

The ABCs of Preparing for Camino Nova Scotia 2022

Annapolis Valley Pilgrimage or North Shore Gaelic Weekend: What to Pack, How to Train, and More



Be a bright flame before me, O God
a guiding star above me.
Be a smooth path below me,
a kindly shepherd behind me
today, tonight, and for ever.
-attributed to Calum Cille/St. Columba

Please read through this entire “alphabet” for your packing guide and walking tips. Things to pack are in red!

Adventure – Welcome to the adventure! Pilgrimage is an ancient practice of taking an *outward journey* to the explore the *inner geography* of our spiritual lives ... and receive a blessing. In this guide, you’ll find tips to help you prepare physically and spiritually for our long-distance walking pilgrimages.

Beginnings – Camino Nova Scotia’s 2022 Annapolis Valley Pilgrimages begin Sunday evening at St John’s Anglican Church, Wolfville. The walk starts the following morning (Monday) bright and early at Grand Pré. We will be walking along the Harvest Moon Coastal Trail (<https://destinationtrailsnovascotia.com/trails/harvest-moon-trailway/>).

For those going on the Camino Nova Scotia’s 2022 North Shore Gaelic Weekend Trek, it begins at Pictou United Church, Pictou, on Friday evening Oct 21st following supper.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Participants who sign up in advance for the **shuttle service** will meet on campus at Atlantic School of Theology, 660 Francklyn St., Halifax, NS, on your day of departure. **We will contact you in advance with the exact departure time.**

Parking is available at AST (see **Parking**). If you have your own transportation to Wolfville (for the Annapolis Valley walks) or to Pictou (for the North Shore weekend) **please let us know in advance of your plans to meet us directly.** We will let you know what time the program starts on the Sunday evenings (Wolfville) or the Friday evening (Pictou).

Blisters – Blisters are very common and can be agonising after a full day of walking. Prevention is key. *The best blister prevention is to break in your shoes/boots before attempting a long walk.* Advance training is a must! Invest in good footwear & wool socks (more under **Footwear**) and pay attention to any areas that rub. Cover those “hot spots” with **bandages, gauze, tape**, etc. as soon as they form. Stay hydrated. Changing socks part-way through a long day of walking can be helpful.

Wisdom from a past participant about blisters

“For blister prevention, the 3 important things are shoes, socks, and hydration. Sweaty, wet socks make blisters. The good news with Merino wool is that they won't smell if you reuse them ... at least the first week. Drink a litre or two of water after you finish for the day, and your skin will be tough and sturdy the next day.”

Calum Cille (St. Columba) – Calum Cille, whose Gaelic name means “the dove of the church,” was an Irish monk and missionary. Around 563 CE he set off in a small boat with a few companions from the northwest tip of Ireland, landing some time later on the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland. Their journey and the monastery Calum Cille founded on Iona were deeply significant in the early Christian history of the British Isles. Iona, “the holy isle,” is still frequented by thousands of pilgrims annually.

The legends & legacy of Calum Cille continue to be celebrated among the Gaels of Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, and Nova Scotia. He is the namesake of the St. Columba chapel at Atlantic School of Theology and his journeys of faith are part of the inspiration for Camino Nova Scotia. As we walk, we remember Calum Cille/St. Columba, the traveller who blessed strangers & companions, islands & people.

Cash – You won't *need* much money once we are underway. But you may wish to bring **some Canadian dollars or a credit/debit card** to buy the occasional drink, ice cream, snack, gift, or souvenir along the way.

Cellphones – Coverage is good in some places and spotty in others. **We will not have access to wifi in every place we stay overnight**, though area cafes etc. *may* offer this. Some pilgrims choose to unplug and leave their phones and gadgets at home. The Pilgrimage staff *do* carry cellphones and can be contacted in case of emergency.

Chores – Helping each other is part of being in community. To build up our “company of pilgrims” – and to get things done! Everyone is expected to help with the daily tasks of meal preparation, loading the van, tidying up, etc. Staff will announce & coordinate chores but feel free to step up voluntarily when you see a need.

Directions – Daily sheets with route info and directions will be distributed. Please use them. Keep an eye out for fellow travellers to avoid getting lost. If you stick to the directions, you won't lose your way (the path is linear and generally well-marked).

