



Oystercatcher

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2009

TRAIL BLAZER LINDA

Zeke Blazicka

Many members will know already the contribution that Linda Quiring has made to the Trail and Nature Club. For those who don't know her, walk into her Salt Spring Soapworks shop when you go to buy your tickets for the Christmas luncheon and spend some time there. For time is what Linda has given the Club, time as hiking coordinator, treasurer, vice president, president and editor of the Oystercatcher. If that isn't enough she has also represented the Club's interests on the PARC trails advisory committee.

Linda joined the Club in 1979 as one its youngest members, but because she was a smoker she started out as a walker. More recently well known for leading hikes to the Kellogg or Streisand properties, Linda has been leading hikes since 1983 and so probably has memorized more hiking trails than exist on the handouts in the Visitor Centre.

It seems pointless to have a picture of someone who posed mostly naked for the 2000 Salt Spring calendar. (But here is one anyway in more modest attire.) That calendar raised money to pay for the purchase of land in the south end. At that time she was president of the Club. Seems strange that no other presidents have been asked

to do the same thing.

Thanks, Linda, for your many contributions to the Club. We look forward to your continuing involvement. Welcome to the list of Trail and Nature Club Trailblazers!



Linda and Bill on a hike in California.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Gil Schultz and John de Haan

The Salt Spring Island Trail and Nature Club has sponsored the annual Christmas Bird Count for the past 22 years. This year the count will be held on **Monday, December 28th, 2009**. Various factors like weather do, of course, affect the count, but over the years such annual bird counts produce useful information on winter bird distribution and population trends. Gathering of data over long periods of time is important and the only way to make the information relevant. The involvement of the Trail and Nature Club has been helpful in assuring that the counts continue uninterrupted in this example of "citizen science".



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Last year the Christmas bird count was held on Saturday, Dec. 27th after two weeks of extreme winter weather that left knee deep snow, slippery roads and frozen ponds across the island. Fifty-nine (59) counters braved the appalling conditions, while another fifty-three (53) monitored feeding stations from indoors. Still, a respectable ninety-two (92) species were counted and the total number of birds (11,410) was similar to recent years with the exception of the 16,745 spotted in 2007.

This will be the fourth year that the Christmas bird count will be coordinated with the Bird Studies Canada/Audubon Society Christmas Bird count for North America, and the 110th Audubon count. While the mechanics of the BSC/Audubon count are different from our traditional count, coordinators still compile numbers that can be compared to the Salt Spring history.

A \$5.00 fee is collected, going to Bird Studies Canada, for counters in the field. Feeder counters, BSC and

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We bought our Salt Spring home in 2001. The property once had a nice garden with some fruit trees (apple, plum and cherry), perennials and four small ponds, connected by waterfalls. When we bought the place the garden was already neglected, and the fact that we only moved here in 2003, no doubt contributed to the mess. With the help of a landscaper and the generosity of some neighbours in sharing their excess perennials, followed by many hours of hard labour and by pouring buckets of money in the project, we now have a garden I can live with. That means a garden that attracts birds....

The key to luring birds in your environment is biodiversity: the greater the variety of plants, such as trees, shrubs, native flowers and grasses, the greater the variety of birds you may attract. Plants provide shelter, food, and nesting materials for birds; also, they attract insects on which birds feed. Even dead trees, provided they pose no danger for humans or buildings, and brush piles can be vital for birds, especially woodpeckers. Whenever possible I use native plants, but garden varieties may serve as well as their native counterparts. Using organic matter as soil enhancement is also important. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides may be toxic for birds as well as other wildlife. We normally use our own home-made compost and buy top soil and organic fertilizers such as sea soil or composted manure.

The surroundings

Our property measures 0.6 acres and is fully landscaped and fenced. Thus, the environment outside our property is of importance too. Situated about 200 m from the shoreline at an elevation of 60 m, we are surrounded by patches of mature yellow cedar, Douglas fir, large-leaf maple and alder and willow where wet spots occur. Some trees have been affected by time and the elements and turned into snags. These woodlands are interspersed by small parcels of grassland bordered by hedges of willow, alder, ocean

spray, berry bushes, and so forth. Properties carry fruit trees and some have nice gardens; some are used as hobby farms with chickens, goats, ducks, and sheep; in short, a typical Salt Spring scenery.



