



11 Belorado – San Juan de Ortega

6¼ hrs.
23.9km

Hostels: Tosantos (821m, pop. 60), RH, ☼☼☼, 30 M/donations. Rectory, tel: 947 580 371. Mattresses on the floor, kitchen, communal cooking and clearing up, no internet. Prayers. 13–22.00, April–mid Nov. **Villambistia** (860m, pop. 50), MH, ☼☼☼, 14 B/6 €. Alb. San Roque, tel: 656 930 220. Plaza Mayor, right at the church down to the centre of village. W/D, bar, meals. All day, all year except end of Dec.–beg. Jan. **Espinosa del Camino** (900m, pop. 40), (1) PH, ☼☼☼, 12 B/5 €. Alb. Espinosa del Camino, tel: 630 104 925. Kitchen, washer, normal beds, bar/rest. 12–22.00, all year. (2) PH, ☼☼☼, 10 B/price on request. Alb. La Campana, José Mir, tel: 678 479 361. The hostel is up for sale, therefore changes possible. Evening meal, breakfast. Small private museum. No internet. 13–22.00, March–Oct. **Villafranca Montes de Oca** (948m, pop. 130), (1) MH, ☼☼, 60 B/5 € (winter 7 €). Tel: 691 801 211 (Reservations possible). Kitchen, W/D. Until 22.00, all year. (2) PH, ☼☼☼, 26 B/5 and 8 € (bunk beds), 10 € (normal bed), (3 DR 30 and 45 €). In Hotel San Antón Abad, C/ del Hospital, 4, tel: 947 582 150. Microwave, W/D. From 11.00, mid March–mid Nov. **San Juan de Ortega** (1,008m, pop. 20), CH, ☼☼, 70 B/7 €. San Juan de Ortega monastery, tel: 947 560 438.

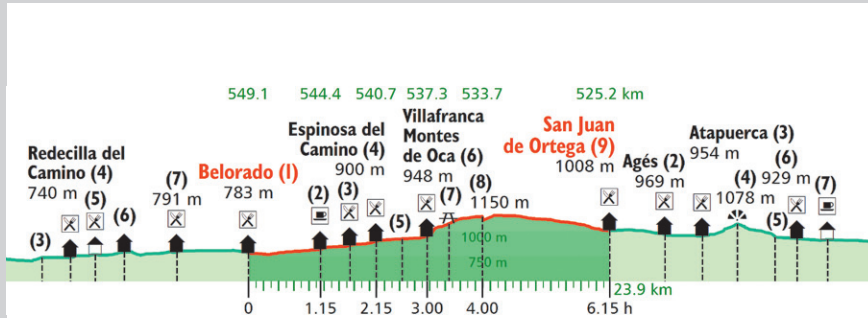
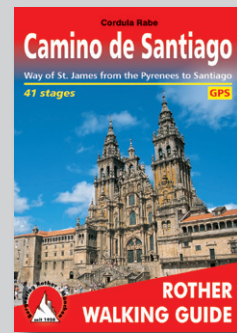
Often full in July/Aug. Washer, drinks/snacks machines. Tradition: garlic soup after mass. 13–22.00, Mar.–Oct.
Grade and route: easy to moderate. Well marked, paths and farm tracks. Easy up to Villafranca, but after that, an incline and 12km without services along a forest track.
Height difference: 380m in ascent, 160m in descent.
Critical points: rather than walking along the N-120 before Villafranca Montes de Oca, it's better to follow the beaten path on the right of it.
Scenery: from Belorado the landscape becomes greener again. The path to Villafranca ascends imperceptibly to over 900m. Then it goes steeply uphill into the wooded area around Montes de Oca. Moss covered oak trees and thick ferns create a magical atmosphere until the path runs along a broad firebreak.
Local services: Tosantos ☼☼☼@; Villambistia ☼☼☼@; Espinosa del Camino ☼☼☼@; Villafranca Montes de Oca ☼☼☼@; San Juan de Ortega ☼☼☼@ daily 18.00.
Remarks: (1) Between Belorado and Burgos, no cash machine! (2) Take water and food with you for the long stretch from Villafranca to San Juan de Ortega.

