

Culture for Nature

Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

Mount Kailash, the most sacred mountain in the world for up to a billion people in Asia, seen through an entrance chorten or stupa. Photo Credits – Edwin Bernbaum

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Editorial

- Radhika Borde & Jason Brown

Dear Friends,

This issue of Culture for Nature showcases articles on sacred natural sites from around the world. As our emphasis on the cultural and spiritual values of protected areas gains momentum, it is appropriate that we reflect upon the focus of our work. Do we just explore and reinforce the cultural and spiritual values of nature – or do we do so in the context of the protection of nature with the help of these values? The ‘protected areas’ we focus on may not be formally protected, but the emphasis towards protection is definitely present. We emphasize the protection of nature with the help of cultural and spiritual values, both for the intrinsic values nature possesses, as well as its use-value for humans – such as the provision of clean air, water, recreational services etc.

When we were choosing a name for the CSVPA newsletter which you are now reading, various suggestions were debated. ‘Culture for Nature’ finally won over ‘Culture and Nature’ and the reason for this is important. Culture and nature are very often interlinked, despite the positing of a binary opposition between the two across the history of much of western philosophy. But is culture always for nature? And why is it important that we emphasize this? There may be a cultural significance to nature but this does not mean that the protection or conservation of nature necessarily follows.

In instances in which nature is not conserved despite being accorded a cultural, spiritual or religious significance, it would be fallacious to argue that is because cultural or spiritual values are being lost. For example, in India, the river Ganga possesses an extremely high spiritual/religious/cultural value, and yet it is extremely polluted. Many of the sources of the Ganga’s pollution are industrial and are consequently opposed at a fundamental level to the values represented by the Ganga’s sacredness. It is of significance however that the spiritual values of the Ganga have not been able to override industrial interests, despite the fact that there is no evidence that these spiritual values have been in any way diminished. A technology-based program to clean the Ganga is now underway and sometimes non-traditional technology can succeed at protecting sacred nature where traditional values do not. In summation, it is important to guard against unnecessary romanticization and to also be critical towards the values that we seek to promote.

The sacred natural sites mentioned in this newsletter all contribute in some way to the flourishing of life on this planet. However, none of them exists in a time capsule. Culture is ever changing and each sacred natural site is embedded in a broader cultural landscape that can at times encourage and at others discourage the preservation and conservation of what we so often call nature. Culture is not the same as tradition.

Just because something is sacred, other cultural values may not be excluded, and these may at other times predominate. In the world of Catholic monasticism, where monks must work the land to make a living, sometimes ecological values are subordinated to the practicalities of running a sustainable enterprise. For example, in Vina, CA where the Trappists of New Clairvaux Abbey grow grapes, prunes and walnuts, pesticides are used in a judicious manner in order to keep up with industry. Many monks lament this fact, given the sacred character of the purpose of their lives on the land, but they realize that without the chemicals they could not make a living.

It is certainly the case that many if not most sacred natural sites are exemplary interactions between cultural practices, spiritual values and conservation priorities, yet as sacred natural sites become part of the wider cultural landscape, it is important that we think through the conservation-related implications of the cultural and spiritual values we explore in our work.

In this issue of Culture for Nature you will find stories of the spiritual and cultural values of former rock salt mines, sacred natural sites and landscapes, and water in general. It is clear that the scope of our work extends widely and we hope you will enjoy exploring the ground it covers.

Yours,

Radhika Borde, Jason Brown

Update from the Co-Chairs

On our way to the WCC: Building on Momentum from World Parks Congress

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The CSVPA has continued to build on momentum from the project initiated at the World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia, in 2014, on promoting the cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected area management and governance.

The CSVPA completed work on a grant from The Christensen Fund to follow up on the workshop held at the Congress. This work included identifying and compiling information on related workshops, creating several model training modules, working on expanding a network of interested parties, and laying the groundwork for developing IUCN Best Practice Guidelines.

Since the last newsletter, a full overhaul of the CSVPA website at www.csvpa.org with a new appearance and organization has been completed. The website includes a new discussion forum for members and other interested parties to share ideas, experiences, and information. One of the main aims is to support the network of people interested in promoting the cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected and conserved area management and governance. You are encouraged to visit the forum at <http://csvpa.org/forum/> and participate. The new website also includes many useful

references and links, as well as news of interest to CSVPA members.