Black Hawthorn: notorious natural birdfeeder!

Water

Water is plentiful in our area. Having a water source is of vital importance to attract birds as well as other wildlife. We have four small ponds connected by pump-generated waterfalls. The ponds would be seasonal if we do not keep the water level up during dry spells. In winter, the ponds are fed from a natural spring. The ponds' excess water flows into a natural wet area that drains into a ditch and eventually disappears into the ocean. Water plants like yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), water lily, pickerel weed (*Pontederia cordata*), bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) as well as a reed of unknown variety (to me) take up half the water surface. The flow that is brought on by the waterfalls keep the mosquitoes to a minimum. We do not have fish, but the tree frogs use the ponds as nurseries, as do the many water insects. Garter snakes have a feast in the spring when the tadpoles are abundant. The plants provide cover for all species.

As for the birds, water is good for drinking and

bathing. The other day I had six red crossbills taking a shower in and around one of the waterfalls! American robins and towhees are also regular bathers. Others include purple and house finches, American goldfinches, cedar waxwings, starlings, house wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, etc. Sometimes we see a lost great blue heron or a pair of mallards. Unfortunately, there is not much for them to feast on so they take off



Huckleberry produces berries that are delicious for birds and humans alike

again.

Not all properties are blessed with water features such as ours. But a birdbath or two provide excellent substitutes. Try to get one with a little fountain; the sound of falling water certainly will attract birds!

Perennials

Many perennials, especially native varieties, are magnets for birds of all plumage: sunflowers (*Helianthus*), Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), blue camas (*Camassia quamash*), trillium, coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), sedum varieties such as stonecrop (*Sedum brevifolium* or *Sedum divergens*) will go to seed and attract finches, juncos, sparrows and goldfinches.

All these perennials are growing in or nearby our garden. Hummingbirds are attracted to bright, bold native plants, especially those with red coloring. They prefer bell or trumpet-shaped flowers such as bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*), blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*), Virginia bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*), or cranes bill (*Geranium maculatum*). In addition, they feed on garden plants such as bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), Canada lily (*Lilium canadense*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), but flowering bushes such as black twinberry bush (*Lonicera involucrata*), hardy fuchsia (*Fuchsia magellanica*); the purple flowers of sage (*Salvia officinalis*), butterfly bush (*Buddleia*), and California lilac (*Ceanothus*) are attractive to them as well. Some birds (California quails for instance) love certain vegetable plants, such as carrot greens, peas, asparagus seeds, corn and scarlet runner beans, provided you are willing to share. Mixing vegetables with flowers adds visual interest to any garden. I mixed herbs with perennials: rosemary and thyme flowers attract hummers, but also bees and sometimes they need to compete with each other.

Trees

Evergreens provide birds with year round shelter. They provide protection from the wind and their cones (or fruit) and bark supply much-needed food for species such as crossbills, chickadees, goldfinches, finches, nuthatches, and brown creepers. You can expect visits of pileated woodpeckers or northern flickers, red-breasted sapsuckers, as well as downy and hairy woodpeckers, especially on snags. Cedars on our property provide shelter for the Anna's hummingbirds too, but we also see golden crowned kinglets, warblers, juncos, finches, creepers, nuthatches, and chickadees foraging for insects in the

high trees. The red crossbills with their specialized bills like the cones of cedar and fir. Cedar waxwings go for the maple seeds and robins like the mountain ash berries. Arbutus trees flower in spring and we have seen rufouses feeding from its flowers and robins gorging themselves on the red berries in autumn.

A rubbish pile or two form a good hide-away to ground feeding birds such as towhees, sparrows, and quails. So leave some twigs and branches lying around. We usually leave some twigs from tree pruning in a pile for the ground feeders.



Fruit bearing trees, vines, and shrubs.

The tree most attractive to birds this year was our cherry tree. Day after day, it seemed dripping with birds, although not all came for the cherries; insects were abundant too. One late afternoon, I counted 14 different species in that tree within an hour's time.

