

Having ideas is easy: bringing them into reality requires perspiration and persistence.

In 2008 we returned from walking from Leon to Santiago de Compostela full of enthusiasm for the idea of creating a similar walking trail back in Australia. We'd identified the beginning and the end having decided that it would go from Subiaco, an urban area close to the heart of the city of Perth, to New Norcia 145kms north in rural WA. Why those two places? Well to us, it seemed that it was a natural link. The Church that we attended was in Salvado Road Subiaco - two names with powerful links to the Benedictine Community and we'd just returned from Santiago De Compostela where the former Benedictine Monastery of St Martins still stands. And as many of you would know, it was at this monastery that Dom Rosendo Salvado entered as a novice monk. Later on he was to go to Italy and then to the Swan River Settlement in 1846 as a missionary at the request of the young Irish Bishop Brady, and to work there with the indigenous peoples of the new Colony. Soon after arriving in what is now known as Perth, Salvado was to go on and establish the only Monastery Town in Australia, New Norcia. So in Subiaco and New Norcia, we had a begin-

ning and an end and the hook for the Trail was going to be that peripatetic catholic cleric Rosendo Salvado. All we had to do was join up the dots and learn more about this missionary benedictine monk.

Even at this early stage in the venture, it was plain to me that the Pilgrim Trail would be about story telling. Our experience on the trail in Galicia had left us with several stories of peoples and experiences, and it had also had a real spiritual impact on the both of us. It was for those reasons that we wanted to reflect those experiences with our trail “Down Under”. I like to think that we have tapped into a great heritage of such stories and experiences.

From the very beginning we had no idea what we were attempting to do and each step was a new discovery. The great thing was that the idea was met with enormous enthusiasm by nearly everyone we talked to about it. If we’d met 100 people, then 97 of them were really supportive.

It seemed natural that we should involve our local parish community for the first ever walk, and that meant seeking the cooperation of the parish priest, who after 3 attempts at getting getting his attention finally said “OK, let’s do it”: and then it all began.

St Joseph's Church is a large redbrick building with a high pitched roof and a dominant bell tower. Inside you can see that there was an Irish influence in its rather austere decor, yet it has an imposing presence all of its own. To one side of the altar is what is known as the Tribune Chapel where weekday Masses are held. It was in this Chapel that we held our first meeting on a Sunday afternoon and where the plans and ideas slowly took shape.

During this initial phase, I took to spending long hours poring over Google Earth to work out a route from Subiaco to New Norcia. One can only smile and imagine what Salvado would have done if he'd had access to the Internet! My wife and I also started walking sections of the route and began to meet up with representatives of the Shires and Community groups along the way.

We certainly weren't the first group to walk to New Norcia but nothing permanent had come out of their efforts. I suspect that one of the reasons for this is that if you follow a straight-ish line from Subiaco to New Norcia, most of it is covered in Tarmac. Whilst I cannot deny that sealed roads have made the journey faster in the modern era, however they certainly haven't make it any easier for those who still choose to travel on foot, es-

pecially when that means meeting road trains coming in the opposite direction at 110kms an hour!

As a result, the challenge of establishing a permanent alignment took some years to finally settle if we were going to avoid the highway. But for this our first Camino, it seemed like we had no choice other than to walk 50km of highway on the final two days. The good news was that the earlier sections soon fell into place and have remained unaltered since that first group of pilgrims walked to New Norcia in 2009.

Day one would take us up to Guildford some 20kms from the CBD. The path follows the Swan river heritage trail 90% of the way, and has proven to be a wonderful choice, with glorious views of the river and parkland.

Walking along by the Swan river on a fresh clear morning you feel like you're still in the city, and yet you're enjoying the feel of the countryside at the same time.

