

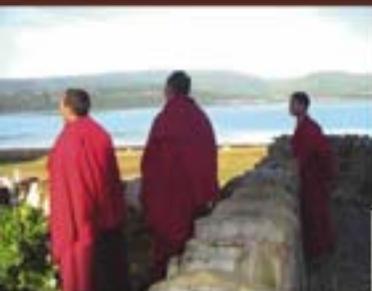
IUCN  
World  
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on Protected  
Areas



## Protected Areas and Spirituality

Proceedings of the First Workshop  
of The Delos Initiative - Montserrat 2006

Edited by Josep-Maria Mallarach & Thymio Papayannis



Publicacions  
de l'Abadia  
de Montserrat



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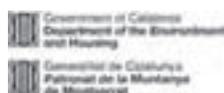
# Protected Areas and Spirituality

Proceedings of the First Workshop  
of The Delos Initiative

WCPA Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

Monastery of Montserrat, Catalonia, Spain, 24-26 November 2006

Edited by Josep-Maria Mallarach and Thymio Papayannis





Publicacions  
de l'Abadia  
de Montserrat



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# Summary

This volume presents the Proceedings of the First Workshop of The Delos Initiative. The Workshop was held in November 2006 in the holy mountain of Montserrat, a Nature Reserve and Natural Park located north of Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain. The Delos Initiative is part of the IUCN World Commission of Protected Area's Task Force on the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas.

After the introductions (Chapter 1) from the Chair of the WCPA and the Abbot of the Monastery of Montserrat, Chapter 2 features the four opening addresses, all of great significance and very individual in style.

Chapter 3 contains a comprehensive introduction to The Delos Initiative written by its coordinators. It includes descriptions of its goals, objectives, methodology and projects carried out, as well as technical guidance for natural sacred sites and a complete overview of the development of the Workshop.

Chapter 4 includes five speeches which provide a conceptual context for all of the issues discussed: the relationship between Nature and Spirituality; protected areas and sacred sites of indigenous and traditional peoples; spiritual values in the history of protected areas in Spain; the contribution of sacred natural sites to nature conservation; and the particular experience of the Sacred Mountains Programme in several national parks.

The Montserrat case study is presented in Chapter 5. In addition to the standard report, prepared according to the Delos methodology, it features the viewpoints of the main stakeholders in the mountain: the monastic community, the Park Board, walkers and climbers, the company providing services around the main monastery, and a private foundation.

Chapter 6, the longest, includes the presentation of nine case studies: two from Finland, one prehistoric (Kolovesi) and the other contemporary, concerning the Sámi people (Ukonsaari); two from Greece, concerning Orthodox Christianity (Athos and Meteora); one from Andalusia, Spain, concerning lay Catholic brotherhoods (Protected areas of Doñana and the Virgin of El Rocío shrine); one singular case from Scotland, United Kingdom, con-

cerning Tibetan Buddhism (the Holy Island of Arran); one from Rumania, concerning Orthodox Christianity (Vanatori-Neamt); one from Japan, concerning Shugen and Shingon Buddhist schools (Kii mountain range and pilgrimages routes), and, finally, one from Tennessee and North Carolina, USA, concerning the Cherokee Native Americans (Smoky Mountains). These case studies encompass a wide range of highly diverse types of protected areas in three continents belonging to all IUCN categories; they were prepared largely on the basis of interviews with key stakeholders.

Finally, Chapter 7, the Montserrat Declaration, provides a summary of the main findings and conclusions that can be drawn from the lively discussions that took place during the Workshop.

Appendix 1 includes the names of all the participants and the Workshop's coordinators. Appendix 2 consists of the programme of events, followed by an explanation of how the Workshop's organisers decided to compensate for the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions it produced.

This book has been published jointly by the IUCN and the Abbey of Montserrat's publishing house and is a clear indicator of the links that the Delos Initiative is fostering between conservationists and the custodians of natural sacred sites, in this case a monastic community with a millennial history.

## Why a 'Delos' Initiative?

The island of Delos in the midst of the Aegean Sea is today an important archaeological site and a protected marine area. In Antiquity, though, it was a sacred site for both Greeks and Romans: it was dedicated to Apollo, the god of light, who, according to myth, was born on the island.

In addition, from 478 BC onwards, after the Persians had been expelled from Greece, Delos became the centre of the Athenian Alliance and the location of its treasury, and was home to religious and peaceful political functions. Under the Roman Empire, it developed into one of the most important trade centres in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its role declined after the establishment of Christianity, although its cultural and spiritual influence has continued right up to the present day.

As a sacred site set in a pristine marine environment, Delos is a symbol: it has no links to any single living faith and is an ancient centre of political alliance and international commerce.



*Plate found in Delos. From a pottery shop on the island of Rhodes, second half of the seventh century BC.*



# 1. Prefaces

*Nikita (Nik) Lopoukhine*

*Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas*

I am honored and pleased to write this preface to this inspiring book resulting from the Delos Initiative. Presenting, as this book does, an array of sites dedicated to prayer, meditation and liturgy and demonstrating how these significant areas of sanctity link to biodiversity conservation is, to say the least, timely. The world is facing problems of almost insurmountable magnitude, of which climate change is but one. This book provides examples of places where humans strive to live sustainably and to reflect on their relationship with God and the environment. These examples can act as an important guide for our own daily living.