Berries of all kinds are delicious for birds, including wild raspberries or brambles, blackberries, salmonberries, thimbleberries, flowering current, all of which are on our property or close-by. Some were not there when we moved in; they just came and we left them grow. Wild strawberries, too, appeared suddenly. Other popular shrubs and vines include firethorn and cotoneaster. The native huckleberry's tiny



flowers provide nectar to the hummingbirds, some sweet-toothed house finches, and the orange-crowned warbler in spring; and in summer, towhees and other berry-eating birds go after the fruits. Black twinberry bush (*Lonicera involucrata*), Saskatoon or serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), Indian plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*), Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), and trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*) are all food providers. All are native to our area, and if they arrive in your garden, do not pull them out. Most are not invasive, and they provide a lot of food and shelter for our local birds.

Another provider is the ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*). Together with salal, honeysuckle and huckleberry these bushes form a hedgerow along the fence with the sheep meadow that belongs to our neighbours. It is home to junco's chickadees, towhees, finches, wrens,

kinglets, several sparrows, orange-crowned warblers, bushtits, and golden-crowned kinglets. Most of the time it is an unattractive bush with the brown leftovers of its cream coloured flower clusters. Nevertheless, the ocean spray is well frequented.

Feeding stations

While our garden provides natural food and shelter for a host of birds, we have feeders too. Seed-feeding birds such as finches and sparrows will enjoy black-oil sunflower seeds while juncos and sparrows like millet seeds. Suet will draw species such as woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches. If you choose to put out a hummingbird feeder, remember to clean it every week in winter and more often when the weather is warm to avoid fermented syrup and ant infestation. We use a solution of 4 parts of water to one part of plain white sugar. In freezing weather, we wrap the feeder with bubble wrap. Sugar water does not freeze unless the temperature drops below -4; with bubble wrap you may lower the freezing point. Last winter with the prolonged cold spell, we kept one feeder inside and one feeder outside at night. In the morning, we switched the feeders and we had two grateful female Anna’s hummingbirds!

The first few years we put seed feeders up from November to April. Last year we started to keep one seed feeder and two hummingbird feeders (more in summer) out all year. There is some controversy about year-round feeders. Opponents say that you make birds dependent on the food supply. At first, we were of the same opinion. On the other hand, keeping a seed feeder

Oregon Grape in bloom



out at summertime ensures that offspring of birds such as sparrows, towhees, juncos, and finches have a better chance of survival. Also, when the parents bring their young to the feeder they provide great entertainment to us birdwatchers. We noticed young finches, with some nest feathers still

sticking out of their new plumage, trying to land on the feeder (more misses than hits!). We also learned that young towhees are all but colourful at first. In addition, you get to see a far larger variety of birds. Some birds such as the golden crowned sparrow, fox sparrow, and the varied thrush leave our region to breed at higher elevations, while summer guests such as gold finches, brown-headed cowbirds or Swainson’s thrushes will show up at your feeder. As for the hummers: the rufous

is here from mid-March until early August, but the Anna’s are here year round and could not be here without our help.

Photographs by Nieke Visser, Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell lab of Ornithology.

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SSTNC members are exempt from the \$5.00 charge.

While some areas have numerous species and keen birders verge on the competitive, here on Salt Spring Island the count is a great excuse for friends to get together out of doors. It also allows birders with different levels of expertise to participate and involves folks who simply count birds at their own feeders and yards, to others who poke into every hidden corner of their count area looking for treasures.

Those interested in joining in this year’s Christmas Bird Count should contact John de Haan by telephone at 250-537-8329, or electronically at keoni@shaw.ca and provide him with their address and phone number and relative level of bird watching expertise. He will try to pair them with the appropriate regional coordinator or for par-



Northern Flicker

HONORARY MEMBERS

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| Bob Ball | Charles Kahn |
| Loes Holland | Simon Rook |
| Tony Pederson | Jim Barber |
| Jean King | Alan & Rita Robertson |
| Joan Lott | Fred Powell |

NEW MEMBERS

- Nicola Bell
- Mei-Hua Cameron
- Dan Dickmeyer
- David Paine
- Karen Hudson
- Stacia Kennedy
- Harvey Moore
- Laura Moore
- Carolyn Mouat
- Marcelle Roy
- Valerie Short
- Helen Ormiston Smith
- Barbara Toynbee

PAST TRAIL BLAZERS

- Lynn Thompson
- Bill Harrington
- Paul & Beth Ranney
- Owen Benwell & George Hignell
- John Myers
- Ian Fraser
- Bob & Betty Ball
- Dick & Chris Pattinson
- Betty Kirk
- Brian Radford