As an interesting aside, the Swan river foreshore is where the early British settlers continued to enjoy their english national game of cricket, a game that Salvado interestingly came to love as well. In fact he organised for the indigenous at New Norcia to be taught this very British of sports, and as it turned out, it was a game at which they very quickly began to excel. A

match was then arranged between the English settlers and Salvado's indigenous eleven. The New Norcia players walked 140kms from the Mission to Perth and beat their colonial masters. Then after the game they packed up and walked the 140kms back home to New Norcia. They repeated their success when later challenged by the settlers from Fremantle - again walking to and from the games.

One of the team's stars was Johnny Walley who had outstanding throwing skills. At one Perth game he demonstrated his talents by throwing a ball at a Top Hat, placed on the ground 90 meters away and successfully demolishing the hat on the first throw. At Fremantle he hit a folded umbrella fixed into the ground at a distance of 100 meters.

But I digress.

Guildford itself is a place of great interest from an "Early Settler" point of view - Salvado's Benedictine Missionaries had three lodging houses there in those early years, but their exact location has been lost with the passage of time.

Guildford is one of three towns established in 1829, when Western Australia was settled, and its plan was based on the model of an English country town.

As the furthest navigable point on the Swan River, Guildford became an inland port, providing the main link between Perth and the country districts, which was why it soon evolved into a thriving market town and commercial centre. The town was declared a municipality in 1871 and granted its own crest of anchor, sheaf and grapes.

However, Guildford's status changed dramatically with the establishment of the railways in the 1880s. River transport declined, and with the rise of Midland Rail Junction a few miles to the west in the 1890s, Guildford's commercial importance eroded and it reverted to a sleepy outpost of Perth with some well preserved historical architecture. And if only for these latter reasons it's well worth a visit, especially as Perth itself is not renowned for preserving historical sites, preferring instead to re-build rather than renew.

On day two, the trail from Guildford heads north into the Swan Valley an area renowned for its vineyards and wineries owned by 3rd, 4th and 5th generation Eastern European and Italian settlers. But for the tired and thirsty walker with the first hints of blistered feet, one particular estab-

ishment gives rise to an almost spiritual experience ... and this is a stop at the Chocolate factory for a hot drink and to taste their goodies!

After the Swan Valley, it's on to, and into two of my favourite spots, Bells Rapids and Walyunga National park. Bells is an awesome spot in spring time when the river is high, white and noisy with water crashing through huge granite boulders. It's a feature spot for the famous Avon Descent - an International White Water Classic for paddlers and speed boats.

Walyunga has been "home" to the Indigenous Whadjuk people for a long long time, and makes us modern settlers seem very much like new kids on the block! There is evidence of continuous settlement in the area going back about 35,000 years give or take a millennia or two, and in other areas around Perth there is evidence to trace their presence back at least 45,000 years. But Walyunga has areas of deep spiritual significance to it's indigenous folk, and as one of the Whadjuk told me, "Its a very happy place" - and believe me, it is a happy place! In fact in the Noongar language, Walyunga means "Happy"

From Walyunga heading north, the Trail was to tease and test us as we worked on a long term viable alignment. At this early stage we were work-

ing on getting an alignment that would be as straight as possible and that meant that we faced many kilometres of walking along a major highway. “Meanwhile, back at the office”, the pressures of being a full-time GP, a Partner at a busy and expanding Medical practice, and being the public face of a very large Private Health Organization, and organising a Pilgrim walk from scratch was beginning to wear me down. We’d booked a holiday for July in 2009 and had asked the committee to take over checking out the route and especially to work out an exit path from Walyunga to the next part of the Trail in the Chittering Valley. Whilst there appeared to be a track on the maps, in reality things were far different.

Then my life journey suddenly took a direction that I’d rather have not taken, but as it turned out I had no choice in the matter - because it was literally a matter of life or death.

Being a Doctor can be a double edged sword - you can read too much into a personal symptom and think the worst, or you can trivialise potentially serious ones and put your life at risk. I’d had stents put in my coronary arteries when I was 52 and had lived a very healthy life ever since - not that I

hadn't lived a healthy one prior to that. According to my Cardiologist, my major risk factor for having coronary artery disease was plain "Bad Luck"! I became aware that all was not right with my heart whilst running for a coach after a concert we'd attended with our daughter and son in law. The very unsettling sensation in my chest prompted me to organise appropriate testing. The upshot of those tests was that I found myself in the Coronary Care ward awaiting urgent by-pass surgery on a life threatening narrowing at the origin of my coronary arteries.

