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Saint's footsteps followed

Mary MacKillop's life inspires 230km pilgrimage

TEN dedicated yet exhausted pilgrims made their way into Penola on Thursday, finishing their 230km trek of the Camino Australia.

The Camino pilgrimage walk is inspired by the life of Saint Mary MacKillop and her journey.

Beginning in Portland and ending their journey in Penola, the pilgrims passed through Cape Bridgewater, Nelson, Port Macdonnell, Mount Gambier and Kalangadoo.

The pilgrims stayed overnight in the towns they passed through and were given a guide book and passport to be stamped for every place visited.

The Camino ended at the Mary MacKillop Penola Centre and pilgrims were met with refreshments and were also given a certificate of achievement by the centre.

Joe Ferwerda was the first of the ten pilgrims to complete the religious trail and explained it was a wonderful time for reflection and people to move outside of their comfort zones.

"It was a lovely and spiritual journey which honours an incredible person who was strong and generous," he said.

He said everyone enjoyed the opportunity to build friendships in a scenic and peaceful setting.

"The journey is pure in its simplicity as people eating, walking and

talking together," he said.

Mr Ferwerda is not new to long distance walking as this was his fifth Camino walk and one of his shortest as he had previously participated in the 800km Camino Portuguese.

Mr Ferwerda explained the group of pilgrims made good memories and shared many laughs during their time together.

It was the first Camino for some of the participants.

"Some of the group struggled at times, but persisted through it," Mr Ferwerda said.

Pilgrim Peter Jones said it was a fitting way to explore the picturesque South East.

"The walk was definitely worthwhile and the scenery was stunning," he said.

It was Mr Jones' first Camino and he explained that he used it as preparation for a 700km Camino journey across France in March.

Highlights on the trail for Mr Jones included walking alongside cliffs and exploring the coastline.

"I am physically all good and everyone got on really well, which was great," he said.

The pilgrims walked 38km on Thursday and made the journey back to their home city of Melbourne via a bus the following day to spend Christmas at home with their families.



SOUTH EAST TREK: Joe Ferwerda and Peter Jones arrive at the Mary MacKillop Penola Centre.

Penola faithful pray for safe holiday season

A BLESSING of the roads ceremony was held in Penola last week in the hope of reducing the number of car crashes over the Christmas and New Year holiday period.

Completing their Aussie Camino, a group of pilgrims including Father Dominic Murphy arrived in Penola on Thursday, where St Mary of the Cross's journey and the Josephite Order began 150 years ago.

Stretching from Portland to Penola, the pilgrimage route is inspired by the life and journeys of Mary MacKillop and her mentor Father Julian Tenison Woods.

Before leaving the Limestone Coast, a blessing of the roads ceremony was held at the Mary MacKillop Interpretive Centre.

The ceremony was conducted by Father Murphy and fellow pilgrims who shared the Camino experience.

Together with Luke Mills, who established the Aussie Camino in 2013 as one way of paying homage to Australia's first saint, they declared

greater efforts must be made to improve road safety.

"As far as we know, there has never been a blessing of the roads ceremony in the South East, but there are far too many drivers and we might add walkers, pedestrians and cyclists who believe that an accident just won't happen to them," Father Murphy said.

"To hold a ceremony here in the same community where the young Mary MacKillop began her travels that took her all over Australia and New Zealand is a privilege.

"It is so fitting to do this when we consider her epic journeys and those of the pioneering Father Julian Tenison Woods, who also travelled this region, remote areas of Australia and the islands in the late 1800s to provide pastoral care to the early settlers and their families.

"Our prayers are for the safety of not only all road users, but our police and emergency services and those survivors impacted by painful memories."

Father Murphy said everyone had

a part to play in reducing road deaths and the resulting trauma.

"We have seen this week far too many crosses on crash markers by the side of the road where people, members of your community, have lost their lives," he said.

"My message to travellers is to take 10 seconds of grace to consider safe behaviour each trip to keep families together and safe this holiday season."

Limestone Coast regional community road safety officer Rob Forgan attended the blessing and there was a spike in fatalities and serious crash injuries on South Australian roads during holiday periods.

"This year the police will again be highly visible with a focus on speeding, drink and drug driving and the wearing of seatbelts," he said.

"We encourage everyone to take regular rest breaks, be patient behind the wheel and avoid any form of risk taking as the consequences to families and communities are often devastating."



BLESSING: Father Dominic Murphy with fellow pilgrims undertaking a blessing of the roads ceremony in Penola.