



Monte Facho. The hermitage probably dates from the 11th century, but the orientation of the work, facing Monte Pindo, the Olympus of the Celtic tribes living here at the time of the Roman conquest, suggest a much earlier usage. The place has long been associated with fertility rites and local folklore says that barren couples who spend the night together on the great stone slab will be blessed with progeny soon afterwards.

The church, always at odds with this kind of thing, sought to neutralise the place, first by converting it into a Christian temple, then by completely razing it in the 17th century in a vain attempt to erase it from public memory, some say that the ancient stones are eloquent in their silence. It's very hard to think of it as a mere coincidence that pilgrims arriving from Compostela choose to end their arduous trek at Monte Facho. Tradition demands that they remove their pilgrim's attire and then solemnly set fire to it on an improvised altar at sunset, with nothing left behind them but thousands of miles of lonesome road. It could be that the old time religion is still there and well. So even if you're not that given to superstitions and the getting your kit off part, the place itself is truly awe inspiring and shouldn't be missed.

#### The coast road

My journey with *Ara Solis* began on a cloudy morning in Santiago de Compostela bus station. The road was covering slightly at the yappily insistent engine, the country cheese flogger on the radio and below, I hopped aboard my bus for a one-and-a-half hour ride to Fisterra and the ominously sounding Death Coast. The bus rolled slowly through some really gorgeous



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countryside, with rolling hills, thousand year-old *carballeiras* or oak groves and dense eucalyptus plots, the mainstay of the local forestry industry. The lush fields, planted with potato, cabbage and maize, are divided into a ragged patchwork of granite walls. This is a result of the odd Galician inheritance laws called *minifundios*, where the law demands that the family estate be divided equally among all surviving children, resulting therefore in ever diminishing plots or *fincas*.



Eventually we caught sight of the busy port and sizeable market town of Cee, recently devastated by flooding, a direct result, some say, of this year's catastrophic forest fires. After a quick refreshment stop, we were on our way again. The next port of call was the charming fishing village of Corcubión, with its baronial mansions, pretty squares and lovely bay. The bus then rolled round a few more headlands and we finally pulled into Fisterra.

At first glance, it didn't look too inspiring, the collective madness of 60s urban planning resulted in hideous extensions being slapped onto the original stone fishermen cottages, in pure cowboy fashion. I made a quick phone call to my hotel to let them know I'd arrived and the very kind owner promptly offered to pick me up from the bus stop as the hotel was a little way out of town. After a quick siesta, I headed downstairs for a *cerveza* before heading out for the evening. The owner of the gorgeous *Hotel Rustico Dugium*, Mr Ernesto Insua, a leading authority on the area, is acknowledged to have one of the finest collections of books on the *Costa da Morte*, and it wasn't long before we got down to discussing the many legends and myths surrounding the area.

#### Me and Julio

At around 9.30pm I started to get peckish, so I asked Ernesto for a recommendation for dinner. He warned me that nobody should leave Fisterra without experiencing what is, without any shadow of a doubt, one of the finest fish and seafood restaurants in all Spain, *A Tira do Cordel*. This restaurant's excellent reputation is known far and wide and crooner Julio Iglesias has been known to land his helicopter on the *langosteira* beach in front of the restaurant for a quick seafood fix.