From the end of **Belorado** (1) walk as far as the petrol station, walk straight through and then take the farm track on the left of the road. After the rather monotonous stages walking through cornfields, a broad path now leads to **Tosan-**

tos (2; 1¼ hrs.) on the left hand side of a stream bed, lush with vegetation. Just before Tosantes you come past an inviting and shady picnic spot to stop for a rest. A little way outside the village (to the north) lies the hermitage, the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Peña, with a statue of the Virgin Mary from the 12th century (information in the hostel). The route out of Tosantes continues along a leisurely farm track slightly uphill. Although always within hearing distance of the N-120, you are distracted by lovely views of the surrounding countryside, and then you come through **Villambistia** (3; ½ hr.), **Espinosa del Camino** (4; ½ hr.) and **Villafranca Montes de Oca** (6; ¾ hr.). The remains of **San Félix de Oca** church (5; 9th century) are passed just before reaching Villafranca.

i **Villafranca Montes de Oca** is where pilgrims used to recover their energies for the long and dangerous crossing of the Oca mountains (oca means goose), in whose woods robbers and bandits plied their foul work. Villafranca was a bishopric until the seat was transferred to Burgos in 1075. At the end of the 14th century, the **Hospital de la Reina** (or **de San Antonio Abad**) was built at the command of Doña Juana Manuel, wife of King Enrique II (Henry II of Trastámara). It is said to have been popular with pilgrims due to large servings of food. In the centre of the village stands the **Iglesia de Santiago** (originally, Romanesque, end of the 18th century). A baroque statue of St. James inside the church is very striking and so too the font made from a huge St. James shell originating from the Philippines (June 15–Sept. 30, 10–14.00 and 17–20.00).





View of San Juan de Ortega.

Already in the village, the ascent onto the **Montes de Oca**, at first a tough one, then less steep, starts along a hiking path. After about ½ hr. you can catch your breath at a small **resting place** (7; 1,080m, *área de descanso*). According to the sign (*agua no potable*), however, the water is not for drinking. Another half an hour, this time up a moderate incline, the highest point with an antenna at 1,155m is reached. There's a lovely panoramic view across the extensive forest area. Shortly afterwards you walk along the broad fire-break to the **memorial** (8) for the Republicans shot in 1936 in the Civil War. The inscription is as follows: 'It was not their deaths, but the manner of their deaths that was senseless. May they rest in peace'. Immediately afterwards a deep ravine forces you into a short but steep descent and ascent. Then continue along a broad forest path to **San Juan de Ortega** (9; 2¼ hrs.).

You reach Tosantes along a broad agricultural track.



i The later canonised **Juan de Ortega** (1080–1163) was, together with Santo Domingo, the second most important patron of the Way of St. James. Following a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the student of Santo Domingo retreated into the inhospitable Oca mountains in 1115. In thanks for the miraculous rescue during a storm on the journey back he built Saint Nicholas of Bari the *Capilla de San Nicolás*. Despite the resistance put up by the Oca mountains bandits, he later opened a pilgrim hostel around which a small monastic community was founded. Just like his role model, Santo Domingo, he improved the Way of St. James by building roads and bridges. In the 15th century the monastery started its decline. The interior of the **Iglesia Monacal** (previously a monastery church, 12th–19th century) combines Romanesque, such as the three apses with very beautiful capitals (12th century), and Gothic elements from the 14th/15th century, like the **tomb of San Juan**. The exquisitely worked Gothic baldachin (about 1464) displays scenes from the life of San Juan, such as his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The sarcophagus containing the remains of the saint is located in a niche to the left, beneath the capital of the column for the Miracle of Light. At the moment, the monastery complex is being renovated. The **Milagro de la Luz**, the Miracle of Light, is an architectural masterpiece. On either equinox (21st March at 18.00, 22nd Sept at 19.00, also one or two days before and after), a ray of sunshine falls for a few minutes onto the capital to the left of the altar which depicts the story of Christmas, from the Annunciation to the Epiphany. A pilgrimage to the church was, for a long time, the last hope of childless women. According to legend, Queen Isabella of Castilla, wife of Fernando of Aragón, brought three children into the world after her visit to San Juan.
Information: www.sanjuandeortega.com and www.alberguesanjuandeortega.es.