

Monday 11th September

At the insistence of the old dear stamping my pilgrimage documents, I visit the Aiguilhe St. Michel on the outer edge of town - this a chapel built in 951 AD by Godescalc, who himself made the journey to Santiago and was instrumental in establishing the route from Le Puy.

Dramatically crowning a great volcanic rock, the chapel has an air of celebration; inside the atmosphere is sublime - a touch of le Corbusier's church at Ronchamp, but much more intimate and unselfconscious. Low evening sun filters through a few panes of coloured glass, penetrating right to the core, and the warmth of the gently dipping sun is a perfect contrast to the crumbling limewash and stones stained by centuries of damp; and there's such resonance in the cold curving walls - the thousand year old masonry awakening, stretching, rushing back to life at the first note of my amateurish schoolboy plainsong.



Tuesday 12th September

Mass in the Cathedral at 7am, the sky dark at the start, but the East window gradually lightening as the service runs on. I anxiously eye the other pilgrims and their sensibly-sized rucksacks: 30 people are blessed, although only two of us are hoping to walk to Santiago - most people seem to have just a week or two.

The priest sends us off, giving each person a small medal of Notre Dame du Puy and finding a text of the *Salve Regina* for me - for we sang it as the conclusion of the blessing and I felt it was so beautiful that I must learn it and sing it on the way.