Thankfully the surgery went well and everything went according to plan: well almost! Unfortunately, after the surgery I was bleeding steadily into my lung and needed urgent transfusions.

Recovery was a tough road to travel: especially with one lung cavity half full of blood, so for the first few days, the effort just to sit on the side of the bed and breathe was enormous, and my first shower felt like I'd climbed Everest!

The early days of that road back to health cut me off from the wider world: my life seemed to be limited to one room, being constantly wired up to a remote monitor and the challenge of walking the length of a corridor passing room after room of people in varying stages of recovery from similar

surgery; some of whom were doing very well, and one or two of them who weren't going to make it. They were sobering times, especially as nearly all of them seemed at least 10 years older than me, and I felt 10 years older than all of them!!

I had been warned that extreme fatigue, and mood swings could happen – and to a certain extent they did – so that even when I didn't feel like it I still had to do my daily exercises aimed at keeping me mobile and inflating that compromised lung. It did remind me of those times on the Camino in Spain when my legs were killing me and I didn't think that I would be able to even start, let alone complete the walk on certain days. On those really tough days, I reminded myself that all I had to do was take one step at a time, keep looking up and being hopeful.

It's been an observation of mine that at times of suffering, most of us look down where the view is limited and often not inspiring: just by the simple act of looking up, your physical horizons are immediately widened and the chances of seeing something beautiful increase dramatically. Taking one step at a time is a time-honoured and successful approach that breaks down challenges into “bite sized” pieces that are much easier to cope with and allow greater chances of success.

However, also remembering the physical challenges of a long distant walk from my Spanish Camino experience, I realised that there was absolutely no chance of me being able to take part in the first Camino Salvado pilgrimage from Subiaco to New Norcia which we'd spent so much time organising and which was now only a couple of weeks away. Neither would we be able to scout out the rest of the route and solve the few remaining "missing links" along the way.

But I needn't have worried: the Pilgrimage now had a life of its own, and there were people with great enthusiasm who were seamlessly able to carry on the job and take it to a level I would not have been able to do: perhaps a good example of me trying to make God laugh! You've probably heard the expression that if you want to make God smile, then tell Him your plans!

Just before my radical change in health status, I'd been interviewed by a journalist from the West Australian Newspaper - the largest newspaper in Western Australia, and after her article was published, the number of people interested in walking the Camino escalated. Shortly after that we received a phone call from the ABC - the National Television Broadcaster - from their Religious Affairs Compass program. They too had heard about

our fledgling Camino and would like to send a film crew over from Sydney to film the entire event! Whilst this was wonderful, it was one more thing to factor into the organization of the pilgrimage, and at that stage I was in no condition to do anything. But the rest of our group told me to sit back and just focus on getting better - everything would be fine: and it was fine!

We'd initially decided to call the Pilgrimage the Salvado Camino for two reasons. Firstly to honour the name of Rosendo Salvado who, despite having lived almost half a century in Western Australia, is still somewhat of a fringe figure in the history of the state despite his amazing achievements. The other major reason was to reflect the heritage of the Camino De Santiago which had provided the template and the ideal of Pilgrimage and of how it can be a real force for good both for the individual's spiritual life, and also for the economic impact it can have on the communities it passes through. Later on we were to shuffle those words around and settle on it's now established name of the Camino Salvado® - the Way of Salvado.