Salt Spring Island Trip – Oct. 4, 2009

Sharon Jones

Sunday, Oct. 4 fifteen early risers left Softball City at 6:00 a.m. to catch the 7:00 a.m. ferry to Swartz Bay. We were looking forward to meeting the Salt Spring Island Trail and Nature Club members on their home turf to enjoy the island's Apple Festival. All went well as we happily ran onto the ferry just before they closed the gates. Relaxing on the ferry, enjoying our morning coffee and some breakfast, we watched the sun rise and chatted the time away. At Swartz Bay we did the Salt Spring Island Shuffle as we had been taught by Mai, following close at her heels to be sure we didn't miss a step. But, as we all descended on the ticket booth to exchange our tickets for boarding passes, they closed the gates because the Fulford ferry was full. Now we had to make phone calls to tell the people meeting us that we would be two hours late. For some of us it gave time for a nap and others traipsed back and forth to the market, read books and chatted with whoever would listen.

Finally we were first in line for the 11:00 ferry and in a half hour, wearing our yellow ribbons we streamed off the boat to the waiting arms of our Salt Spring hosts dressed in red rib-

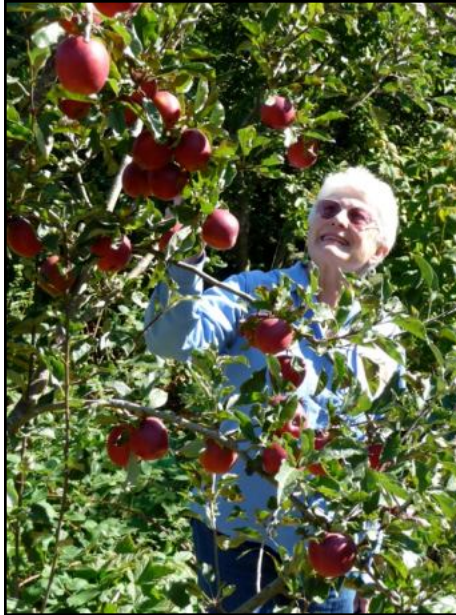


Apples on display in Fulford Hall

bons and wearing smiles. (They really did have more on than red ribbons.) Carol was there also to meet both ferries, having stayed overnight with her daughter. She wondered if she had the

date right when she did not recognize anyone on the first ferry.

Our wonderful drivers, Teresa, John, Susan and Paul brought us up to Fulford Hall where we were amazed



Carol Monaghan at Apple Luscious.

at the display of 319 different varieties of apples all grown on Salt Spring Island. Most of these were organically grown and many were heritage varieties, saved, grafted and planted by dedicated islanders, many dating back to the 1800's. We were able to taste as many as we wanted and tried to remember the varieties we liked best. Apple pies to die for were available as well as other treats.

From here we continued with our drivers to visit three or four different orchards, all providing apple tasting, quiches, soups, juice, or baked goods. Wandering through the orchards, we saw many different apple trees, some still loaded with apples. We found places where there were artists, potters and apple growers all living together in a relaxed island lifestyle. On a promontory of rock jutting into the sea, and appearing to rise from the depths, was the "Windsor Castle" built in 1960 on an original 1884 or-

chard. On a beautiful setting we saw an orchard built near what had been a sawmill in the 1800's and included artifacts found in nearby Chinese and Japanese dumps.

We all had a wonderful time and enjoyed sharing our stories of what we had seen on our pleasant trip home. It was a long day but we did see the sun rise and enjoyed it all day in a beautiful place with wonderful people, then watched it set as we sailed into the Salish Sea. There is talk of wanting to do this again next year.

Thank you to the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club for a wonderful day.

Article by Sharon Jones, photos by Mai Clark and Vera Berseneva; all are members of the White Rock/Surrey Naturalists.

CALENDAR

November 26

Hiking the Rock Wall Circuit in the Kootenay Rockies

Slide show by Lynn Thompson
Crofton Room, Harbour House
7:30 pm

December 8

Annual Christmas Luncheon

Green Room, Harbour House
Please enter from the back parking area
Doors open at 11:30 am,
Food served at 12:15 pm
Tickets: \$19 each,

available on the Tuesday outings from your coordinators and from Soapworks in Ganges

January 1, 2010

New Year Day Hike

A short moderate hike to welcome 2010.
Leader: Kees Visser
Destination: to be determined later
Meet at Artspring parking lot at 10:00 am
Bring a snack and a drink only.

