

The Chemin goes through lots of tiny villages on narrow cobbled streets. Walkers come and go on the trail. Everyone seems to start the day at a different point. However we all meet up at a gite (hostel), trading stories at dinner.

I spent a night at the gite, Le Pech, up on a hill where I had a typical pilgrimage experience. Two German women needed a reservation for the next night. They didn't speak French and only a little English. So I translated their request into French to a guy who called up and made the reservation for them.

I had planned to take a rest day here and there but I was afraid to break my rhythm. I liked the people I met at the gites. If I missed a day, I'd lose them. But I find I'm a very attractive companion to English speakers because I have a French cell phone and I speak French.

So many experiences would never have happened if I were with a steady hiking partner, no matter how much space they gave me. In a Basque country hotel where I stopped for coffee, I bump into a Cousinade. Over 90 cousins and extended family members gather once a year to eat, drink, and catch up with each other. It was past 5:30 pm and this meal had been going on since noon. By now, they've had their desserts and coffee and are ordering after dinner drinks. When they found out that I was an American on Le Chemin, they kissed and hugged me and the questions started.

If I was comfortable walking by myself on Le Chemin, it was almost necessary when I visited Marseille, my birth city. I went in search of where I lived as a young child, my school, and playground. I walked back and forth on small streets, stopped walkers for instructions, and took lots of pictures of--nothing. No one else would have put up with this. I was glad to be by myself.

For more of my experiences and information on Le Chemin de St. Jacques, see <http://www.hikertohiker.com/le-chemin-de-st.-jacques-resources>