The CSVPA has continued to actively fundraise for the program. The group succeeded in securing funds from the German Federal Agency for Nature (BFN) to further the work on the Best Practice Guidelines and organize and conduct two international workshops in the summers of 2016 and 2017 at the International Nature Conservation Academy on the Isle of Vilm in the Baltic Sea. The workshop will draw on CSVPA membership and beyond to bring together experts from various fields and representatives of indigenous peoples and traditions, mainstream religions, and the general public, to further develop the best practices guidelines on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature, scheduled to be completed in November of 2017.

The first of these two workshops has just taken place and was very successful. The first steps towards the IUCN Best Practice Guidelines were made, their scope, aim and structure were explored, case studies are now being collected and a roadmap for their further development is being drawn up. You can still contribute case studies and experiences that you may have so that they can inform these guidelines: <http://csvpa.org/2016/06/csvpa-calling-for-case-studies/>

CSVPA submitted a proposal for a workshop at the World Conservation Congress to be held in Hawai'i in September, 2016. The proposal was accepted and combined with a proposal for a knowledge café to look at the relationship between sacred



natural sites and World Heritage sites proposed by, among others, CSVPA members Alison Ormsby and Shonil Bhagwat. The title of the joint workshop is “Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in the Management and Governance of Protected Areas and World Heritage Sites.” The workshop will focus on testing and developing Best Practice Guidelines in tandem with training modules. The CSVPA has been working with the IUCN World Heritage Programme and ICOMOS on bringing culture and nature together, and the workshop will be part of a journey on the topic at the World Conservation Congress.

Finally CSVPA Co-Chair and Coordinator for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative (SNSI) Bas Verschuuren is close to finishing a book in collaboration with WCPA-J's Naoya Furuta on Asian Sacred Natural Sites and the relevance of Asian philosophies and practices for conservation and protected areas, to be published by Routledge. Over 10 CSVPA members have contributed chapters to this book. The aim is to launch the book at the World Conservation Congress and to promote its most important discussions with the conservation community and decision makers.



A Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) in bloom next to the church of the Virgin Mary in village Aidonochori (literally the village of the nightingale) in Konitsa, Epirus, Greece.
Photo Credits – Kalliopi Stara

The Sacred Forests of the Villages of Zagori, Konitsa, and Epirus in Greece

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In the mountains of Northwest Greece, an important feature of the cultural landscape, are the sacred natural sites consisting of isolated veteran trees or sacred forests around chapels.

Their foundation and maintenance is often interpreted as the management of natural resources and ecosystems through religious rules, while their conservation is ensured by taboos and potential supernatural punishments to trespassers. These sacred forests are little known outside the communities that have preserved them, communities that are today

being depleted. The observance of taboos is also fading with the older generation and the knowledge about them is getting lost.

Over the last five years, the University of Ioannina has hosted an interdisciplinary project entitled “Conservation through Religion: the Sacred Groves of Epirus” (“SAGE” 2012-2015, Scientific Coordinator, John M. Halley), aiming at the study of the biodiversity and cultural value of these sacred forests and their effective conservation. Detailed work in this area has led (amongst other things) to a proposal to the Greek Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs, for the Sacred Forests of the area to be included in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage list (UNESCO,

Greece). The successful proposal (approved July 17, 2015) is dedicated to the memory of our colleague, Professor Oliver Rackham.

Moreover, as part of our feedback to the local communities with whom we worked, we created an environmental education package entitled: “Ancient Trees, their Values and Importance for Biodiversity Conservation” (Eds. Kalliopi Stara and Despoina Vokou). This was based on the results of the SAGE project and paid special attention to local culture and history, as well as the appreciation of trees as habitats for many other organisms and as long living creatures with aesthetic, spiritual and historic value that can inspire people towards nature conservation.



Iguaçu Falls in Foz do Iguaçu - place of memory, legends and sacred songs of indigenous peoples. Photo Credits – Érika Fernandes-Pinto.

Discovering the Sacred Natural Sites of Brazil

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As the efforts of the CSVPA have shown, the subject of sacred natural sites (SNSs) has, in recent decades, gained an increased visibility in several international events and world public policy debates.

Furthermore, numerous initiatives regarding the recognition and safeguarding of these sites have been implemented in many countries.