The work that is being done by the Delos Initiative, within the Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas is providing a very much needed inspiration and guidance for the World Commission of Protected Areas. The critical work of this Task Force assures a more inclusive approach and consideration to spiritual values associated with protected areas.

For many people, these values are of the utmost importance, even in the technologically developed countries, where unfortunately they have been at times neglected.

I grew up mostly in Canada and spent my summers along the shore of Lake Labelle in Quebec. It was and is a place where my family, friends and relatives not only renew our physical strength and relationships, but also our spiritual strength. It is a place instrumental to my becoming close to nature and molding my career in protected areas.

Over fifty years ago on the shores of the lake, my uncles and my father built a chapel dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh, a beloved saint of fourteenth century Russia who lived, for some of his life, in a monastic cell deep within a forest. The late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, then Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York spent his summers on the lake and served the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Christian feast days. Other priests continue to serve in this chapel each summer.

In early August, the feast of Transfiguration is marked by a procession down to

*< Montserrat, Agulles section, one of the favourite areas of climbers.*

the lake to bless it. The priest begins the procession by emerging from behind the iconostasis through the Royal Doors of the chapel over which are inscribed the words of the ancient psalm: "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord". The choir sings hymns of praise, children carry banners and icons, and in my memory, it always seems to be a glorious, sunny summer morning. Returning from the lake, we gather around a table laden with fruit, wild mushrooms and berries, all earth's bounties which are then blessed and for which we give thanks. The underlining significance, of course, is that the flowering and fruitfulness of all creation is transformed by and filled with the glory of the Lord.

I relate this annual summer ritual on the lakeshore in Quebec in the context of the Delos Initiative to suggest that, while we certainly can take inspiration from the selected examples in this marvelous book, let us also not forget the spiritual connections we all have to special personal places where our spirit is lifted and where we can touch the beauty and harmony of nature. All these places – that we touch and that touch us - must be protected. They provide us with the meaning of life.

*Josep M. Soler*  
*Abbot of Montserrat*

I am delighted to have the opportunity to pen a few words with Nikita Lopoukhine, President of the World Commission on Protected Areas, to mark the publication of the proceedings of the First Workshop of The Delos Initiative that, under the title of 'Nature and Spirituality', took place in the Monastery of Montserrat on 23-26 November 2006.

The objective of this meeting was to discuss the study of legally protected sites of great natural value that are also recognised as sites of spiritual importance in technologically developed countries. Montserrat is one such sacred site and possesses an outstanding combination of both natural and spiritual values. It boasts a remarkable variety of flora and fauna, as well as fascinating geological formations of singular beauty that have for long attracted the attention of scientists and nature lovers alike. Nevertheless, when humans enter into contact with the natural world, they not only develop a thirst for scientific knowledge, but also unleash a capacity for symbolic reflection. They learn to admire and also to complement their naturalists' vision of the world from the spiritual standpoint

that forms an indispensable part of the human condition.

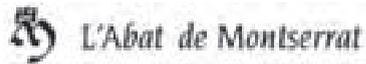
The sum - or, even, multiplication - of the different interpretations of this natural environment, 'inhabited' by humans for over a thousand years, has assumed a special dimension in Montserrat. The conjunction of an exceptional natural monument (the mountain) and the Benedictine Monastery and Sanctuary dedicated to Saint Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has brought about a reality that is rich in meaning and significance, but highly complex as a result to manage. Hence, I believe that it is appropriate to mention here the work put in by the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat in its collaboration with local and other administrative bodies.

As I wrote in the opening greeting for our webpage, for us, the monks, Montserrat is the Benedictine monastery, with its almost thousand years of history. Next to it, a sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God has grown up and this spiritual presence, along with our devotion to the Gospel according to the Rule of St Benedict, has marked in a unique and significant fashion the life of the mountain. From this basic nucleus stem all the activities that in a more or less direct fashion depend on us, and which include, firstly, the Monastery and the Sanctuary, the monastic life and the faith of the pilgrims

that come to our door, our work, prayers and spiritual study, the welcome we give to all, our live, in community, the hopes and wishes of those who visit, our joys and our sacred days. Secondly, we promote many varied cultural activities, all impregnated with Christian faith: our music and the boy's choir that performs during liturgical celebrations, painting and sculpture, the publication of books, the study of philosophy, theology and humanities, and handicrafts. Finally, from within our community springs the interest in the study and conservation of the natural environment of Montserrat, which, as the 'work of God', biblical faith views as an expression of the beauty of creation that

gladdens our spirits and brings us closer to the mystery of God.

I sincerely hope that the Delos Initiative can continue to deepen and consolidate the work begun here in Montserrat and thus contribute to the understanding of how spiritual values can positively aid conservation and the proper use of natural areas in technologically developed countries. For our part, we are happy to be able to contribute in our modest fashion to this initiative.