One of the traditions that I'd hoped to foster for the Camino Salvado was that pilgrims should carry the cockle shell - the symbol of pilgrims. But that meant that we'd need shells, and then we'd need them identifiable. The challenge of finding suitable shells was settled quickly and cheaply too. Students of geography will know that Perth sits on the edge of the vast Indian Ocean - in fact we often refer to Africa as being the next Parish to us. As a consequence we have a thriving fishing fleet based in Fremantle - an area well known to Rosendo Salvado. We found a great fish shop and the people who ran it were very happy to supply us with as many Rottneest Island Scallop shells as we needed - and all for nothing! Armed with 50 shells, I went home soaked and cleaned them and left them to dry in the sun.

Next I had to make a trip to the local hardware store to buy some red enamel paint. This was to embellish each shell with a stylised emblem of the cross of St Joseph which surmounts the spire of the Church in Salvado Road Subiaco - our starting point. Believe me, painting crosses on scallop shells is not as easy as you might think. The first few attempts I deemed to be very average, so in an effort to improve "quality control" I went Hi Tech and made a stencil out of a cornflakes packet. Using this genius de-

vice to draw the outline of the Cross on the shells, I then completed the job with red enamel paint. The results of my automation were amazing and the next 46 shells off the production line were really good - and maybe one day they'll become collectors pieces! Then there was the tricky job of drilling a hole through the shells so that they could be tied to the backpacks or belts of the Pilgrims. But after a few hours of occupational therapy, I had 40 embossed shells with attached strings ready to hand out to our pilgrims.

We also wanted to pick up on the idea of Pilgrims carrying a “passport” where they can jot personal notes, and, as they progress along the trail get them stamped. So passports were organised and an official Camino Salvador Stamp created for St Joseph's Parish to denote the start of the Pilgrimage. This stamp has been used on all Camino walks ever since. I am happy to report that in this the Bicentenary year of Rosendo Salvado, the community at New Norcia have commissioned a new stamp in honour of their Founder and this has now been used on all the passports of those pilgrims who have completed their Camino this year. Others we hope, will be created for the various spots along the walk where there are stops for pilgrim. However, you should be aware that at this point of time, once you leave

the boundary of greater Perth, there is only one township along the whole length of the trail.

Then there was the minor challenge of making sure the walkers didn't get lost as mobile phone coverage doesn't cover all of the trail, so we still had to rely on good, old fashioned paper based maps. One of the committee did a powerful job creating these for each day of the journey, and another committee member compiled spiritual reflections and prayers with which to begin each day.

By the time the Camino was about to begin, I was 3 weeks post surgery. Our priest had arranged for a blessing of the pilgrims at the start of the walk and he'd invited my wife and I to hand out the shells and the passports to individual walkers. It was a special event and there was a real buzz of excitement in the air - plus a national TV camera recording it all for posterity. The group massed on the altar and photos were taken, then it was down the nave, out the door and they were gone.

The two of us were left with mixed feelings as we stood there alone on the pavement outside the church. The first was happiness that something truly

wonderful had just begun, and the other was the feeling you get on the day your child goes off to school for the first time.

That first walk was a great success - despite the long haul along the highway. Everyone returned with great stories and the ABC film crew returned to Sydney to edit their footage. The product of their endeavours was broadcast nationally the following Easter on Good Friday which gave our fledgling trail a huge boost in publicity on the far eastern shores of Australia. In fact, even though we've never publicised the Camino, since that first walk about 15% of walkers come from the other side of our great continent.

Our first Camino had been a one off event with 25 walkers. With that event successfully completed we decided to plan for two walks for the following year. But whilst the walkers had been walking, I had come to the conclusion that we needed a permanent trail to cater for more walkers. My reasoning was that although our parish community had done a great job in running the first walk, maintaining that enthusiasm in the years ahead as interest grew, and more people wanted to take part, would be a real challenge. Also, we all play a passing role in life and although we had a parish priest who had transformed the parish with his vision and personal

charisms, not all priests are blessed with such gifts. Then there was also the fact that our committee was made up of mainly retired people who may not be willing or indeed able to go on volunteering ad infinitum.

Finally I and others truly believed that the idea of a permanent walking trail opened up so many opportunities, not only for the walkers, but for the areas through which the trail would go. So whilst we still planned ahead for the next Camino Salvado, I also undertook the challenge of finding out more on how to create and operate a walking trail in Western Australia.

