.2	607.6
Thu Oct 23	35	A Fonsagrada	O Cádavo (Baleira)	25.3	632.9
Fri Oct 24	36	O Cádavo (Baleira)	Castroverde	9.2	642.1
Sat Oct 25	37	Castroverde	Lugo	20.6	662.7
Sun Oct 26	38	Lugo	Lugo	0	662.7
Mon Oct 27	39	Lugo	Ferreira	18.9	681.6
Tue Oct 28	40	Ferreira	Melide	31.5	713.1
Wed Oct 29	41	Melide	Arzúa	13.9	727.0
Thu Oct 30	42	Arzúa	Labacolla	28.3	755.3
Fri Oct 31	43	Labacolla	Santiago de Compostela	9.4	764.7