*“On this wise ye shall bless the children of the people, saying unto them, the Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of the people; and I will bless them”.*



Blessing recited by Father Ramon Ribera-Mariné at the opening of the workshop. It is a slightly adapted version of the 'priestly blessing' told by Moses, the man of God, according to the fourth book of the Bible, the Book of Numbers, 6, 23-26.

*Opening of the workshop.*

*From left to right: M. Rafa, P.Canals, R.Ribera-Mariné, T. Papayannis, R. Luque and J. López.*



## 2. Opening addresses

**Ramon Ribera-Mariné,**

*Prior of the Monastery*

It fills me with great pleasure to be able to address a few words to the members of this workshop on the Delos Initiative that is being held in Montserrat. I do so as Prior and on behalf of Father Josep Maria Soler, the abbot of this all-but millenary community who cannot be with us today since at this moment he is attending a series of meetings in the USA.

First of all, I wish to thank the organisers for having thought of us when it came to choosing a place for this meeting. Montserrat has a long tradition as a meeting place for a wide variety of different types of groups. Our religious vocation is clear, as our dress reveals. However, we only ask one thing of those who come to us – that they work for peace. Indeed, people like yourselves, who know and love the natural world, could you have any other aim in mind?

Montserrat has always welcomed dialogue and new ideas. A few examples suffice: by 1499 there was already a printing press here and by the end of the eighteenth century new and important work on history and the natural world was

already being carried out. Likewise, today our museum is home to notable works of modern art. The Delos Initiative is also novel, even for those of us who have been working with and writing about the natural world for many years.

Nevertheless, Montserrat and its mountain, with its pale vertical cliffs is –if it is anything– home to a Holy Image, a symbol of the transcendental, that unites all those that come here (and perhaps even those who merely contemplate the curious forms of the mountain from afar). The verticalness of the site evokes a further reality: the sanctuary and its rather uninspiring secular buildings offer a place of peace and conviviality and will do everything in its power to offer hope to the human race.

Likewise, you may well be able to offer us ideas as to how we can improve our management of the natural and spiritual values of our mountain, which is the legacy that we will have to pass on to future generations.

The Rule of Benedict of Nursia, a sixth-century monk and founder of the Benedictine Order, refers to the treatment of one's guests: they should always be received in the monastery as Christ him-

self. And so, in light of this statement of principles, Montserrat welcomes you and hopes the workshop is fruitful for all concerned.

**Jordi López,**

*President of the Steering Committee of the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat*

It is my pleasure to be able to welcome you to Montserrat on behalf of the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat and to thank you for coming to this natural park. We were surprised when the idea of holding this meeting here was first suggested, but as time has passed your presence here has become an element of great satisfaction for us for both institutional and personal reasons. My own links to Montserrat began the day I was brought here to be baptised at the tender age of just one month. Since then I have remained in close contact with the mountain, as the members of the community know. I think that the idea of establishing a connection between a natural area and our own personal interior experiences is extremely positive; the discovery of these personal spiritual elements is of great importance in modern society. I'd like to remind you that the words spoken by Pope Benedict XVI this week, in which he described the monasteries as the lungs of the soul in an urban

world, can be applied just as well to the natural world.

Having begun with a personal confession, I should like to continue briefly in this vein. I too am a biologist and would like to share with you a significant personal experience from my time here: the mystical dimension of the contemplation of the natural world. I remember the nights in Santa Cecília, another monastery near here and a little further down the mountain, when I would contemplate the heavens and would feel aware of their infiniteness and the relative insignificance of humankind. I would note the same sense of infiniteness during my research on cellular structures when I delved deep into a different world via the eyepiece of an electron microscope. Here too I would discover other immensely small enormities and realise that in those cells too there was a harmony that reflected the infiniteness of life. The Universe and living cells merged for me in a highly personal experience here in Montserrat and so I too can claim to be a spiritual son of this mountain. I firmly believe that the reality provided by Montserrat gives modern society a spiritual dimension amidst the organised chaos that we are forced to live with.

In Catalonia the majority of natural areas also contain religious elements such as monasteries or hermitages. They remind us that many of our forefathers lived a

contemplative life in touch with nature. Society needs places such as this where one can find one's inner silence and benefit from spiritual experiences, and these can be found in nature. As well, it is of great help when a community is present that can help with the spiritual reading of today's world.

Thus, projects such as yours are of great value in the modern world and so I keenly await the results of your deliberations and hope that your work is both fruitful and pleasurable.

***Miquel Rafa,***

*Head of projects, Fundació Territori i Paisatge Caixa Catalunya savings bank*

I am doubly delighted to be able to be here with you today. Firstly, I would like to welcome you on behalf of Fundació Territori i Paisatge, one of the institutions that has provided financial support for this meeting and, secondly, on a more personal note –as someone who lives nearby–. I am pleased to be able to share with you one of my visual, as well as emotional and spiritual, daily points of reference.

I'd like to briefly explain why we are here. The Fundació Territori i Paisatge is a foundation created by a local savings bank, the Caixa Catalunya, as part of its com-

mitment to community work. Our aim is to help nature conservation from a social point of view: and this means that we have to be aware of the ethical, moral and spiritual needs of our society and our work in nature conservation should not ignore these aspects of the modern world.