It soon became pretty obvious that if we were going to establish the trail on a permanent basis then we'd need expert help. So we secured the services of a Trails Consultant whose expenses were funded by a grant from the State's Lottery Commission. We were very blessed by the fact that when our Consultant had completed his job, he stayed on as a member of our newly constituted Pilgrim Trail Foundation Board, because in the long process of creating our Strategic plan, he'd come to share our vision and had become a dear friend of ours too.

There is no doubt that working on creating the Pilgrim Trail has allowed me to meet some truly inspiring people. I literally had no idea what was involved in the mechanisms of creating such a facility and the processes

that had to be gone through in order to turn the idea into a reality. But at every step of the way I was greeted by people who exuded enthusiasm and constructive advice, and there was a great sense that this was an idea whose time had come and that perhaps, it had been blessed by the good Lord himself.

Naturally there were a few “road bumps” along the way, and one of the early ones came from an unexpected source.

New Norcia is a small hamlet, it’s far too small to call a town, owned by the Benedictine monks and founded back in the 19th century by Doms Salvado and Serra. The monks’ initial focus was to work with, and for, the indigenous folk on whose lands the early Swan River Colony was settled - the Noongar people. Since Salvado’s time in those early foundation years, the focus of the community shifted during most of the 20th century to building schools and educating all west Australian children within their jurisdiction, as well as fostering the religious life of the now almost 200 brothers and priests within the monastery of that time. In Salvado’s early years there, New Norcia had been funded by the poor peoples of Sicily, southern Italy, Spain and France who donated what little of their meagre income they had to the Missions, and in this case, the missions in Aus-

tralia. Following establishment, the mission literally grew on the sheeps' back as Salvado became one of the largest wool producers of his era in Australia.

In the 21st century, being independent of just about all State and Commonwealth support means that New Norcia still has to be fully self supporting even though the community has shrunk to less than a dozen brothers and priests. The practicalities of this means that this now very small community has to now employ people to run the farms, provide their own electricity, maintain all fences and roads, dispose of their own rubbish and sewage: in fact every facility a local Council provides. As well as funding all these services, they also have to maintain the Spanish influenced Heritage buildings that comprise most of the extant buildings there, and most of these are in serious need of refurbishment and repair. Just about the only thing they don't have to maintain is the main North-South Highway between Perth and the rapidly expanding mining towns way up in the north west of the State. This road is known as the Great Northern Highway and literally runs right through the middle of New Norcia. The huge road trains that use this highway carry massive machinery to the mine sites and literally shake those Heritage buildings as they go through 24 hours a day, sev-

en days of the week. There is talk of a bye-pass, but currently that is only at the furthest horizon of the Department of Main Roads current planing - probably 10 to 20 years away. As I said, most of their buildings are now in need of much tender loving care, as nearly all of them are over 100 years old, and structural maintenance is an ongoing and expensive drain on the communities funds.

So when we first approached the community with our idea for a pilgrim trail, I naively thought that they would be just as excited about the proposed Pilgrim trail as we were. But they had a different take on things.

Whilst they offered their encouragement and support for the annual Camino pilgrimages, they were concerned from the outset that if there was a permanent trail then hundreds of walkers might just turn up on their doorstep and have no where to stay. This, in their view would mean that the community would have to support them until they could exit the Hamlet. They rightly pointed out, that that might not be for some time as the bus only leaves New Norcia twice a week! Overall, they expressed their reservations that this increased burden on their fragile infrastructure would be too much for them to support physically and financially.

This shook our confidence a bit in the beginning, but we were determined to build on the relationship as we both believed in the same ideals, and we both wanted the best outcome for New Norcia.

Since those first meetings we have emphasised to everyone who walks there, or who is considering walking to New Norcia that it is a fragile environment and that if you are planning a pilgrimage, then you should organise return transport before you put one foot outside of your own front door.