Brazil, with its large territory and variety of environments, is among the top five countries in the world with the greatest biological diversity. It also stands out for the number of protected areas established by the government. Brazil also has significant social and cultural wealth, represented by more than 300 indigenous peoples and hundreds of other traditional local communities.

Since SNSs express a direct relationship between biological and cultural diversity, one can infer that Brazil has great potential for the occurrence of sacred natural sites in its territory. However, it is seen that in the substantial body of international publications on the

subject, and databases of thousands of SNSs on all continents, references to Brazilian SNSs are rare.

This scenario inspired an exploratory survey on the subject, which was published in an article entitled Sacred Natural Sites of Brazil: The Unknown Giant, available in the Silene Documentation Center (in Portuguese). From scattered and diffuse information gathered from national academic research in various areas of expertise, we have identified 60 sites that can be considered SNSs in Brazil. They include caves, mountains, waterfalls, forests, rock formations, springs and waterways, ponds, dunes and trees. Many of them are located inside protected areas. However, initiatives regarding the recognition and safeguarding of sacred natural sites by national public policies are scarce and Brazilian participation in the international debate on the subject is still incipient.

In order to deepen the mapping and advance the debate on SNSs in the Brazilian context, we prepared a diversified strategy to search for references – from multiple sources of information — and a proposal for a collaborative research network to share and disseminate knowledge on the subject. This initiative also seeks to outline the paths that have been established and the prospects for the protection of sacred natural

sites in national public policies. It also intends to interpret, in this way, the main challenges for the management of SNSs related to protected areas legally established in the country.

The results of this research will be presented at the World Conservation Congress of the IUCN, to be held in Hawaii in September 2016. We intend to contribute so that the understanding of the Brazilian SNS context will have visibility in the international debate on the subject. And we hope that this research can also stimulate the exchange of experiences and integration with SNS safeguard initiatives in other regions of the world, especially in Latin America.

We believe that the effort to expand the debate on the importance of cultural and spiritual values for the conservation of biodiversity and the recognition of SNSs represents an essential path for the construction of a new ideology of nature protection — more suitable to the socio-environmental reality of countries such as Brazil, and one that reflects the understanding that the future of biodiversity is inseparable from the future of cultural diversity.

This research is part of a PhD thesis developed in the EICOS Program at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and linked to the Research Group Governance, Biodiversity, Protected Areas and Social Inclusion (GAPIS).



The haunting beauty of Mono Lake. Photo Credits – David Wright.

Water Walk Pilgrimage Supports and Celebrates Water Everywhere

– Geoff Dalglish
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A pilgrimage in California called “Walking Water” is spotlighting humanity’s relationship to water and inviting people to co-create solutions that are pivotal to the wellbeing of all life on Earth.

Walking Water is an invitation, an action, an educational journey and a prayer intended to foster a healing relationship among people and water, while celebrating the beauty and power of water.

The pilgrimage is taking place in three sections over three years. It began on September 1, 2015 and resumes on September 22 of this year, with the final section due to be completed late in 2017. The initiative brings together the voices of many, through the act of walking together on a route that follows the waterways — natural and manmade — from their source in the mountains to the place of end use, the city of Los Angeles. Today the Greater Los Angeles Area is home to more than 18 million people.

Among those participating is Findhorn Foundation member Geoff Dalglish, who has walked around 20,000 km with messages about treading more lightly and lovingly upon the Earth. “I’m privileged to

be playing a part in this inspiring initiative and also representing the Foundation and Global Ecovillage Network,” Geoff says. “While there is a perception in Scotland and the UK of water being totally abundant, access to clean, healthy water has become a burning global issue and nowhere on earth is immune to the need to radically re-envision how we act, think and live in relation to water.

“The pilgrimage is taking place in areas of astonishing natural beauty but also passing through areas devastated by drought and the impacts of the water being channeled to LA during the past century, literally sucking some areas dry. “Walking Water brings together stakeholders from all walks of life – including representatives of the indigenous tribes who are the first people of the land – and hopefully we can co-create new ways of being in relationship to water and each other.” Separating the walk into three sections is giving participants time to interact with local communities and the environment, and to weave in activities that have the potential to create beneficial long-term impacts.