In 2004, as part of the Parliament of the World's Religions that was held in Barcelona, we organised a seminar on the role played by the world's religions in conservation, the first such action in the line of work that this Task Force has undertaken with such seriousness and success. Since 2004 we have been working with two spiritual centres, one in the Buddhist monastery of Sakya Tashi Ling in the Garraf Park, and the other in the Christian sanctuary at Gallifa, also located in a designated protected area in Catalonia. In both cases we have reached agreements that will enable these centres of spirituality to improve the way they manage their natural surroundings. We believe that this is a good way of assuring the conservation of the natural and spiritual values present in these two protected natural areas. These are just two of the lines of work we are involved in and we are well aware that in this field a lot still remains to be done. However, we hope modestly that in future years our organisation can continue to work in collaboration with this international Task Force.

We believe that this is a very important task and this explains our presence here. We offer our support and encourage you in the hope that for your own sake and for that of the organisations you represent you will be successful in your aims. Likewise, for all the other organizations and people who are concerned with the conservation of the natural world and for the ethical dimension that is inherent in our work, we wish you the best of luck.

**Ramon Luque,**

*Director of the Directorate-General for the Natural Environment, Ministry of the Environment and Housing, Autonomous Government of Catalonia*

First of all, I would like to begin by reminding everyone present that we are in one of the most wonderful of all natural areas in Catalonia, which also happens to be a site of special religious significance for our country.

I recall how I first got to know this marvelous mountain. Like so many other immigrants from other parts of Spain, when we first arrived in Catalonia we asked what should be the first place we visited. Somebody told us that we should begin with Montserrat, which, apart from being a religious symbol, is also a reference point for the country's national identity

and its democratic liberties. Although this is not the time and place to discuss this question further, I feel this fact may be of interest to those of you who come from other countries.

Without doubt, the recognition of the intangible values inherent in protected areas was one of the most important achievements of the V World Parks Congress held in Durban in 2003. This need to recognise and integrate intangible values into our conservation policies in all types and systems of protected areas was reflected in full in the conclusions and recommendations that came out of this Congress. Since then, the work groups that were constituted at the Congress have been active in the development of these ideas.

In the Ministry of the Environment and Housing, which is responsible for the conservation of natural areas in Catalonia, we believe that if we are able to incorporate cultural and spiritual values into the management strategies and plans for our protected areas, and also guarantee their inclusion in the conservation of overall biodiversity, we will encourage many social sectors that have up to now been marginalized or have even expressed their disagreement with our policies to become far more involved in nature conservation. All too often, neither conservationists nor the

Administration have been able to communicate well with those people who feel a special spiritual link with a natural site, which may in fact be the most singular and most precious of all visions of that site.

Likewise, the bonds between a people and its places of recognised spiritual importance can also help preserve natural sites. In some cases certain contradictions may arise when managing such sites, although management is also a good opportunity to promote the natural values of this type of protected area. The fact that people visit this mountain for its singularity as a symbol of our national identity or for its inherent spirituality should be regarded by conservationists as an opportunity to reach out to large numbers of people amongst the population as a whole and transmit to them the natural values of this special place. We should not think of the conservation of the natural values of a site as being unconnected to the preservation of its spiritual value. The recognition of a way of life linked to the traditional activities of sites with special spiritual significance is an essential element in the conservation of biodiversity.

Thus, the government of Catalonia and its Ministry of the Environment and Housing would like to publicly reaffirm its commit-

ment to the conclusions of the Durban Congress and our desire is to re-evaluate the significance of these spiritual values of such import to so many people and to incorporate them from now on into the management of our protected areas. These intangible values must be present in our planning strategies and in our specific management policies.

I'm sure that this workshop will give rise to many conclusions that we can develop and then incorporate into our work in protected areas. We will work hard with local communities, town and city councils, and with those bodies that best represent this integration of ideas. We will enable them to participate in our work and thus create an identity that links our protected areas with the cultural and spiritual values of our country.

I am happy to recognise the partiality and insufficiency of the view of the world as expressed by our conservationists, the scientific community, the so-called experts and the Administration. It is often too scientific and technical and I can't help but agree with the great Catalan ecologist, Dr. Ramon Margalef, who reminded us all of the "impossibility of trying to describe the whole of nature by means of the differential equations that are so dear to many ecologists, when, after all, it may be just as effective to sit

down and watch a river flow or to listen to the whisper of the leaves on the trees”.

Many thanks.

### ***Purificació Canals,***

*Vice-president of IUCN*

Good morning everybody. I'm delighted to be here today to welcome you to Montserrat and to represent the IUCN during this meeting in such a special place. Those of us who work for the IUCN in nature conservation are well aware of the scientific and technical aspects of our work. However, many of us have felt for some time that we need to look for a more human or more spiritual side to our work and we believe that, unless we do so, our work may end up as rather intranscendental. Although there are relatively few of us here today, I am convinced that this meeting will have significant repercussions on the work of the IUCN and I am sure that the ideas on the conservation of natural spaces that we are here to discuss will be taken fully into account.

We are here to discuss the natural areas that for some people are, above all, repositories of extraordinary natural values, but that for others are important as places of great spirituality where one can re-establish links with one's own personal

identity. I believe that this meeting might signal the start of a change in some of our perspectives on conservation, a change that I would very much like to see become explicit at the next World Conservation Congress that is to be held not far from here in Barcelona in October 2008.