Distances – Closely estimated distances will be provided on the info sheets you will receive each day. Our shortest distance is ~17 km. The longest distance is ~29 km. NOTE: these are approximate measures! You can set your own pace and take rest stops whenever you'd like.

Diversity – Pilgrimage appeals to all sorts of people, for all sorts of reasons. You can expect the pilgrim group to include a diversity of ages, genders, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, and spiritual perspectives. Travelling together creates many opportunities to practice mutual respect & hospitality towards each other.

Endings – The Annapolis Valley pilgrimages will wrap up with a short ceremony on Saturday morning (and the North Shore pilgrimage with one on Sunday afternoon). **If**

you have signed up for the shuttle service, transportation back to the Atlantic School of Theology campus in Halifax will be provided.

Food – Meals (and morning coffee and tea) are provided. Camino NS staff purchase and supply the food. Breakfast is set out for self-serve, along with the day's lunch fixings and snacks (to create your own lunch to carry with you). Supper is a common meal, prepared & cleaned up by the willing. (Part of camino *communitas*!) Evening snacks are provided too. If you have dietary needs, please advise Director Matthew Anderson well in advance of the walk (upon registration). In a few places, we need to honour nut-free policies of our host churches & community halls. As occasion allows, you are welcome to avail yourself of local pubs, etc. along the route. Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs will not be tolerated.

Footwear – **Good quality hiking footwear** is essential! The terrain is mostly flat but you'll be walking long distances, so trail/hiking shoes are great option. Running shoes won't offer enough support and hiking boots add unnecessary weight for this kind of walking. If you opt for waterproof shoes/boots, make sure they're breathable (e.g. GoreTex). Some walkers have had trouble with waterproof boots/shoes—the lack of breathability makes blisters far more likely. Many hikers find that **wool, smartwool, or Merino socks** help against blisters too. Some say “cotton is rotten”! Bring **extra socks** with you each day to switch them partway through the day. The staff at a good outdoor store generally give solid advice when it comes to the fit & function of different hiking shoes. Don't start a walk with new shoes. Break them in well in advance!

Gaelic-themed weekend – A rich Gaelic culture shapes much of Nova Scotia. Between 1773 and 1855, an estimated 50,000 Gaels immigrated from the highlands and islands of Scotland to Nova Scotia. By the late 1800s, there were approx 100,000 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia, primarily in Cape Breton and along the Northumberland Strait. Though discriminated against for their Gaelic language and culture, many Nova Scotia Gaels persevered in maintaining their language, culture, and identity.

Today, Nova Scotia is the only region outside Europe where Gaelic language, culture, and identity continue to be passed down through the generations, and where Gaelic is spoken as a community language.¹

In recognition of the special richness of Gaelic culture in this region, Camino Nova Scotia, working with the Office of Gaelic Affairs of the Province of Nova Scotia, incorporates Gaelic themes, language, and history into its walks.



The symbol of the Gaels of Nova Scotia is a salmon in the shape of the letter 'G'. The salmon represents the gifts of knowledge and wisdom in the Gaelic tradition. The 'G' represents Gaels as a people, and how their unique Gaelic language informs their culture, and identity. The ripples flowing out from the salmon reflect the manifestation of these through song, story, music, dance, foodways, lineage, customs, beliefs, and hereditary connections to place.

¹ Source: <https://gaelic.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/inline/documents/gaelic-nova-scotia-a-resource-guide.pdf>

Gear - We encourage light and compact packing!!! Bring a daypack for your water, lunch, TP, directions & personal items. Your **daypack** should be sturdy & comfortable, since you'll be wearing it a lot. Consider investing in a pack with contoured, padded shoulder straps & an adjustable waistband and/or sternum strap. Your **overnight bag** will be transported for you to the next destination.