The pilgrimage is seen as a journey through inner and outer landscapes that connects to the soul of a place and to our essence as humans, with the art of pilgrimage having been used for many centuries by the major religions, belief systems and indigenous

Walking Water brings together stakeholders from all walks of life – including representatives of the indigenous tribes who are the first people of the land – and hopefully we can co-create new ways of being in relationship to water and each other.

tribes as a way to come closer to the meaning of life. Walking Water attempts to connect that sacred path of pilgrimage – our internal relationship to ourselves – with our relationship to our external environment. “We walk for the issue of water, we walk with water and the communities along this path that are so affected by this issue, and we walk towards a change in our acting and thinking towards water on both a local and global level,” says coordinator Kate Bunney. “We also walk toward a vision of a regenerated environment, a healthy valley and a self-sufficient metropolis.”



What is a Sacred Site?

Words on Wahipana (Sacred Sites) from Hawaiian Elder Hale Makua

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Hawaiian Elder Hale Makua gave generously of his time and wisdom to not only renew the traditional spiritual practices of his Hawaiian people, but also to share his teachings with students and seekers from other cultures and traditions.

Presented here are some of his thoughts on sacred sites:

*“The concept of a sacred place merges the importance of place with that of the spiritual union with the material. My Hawaiian culture accepts the spiritual as a dominant factor in life; this value links me to my past and to my future, and is physically located at my sacred sites.”**

“In ancient times of the ancestors, the sacred sites were treated with reverence and humility. These places possess the spiritual power of the ancestors; but these designated areas were more than what the eye perceives. It tells me who I am, who my extended family is, and it gives me my family history, history of my clan, and the history of the people itself.”

Though sacred sites are normally associated with geographical areas, this is not always so. For instance, Pali Uli, a divine place of much spiritual

presence, cannot be found with a map or guide. Pali Uli is discoverable only if one’s mind and soul are ready to receive this sacred site in the uplands of Hilo. The Worldwide Indigenous Science Network (WISN) and Mr. Makua partnered to establish the Hale Mua project. His wish was to help educate Hawaiians, and others, in the most powerful and ancient of cultural forms, the Hale Mua, or House of Universal Knowledge. One of the project goals was to place signposts pointing to the traditional sacred sites where Mr. Makua conducted his teachings and ceremonies. Until the Hale Mua heiau could be built, these signposts were to help people to find those sites where they could receive Mr. Makua’s teachings.

“Approach the sacred sites with appropriate sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and humility. Those who visit and pay these sites the respect and deference they deserve, whether they are native Hawaiian or not, will benefit from the experience of communing with the ancestors, learning the functions, and absorbing the spiritual power of the sacred site. Study, observe, and appreciate, for these sites are part of spiritual wisdom.”

Tragically, Hale Makua died in a car accident in March 2004. His death cut short the project and his work, which included plans to build a heiau, to repair and revive the remaining ancient trails (Pathways to Enlightenment), and to activate the sacred sites he was guided to open. He is no longer here

to teach at the traditional sites, and there is no one to replace him, but he did leave signposts to perpetuate his teachings, in his letters and his words to all who listened to him. How did he recognize sacred sites in his own land? He tells us here:

“Only when a kanaka maoli (native) gains spiritual wisdom is the ancestral and spiritual sense of place reactivated. Spiritual knowledge and the sacred sites are ancestrally related, thus spiritual strength connects to the ancestral guardians. My guardian knew that the gods created the land and generated life. The gods infused the earth with their spiritual force. The gravity of the concept was keenly grasped by the ancestors: they knew that the earth’s spiritual essence was focused through the sacred sites. The ancestors honored the earth and life as divine gifts of the gods. Their fishing and farming enterprises always included a spiritual function and focus on a sacred site. Their activities never encouraged land or sea resource overuse because to do so would dishonor the gods. ‘The earth must not be desecrated’ is a native value.”

All quotes are from Hale Makua’s letter, 31 May 2001, to Dr. Apela Colorado, WISN Director, discussing the formation of the Hale Mua project.

*Kit Cooley (Vestini, Brutti, Celt, Dane, Tsalagi, Haudenosaunee), Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, Archivist and Wordsmith



A worship ceremony in progress at one of the caves in Lugu Buru. Photo Credits – Siman Hansdak.