It has been decided that at this congress we will not only discuss biodiversity, but the idea of diversity in its broadest sense that includes species and cultures, intangible values and beliefs. I hope that thus this world congress in 2008 will be different and we will be able to reach more people than ever before. There are people who will perhaps never understand that we must protect, for example, the Lynx as a creature that is at the top of the food chain. However, these same people are perhaps much more able to appreciate that the Lynx should be protected as one of God's creatures that has as such an intrinsic value. For these people, the Creation has a spiritual value that goes beyond the role plants and animals play in natural systems. I think that we have rather ignored some of these different elements over the years and that it is time for them to be brought together again.

On a more personal level I would like to explain to you my deep personal links with Montserrat. It was the first place my parents ever brought me when I was barely a

year old and before I could even walk. When I look at old photos, I cannot help but think that an important part of my life in nature conservation began on that day. I'm sure that if we look back we will all find that somewhere we will have had some kind of emotional or spiritual experience in a natural area that has left an indelible impression on us. Our relationship with nature is complex and I am convinced that to fully love and appreciate nature we must be prepared to go beyond simple rationality and listen to our emotions and heartfelt beliefs.

Montserrat is an ideal place for a meeting of this type. If you look down towards the surrounding plains you will see a landscape dominated by built-up areas and large-scale infrastructures. However, if

you look skywards, you will see a well-conserved mountain that, despite not being completely virgin, does have a certain natural balance. We must learn to understand the links between one dimension of the landscape and all others and enable these realities to co-exist as best they possibly can. We must assure that future generations can enjoy these natural areas from a scientific point of view, as well as from a more spiritual standpoint of belonging to nature.

On behalf of the IUCN I would like to close by saying that we are very pleased that our members and supporters should organise meetings such as this one and offer our sincere thanks to all those that have made it possible.





## 3. Introduction

### The Delos Framework

*Thymio Papayannis and Josep-Maria Mallarach*

In the highly appropriate setting of Montserrat, resplendent in the unique natural beauty of its mountain landscapes and monastery and ancient hermitages, a workshop on nature and spirituality was held on 23-26 November 2006. This meeting of international experts was organised as part of the Delos Initiative, a project focussed on sacred natural sites in developed countries.

#### 1. The Delos Initiative

##### 1.1 Aims

The purpose of the Delos Initiative is to identify the relevance and significance of sacred natural sites in technologically developed countries and to investigate whether and how spiritual values can contribute to both the conservation and proper use of important natural areas and the maintenance of cultural heritage. Its main focus is on protected sites of great natural value that are rep-

resentative of the world's religious and spiritual traditions.

More specifically, the principal objective of the Initiative is to reach an understanding of the views of the major faiths in developed countries on the sanctity of certain natural sites and the relationship of these faiths with the natural world. A second aim is to assess the pertinence and importance of sacred natural sites in people's lives today and thus to attempt to estimate their exact significance.

Finally, the Delos Initiative aims to resolve possible conflicts between the essential nature of sacred sites and conservation and management requirements via the implementation wherever possible of interacting synergies.

The aim is for these objectives to be fulfilled by the Delos Working Group via work based on the experience gained from a representative sample of case studies or pilot sites. Conclusions will be drawn from the analyses carried out and then, after a process of sensitisation, recommendations will be made and/or specific guidance provided.

*< Hermitage of the Holy Grotto of Montserrat, in the morning mist, from the Rosary Way.*

## 1.2 Framework and *modus operandi*

Within the framework of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, a Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA) is focussing its activities on the point at which humans and nature interact. The Delos Initiative was launched in September 2004 as part of this Task Force in order to study the contemporary relevance of sacred natural sites in technologically developed parts of the world. More specifically, the Initiative was set up to determine whether the spiritual/cultural values of a site are compatible with its natural values, and whether conservation efforts can create synergy between these different types of values.

The methodology of the Delos Initiative combines complementary bottom-up and top-down approaches. The bottom-up approach is based on an analysis of specific sites that aims to:

- Identify participants and sites in representative countries;
- Examine objectives at local level;
- Debate the results of the analysis with different stakeholders to reach conclusions acceptable to all;
- Generalise results and extrapolate them to a broader level;

The top-down approach applies the basic metaphysical principles that all spiritual and religious traditions share a belief in the symbolic character of nature and in the sacredness of at least some natural theophanies and, thus, profess an awe and deep respect for the natural order as a terrestrial reflection of a celestial or divine order. Hence, the Initiative attempts to:

- Identify the underlying principles of different spiritual traditions;
- Examine their relevance and influence in different contexts;
- Propose and validate relationships and analogies.

The Delos Initiative is coordinated jointly by Thymio Papayannis and Josep-Maria Mallarach with the support of Med-INA and Silene, the two non-governmental organisations they direct. Its web site is located at [www.med-ina.org/delos](http://www.med-ina.org/delos).

The initial small Delos Working Group has expanded into the Delos Network and today includes members from countries in America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. All of its members contribute their work on a voluntary basis.

