

INTRODUCTION TO THE CAMINO OF SANTU JACU AND THE “AMICI DEL CAMMINO DI SANTU JACU (AdCSJ)”



WHAT IS A “CAMINO”?

As the poet Antonio Machado says: "...caminante, no hay camino, al andar se hace camino..." it is by walking, going step by step that you make a Camino, reflecting the eternal becoming of time and space, the *Panta Rei* mentioned by Heraclitus, who sees us on earth, in our life cycle.

This movement, this way of going allows us to depart for a more or less longer time, from real life, its constraints, its stress and its set time. It allows us to resume a slower pace of life, closer to nature, best suited to meditation. It allows us to live in contact with other humans of different

origins and experience; to change our metabolism due to the daily effort and the duration of our walking, until we are able to walk despite we ache all over and until we “dream” with our eyes wide open thanks to the endorphins produced.

But a journey, as well as an individual matter, is also a path more or less organized, with directional arrows, refreshment areas and various kind of facilities.

Often it overlaps with other hiking trails, cycle paths, footpaths, greenways and trails in national parks.

Everything should exist and refine with the passage of people who give life to the Camino.



WHAT IS A CAMINO DE SANTIAGO?

There are several routes to Santiago in almost all mid-western European countries. Others are being born in the north and the east of our continent under the impulse of fans on their return from Santiago wishing to revive or create from scratch the routes to Compostella, as well as to other destinations (see the Francigena and Rome).

In France the roads are institutionalized on trekking routes and managed by the French Federation of Randonnée (hiking) with the typical red and white signs. In Spain indeed, the various local and regional authorities manage on their own the different Caminos, each differently both as paths and as signs. In Portugal, the Camino is the work of fans who thought, traced and signalized it. Only recently some municipalities realize how much it brings (with difficulty) so they open accommodations, but nothing is official.

The rediscovery of the march on foot (to which it was added in recent years cycling on these routes) and the work of some fond enthusiasts in Spain reopened the Camino Francés from St Jean Pied de Port to Compostella in the 80s and 90s. The early pioneers were followed by a few thousand adventurous towards the end of the millennium. Other paths were opened and organized in some way; associations were founded; books and various publications were edited. Internet and word of mouth did the rest.

The fruition of the Camino was clarified and defined: approximately 80% of people cover only the last 100kms (needed for the Compostela, a certificate of pilgrimage of faith or cultural tourism) up to a maximum of 300kms (about two weeks). The remaining 20% travel at least 500kms and often many more (820kms from St Jean Pied de Port and the Pyrenees -1800kms

from Le Puy en Velay - 700kms from Lisbon - 900kms from Irun - 1000 from Seville or Lourdes). Who are these people? Pilgrims *ad limina Sancti Jacobi*. Travellers in search of something, vagabonds, athletes, tourists, etc. etc.

Why do they do it? Each one has his problems, his history and his personal answer. However, since 2009 more than 100,000 people walk the French Camino; 15000 the Portuguese; 6000 the Via de la Plata; 11000 the Camino del Norte. Other Caminos, though popular, do not reach these numbers, why? There is a lack of signalization and accommodation. There is no private or public will to make them live; they lack of the essence of the Camino many people search for, so they just go somewhere else....

WHY A CAMINO OF SANTU JACU (SANTIAGO) IN SARDINIA?

Nowadays everybody claims his own routes and itineraries with the most extravagant attribution to saints and other fancy names (celestial, bishops', abbots' ... with due respect to the people who think about them), but in the European map of Caminos, Cultural Heritage, there is the absence of a Sardinian Way of Santiago.

This led us to think, study, put into practice and institutionalize a Camino of Santu Jacu and tie it to the European Caminos with the help of Camino Friends who volunteer in the creation of this Camino.

The Island's history and some religious traditions and customs related to the period of Spanish domination, the Catalan-Aragones with a legacy that is part of the Sardinian cultural layers, such as 17 churches dedicated to St. James the Greater.

Recent studies on ancient manuscripts imply a passage of Santiago in Sardinia. There is an increasing presence of Sardinian pilgrims resident on the island or elsewhere on the Spanish Caminos and their interest in this work demonstrates it.