Luguburu: an important sacred natural site of the indigenous Santhal tribe

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Lugu Baba is considered the founding father of the indigenous Santhal tribe. Scattered across India, Nepal and Bangladesh, the Santhals are estimated to number almost 7 million people.

The Santhals believe that Lugu Baba was the incarnation of God who had the divine power to change or transform himself into any form. He was believed to have converted himself to the hill and forest which is now known as the Lugu Buru hill.

The Lugu Buru hill is situated in the state of Jharkhand in the East-Central part of India. It is said that Lugu Baba conducted a 12 year long seminar on the Lugu Buru hill. All the elders from the different villages and clans had participated. It is said that

gods and goddesses had also attended the seminar. The main subject of the seminar was the codification of social rites performed at different occasions such as birth, marriage, death etc.

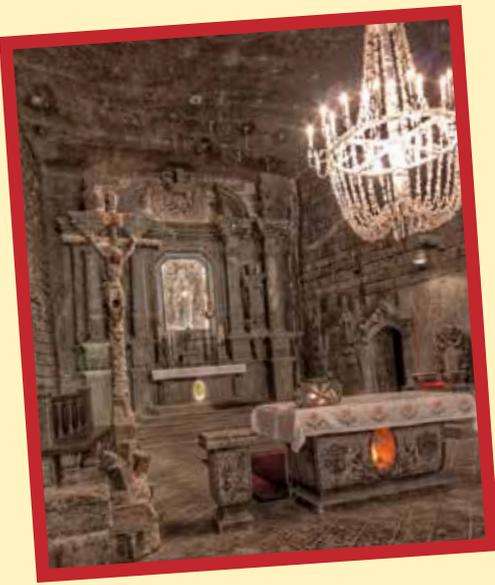
After the seminar it is believed that Lugu Baba disappeared into the top of the Lugu Buru hill. The Santhals believe that the cave complex on the hill top is a secret way to enter the spiritual world. They believe that the spirit of Lugu Baba still resides there.

He still teaches his true devotees to use spiritual and natural energy to heal wounded souls as well as society. Devotees go to Lugu Buru to attain spiritual wisdom.

Local custodians have re-established this sacred natural site as a place of mass spiritual gathering for Santhals in the year 2000. They have formed a society focused on empowering indigenous culture and traditional religious practices, promoting the use

of the Santhal script, protection of indigenous identity as well as the land, water and forests. Local custodians realized that mainstream Indian society was appropriating their sacred natural sites. Initially, several Hindu shrines (such as Rajrappa and Parasnath) were the sacred natural sites of the Santhals.

The Santhals are now aware of the need to protect the Lugu Buru hill, which is also under threat from mining as it is located in a coal-rich area. In order to protect their livelihood and cultural identity, the Santhals have created a socio-religious group. Village headmen from each village along with the village youth are part of this group and participate in the annual festival which is held on the Lugu Buru hill. This group has also developed strategies for networking with Santhal associations, political leaders/parties and funding bodies.



The cultural and spiritual values of the Wieliczka salt mine in Poland (WHS): a heritage still to be appreciated

– Helena Solman
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The Wieliczka salt mine in Poland, is a very old mine (from the XIII century) which is famous for being constantly in production for as long as until the second half of the twentieth century!

This long tradition of salt mining was the main reason for the listing of the Wieliczka mine as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Besides that, the mine is also known for its unusual geological values. This is why IUCN called for a stricter protection of the site with a focus on its geological heritage. As a result, the Wieliczka mine was listed as an endangered heritage site in the years 1989–1998. Thanks to financing and increased protection, the threats to the mine have been under control ever since.

Furthermore, the Wieliczka mine has a unique cultural heritage which is a reflection of the religious and spiritual values of the mining community living around it and their traditions. In my research, I studied the perceptions of the mining community living around the Wieliczka mine, in relation to their intangible heritage. Based on my findings, I argue that as a result of this heritage the Wieliczka mine definitely deserves listing under the category of UNESCO Heritage of Religious Interest.

I want to share with you the story of the religious heritage of the mining community as it was narrated to me by former miners and the people living around the Wieliczka mine.

