



## THE TOURO - O PINO MINE PROJECT AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE ROAD OF SANTIAGO

International Fraternity of the Camino de Santiago (FICS)

It is a known fact that *Atalaya Mining-Explotaciones Gallegas S.L.* plans to reopen an old copper mine and develop an open-pit strip mine that will encompass the municipal boundaries of O Pino and Touro. To this end, the company has spent months applying to relevant administrations for needed permits and permissions. The mine will have a massive environmental impact, and has met with rejection, alarm, and protest from neighbors as well as all kinds of activist and community groups, scientists and technicians.

The International Fraternity of the Way of St. James, an entity that brings together pilgrims and Camino experts from 27 countries, was from the first moment interested in the possible impact that a project of such magnitude might have on the Jacobean route. The company itself, in its technical documents, affirms that "one of the particularities of the mining exploitation of Touro is its proximity to the French Way of St. James," and that "the last two stages of the Way run through the defined buffer zones for the visual impact area of Touro."

Having seen the worrying statements the company itself makes in its project proposals, the FICS undertook a thorough study of the plan. FICS has sent its concerns to the Galician Directorate of Cultural Heritage, the government arm solely responsible for the conservation of the cultural heritage of the Camino de Santiago, a Site of Cultural Interest and UNESCO World Heritage.

The Directorate responded to our concerns, and subsequent meetings with other stakeholders lead us to this conclusion: The FICS believes the Touro - O Pino mine project will have a severe impact on the final stages of the French Route of the Camino de Santiago, an important cultural asset. At the present time there are too many gaps, silences and omissions in the proposal, both by the company responsible for the project and by the regional administration. We list here the most worrying of these.

**1. The total surface area of the future mining operation is, for the moment, unknown.** Although the company has announced a project that maintains a buffer zone of 450 meters from the Camino de Santiago, the farthest reach of the vein the company can legally mine touches and even overlaps the Jacobean route itself. This means that, should the company decide to mine this area, they would be entitled to invade the cultural protection zone. Despite this worrying fact, neither the company nor the cultural regulators have addressed a single line to explaining how this decision



would be made, nor how the destruction of cultural elements that form part of the Jacobean route environment might be justified.

**2. The visual impact of the strip mine on the Camino de Santiago has not been evaluated by the company or the administration,** even though the company foresees the creation of huge slag ponds, landfills, and machinery parks that will be visible from the Camino. Extracting copper will mean the disappearance of entire mountains that are currently part of the landscape of the Jacobean route. The company recognizes, as mentioned, that the last two stages of the Camino "run along the thresholds" of the mine. The silence in this respect is especially striking, considering that different areas of the mine operation would be sporadically visible along 18 km of the Camino route, from Ferreiros to Amenal and the Lavacolla airport, with its distance from the Camino varying from 6.5 km from Ferreiros, 3.5 km from Amenal and 2 km from Santa Irene or Pedrouzo.

**3. Possible alterations or destruction of the cultural heritage in the historical territory of the Camino de Santiago is still unclear.** The surface area directly affected by proposed mine is now peppered with several types of identified heritage assets, including archaeological sites, inseparable elements of the cultural landscape of the Camino de Santiago. The mine will destroy them forever.

**4. Heavy truck traffic generated by the road transport of the extracted mineral will affect the Camino,** since it will necessarily be carried out on the N-547, which runs parallel to the French Way, or the A-54. The continuous movement of industrial traffic in the vicinity and alongside the Way, especially in the area of Salceda-Empalme, has not stirred any specific attention by the parties involved in this mining project. The Camino de Santiago is a cultural asset used every year by thousands of pilgrims. Routing heavy equipment and truck traffic along the most crowded stage of the pilgrimage should have been thoroughly analyzed by the company and the administration, to at least ensure the safety of the pilgrims and uphold minimal environmental standards. Neither analysis has taken place.

**5. The rural quality of the Way** itself, enjoyed by the thousands of pilgrims and tourists who travel it every year, can't help but be affected by of a nearby large-scale strip mine. Noise pollution and vibration caused by the constant blasting and heavy equipment traffic will affect the travel (and rest) of pilgrims moving along the route, as well as the neighbors who live with them and serve them. Dust and other airborne components may also affect the air quality of the Camino, a cultural asset that is Galicia's main letter of introduction for travelers from all over the world. All this, not to mention the risk of chemical spills, collisions, landslides, and other environmental accidents that are always present in worksites of this type. An industrial accident at Touro would not only have serious consequences on the earth, air, and waterways, but also on a cultural asset whose essence is the safe passage of hikers. So far, these



impacts and risks have not been analyzed or even acknowledged by the parties involved.

The FICS, in its ongoing task of defending the cultural heritage and values of the Camino de Santiago, declares its deep concern about all these un-answered questions. This is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and we are on the eve of the holy year of 2021. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims will travel this section of the French Way, the first European Cultural Itinerary and a World Heritage Site. We are dismayed that a massive mining operation is slipping past the regulators with so few questions asked, and even fewer answers provided.

We ask everyone to reflect on whether a giant open-pit mining operation is desirable less than half a kilometer from the last stage of the main European cultural itinerary. Should we maintain a strict conservation of this element of our cultural heritage, which is also a fully developed, strategic tourist resource for Galicia? There is little doubt. So far, none of the parties involved in the project have clarified any of these points.

Fraternidad Internacional del Camino de Santiago

Santiago de Compostela, June 2018