Recommended Personal Gear List

aim for a small carry-on size suitcase or equivalent for your gear

- Hiking shoes or boots
(** **BREAK IN YOUR SHOES NOW – DON'T WAIT** **)
- 3-5 pairs of socks (wool / “smartwool” /Merino is strongly recommended!)
- water bottle(s) or hydration pack – 1 litre size is recommended
- **sunscreen** and **wide-brim hat**
- **insect repellent**
- good/better quality **rain jacket & pants (or waterproof poncho) – A MUST**
- small **personal first aid kit, including blister care products** (moleskin, Polysporin, gauze & tape, adhesive bandages)
- **towel & facecloth**
- personal **toiletries** (travel size)
- **earplugs** (a must for group pilgrimage experiences)
- **facemask(s)**
- **shirts/t-shirts/trousers/skirt/shorts** (the weather may be hot/warm/wet/cool)
- **sweater/sweatshirt**
- a **bandana or hankie** or 2
- small **roll of TP** for the trail
- comfortable **footwear for the evenings** (e.g. **sandals**, sneakers)
- **cell phone/charger** (though many folks like to **UNPLUG** – it's up to you)
- **Bedroll: sleeping bag; small pillow (if desired); mat or air mattress; single sheet** (to cover air mattress)

** Please advise the Pilgrimage Coordinator **in advance** if you'd like to borrow an air mattress from CNS**

Optional Personal Gear

- **flashlight** or headlamp
 - camera/charger/batteries
 - soap for washing clothes and clothes pins/large safety pins
 - personal **journal & pens/pencils**
 - **painkillers/anti-inflammatories, muscular ache ointment**
 - **walking poles**
 - **swimsuit and quick-dry** towel to carry with you for an impromptu dip
 - book
 - personal music player & earphones
 - small, **compact 1-person tent** (OPTIONAL) – if you prefer to sleep outdoors
- **Some, but *not all* of our overnight venues/hosts may allow tenting

Green your camino – You'll be packing a lunch & snacks every day. To reduce your lunchtime trash, you're welcome to bring **reusable containers**. Also, be sure to bring one or two sturdy **water bottles** – you'll be able to refill them throughout the day.

Insurance – For Nova Scotia residents, please ensure that your provincial **health insurance** is in good standing. For all participants, the purchase of additional personal insurance is at your own discretion and is your responsibility.

Laundry – Clothes washing in machines will NOT be available. You may wish to bring **a small amount of laundry soap to hand-wash a few items** along the way.

Leadership – The Pilgrimage Coordinator is the Rev. Dr. Matthew Anderson. Matthew walks, publishes, teaches, and podcasts about pilgrimage and about settler-Indigenous relations in Canada. Matthew is an ordained Lutheran minister, a longstanding member of the Canadian ecumenical movement, and an avid long-distance walker. He also teaches part-time at Concordia University and St Francis Xavier University.

Each walk has a dedicated team of support staff, along with volunteers, friends of CNS, & guest presenters on Gaelic, Acadian, or Mi'kmaq culture along the way.

Meals - Breakfast is set out for self-serve. Lunch fixings and daytime snacks are also laid out in the morning for a pack-your-own. Supper is a common meal, prepared & cleaned up by the willing. Evening snacks are provided. We do our best to accommodate food restrictions.

Parking – For those who sign up for the shuttle service, parking is available free of charge at Atlantic School of Theology (660 Francklyn St., Halifax). **Please note that there is NOT 24-hour security of the parking lot.** AST is not responsible for any theft or damage to vehicles. **Please park in the large lower parking lot, near the water, and place a sign in your dashboard: “Camino Participant.”**

Path - The path underfoot is mostly even, not covered in roots and rocks; any inclines are very slight. The route is divided between (1) *trails* (dirt, crushed gravel, rough gravel, or asphalt) and (2) secondary *roads*.

Prayer – We meet for morning and evening reflection each day as a whole group. Attendance is optional, but you are encouraged to join in. Opportunities for prayer and meditation throughout the day are plentiful.

Price – Participant fees cover approx. 80% of the costs of providing the CNS experience. The balance is funded by grants from the Province of Nova Scotia and individual donors. Donations can be made here (scroll down to Camino NS in the drop-down menu): <https://www.astheology.ns.ca/home/giving/donate-now.html>

Rest – Rest whenever you like. *Camino NS* is a mobile retreat: a time away from our ordinary work and responsibilities, giving us time to reflect and refocus on what is important. Taking care of our bodies is important too.

Route – Daily instructions giving kilometrage and routing will be provided to walkers. As well, CNS staff will be on the route with pilgrims and reachable by phone in case of problems.

Schedule – a typical daily routine – We try to keep it simple.

