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The Great Westward Walk: From The Front Door To The End Of The Earth



Synopsis

“The Great Westward Walk” is the long-awaited English translation of “El Gran Caminante,” the best-selling contemporary Spanish narrative of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. The tale is told by “Bolitx,” a Basque pilgrim who walked in 2008 from his hometown on the Cantabrian Sea along a disused pilgrim trail, joining “the Mighty Camino Frances” in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Along the Way to Santiago he spins colorful tales of family life in a Basque village: ghost trains, kindly nuns, and card-shark grannies; as well as his daily dealings with pilgrims: the pot-smokers, saints, liars, and scholars who share his journey. Peppered with camino history never before seen in English; it’s an unforgettable view into the character of a witty soul both Spaniard and Basque. “The Great Westward Walk” was this young author’s great and final work: he finished the written journey three days before ALS ended his life at age 41.

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Customer Reviews

This was a wonderful read! I noticed towards the end of the book, I was becoming anxious to finish -- because I wanted to start re-reading it immediately! I hadn't fully appreciated the beginning when he was walking from his home on the north coast of Spain to Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Not having walked that area, I wanted to "join" the Camino Frances, which was very familiar to me, as quickly as possible. The second read was even better!! Written by a Spaniard (wonderfully translated to English by Rebekah Scott), one sees another side of the Camino. The background stories the author recounts - his childhood, his meetings with local Spaniards along the way, his other

Caminos, other perspectives of the people who so long ago made the Camino Frances what it is with yellow arrows, bridges, shelters... - enhanced my appreciation and gratitude for what I experienced. Buen Camino!

If you are thinking about walking the Camino: Read this first. This is, when you consider the end outcome, a heartbreaking story: The author is now dead due to ALS, a terrible disease, that I have experienced firsthand. But before he died, he managed to produce this remarkable book. Pilgrims, firsttimers as well as us old-timers, should read this adventure before embarking on the Camino: This book is written by a young man of exceptional insight, strength, sufferings, joy, and understanding of a meaningful life, packed with both practical as well as spiritual guidances for the Camino. Newbies will cherish all advice and stories; Oldtimers will love the familiarity of all places on the French Camino, as well as the deeper meaning/history of the places on the Camino Frances. As a peregrino for many years, I highly recommend this book with its wisdom for the Camino.

A poetic account tells the Camino stories of the author, who is Basque, and whose perspective is enlightening for me, an American. I think in general the translator did a beautiful job in conveying the lyrical quality of the author's experience and insight. The translation was marred, however, by mistakes of simple grammar conventions, such as the need to use an article in English where Spanish would use none. While appreciating the fact that this work is available in English, I think it would be worth another edition to make corrections and take another look at some words that don't have a direct English translation. It would be worth it because it really is a wonderful book.

The Great Westward Walk: From the Front Door to the End of the Earth By Antxon (Bolitx) González Gabarain (Translation by Rebekah Scott) For more than eleven hundred years pilgrims have been walking across Europe to the tomb of Saint James in the city of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. During that time, many books have been written describing this journey. However, because of the recent re-birth and popularity of the network of pilgrimage routes collectively known as the Camino de Santiago, there has been an explosion of new books, memoirs, journals, and blogs published which recount the authors' experiences along this road. As a veteran of this journey, I have read and enjoyed many of them. But for me, The Great Westward Walk: From the Front Door to the End of the Earth stands head and shoulders above the rest for one reason - the depth of the author's understanding and insight into the history of the Camino de Santiago. He has the uncanny ability to

make the Camino come alive, as if it were a living thing, and that by walking this pathway, he becomes one with its essence. And, oh yeah, he's a fantastic wordsmith as well. Antxon González Gabarain was a native of Spain's Basque region; he lived his life along one of the major variants of the route, and walked several of the others starting in various places across the Iberian peninsula. This book focuses on a journey in 2008, when he one day walked out the door of his home in the northeastern corner of Spain and followed the Ruta del Tnel (the Tunnel route) to Santo Domingo de Calzada, then on to Santiago via the Camino Francs (the French route). As I read this book, I could sense that the soul of the Camino was in his DNA as he masterfully wove the day-to-day experience of this, his final walk on the Camino, with anecdotes from the history of the ancient pilgrimage route, from his own life, and from his previous experiences on the other routes to Santiago. It seems to the reader that with each of the million-plus steps he takes on this journey, he both leaves a piece of himself in the dust and mud of the trail, while at the same time he picks up a piece of the lingering spirits of those that preceded him. Ask anyone who has walked the Camino de Santiago about their experience, and all agree that it was an inward journey as well as an outward one, and that somehow their life has been changed as a result. However, few authors have been so aware of and attuned their personal experience and able to describe it in such a beautiful and soulful manner as González Gabarain. For him, the Camino Francs in particular (which he calls the "Great French Way") has a "strange, powerful current" that possesses a soul of its own which is made of "the sky, wind, and wide-open space." It becomes a transcendental experience in which he shares the footsteps and feelings of the hundreds of thousands – perhaps by some estimates, millions – of pilgrims who have trod this path over the centuries. While he may not have consciously realized as he walked that this journey would be his last, he certainly knew it by the time he wrote the poignant epilogue which described the end of his journey at Finisterra, out past Santiago where the land meets the sea. Here is where he envisioned his immortal soul sailing westward across the vastness of the great unknown like the wake of a ship sailing on the ocean beyond the cliffs, the booming surf, and the lighthouse at the end of the earth. This book is definitely not a guidebook or a how-to book for one planning to walk the Camino de Santiago. In fact it is probably best read after one has completed this walk and seeks greater understanding and appreciation of what they have seen and felt, and what the meaning of that experience is and continues to be in this journey we call life. I highly recommend this book, not only because of the way it captures the spirit of the Camino but also because it's simply a great piece

of literature.

Ok, to be completely honest...I'm not finished with this book. Yet. For me this isn't a quick read. I'm finding it a book to be savored, slowly. It's not the kind of book you stay up till the wee hours reading and wake up early to finish. I read a chapter and then pause. It's rather like walking the actual Camino. It isn't done all at once, but rather in steps and etapas. And darn it...I've got another route to explore now! The Tunnel Route. In my humble opinion, this one is best enjoyed AFTER walking the Camino. There are things he does that you only appreciate if you've walked a long way and pushed, really pushed yourself. So, would I recommend it? YES! 100% recommended. It's certainly not a guide book, but it's terrific re-walking of the Camino, for me.

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