

# Passage – A Cycle Journey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HrJwJXD89g>

In March 2016 I left London to travel in Portugal with my bicycle. The train took me as far as Irún in Spain and the plan was to vaguely follow the Camino Del Norte to Santiago before heading south into Portugal. But I didn't count on the rain, the mountains, the cold, and the newness of life on the road. I made it to Bilbao but I got scared and wet and lonely. So I took a coach to Valladolid further south in Spain. It was still cold but at least it wasn't raining and the land was flatter. The plan changed. I was going to cycle south now and then west into Portugal.

I stumbled upon the Via de la Plata, another Camino de Santiago, and for a few weeks became a pilgrim of sorts. Life was easy: I woke up in the morning, made tea, cycled all day stopping here and there to admire the landscape and ruins, in the evening I stopped in pilgrim hostels, made friends, shared stories until bedtime and did it all over again the following day. Until I reached Seville. The Camino ended there. No more yellow arrows to follow. I panicked for a bit but got better after a night under the stars.

I put my bicycle in a coach in Huelva and crossed the border into Portugal. And there I was. Portugal. My destination. It felt good to finally be there. So I've rewarded myself with a day off to lay on the beach and relieve memories of my first journey to this land in 2015. And then it was time to explore.

I followed narrow roads, my fancy and curiosity for sole guides. I lived on a boat for a week before leaving the Algarve seaside for the mountains. My legs were stronger by then and it was easier to cycle to the top. Though it was still more fun to freewheel down to the other side. I found the Atlantic coast and spent a few days there watching fishermen and big waves crashing onto rocks. But I wanted to see more than the seaside so I went inland and discovered the Alentejo region. There were few roads, few cars, and many artificial lakes. They became favourite spot of mine for the nights. More often than not I would meet other travelers there, their company always welcomed. They would take me in, the only woman on her own, the only person on the bicycle. Life couldn't be better. I had the landscape to myself during the day, the company of other travelers in the evening, and the best bread and pastry to fuel my body. The only thing missing was my partner but I was due to meet her in Lisbon.

Cycling into a capital city isn't much fun but I did it, even managed to find the hotel my partner had booked for us. I forgot to bike for a few days. Life in a big city was new exciting. There was a lot to do, a lot to see, and a lot of moments to be cherished with my partner. I was happy. But all good things have to come to an end. The rain fell, my partner flew back to the UK, and I left the left the Alentejo behind.

I felt alone for the first time since the beginning of the trip which was ironic as I was surrounded by many people in cities and villages. But crowds can make you feel more anonymous than space. I struggled and started to use WarmShowers.org to meet like-minded people. I landed in Coimbra, got kidnapped for a couple of weeks in Aveiro and then in Oliveira de Azeméis. I was offered kindness and an insight into Portuguese life. It was all I needed to find happiness again, but it was a fragile happiness one that held on a tight rope and needed company to remain balanced. The road knew that and placed a Belgium family on wheels in my way. We were both going north so we teamed up and rode to Santiago. I was on the Camino once more, a pilgrim of sorts, content with life on the road with my newfound companions.

Santiago was reached and it was time for me to head back home, but before I did there was the whole France to be crossed, holidays to be had, and family to be visited. I cycled, I took trains, I walked, I did nothing, I ate, and I discovered new places. Sometimes alone, sometimes with company, but never sad and lonely again because I knew the road would always take care of me.