The story of a mine as a religious heritage site:

For centuries, the Wieliczka salt mine was the object of people's religious devotion. There is a legend surrounding the mine and its origin. According to this legend, salt in Wieliczka was found due to the magical intervention of St. Kinga. In reality, Kinga was a princess from Hungary living in the XIII century who married the Polish King. The legend relates that she wanted to bring prosperity to her new country, so she cast her engagement ring into a salt mine in Hungary. Then, after she arrived in Poland, she told people in Wieliczka to dig and search for her ring until they found it – it was finally found in a brick of salt.

This legend about the origin of the mine is still told, not only to tourists but also at local schools and among the people in the mining community. Furthermore, from the stories of a former miner and sculptor, I learned that because of these religious beliefs, miners sculpted figures of saints and built chapels underground in the mine, entirely from salt. They also commemorated the places where miners died with a cross. The religious heritage of Wieliczka is the

The Wieliczka mine has a unique cultural heritage which is a reflection of the religious and spiritual values of the mining community living around it and their traditions.

reason why the mining community living around it and the pilgrims who visit it, value it as a sacred place.

Undoubtedly, the religious heritage present in the sculptures, salt chambers and chapels is valued by secular tourists as well, as well as the management of the site. Tourists visiting the former salt mine do get to hear the legends and do learn about the religiosity of the former miners. However, this information is presented in the form of anecdotes and is not described as heritage per se. Perhaps, it is time to acknowledge the importance of the spiritual values of the mining community that nourish their traditions and constitute the heritage of the mine.

My study showed that this religious heritage, in its intangibility, should no longer be separated from the material heritage of the mine. Perhaps, it is time for IUCN to also give attention to the religious and spiritual values of this site so that it can be given the status of a UNESCO religious heritage site. This would help protect the heritage and honor the local community at the same time.



Challenging science to understand the complexity and simplicity of nature. Photo credits - Chel, S.

Exploring Nature through Mayan Knowledge

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I have always been fascinated by the ability to understand things at a fundamental level and to explain our relationship with nature. Water is one of the most fundamental substances of nature; the richness behind relative simplicity of this substance was my passion from an early age.

Born and raised in Yucatan, Mexico, and from a Mayan background, I grew up surrounded by caves where rainwater accumulates. Those places were important sacred sites for the Maya, one of the most complex civilisations in human history.

More importantly my cultural group has a cosmology, worldview and traditional ecological knowledge handed down through generations. I am trying to apply this knowledge to fundamental questions about complex interactions between society and the water system, with immediate implications for our environment.

I was drawn to work in the field of groundwater sustainability by combining natural and social sciences with traditional ecological knowledge because I realised that it has become difficult for indigenous peoples to relate to their environment since government and environmental authorities do not recognize the potential of traditional knowledge for conservation, and for this reason local knowledge is not being used alongside scientific knowledge.

There is a huge gap and overcoming this requires information, involvement and collaboration amongst young people, researchers, indigenous peoples and policy makers with the help of the involvement of communities and stakeholders. Complex research of this kind requires knowledge from hydrology and related sciences, but I must continuously challenge scientific assumptions since I believe in my history, in my way of spirituality, something implicit that does not require more explanation other than that I should protect and take care of what surrounds me.

I need to re-claim the history of my ancestors in order to contribute to preserving the present.



A view of the Abbey church through the restored Oregon White Oak Savannah, Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey, Carlton, OR.
Photo Credits – Jason Minton Brown.

Exploring Monastic Landscapes of the American West

– Jason M. Brown
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Waking at four AM to chant Vigils, I have entered the daily rhythms of the Trappist Abbey of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Carlton, Oregon. This is the third of four field sites for my PhD dissertation on the spiritual ecology and sense of place of Catholic monks residing in the American West.

Founded in 1955 from a failed foundation in Pecos, New Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe comprises 1,300 acres of foothills just east of the Coast Range in Northwestern Oregon. In the Trappist spirit of making the land ‘blossom like the rose’ they attempted farming for a number of years, but gradually transitioned to making fruitcake, binding books, and opening a wine storage facility as their main sources of income, while maintaining ownership of their lands.

When the property was purchased in 1953, it was covered in a beautiful Douglas fir forest, but after the sale, the owner clear cut the property and took off. The monks spent the next decades replanting over 800 acres

of the property by hand and in the 1980s began to harvest trees as a source of revenue. In the 1990s, as the environmental movement was gaining momentum, an unsightly clear cut prompted a community discussion that introduced a change in their harvest practices. They hired a local forester and have since begun thinning Douglas fir stands to foster greater structural heterogeneity in the forest, rather than cutting in large clear cuts.