## 1.3 Activities

During 2005 and 2006, the following activities were carried out:

- Selection of pilot sites using clear criteria and the designation of a person in charge of each site.

- Bibliographic study of each pilot site aimed at identifying their spiritual and natural characteristics and significance.

- On-site questionnaire answered by key local stakeholders to determine challenges and threats and to identify attitudes and expectations.

- Analysis of the results of the questionnaire and drawing up of conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations were submitted whenever possible to the person in charge of the site's natural and spiritual heritage in order to reach a consensus.

- Organisation of the Montserrat Workshop to present the lessons learnt from the pilot sites, debate the results and issues that have arisen, and plan for the future.

- Presentation of the Delos Initiative in different international and national events such as:

- The International Symposium on Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes, Tokio, 2005.

- The European Nature Conference, Europarc & Europsite, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands, 2005.

- The 11th & 12th Conferences of the Spanish Section of Europarc, in Cangas de Narcea, 2005 and Vall de Boí, 2006.

## 2. Sacred sites in technologically developed countries

The notion of a sacred site is undoubtedly culture specific. During the work of the Delos Initiative the term was interpreted in a broad sense and thus sites of significance to most of the world's major faiths were included, even when they only represented a small minority of the population, as in the case of the Holy Isle of Arran and its Tibetan Buddhist monastery. Particular attention was devoted to indigenous spiritual traditions such as the Sámi in Scandinavia and the Cherokee Native Americans in the USA that still exist in a number of technologically developed countries.

It is worth highlighting here a high degree of diversity. Some sacred natural sites owe their status to the existence of important religious communities: this is the case of the large Christian monasteries on Mount Athos and Montserrat, which continue to attract a wide range of believers from many different countries. Other sites possess mainly oral traditions and experiences associated with particular groups of people: this is the case of the groups that retreat to nature such as Buddhist or Christian hermits and, above all, indigenous sites.

A few sites are well-known and attract hundreds of thousands of people to major events, as occurs during the most multitudinous pilgrimages to the shrine at El Rocío in the Doñana wetlands. Others are of significance to much smaller groups and are celebrated in more modest or even secret fashion.

In terms of the natural environment, Delos focuses on sites of high biodiversity that already possess protected status at national or international level. Quite a few of the pilot sites examined are national parks or nature reserves, some are World Heritage Sites and one a Wetland of International Importance. Most of the European sites are included in the European Union Natura 2000 network, defined on a basis of ecological criteria applied at a bioregional scale and currently at varying stages of implementation in the individual countries involved.

## 2.1 Threats and challenges

In spite of their protected status and the significance that the associated faiths may have for society, sacred natural sites in technologically developed countries are today having to face up to a variety of threats to aspects of both their spiritual heritage and biodiversity,

as has been confirmed by the case studies analysed.

Most of the threats can be put down to indifference and abandonment, especially in the case of sites that are of significance to traditional and indigenous peoples, which are often ignored by both government authorities and the public.

As a result, these sites are often degraded –or even destroyed– by large development projects such as ski resorts, hydroelectric stations or motorways. The fact that most of these projects eventually prove to be unsustainable does not seem to prevent them from being planned and executed. Excessive tourist development ( Meteora is a characteristic example) and spreading urban development exert pressures that are intolerable in sacred sites and both are exacerbated by inadequate, weak or non-existent land-use planning and control.

Additional threats to the spiritual values of a site can arise as a result of insensitive practices carried out by nature management authorities: this conflict originates from the centuries-old schisms between science and spirituality, and between secularism and religion, sometimes aggravated even more by populist political or ideological considerations.

## 2.2 Opportunities

Looking on the bright side, a number of recent developments have occurred that may have a positive impact on the management and conservation of sacred natural sites.

One such development is the increasing awareness in the major faiths of environmental issues as a result of the recognition that nature is part of the Divine Creation and that its destruction by human beings is a sin. This has led to active initiatives such as the sustainable management of church properties. Monasteries, as well, have started recognising that asceticism –one of their guiding principles– represents a deeply ecological approach to life and a close collaboration between the Catholic and Orthodox Christian faiths has arisen as a result, in part facilitated by the work of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation.

Likewise, nature conservation organisations –both multilateral and nongovernmental bodies such as the Conventions on Biological Diversity and on Wetlands, IUCN and WWF International– have become much more conscious of cultural and spiritual values and are attempting to implement specific initia-

tives into the management of protected areas and other fields of work. The Durban World Park Congress in 2003 issued a recommendation in the session entitled 'Building Cultural Support for Protected Areas' that all systems of protected areas should recognise and incorporate spiritual values and culture-based approaches into their conservation efforts. The Convention on Wetlands as well has established a Culture Working Group to provide guidance on the incorporation of cultural and spiritual values into the management of wetlands. The 11th Conference of the Spanish Section of EUROPARC held in Cangas de Narcea, Asturias, Spain, 8-12 of June 2005, approved conclusions related to the integration of non-material values, both cultural and spiritual, into the methods and strategies of planning and management of protected areas. It was decided to include a new section devoted to non-material values in the existing Action Plan for Protected Areas of Spain, during the evaluation process.