In fact, my experience of our walkers is that they are usually over 60, mainly female and highly unlikely to leave Perth city boundaries without everything being 100% organised.

Five years on and the monks have proved themselves to be extremely accommodating. They have made the entry into New Norcia for those walking the Camino Salvado one of the more memorable experiences of the pilgrimage. Once the Pilgrims arrive at New Norica, the Church bells are rung and the group processes through the hamlet to the Church sanctuary. There they sit around the marble tomb of Bishop Salvado and place their tokens on the tomb. The Abbot or his representative then receives them, prays with them and washes the feet of some of the Pilgrims. It is a very moving ceremony and a wonderful completion to the journey.

The next morning all the pilgrims joined the community for Mass. Then it's onto the coach for the two hour return trip to Perth.

Our relationship with New Norcia continues to evolve and I am delighted to report that in the years since, the monks have not been deluged by thousands of walkers turning up to seek refuge and sustenance, and there are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, apart from the initial TV program, we have not advertised the Trail ... until now! And the reason for that was the alignment of the trail itself.

As I indicated earlier, we needed to move the trail away from the highway.

That meant we had to go back to the maps to find a suitable alternative.

Working with our previous concept that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, I found an alignment several kilometres east of the

highway and which passed through Western Australia's only Catholic

Agricultural College. Fortunately for us, the then college principal of this

Institution had recently walked the Camino in Spain and was greatly sup-

portive of the idea. So with his blessing, we checked out the passage

through the farm along the firebreak of their farm boundary fence some 7

kms from the College, and it proved perfect for our needs. Next we had to

seek permission from the farm north from the College lands. That farm is

owned by Mr and Mrs Kelly who were to become somewhat of a legend to us during those years. Both are probably in their early 70's and yet farm many thousands of hectares of land around New Norcia. Their enthusiastic support for the trail was greatly re-newing. Mrs Kelly would turn up with freshly baked scones when the walkers passed through their section of the trail - which was 5 kilometres from her home - she would then would point out the rare native orchids that are to be found on what she calls her bush block which is about of 80 hectares in size - twice the size of Vatican City! ! But not only would she turn up with welcome refreshments, she'd bring her 35 year old severely disabled son with her who'd suffered a tragic head injury whilst playing sport aged 17. He's a gentle soul and much loved by his parents: a quiet reminder of how relative our own sufferings are. It was people like the Kellys who have given us so much joy in our Trail adventure.

The final link to this new alignment was an area that is known as the Buffer Zone.

It's called the Buffer Zone for a very good reason. It's a strip of land that separates private farm land from approximately 300 square kilometres of the one of Australia's Military training grounds - and includes a section

where the Special Operations Unit train on a daily basis. It's a vast tract of mainly natural bushland. It's just that at weekends army reservists go up there and shoot at things. And during the week, the special forces use a small section to do whatever special services do with all of their very dangerous weapons and explosives. We actually held a meeting with army representatives to explain our Trail and they ran a computer program to work out the chances of any of our walkers getting shot or hit by shrapnel anywhere along the Buffer zone. It took them three months to run the program and then they happily reported that the chances of anyone getting hit was once in 800 years , and they could happily live with that! One of the problems which was to delay us for the next 3 and a half years was actually getting a licence from the relevant government department to walk along the buffer zone in order to reach the next part of our trail. This was a vital link as without it we didn't have an alignment that would legally allow people to cross through that land.

My patience eventually wore thin and I was forced to write to the relevant State Government Minister. Once that had happened, things moved at the speed of light. Almost overnight, the Head of the department who was pro-

fusely apologetic at the unnecessary delays signed off on our license and hey presto we were on our way again.

By now we'd cut down the distance along the highway from 50 kms to just under 5 kms: and what an improvement it proved to be. But that wasn't the end of the alignment saga!

Because a section of the trail went through the Catholic Agricultural College property, it meant that we needed to seek permission well in advance each time a group walked through it. So we were still not in a position to declare the Trail "Open for Business".

