

PART THREE, CORAO - ABAMIA - CRUZ DE PRIENA - COVADONGA (9 KMS.)

At the moment you are in the borough of Cangas de Onis and Corao, where we arrived after a long walk through the second section. Now we begin the third and last section. Corao is on the right hand side of the road from Cangas de Onis and Cabrales, although previously the main road went through the centre of the village.

We begin by taking el Camino de los Castaños, the route of the Chestnuts. Here in Corao you can see the old chestnut grove where there are trees which are centuries old and, due to the course of time, contorted into some fantastic shapes. The route, now a wide pathway, passes over the river, Güeña. After a turning the route comes out onto the road, which leads to the village church of Santa Eulalia de Abamia. This is an important Romanesque church. Santa Eulalia (St. Olaya), according to tradition, was built by don Pelayo, in whose time it was destined to be a monastery. It was rebuilt in the tenth century and herein were interred the remains of Don Pelayo and his wife, Gaudiosa, at the beginning of the twelfth century. Later they were transferred to Covadonga.

Ambrosio de Morales, a historian in the service of king Felipe II, wrote that, "the church was very small, like all those of that era, and there was the tomb of the King and, a little apart, that of his wife. He said had rebuilt the church bigger, such that the tomb of the King was included inside it, while outside was the tomb of his wife. Nowadays in the nave of the church in the part closest to the headboard, there are two cenotaphs level with the floor beneath a niche or archway. The one on the side of the Epistle has a sword whose sheath has been carved and this is attributed to Don Pelayo. The other, on the side of the Gospel is in the shape of a trapezoid and has the following inscription, which dates from the twelfth century. "Here is the Queen Gaudiosa, wife of Don Pelayo."

The same Ambrosio de Morales, wrote that "The day that I was there was a Sunday, and it seemed to me that the army of The King Don Pelayo was there. There were more than two hundred lances, all around the church. They belonged to those who had come to mass over that wild land (in which there was every possibility of meeting a bear) and had been brought for the purposes of self defence.

The church was abandoned for years and what remains of the original nave is very little. It was declared a Monument of Historic Interest by the Royal Decree 15-3-62 and in the last few years has been restored, mostly due to the concern of the parish priest, Fermín Alonso, the mayor and the people of Corao as well as the Caja de Asturias.

There also exists another story about Corao and Santa Eulalia de Abamia (St. Olaya of Abamia.) On the right of the church there is an abandoned cemetery where there was a modest tomb, covered in weeds. Here there is a stone with a huge crack, threatening to divide it in two. By separating the ivy it is possible to read, "Here lies buried, Roberto Frassinelli Brurnitz". This is of course is the famous "German of Corao," as he was known in his time. He was celebrated in his lifetime for his courage. Frassinelli, born in Germany and son of a German and an Italian, arrived in Corao around 1844 about 43 years old. He died there 33 years later. A pilgrim of sorts, in search of peace and health, he found here in Asturias what he desired. He was an extraordinary draftsman with a thoroughgoing knowledge of architecture and archaeology. He discovered the dolmen of Abamia as well as many ancient stones, some originating beyond the pale of history. The slopes of the Picos de Europa were depicted by his pencil. The chasms together

with the mineral secrets of their depths were portrayed by Frassinelli. He, like the very best Asturian, had a deep sense of the spirit of the Sanctuary of Covadonga. And to him we owe the Sanctuary of the Grotto, (el Santuario de la Gruta) which had begun to take shape up until the Civil War. The beginning of the present day Basilica has been attributed to him. Don Pedro Pidal, wrote of him, “.. he was the intimate friend of those stone towers, of those solitary lakes, of that inaccessible, fearful region, of each insecure footstep, of the whole spirit untouched by the irritable love of the infinite which overwhelmed that great friend, Roberto Frassinelli”

Nowadays, the grey slate, covered with weeds and bedded in good Asturian soil remains the shelter, of “the German of Corao”. The group, “The Veterans of the Mountains” with the blessing of the parish and of the Cultural and Artistic Heritage transferred the tomb of Roberto Frassinelli, to the church in Abamia, so his memory will be preserved. His remains were transferred by Fermín Alonso, the parish priest of Corao, a builder and an anonymous veteran mountaineer. His tomb is at the back of the nave on the left hand side. Part of this walk, GR 105.2, is the Senda Frassinelli, (Frassinelli’s Route) thus called since he used to go up into the Picos de Europa. Let’s hope he will go with us in spirit towards Priena

From the church at Abamia, which is possible to visit, we walk towards the houses in Cuetu-Aleos,. Here the path goes upwards through trees coming out onto a pathway which, at a crossroads leads towards more open land, next to the cabins of La Canal. Continuing on the Frassinelli Route, more cabins can be seen in La Cruz and Orientes. As the new track begins to go up on the left, you have to leave this route, turning right to Andoreñu which comprises a group of old cabins, seen on the right hand side. Thus you come out into open pastureland, the type of countryside which predominates the route from here to Priena. The absence of places to signs has made it necessary to use stones with red and white markings to show the route, hoping that they will be respected, although past experience would suggest otherwise.

You will come out next to Les Fuentines, where there is a wide drinking trough. Over on the left you will see the stone wall belonging to a plot of land. Once at the high point of this pathway, it changes direction, turning to the right, this new path will take you to higher pastureland, continuing towards the left. Carry on, always keeping on the pathway towards La Cruz de Priena, via Collía. From there the route gives way to a rocky stretch, with frequent signs which will help you along the final part. This last part leads on to the cross that you can see, the final, “Royal” destination of your journey. The cross, put in place in 1907, was erected “To commemorate the complete victory of the Christians and their leader, Don Pelayo, over the Arabs”, according to the records of the Chapter of Covadonga in October 1906.

From Priena, the countryside is beautiful and calm, surrounded as it is by the mountains. From the cross, go on down towards the left, looking at Covadonga and following the signs towards the back of the pasture. Here we pick up the pathway of the Cuesta Gines, which, half way along the hillside begins to weave downhill from the Coll of Prayer. Covadonga is approaching and even the very candles on the altar of the Virgin can be seen as you go down. The whole site can be seen at once, beautiful and peaceful; the cave, the church, the statue of Don Pelayo, even the pathway we will take on the final stretch can be seen on the right of the road going up to the sanctuary. At the end, almost at the bottom, the track becomes a pathway through a little wood, which comes out onto the road. You need to follow this on the left and after only a couple of hundred metres, you pass the car park on the right of the road and go into the Parque Del Principe (The Prince’s Park.) This is signposted by an old poster and is an important part of the Royal

Site of Covadonga that not many people know about. At the moment the site is completely abandoned but it was a garden, set up at the same time as the creation of the National Park and was the place where Alfonso III planted a tree on the day the National Park was inaugurated.

The area in which we are walking was originally crossed by the old pilgrim's route when the present road didn't exist. You cross in front of the old restaurant Hostal Favila, on the right of the path, a beautiful building, erected in the reign of Charles III, which served as a hostel for pilgrims up until the end of the last century. It has been restored and converted into the School at Covadonga.

A paved pathway and a track takes you to the roadway which comes out just next to the lions and where the river Diva has been canalized, coming out as the spring underneath the Grotto. All that is left now is to go up the Promissory Steps and present yourself to La Santina", the Virgin Mary.

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