

## Teesdale U3A Monthly Meeting – January 2019

The speaker at the January meeting was Felix Davies whose topic was 'to the Costa da Morta on foot'. Felix had walked many of the pilgrims' routes to Santiago de Compostela in NW Spain. After giving us a brief lesson in the Spanish language he ran through the history of the 'invaders' to Spain and identified the significance of the NW area. In the year 812, three bodies were found there, thought to be the bodies of James the disciple and 2 of his followers together with some religious relics. Legend tells us that James' body was transported to Spain following his beheading in Jerusalem. This discovery led to the well-known pilgrimages to see the tomb and relics of St James. The tomb is now in the magnificent cathedral in Santiago.

The numbers of pilgrims taking part have increased steadily, particularly in recent years ie from 2,400 in 1986 to 327,000 in 2018 and involving walkers from over 150 countries. Pilgrims were initially men although there were a few women as evidenced by Chaucer's 'wife of Bath'. Currently there are slightly more women than men taking part.

Felix showed some lovely photographs of the different landscapes you would encounter on the route including forests, verdant valleys and scrubland. Accommodation was varied from extremely basic to luxurious but beware cimex lectularius the irritating bed bug. Many meals were served in auberges sometimes by volunteers. The symbol of the walk has become the scallop shell which together with a wide variety of crosses of different shapes and sizes is also the way marker. Little was said about the 2 brothels passed on the way. For many, arrival in Santiago was not the end of the journey as it was now becoming a ritual to walk on to the Costa da Morte on the north west coast. There, walkers would burn their clothes, swim naked in the sea (thankfully no photographs of the speaker), light candles and perhaps watch the setting (death) of the sun.

Why do people undertake the pilgrimage? Felix says for lots of different reasons. Many people are looking for something spiritual which for some might mean God revealing himself to them. Others were remembering sick relatives or hoping for a cure themselves. Many are hoping for a life changing experience and it was clear that this experience had influenced the speaker's life. The talk was fascinating and thought-provoking talk and the vote of thanks was given by Ruth Sansom.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 28th February when Steve Owers will be speaking on the Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue Service. For information on U3A contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304

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