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## Review of: Perpetual Journey: A Semester on the Road to Santiago

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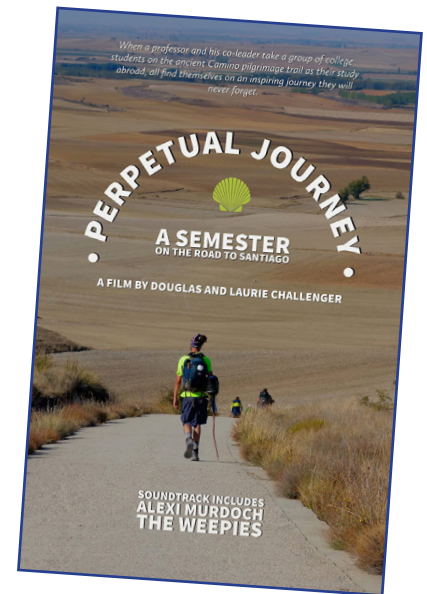
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## Review of: *Perpetual Journey: A Semester on the Road to Santiago*

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*Perpetual Journey: A Semester on the Road to Santiago* Produced, directed, and edited by Douglas and Laurie Challenger. Chrysalis Media Arts Productions, 2021 Run time: 100 minutes

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This documentary follows the pilgrimages of five Franklin Pierce University students—Luke Walsky, Alexis Vantrees, Samantha Cordiliko, Michael Bona, and Matthew Maher—who walked the Camino Francés in 2017 as part of a study abroad program. ‘To me it’s like the best way to teach,’ says faculty leader Douglas Challenger, who, together with his wife Laurie, co-led the study abroad program and created the film. ‘Setting up a learning experience for them and putting them into it and coaching them through it.’

The students and program leaders each had a hand in filming the documentary, using hand-held compact cameras they carried in their backpacks. As they walked and filmed, they caught candid commentary from each other, along with capturing a beautifully realistic account of the Camino experience: The sounds of the Camino. The crunch of gravel beneath footsteps. The clipping of walking poles against pavement. And the ‘snoring orchestra’ encountered in an albergue, as described by Bona.

Characteristic sights. Dairy cows passing by in a village. Long, sweeping vistas. Crossing busy highways. The desolation of the Meseta. Albergue bunk beds. Camino laundry hung out to dry.

Tastes of the Camino. Paella. Cheese. A refreshing cola. A well-earned vino tinto at day’s end.

A Camino soundtrack. The singing gîte host in France. A singing paellara. The singing nuns of Carrión de los Condes.

The challenges. Blisters and blackened toenails. Debilitating tendonitis that might end a Camino. Navigating wildfires. Saying goodbye to Camino family.

The joys. Amazing hospitaleros. Enjoying the 4,169th paella that has been prepared for pilgrims. Reuniting with Camino family.

A Camino angel. The doctor who provides healing and hope to Cordiliko. The requisite epilogue. A Cape Finisterre sunset. Reflecting on lessons learned and the things they’ll carry home with them. As one student reflects: ‘You don’t get what you want from the Camino. You get what you need.’

Five years on, the reviewer caught up with some of the pilgrims to learn what sparked their interest in the Camino as a study abroad experience and what Camino lessons they still carry with them.

### *Camino As a Study Abroad Experience*

Alexis Vantrees:

*I was studying anthropology, and [something that] involved so much history was extremely fascinating to me. Plus, I have always thought the best way to learn is first-hand experiences.*

Matthew Maher:

*Prior to the Camino, I had travelled abroad to several countries through foreign exchange programs, but never had I strapped 25 pounds*

*to my back and carried it across a country. This didn't seem like a vacation, but rather a challenge and a change, both of which I needed.*

Luke Walsky:

*I was in Doug's Documentary Studies class and he asked if I would consider taking this trip to help him document it. I love to travel and had been feeling like I was kind of in a rut in my personal life so, without thinking too much about the logistics, I agreed.*

Michael Bona:

*I needed something different from my everyday life. What could be more different than leaving most of your life behind and walking every day for over 500 miles?*

### **Camino Lessons**

Matthew Maher:

*One thing I learned along the Camino is the harder the journey, the more rewarding the destination. The Camino gave me confidence and strength but also taught me to be more open minded and empathic. Through all, the Camino brought me peace, for which I am most grateful.*

Alexis Vantrees:

*I learned you are capable of doing anything you set your mind to, and stronger than you think. And to appreciate the stunning world around you.*

Michael Bona:

*The most significant lesson the Camino taught me is about self-reflection. [It] is the key to personal growth. To be able to step back and reflect on how your life is and where your life is going.*

Luke Walsky:

*What I learned more than anything is to not take anything for granted. When you're on the Camino, some of the best times you will have will be sitting around with a group of friends you might have just made that very same day talking about everything and nothing all at once over some bread and a cheap bottle of wine*

Reviewed by Amy Horton, American Pilgrims on the Camino, amylic321@yahoo.com.

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**Editor's notes:** This film is available for streaming at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/perpetualjourney/433463592>

An earlier version of this review was published in *La Concha*, the quarterly digital publication of American Pilgrims on the Camino, in Spring 2022.

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