

## Henry the Hiker takes his aspirations to Camino Frances



Written By PAULA BROWN

### LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

A local youth has returned home after seven weeks of putting one foot in front of the other to complete an ancient pilgrimage hike in Europe.

Henry Little, 12, known locally as Henry the Hiker, has completed his biggest hiking challenge to date, a nearly 800-kilometre hike of the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

The Camino de Santiago is a hiking route consisting of many different trail networks. Throughout the Middle Ages, thousands of pilgrims walked from their homes to make the journey to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela eventually paving the way for the more than 200 recognized routes across Europe that arrive together in the city.

Henry, along with his mother Carola Little, started the hike on April 6 in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, France the gateway to the Camino Frances, commonly known as the French Way, which is the most famous of the Camino de Santiago routes.

The ancient pilgrimage trail spans nearly 800 kilometres across northern Spain, starting in the town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France and ending in the sacred city of Santiago de Compostela, where it is believed the remains of St. James are held.

Henry and Carola completed the trek on May 25 in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, having walked a total of 603 kilometres of the 779-kilometre trail.

‘It was exciting, tiring and hard, but it also felt like a rhythm,’ recalled Henry. ‘Every day we’d get up and walk and after a while, you zone out; I was just sailing along.’

When asked about his favourite part of the journey, Henry recalls their second day of the trip when they reached the highest point on the pass over of the Pyrenees Mountains and entered into Spain.

‘We were 10 kilometres into the hike and we got on top of this mountain and it looked like we were on top of the clouds,’ said

Henry. ?It really felt like you were in heaven.?

The duo started the hike by walking roughly 20 kilometres a day and eventually scaled down their daily treks to between 10 and 15 kilometres. In total, they averaged roughly four to five hours of walking each day.

Prior to leaving on the trip, Henry trained with Tyler Harron, a fitness trainer with Trainer Games in Shelburne. The duo trained together twice a week, focusing on compound lifting exercises for strength and high-intensity interval training for cardio.

While physically prepared for the long journey, the hardest part of the hike came down to mental strength.

?The mental part of it was much harder than the physical. Trying to know that there was an end,? said Carola.

After completing their hike of the Camino de Santiago, the duo received the Compostela and a Certificate of Distance from the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago de Compostela.

The Compostela is awarded for completing a religious or spiritual pilgrimage, requiring a minimum distance of 100 kilometres on foot or 200 kilometres by bike and proof of the journey through stamped credentials. The Certificate of Distance is available to all pilgrims and details their specific distance travelled on the Camino.

?I really enjoyed watching Henry come into his own. He was in a country, where he didn't know the language, but he wasn't afraid to go up to people. He met people from around the world and everyone was very supportive of him. They thought it was great that a kid of his age was trying to take it on,? said Carola.

In 2020, while quarantining due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Henry, who is an only child, began to go on daily explorations of a portion of the Bruce Trail that crosses through his family's property. During this time, his interest in nature and the environment peaked as he discovered animal tracks, different species of trees and plants, and insects along the trail.

Hiking regularly in five to 10-kilometre increments, Henry eventually completed the entire 67-kilometre Blue Mountain section of the Bruce Trail, and with that, sparked the desire to hike all 900 kilometres of the Bruce Trail. The trail spans end-to-end from the Niagara River to the tip of Tobermory.

From 2021 to 2024, Henry completed the Dufferin Hi-Land, Toronto, Beaver Valley, and Caledon Hills sections of the Bruce Trail, totalling just over 500 kilometres of the total 900-kilometre trail system.

Since then, Henry has expanded his hiking bucket list, adding the goal of completing trails in every province and territory in Canada. He has now undertaken hikes in Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. In September 2022, he summited Tin Hat Mountain, a part of the Sunshine Coast Trail in B.C., known for being the longest hut-to-hut trail in Canada.

Henry told the Free Press that he hopes sharing his journey hiking the Camino de Santiago will encourage other residents to take up the hobby.

?I don't expect too many people to think they should hike the Camino straight away, but I do hope for them to kind of ease into hiking a little bit and enjoy the nature,? said Henry.

Community members can keep up to date with Henry's hiking journeys by following him on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube at ?Henry the Hiker.?

To learn more about Henry the Hiker, visit his website ? [www.henrythehiker.com](http://www.henrythehiker.com).