7 am	Rise, eat, prepare a packed lunch
8:30 am	Morning meditation
9 am	Begin the day's walk <u>as a group</u> ; individual speed will vary as the day unfolds
Lunchtime	Take a break in a beautiful spot
3-5 pm	Arrive at our evening destination
6 pm	Share a common meal
7 pm	Relax, reflect with a guest speaker or musician...or....
8:30 pm	Group conversation about the day's experiences
9:15 pm	Compline (evening prayer, together)
10 pm	... ZZZZZZZ

Showers – We will have access to showers at campgrounds, municipal pools, etc. about 2-3 times during the week.

Sleeping arrangements – To keep the budget low and provide a real communal experience, we sleep overnight on the floor of host churches and community halls. Private rooms are not possible, but some walkers prefer to bring a compact tent! (Note that tenting may not be an option every night, as some venues do not allow it.) Bring your own sleeping bag, pillow, and camping mat or air mattress. (We can provide an air mattress if needed! Just let us know in advance). There will be room in the venues for distancing, and we will pay close attention to ventilation. We are also looking into building a Corsi-Rosenthal box (air filter) to bring along.

Speed – *Camino Nova Scotia's 2022* pilgrimages are not a race. Travel at your own pace. Speed up, slow down, rest, take a break, enjoy the world around you. Walk alone, walk with others. It's up to you. Our evening meal, cold drinks, friends, and a place to sleep will be there whenever you arrive.

Substances – To respect the regulations of our overnight host sites, and in the spirit of pilgrimage simplicity and contemplation, alcohol is not served at dinner. It isn't forbidden, and as occasion allows, you are welcome to avail yourself of local pubs, etc. along the route. Disruptive drinking and/or illicit drug use will not be tolerated, and pilgrims may be asked to head home early. Some pilgrims have chosen to use a walking pilgrimage as a chance to quit smoking! This is difficult to do, and we don't require it. We do ask that smoking be done only outdoors and only at a safe distance from fellow walkers who may have medical reasons to avoid second-hand smoke.

Support vehicle – If you are tired or injured, getting a lift in the van is not hard to arrange. However, you might have to wait a little while to be located and collected. The van is also used to purchase each day's supplies and we use it to transport your overnight bag/gear to the next destination. You need only to carry a daypack for water, lunch, etc.

This Isn't Spain – Although we are pilgrims like the Camino de Santiago pilgrims, we adopt more communal practices on CNS. See (for example) *Schedule, Chores, Meals, Prayer*. Be open to what *this* experience can be!

Ticks – Ticks are a reality in Nova Scotia, so *please be prepared* with insect repellent, proper clothing, and awareness. Read up ahead of time on how to avoid and remove them: <https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety/>

Training – Training is essential. **START TRAINING NOW!** Daily 1-2 hour walks are a good idea, with longer walks (3-5 hours) at least once a week. As your endurance increases, try back-to-back days of longer walks. You will be fit and ready!

Washrooms - While indoor plumbing (toilets and sinks) is available to us morning and evening, we often will NOT pass a washroom or outhouse during the day. Bring toilet paper in your daypack for these festive occasions. Some professional outback hikers swear by carrying a hand spade with which to bury toilet paper and poo. We want to tread lightly on the Land, so please don't litter non-biodegradable items such as plastic tampon applicators (for these, bring along a Ziplock bag or some such, to transport them to the next garbage can).

Water – Do bring a water container. Even if you don't normally drink much water, your body needs it walking over 20 kms in a day, because you dehydrate through sweat and breathing. Tap water in Nova Scotia is great, and you can fill up in the mornings. The Camino NS support team will also arrange water stops along each day's route so you can refill.

Zero trace – On pilgrimage, we aim to leave behind only footprints and pleasant encounters. Please pack out your trash.

Testimonials from past participants

*“A wonderful space for intentional community & spiritual growth
—more meaningful than I ever imagined”*

“I have been inspired and shown how to begin a ‘walk’ with the Spirit.”

*“It was a terrific experience... The team did a great job of anticipating needs
and offering appropriate support.”*

*“I liked roughing it. Sleeping on church floors really makes one appreciate
hot showers and clean clothes.”*

*“Knowing that each day would be threaded through with the company of others meant that even
when I was alone on the trail, I felt safe because others were at either end of the trail.
An ease developed, in which people drifted together and apart.”*

“An incredible experience. I feel blessed to have been a part of this lovely group of people.”

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