January 28, 2010

Luncheon and

Annual General Meeting

Green Room at Harbour House
Lunch at Noon, price to be announced later
AGM starting at 1:00 pm

A Long Distance Hike Through History

Kees Ruurs

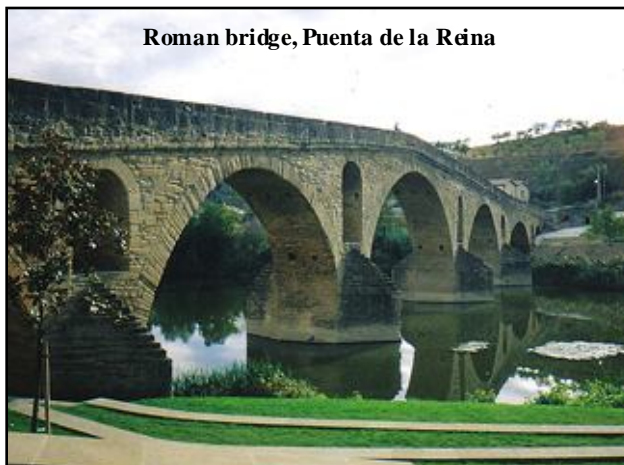
Anyone interested in seeing a different part of the world and getting some healthy exercise at the same time should think about walking the 'Camino de Santiago' in Spain. The Camino is a 750 kilometre long trail, which runs from the border between France and Spain to Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain. The trail is an old pilgrim's trail, which has been followed by millions and millions of Christians over the last 1,000 years. Legend has it that around 860 the remains of the apostle James were found in north-western Spain. A church was built on that spot and over the centuries the city of Santiago grew up around it. During the Middle Ages every year millions of people would make the trip to this third holiest city (after Jerusalem and Rome). Even nowadays 40,000 people a year are walking the trail. Still half of these people are walking to Santiago for religious reasons, but the trail is becoming more and more an attraction for those who are looking for a relatively easy long distance hike. The 750 kilometres trip takes anywhere from 4 to 5 weeks depending on your condition, the weather and your ambition.

Some people walk the entire trail, some join the trail half way or if you only have a few days you can join the trail 100 or 200 km before Santiago. More ambitious hikers may start their hike from anywhere in Europe whether it is France, Germany, or Italy. I joined my brother near the France/ Spanish border, after he had walked 1800 km from Amsterdam in three months.

Getting to the start of the trail is a little difficult because it is a small village high up in the Pyrenees, the mountain range separating France and Spain. I therefore decided to start in the first major city after the border, Pamplona (the city where they 'run with the bulls'). Fortunately, I got there after the bulls had been locked up again. First, you obtain a 'passport for the pilgrim', which you have to get stamped every night in another village or city to prove that you walked the trail to Santiago. The first few days after leaving Pamplona take you through gently rolling hills and small villages

and towns. The third or fourth day you enter the meseta, the high plateau of northern Spain which is a little like walking through Saskatchewan, interesting, but after a couple of days you probably have seen all you want to

see as far as the landscape is concerned. The centuries old towns and villages along the way provide very interesting sights. You come through a few large cities, Logrono, Burgos, Leon with beautiful cathedrals and all the amenities you may need. The landscape gets more interesting after you pass Leon and the last 10 days you walk through beautiful Galicia, a mountainous area where the trail climbs over several passes.



The condition of the trail varies almost from kilometre to kilometre. At times you are on a very well maintained 10-15 feet wide gravel path, sometimes you walk along secondary roads, sometimes it is narrow path through the fields or forest sometimes it looks more like a creek bed barely 1 foot wide. On a rainy day, you may end up wading through a foot of water because the trail is so worn out and not maintained. Nevertheless, occasionally you may also be forced for a little while to join the traffic on a busy highway. On average you only need to walk 23-25 kilometres per day, not much,

but to do it day after day after day you need to be in reasonable condition or you might injure yourself. We varied the length of the daily hike, sometimes only 10 kilometres on the day when we came through a large city and wanted to see the sights, or 36 or 40 kilometres if we felt energetic.