As a result, it seems that the schism mentioned above is narrowing, mainly thanks to the efforts of enlightened religious leaders and conservationists.



## 3. The Montserrat Workshop

The Montserrat Workshop was organised by Josep-Maria Mallarach, one of the two coordinators of the Delos Initiative, with the assistance of Jordi Falgarona and Mariona Ortí and other colleagues from the Silene Association.

Moral support was provided by the Monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, with financial assistance from the Governing Board of the Mountain of Montserrat, the Catalan Ministry of the Environment and Housing and the Fundació Territori i Paisatge (that belongs to the Caixa Catalunya savings bank).

### 3.1 Venue: The Monastery of Montserrat

Montserrat has been considered a sacred or holy mountain since written records have existed and is regarded by many as the spiritual heart of Catalonia. Nestling on a narrow platform 600 m above the valley below, the famous Benedictine Monastery, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, has been at the service for almost 1,000 years of the pilgrims from all over the world who come to worship the Black Madonna. The monastery today retains its centuries-old cultural and spiritual significance reflected

in its publishing house and school of music and its works on biblical, liturgical, theological and historical subjects. For many centuries there were hermits living in scattered and isolated hermitages, or caves, in different parts of the Montserrat massif. For centuries these hermits enjoyed great prestige as wise and holy men. There are 12 hermitages in the mountain, of which two are still used for temporary retreats by the monks.

A few years ago the monastic community of Montserrat chose 'Nature, Culture and Spirituality' as their motto for consumption by the general public. These words encapsulate the combination of important values to be found in and around the monastery and so it was only logical that the monastic community should be interested in hosting the Delos Initiative's workshop devoted to exploring the interaction between these three coexisting dimensions.

Father Ramon Ribera-Mariné, an experienced walker who has published several guidebooks on the footpaths that criss-cross this unique mountain, lent his full support to the project during its preparation and was very active during the workshop itself as a leader of field trips.

*< Guest houses of in the Monastery of Montserrat, where some of the participants stayed.*

### 3.2 Objectives and agenda

The most important of the multiple objectives of the Montserrat Workshop was to draw conclusions from an analysis of the pilot sites that would guide the future work of the Delos Initiative. Representative sites were selected on the basis of both their geographical location and their natural and spiritual characteristics and, although most belong to mainstream faiths, some also reflect the challenges posed by indigenous and minority beliefs. An unavoidable and pragmatic criterion was the existence of experts able and willing to analyse the pilot sites on a voluntary basis within a fixed time frame and some case studies had to be postponed until a second phase of work begins.

A further objective was to strengthen the links between members of the Delos working group through personal contacts and lively debate, which had not been possible previously.

The contribution of the Delos working group to other IUCN activities and, especially, to the preparation of the UNESCO/IUCN Guidelines on Sacred Natural Sites, was of special concern during the workshop.

Finally, it was hoped that the workshop would debate the future of the Delos

Initiative and suggest directions for the future.

Adequate time for all these objectives was included in the agenda of the meeting (see Appendix II). The meeting was inaugurated by addresses from members of the Catalan Government, the Monastery of Montserrat and the IUCN, and continued with the keynote speech from Jesús García-Varela on 'Nature and Spirituality'. Four lectures then followed that provided a broad background and an invaluable framework for the discussions of the case studies:

- Gonzalo Oviedo, 'Protected areas and sacred sites of indigenous and traditional peoples';
- Santos Casado, 'Spiritual values in the history of protected areas of Spain';
- Edwin Bernbaum, 'The experience of the Sacred Mountains Programme';
- Liza Higgins-Zogib, 'Contribution of sacred natural sites to nature conservation'.

The presentation and discussion of the pilot sites occupied most of the workshop's time; however, the last day was devoted above all to the discussion of more general issues and the drawing up of conclusions.

Despite its tight programme, participants in the workshop were able to go on guided visits to selected parts of the natural and sacred site (the historical hermitages of Tebas, the area around the monastery of Santa Maria, the Holy Grotto and the Agulles section of the mountain, the latter a favourite area for climbing), participate in some of the religious rites and ceremonies of the Benedictine community and listen to the monastery's boy's choir.

### 3.3 Case studies

As mentioned above, the core work of the workshop focused on the presentation of ten case studies of sites from seven developed countries. The presentations,

mostly by the experts in charge, included a critical analysis of the natural and spiritual significance of each site, a discussion of potential threats and prospects and usually some initial recommendations for improved management policies.

The Meteora site was presented by T. Papayannis and the Kii Mountain Range by B. Verschuuren in lieu of the experts in charge who were unable to attend the workshop.

The Solovettsky Island case study, which had been prepared during the pilot phase, was not discussed since the author of the case study, Alexander Davydov, could not be present.