Also we still had to complete the community discussions that our Consultant had advised we organise, and one of those was with the local indigenous people.

For me it was a wonderful experience meeting with the Indigenous Australians who had been living continuously in that part of the world for over 40,000 years. The local peoples we met with were the Whadjuk, whose traditional lands cover metropolitan Perth, the Swan valley and Walyunga National park, and the Yued whose traditional lands are north of the Whadjuk and cover vast areas which include New Norcia too. These are the people that Salvado came to serve and to teach.

I am somewhat embarrassed to report that after over 30 years of living in Australia, this was to be my first “up close and personal” encounter with the original owners of the ancient land now known as Australia. But it was a vital meeting to have as some early european treatment of the indigenous peoples had been a shameful episode in the history of the Colony. In fact the legacy of that era still reverberates today and it was my hope that as the indigenous stories became familiar to Pilgrims, then, perhaps we could play a small part in the very necessary healing process.

So we organised a meeting, which to my eyes, was pretty chaotic.

I arrived, set up my computer with an appropriate slide show and was ready to start on time but that was my first lesson about indigenous people! They have a slightly different concept of time than we european australians do. There was a great deal of milling around with people coming and going and various calls of “Anyone seen Bill?” and “I think he's gone for a smoke”. Until at last about 14 people gathered around a large, very official looking Boardroom table.

I must admit that at first, there didn't seem to be much interest in what I was talking about. Then I told them the story of how one day when my

wife and I were scouting Walyunga National Park - which, as I've said, is very special to them. It was a beautiful winters morning with clear blue skies, crisp fresh air and not a breath of air stirring the leaves. At the end of a steep climb, I paused to get my breath. I looked down into a deep gully and out of nowhere, the wind swirled up the steep slopes, rocking and swaying a narrow band of big trees in its path. It came straight towards me and blew my hat off. I turned to catch it and found that all the trees behind me were quite still and my hat lay at my feet. You could have heard a pin drop in that room. Then an older lady lent forward, held me in her gaze and said "You should've lain down then son! That was the wind Spirit".

Everyone in the room was silent and looking at me. The hairs stood up on the back of my neck when she said that. There was a quiet pause and then it was as if a release valve had been opened and the talk in the room became animated as people shared their memories of Dom Salvado and his time. It was a real privilege for me to be there listening to them talk. These people still have an amazing Oral Tradition and they can recount tales told to them by their grandparents, who'd been told stories by their grandparents, and hey presto, it was as if Rosendo Salvado had become a tangible presence in the room as these people spoke of him and his fellow Benedictines.

I didn't attend the meeting with the Yued people and I was told that although the Trail was met with acceptance, a small group of women who'd been affected by what is known as the Stolen Generation in the 20th century, spoke of their grievances about how badly they and their families had been treated and how they'd suffered as a result. Luckily for us, one of our representatives was a clinical psychologist who has deep empathy for the indigenous people and he was able to handle their concerns sympathetically. But the overall response was very positive and we felt we had learned much. We now knew that when we walked through Walyunga, what the Whadjuk people call djin djin - the good spirit - would be with us!

So with the army and the indigenous on side, a new alignment looking good, and a formal foundation established to oversee the trail, things were looking good. Our major stumbling block for open access remained the fact that we were crossing private property - the Agricultural college and the Kelly's farm land to the north.

However, in many ways this has been to our benefit as it gave us some control over hikers just wanting to walk straight through to New Norcia and possibly putting a strain on their limited resources. And maybe God does work in mysterious ways because each year we've held two organ-

ised walks from the Parish of St Joseph's and each year the reception from New Norcia has become more generous and more bedded into their fabric of life.

But as I mentioned earlier, if you really want to make God laugh, then tell him your plans.

Out of the blue we suddenly had a new challenge.

The Christian Brothers who had run the Agricultural College - and through whose lands we walked - were facing many challenges to their very existence on many fronts. The outcome of this was that they'd decided to restructure their organisation and become the Edmund Rice Education Authority. As a result of this reorganisation they'd moved their head office to the Eastern States of Australia - which in real terms is over 2,500 kilometres away. Those at head office were unaware until that point that pilgrims were walking across their land.