The best time of year to do the hike is either early in the year (April / May) or later in the

year after August 15th because during the summer it just gets too hot in northern Spain when 40 degrees or more is not uncommon.

The nice part about this centuries old trail is that because so many pilgrims walked the same trail, numerous hostels, restaurants and bars have sprouted up along the trail. A chain of special pilgrim hostels is available along the entire route and even though the quality of the hostels



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EAGLE TREE *Ken Mugridge*

When we moved to Salt Spring in 1998, we noticed a huge fir tree in one corner of our lot. It was dying and beginning to show some rot. Our neighbours told us that eagles had continuously nested in it for over 19 years. It had a "protected tree" government decal affixed to it.

Perhaps showing some avian common sense, the eagles had recently vacated the nest and moved into another large tree on an adjoining lot. We derived a great deal of pleasure in watching the birds build a brand new nest. We had a great view of them as the nest was almost at eye level, the tree being situated on a lower slope. We would monitor the eaglets (usually two of them) progress and, regular as

clockwork, the first one would fly on July 4th - being an American bald eagle, of course. Their screeching, starting at 4 am, was really something to remember (or forget).

Unfortunately, in one of the periodic January storms about 4 years ago, the tree was hit really hard and a huge dump of snow brought the whole nest down. The eagles must have lost heart as they abandoned their new tree and



now have established another nest further north out of our sight.

Our existing rotting tree also did not fare well. In a recent windstorm, about half of it came crashing down, fortunately not doing any damage. About three weeks ago, we were awakened at 6:30 am by the sound of chain saws on the road below. Giving it little thought and being out of sight, we took no notice. It was not until we had walked down there a week later that we saw that the rest of the tree, apart from about 30' still standing, had crashed down on the road and completely blocked it. The road crew had cut and bulldozed the fir into the ditch. The road is almost a dead-end at that point so only a couple of people had been affected.

Last week the road crew returned and removed the fallen tree. It took two backhoes and a dump truck with about four guys all morning. I felt a small pang of regret watching the tree's departure, thinking that it had provided somebody's home for 19 years. The only upside is that the remaining snag is going to provide a good food source for the woodpeckers for some years to come.

Photographs by the author.

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differs greatly, you can always find a shower and a bed at the end of a day's hike. The cost of these dormitory style hostels is \$3 to \$5 per night!!!!. As far as food is concerned, most hikers make their own breakfast and lunch and usually go to a restaurant for their supper. For \$10 to \$12 you can get a fairly good three course meal. Unfortunately I have to say that the Spanish kitchen is not among the better ones in the world. And beware, Spanish restaurants don't start serving supper until 9PM and that often makes for a long hungry wait after a day's hike. Because the cost of living is relatively low in Spain we spent less than \$750 per person on living expenses for the entire month we were there. The expensive part is getting there and back. You need to fly to Madrid or Paris and take a train or bus from there, but that can cost you \$1,500 easily.

Knowing a few words of Spanish certainly helps. The younger generation of Spaniards learn English in school, but the vast majority of people over 30 years of age do not speak English or for that matter any foreign language. As far as gear is concerned take the bare minimum of course. Because you only need your personal stuff, a sleeping bag and foamy (when all the beds are taken and you have to sleep on the floor in the hostel), but no tent or

cooking gear, you can keep the weight of your pack down to 11 or 12 kilograms without too much of a problem.

Finding the trail is easy. There are dozens of trail guides, but even without a guide you can find the route. Yellow arrows point the way to Santiago on every corner, traffic sign, church wall, tree or fence. You can't miss them and if you do, you'll soon run into a Spaniard who will point out the correct way again.

Near the beginning of the trail you may be walking the same route with 15 or 20 other people, but since everybody leaves at a different time in the morning you may not see them again till supper time in the next hostel. Closer to Santiago there might be 300 to 500 people a day walking the trail and you will see some other hikers on the trail, but never is it so busy that it becomes a parade. One of the interesting aspects of this hike is that you will meet people from all over the world and (if you can find a common language) learn lots about other countries and peoples.

If you are able to take a 4 week holiday I can recommend this trail. It is an excellent training for when you want to hike the 15,000 kilometre Trans Canada Trail...

Kees Ruurs is an SSTNC Member; photographs by Kees Visser

Some Pictures from the Fall Trip To Cathedral Provincial Park



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