HOW DID WE OPERATE?

We relied upon the *Santu Jacu bias-de-fidi program agreement* (see www.santujacu.it) between the Mayors of nine Sardinian municipalities and their intention to have the path created. We began to study history, prehistory and early history, customs, peculiarities, traditions and ways of transhumance and of pilgrimage, natural beauty, topography and existing trails, parks and hosting facilities.

Everything in order to create a path as consistent as possible and walkable by backpackers and in line with going westward towards the port of embarkation, merging with the 9 municipalities Perdaxius (Carbonia) ending at Orosei (Nuoro), including some variants easier for cyclists and the elderly people and an outlet to the north at Porto Torres, Cagliari which is the other point of embarkation.

By springtime, the preliminary study had grown so widely that it was urgent to check on site the feasibility of what was only roughly signalized and mapped out. During 45 days of walking the forerunners have begun to turn ideas into practice ...

Meanwhile it was necessary to establish an Association of Friends of the Camino to legitimize and institutionalize our work participating in the establishment of the Foundation Santu Jacu with the members of the *bias de fidi program agreement*.

Our Association was formalized on December 10, 2010 at Mandas and registered at our expense as everything we've done so far.

On that occasion, we have designed, manufactured and sold "Sardinia-Pilgrim" T-shirts to finance ourselves during Mandas and Goni Santu Jacu Holy festivities.

The Camino is a dream, but in order to transform it from utopia into reality it is necessary to finance it, and put all our friends and supporters energies into it....

In September and October, we proceeded to signalize a good part of the way with yellow arrows and Conchas typical of Santiago and the work will be completed during wintertime.



We are editing official maps 1:25000 scale and a free guide will be made available in 5 languages detailing the route, accommodation and various information available to everybody by springtime. We are also completing the acquaintance of necessary people in order to proceed in the formalization of our Camino as being part of the Regional as well as National and European Heritage Camino de Santiago.

We will attend various international and institutional gathering of Associations of Friends of the Caminos; conferences and meetings in Italy and abroad to let people know about our work and let the widest range of public enjoy it.

Based on our experience as pilgrims on many different paths, as hospitaleros in

accommodations of the various existing routes, we are confident that a well-made Camino, so full of differences and charm, with good facilities, in a few years would enter the ranks of the most popular routes. Though we do not hide the walking problems related to weather conditions during the summertime, the reluctance of some municipalities, the negative remarks of those who just objected to this project and have also worked to prevent its birth and its finalization.

But we are aware of its value, the quality of services offered and the expectation of municipalities and privates who want to see people flowing in places often in the middle of nowhere and without basic services. It's a gift, in a sense, we offer this land and all the pilgrims and walkers who want to come and discover it. At the same time we will refine the Camino Route that is not immutable, but the steps of hundreds of people will shape it, alter it, consolidate it, to make it alive.

Our initiatives, word of mouth and the diaries of journey will take the leap, urging municipalities and privates to establish and improve facilities and services.

SITUATION AND EXPECTATIONS:

On the basis of our experience, we evaluated three types of users of the Way of Santu Jacu: 1) the "poor pilgrim" - sleeping in the city or parish hosting accommodation or in tents, dining with a hot meal at a restaurant or cooked by him/herself, spending on average less than 30 € per day 2) the "average pilgrim" B&B-sleeping spending an average € 50 per day 3) the rich-pilgrim sleeping in agritourism or hotel, spending approximately € 100-150 per day. With a time-walking of 20 days average for 5000 people in the first five years, there would be an income of approximately € 5,000,000 and it may be increased if the activities associated with the route (festivals, exhibitions, shows, entertainment in schools, etc.) will continue to be pursued. We have agreed to appoint the men of Santu Jacu of Mandas the task of reviewing the passages on the route by issuing a Sardinian "Compostela" to all the people who will walk it, as Mario Giugni on the Via Francigena is currently doing at San Miniato Basso. By doing so, we could keep an eye on the type of users of the Camino and think about any corrections and changes needed.

We also intend to adapt the route to cyclists, people with donkeys, mules or horses (joining our work with those of the parks and forests with its Riding Trails), groups of people using the *green train* to cross only the stretch from Mandas to Sorgono.