In addition, as part of a Conservation Easement purchased by Bonneville Power in 2010, which protects the property in perpetuity, the community also agreed to restore several dozen acres of Oregon White Oak savannah, an ecosystem that has been designated as critically endangered in Oregon. The monastery is now not only the largest contiguous forest cover in Yamhill County with full public access to its trails, it is also on the leading edge of ecological restoration efforts in a mostly wealthy, agricultural county.

My dissertation research will focus on how traditional monastic motifs like wilderness and garden affect land use management and embodied experiences of land. It will also explore how contemporary environmental discourses shape these practices and experiences.

So as just a brief example, in the case of Our Lady of Guadalupe, rather than converting the wilderness into an agrarian paradise as many monastic communities saw themselves doing in the middle ages, the Trappists in Oregon are in a sense converting the agrarian paradise back into the wilderness. I am now in the process of transcribing and analyzing my data. The dissertation will be finished sometime in early 2017. Wish me luck!



Presentation of the Young Professionals Working Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

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The Young Professionals Group of The World Commission on Protected Areas (YP-WCPA), composed of young people under 35 years of age, connected in some way to protected areas and conservation, has recently defined different working groups related to each section within WCPA. One of these Working Groups is focussed on cultural and spiritual values of protected areas. This decision, instigated by the WCPA Chair and the YP-WCPA, is based on the outcomes of the “Inspiring new generations” stream that took place at the World Parks Congress 2014 and is part of the “Promise of Sydney.”

The Congress highlighted that many barriers still exist to effectively empower young voices in conservation and the necessity to create more opportunities to empower young people to become tomorrow’s conservation leaders. By creating this YP working group, the ideas and voices of the young professionals will have an active space in CSVPA. For the moment, the group is starting to work with a little team, with representatives from Asia, South America and Europe, with experiences on cultural landscapes, traditional knowledge, and cultural and spiritual values.

The main goals of this group are to go after the integration of the new generations into the dynamics of CSVPA, to facilitate intergenerational mentorships and explore capacity-development opportunities. By increasing YP contributions to the existing work of CSVPA, YP’s aims to contribute to bringing new perspectives and ideas to the existing ones and keep CSVPA abreast of relevant YP activities and discuss how we can better cross-fertilize. An important aim of the YP Working Group is to spread the word about the importance of consideration of cultural and spiritual values in young people’s networks using social networking. As the group is being founded it will encourage more people to get involved.

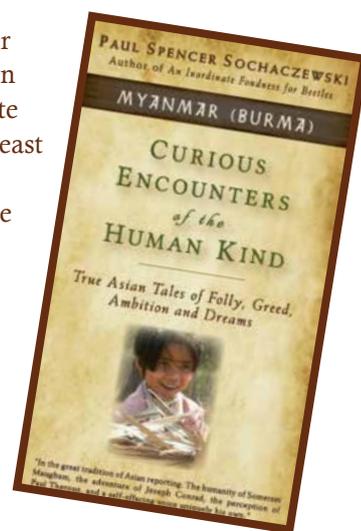
For more information, to contribute or to become a part of this group, please mail to wcpaypcultural@gmail.com

The Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) conferences in 2016

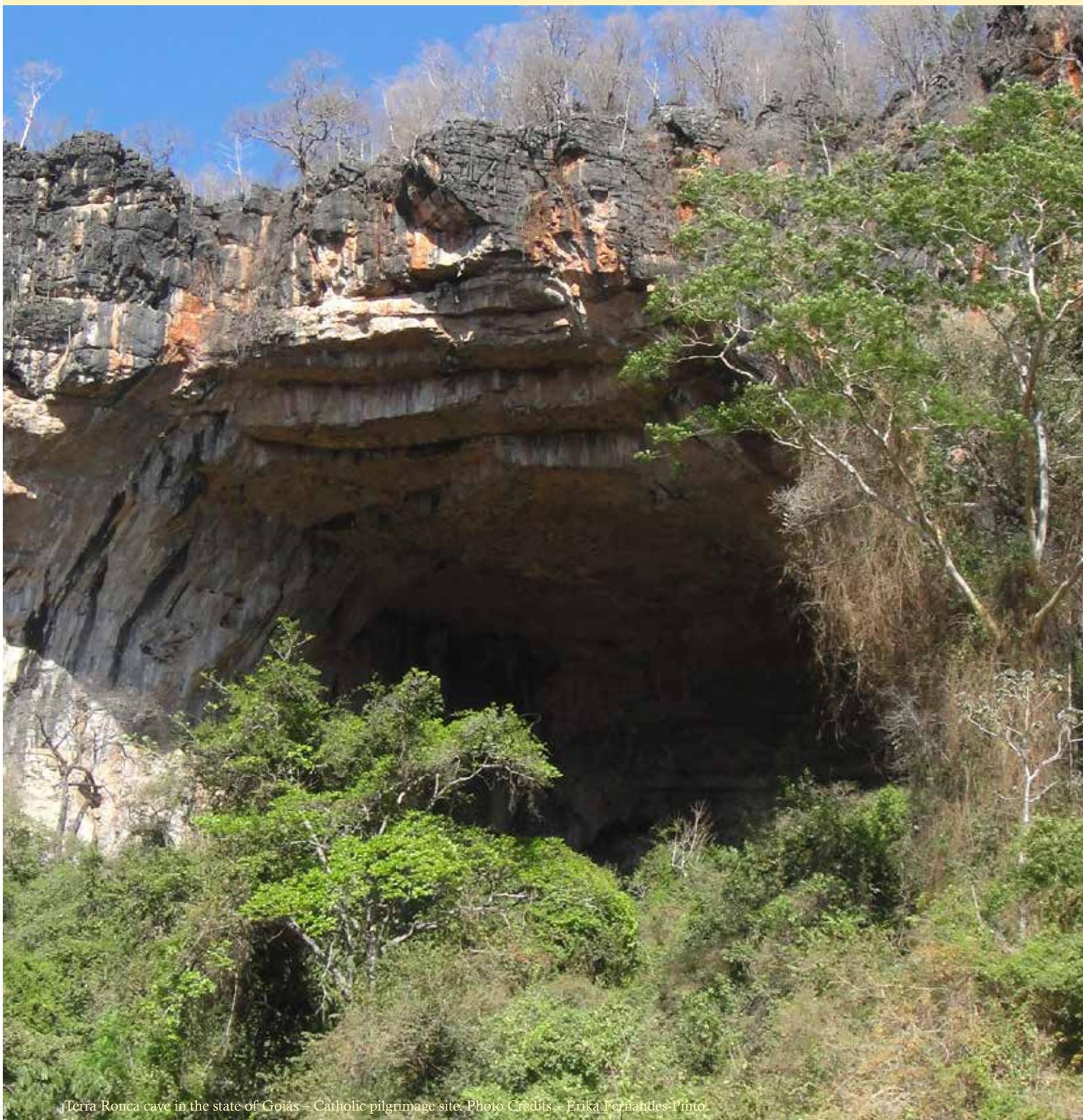
The Ecosystem Services Partnership (www.es-partnership.org) will organise several conferences in 2016 focussing on the use of the ecosystem services concept in policy and practice to find ‘nature based solutions’ for pressing environmental and socio-economic problems in Asia (organised in South Korea, 30 May-3 June), Europe (in Antwerp, Belgium, 19-23 Sept.), Latin America (14-18 November in Brazil or Colombia), Africa (in Kenya, 21-25 November) and N. America, together with ACES (in Florida, USA, 5-9). See <http://www.es-partnership.org/esp/79104/5/0/50> for further information.

Paul Sochaczewski’s fiction and resources for writers

Long-time CSVPA member Paul Sochaczewski has written a five-book series with separate volumes for Myanmar, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Borneo, and the Himalayas which might be of interest to colleagues. He would like to offer one free electronic version (which can be read on most computers, tablets and Kindle devices) to CSVPA members. Just write to him at: pauls@iprolink.ch or via his website: www.sochaczewski.com



And CSVPA members who would like to write about their personal experiences on the front lines of conservation might be interested in Paul’s writing handbook: *Share Your Journey: Mastering Personal Writing*.



Terra Ronca cave in the state of Goiás – Catholic pilgrimage site. Photo Credits – Érika Fernandes-Pinto.

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Values of Protected Areas, please visit the CSVPA website - www.csvpa.org