We met with the local representative of EREA to discuss the future of the Trail across their property. We'd been informed that the College principal no longer had any say in the matter yet we hoped that this meeting with EREA would lead to both sides signing an agreement to indemnify them against any negative outcomes of the Pilgrim trail. We were somewhat

stunned to hear that they'd received legal advice that that contained this sentence *“Unless you particularly wish to maintain a relationship with the Pilgrim Trail Foundation by way of their use of your property then it is our advice that you inform the Pilgrim Trail Foundation that you are not able to sign their licence agreement and that they must cease access to your property immediately”*

That was a real blow to us, because at the local level, we had received so much positive cooperation from the College principals and the farm manager. But on the scale of things, our's was a minor concern. I later discovered that the farm manager had re-located to another part of the State and the farm land had been leased out.

But then out of adversity comes opportunity.

It was back to poring over Google earth to find an alternative route.

Up until this time I had been focused on finding the shortest distance between two points, but in truth, the original Benedictine settlers would have never taken a direct route. They would have followed the waterways, and they didn't flow in a north south direction! From New Norcia the seasonal streams flow from the Darling scarp down towards the coast from east to west, not south to north as our current alignment went. So if we were to

follow more closely in Salvado's footsteps, then we would end up with a more zig zag trail that headed northeast and then northwest to New Norcia. It would also take us to a small town which Salvado would have known very well. This tiny town is called Bolgart - a minute metropolis largely unheard of by most West Australians. Historically it was the site of the most northerly settler at the time when Salvado and Serra first came to the Swan river settlement. His name was Captain John Scully, an Irishman. Official records from the time tell us that on one occasion Salvado's small community of monks were literally starving to death and Captain Scully sent his maid with sacks of flour to help feed them. Salvado also stopped at Scully's small house on several occasions on his trips to and from Perth. Scully's house, apart from its foundations, is long gone but the small community is still there. It even has its own pub - it wouldn't be Australian if it didn't - and it seemed like a nice idea to finish at least one day of walking by washing down the dust with a cold glass of beer. But Bolgart is a little like the place that time forgot. The pub looks a little forlorn and the little town looks a little un-cared for. I was vividly reminded of the many small hamlets along the Camino De Santiago that have been restored to life with the influx of the many Pilgrims that have visited

those remote areas of Galicia in the last decades. Another of the many hopes that I have for the Trail is that with time, Bolgart will benefit in a similar manner from the economic impact that the increased pilgrim-tourism will bring into their area.

The other wonderful outcome of the sudden re-alignment was that we were now going to traverse Julimar State forest. This would be a walk of about 25 kilometres through some glorious scenery with native birds, cockatoos, emu and Kangaroos, and in Spring time it's awash with native wild flowers too.

About this time we also got news that the Buffer Zone licence had been issued which meant that once we had finalised our community partnership with the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the parklands trustees, we would have a 201km walk with no private property to cross. At last people could freely access and enjoy some of the best scenery in Western Australia, and all of it on the doorstep of the city of Perth.

I was a very happy man.

Finally we had a trail but what about the walkers?

Up until this year we've had the two event Camino Salvado walks which attract people from around Australia, 15% currently coming from inter-

state - and that's without any advertising. We now have a number of schools and Colleges who are using the Trail. Some are using it as a part of their senior school leadership formation and others as a way of imparting the history of Salvado and of teaching about pilgrimage, the environment, spirituality and the stories of the indigenous peoples.

So at last, we've now open for business ... at least from April until October. In summertime trail walking in Australia ceases - it's just too hot and there is the ever present danger of bush fires! But in our autumn, in our winter and in our springtime it's perfect walking weather and we'll receive you with open arms and give you a great Aussie welcome.

Thank you.

Thank you.

*I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath
moves through—listen to this music.
Hafiz*