I've been working on other Caminos and participated in the development of the Portuguese Way, the route from Lourdes to the Somport, to Saint Jean Pied de Port and Roncesvalles, and the trail towards Irun Camino del Norte. I know, for having participated in the discussions of preparation and then by walking them myself, the new routes as the Via Francigena and its variants and the path of the Coastal route on the Ligurian and Provençal coast.

The historical routes that had a real impact on a cultural and touristic basis, like the Portuguese, have had a steady growth up to 15,000 passages up to date, though without a big hype and a widespread network of hostels, even if the figure is mainly accounted for the final part from Porto to Santiago (243 kms) while the rest, from Lisbon to Porto, this Camino is a 2500 people a year route wholly or in part (without taking Fatima into account with 50,000 people a year).

Other historical routes, such as the Provençal, the route of Arles, the Pyrenean Piedmont etc have suffered and are suffering from a too long time gestation and the lack of "cheap" housing so they remain limited to short trips or weekends with lower numbers such as 500 per year.

The departures from Lourdes is a different matter. They regard the Italians in particular, allowing them to reach the Pyrenees in Spain as long as they had a little bit of training ... Here we have about 250 passages per year towards St. Jean Pied de Port and 6000 towards the Somport.

As regards to Italy, the Via Francigena has remained blocked for years because it was managed by the scouts, despite the hype rather "consumerist" represented by the Association since 2007, only in the last two years it had an Official Route and from 2009 enough accommodation for each stretch allowing the use of it at least in the last 500kms from Fidenza onwards regarding almost 1,000 pilgrims. About 2500 in the last kms from the borders of

Tuscany with Lazio (data from Don Renzo di Campagna).

Other minor routes, such as the Saint Francis Way and the Anania Way, which are signaled and have a guide available, do not reach 100 pilgrims per year, for different reasons.

For the last two years, there has been a flourishing of routes or so-called in every part of Italy, but without a real vision and strategy for implementation and verification of users and the possibilities of survival (see the Camino de Santiago Sicily in 2007 with a tourist guide that is a summation of brochures of tourist offices, without a real path and consequently no real pilgrims).

With regard to the Way of Santu Jacu, due to the characteristics of the Sardinian territory (morphological, cultural, touristic, economic, religious, etc. etc.), the number of Sardinian pilgrims or Sardinian origin on the Caminos in Spain, the commitment to the *bias de fidi program agreement*, our experience of routes and our list of worldwide Jacobean contacts, for the first three years, we foresee:

1) for the first year, the **forerunners**, especially foreigners, used to and longing for new routes, lonely and rough, **about a hundred**, but supposedly they report their impressions to their own circle of friends or associations. **So it is necessary that we make things properly from the very beginning by creating different kinds of accommodation and a well done and signaled route.** This is what we're trying to do.

2) some will only dedicate a week or 10 days and then they'll go to the beach, therefore we are studying a route suitable for this kind of users. We are thinking about the area of Mandas to Sedilo, which is not too difficult and eco-touristic, **around 150 people for the first year.**

3) within two years, depending on the goodness of our propaganda work and adjustment of the route and spread of accommodation to the three different levels: poor (municipal hostels), medium (B&B) and high (agritourism) to reach 1000 so we have a resonance in the world (with the conferences and exhibitions and conferences to do ...). This allows us to assume to get to **2500 per year total or partial passages in 5 years.** To make a comparison, the hiking trail in Corsica, some of our most difficult, but equally wild, swapped from a beginners to a crowded trail. It blew up because the facilities did not match the increasing affluence of people (10,000) because it became trendy. What can we do to have the Way of Santu Jacu become trendy? and have people ask: "haven't you walked the Camino of Santu Jacu yet?" hence the land of Sardinia would become a destination for those "crazy wild ones, walking with backpacks and sticks" as we were called during our first Sardinian CaminoBuen camino!

This is our task. Thank you for your attention, Flavio Vandoni of AdCSJ

E-mail: amicisantujacu@gmail.com website: www.camminando.eu

Facebook page: amici del cammino di santu Jacu or il cammino di santu Jacu- Santiago in Sardegna

(translated by Gisella Gix Parente)