Country	Site	Protected Status	Faith	In charge
Finland	Kolovesi	National Park	Indigenous Sámi	M. Määttä
Finland	Äjjis / Ukonsaari Island	Natura 2000	Indigenous Sámi	Y. Norokörpi
Greece	Meteora	WHS, Natura 2000	Christian Orthodox	I. Lyratzaki A. Sorotou
Greece	Mount Athos	WHS, Natura 2000	Christian Orthodox	T. Papayannis
Japan	Kii Mountain Range	WHS, National Park	Shinto + Shugen Buddhism	M. Motonaka
Romania	Vanatori Neamt Natural Park	Nature Park, Natura 2000	Christian Orthodox	S. Cataniou
Spain	Doñana Protected Areas	National and Natural Parks, Ramsar Site	Christian Catholic	J. Falgarona J. García-Varela
Spain	Mountain of Montserrat	Natural Park + Nature Reserve	Christian Catholic	J.-M. Mallarach
United Kingdom	Isle of Arran, Scotland	Marine Reserve	Celtic Christian + Tibetan Buddhism	I. Soria
USA	Ocanaluftee River Trail, Great Smoky	National Park	Native American (Cherokee)	E. Bernbaum Mountains

## **Kolovesi National Park, Finland**

Kolovesi National Park lies in the province of Eastern Finland and was established in 1990 to preserve the natural features of the Lake Saimaa archipelago, home to the endemic Saimaa Ringed Seal (*Phoca hispida saimensis*) and forest ecosystems characteristic of southern Finland. The rock paintings in the park are sacred sites associated with the annual cycle of spiritual fishing and hunting ceremonies. The sacred sites were once collective meeting places where spiritual rituals were carried out that reflected and strengthened the social identity of the local people.

## **Äjjis/Ukonsaari Island, Finland**

The Inari Hiking Area is situated in Northern Lapland and the whole area is part of the European Natura 2000 network. It is being set up as a national hiking area, protected by an act of parliament. In the middle of Ukon-selkä open water area in Lake Inarijärvi rises the island of Ukonsaari, Ukonkivi or Ukko (Äjjis in the Inarisámi language), a strange-looking hunchbacked-shaped lump of rock. It is a famous natural sight and was once a very important and well-known site of worship for the indigenous Sámi people and is today one of the most investigated of all their sacred places of Finland.

## **Meteora World Heritage Site, Greece**

Situated in central Greece, these enormous natural megaliths in the west of the Thessaly plain first attracted hermits in the eighth century and by the fourteenth century an Orthodox monastic community was well established there. The astonishing complex of tall sandstone pillars of Meteora, a name deriving from the ancient word *meteoros* meaning 'hovering in the air', rises over 400 m above the surrounding plains. The site is rich in both natural and cultural values and has been declared a Special Protection Area for Birds, a Natura 2000 site and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

## **Mount Athos, Greece**

The peninsula of the 'Holy Mountain' of Mount Athos lies in Chalkidiki, Northern Greece. Rich in history and with a continuous living Orthodox tradition of over 1,000 years, Mount Athos possesses great natural biodiversity and a unique landscape; it was designated a World Heritage Site in 1988 for natural and cultural reasons. It is characterised by an unusual diversity of ecosystems, ranging from Alpine to Mediterranean, and has rich coastal and marine biodiversity. Mount Athos enjoys a special degree of political autonomy and self-management under the spiritual guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Although access is limited (women are not allowed), the flow of visitors has been increasing during recent decades. Its monasteries are not only Greek, but also Bulgarian, Russian and Serbian.

### **Kii Mountain Range protected areas, Japan**

The Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range are a group of temples and shrines connected by pilgrimage trails that are related to both Shintoism and the Shugen sect of ascetic Buddhism. Since ancient times, the Kii Mountain Range has nurtured a tradition of nature worship, in which mountains, rocks, forests, rivers and waterfalls are revered according to the Shinto interpretation of the world. Over one thousand years ago the region was already regarded as sacred by people from the ancient capital cities of Nara and Kyoto and pilgrimages have been undertaken ever since. All elements in the core area of the World Heritage Site are designated as part of a National Park or as National Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty or Natural Monuments under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties.

### **Vanatori Neamt Natural Park, Romania**

Vanatori Neamt Natural Park is situated in north-east Romania in a forested moun-

tainous region with important natural populations of species such as Brown Bear and Wolf.

The park was set up in 1999 and since then has been managed by the National Forest Administration. It was designated as a Natural Park on the strength of the sustainable management of its forests, the conservation of its landscape and local traditions, the reintroduction of European Bison into its natural habitat and the encouragement of tourist activities based on these natural values. The area has also been proposed as a Natura 2000 Site. Vanatori Neamt is famous for its 16 Orthodox monasteries, as well as for the 40 churches and small hermitages scattered throughout the area. In addition the area has acted as inspiration for many important Romanian artists.

### **Doñana National and Natural Parks, Andalusia, Spain**

Located at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river on the Atlantic coast of Andalusia, the Doñana area is the most important wetland in Spain and is protected by its designation as a National Park, a Natural Park, a Ramsar Site and a Wetland of International Importance. The variety of different habitats ensures that the main environmental value of the area is its biodiversity. Just on the edge of the National

Park stands the shrine of the Virgin del Rocío ('Our Lady of the Dew'), known locally as 'The Queen of Marshes', object of some of the most important pilgrimages in the whole of Spain. Over one million pilgrims participate each year, walking or riding through the dunes and marshlands, chanting and praying for days on end during their journey to the shrine.

### **Muntanya de Montserrat Natural Park, Spain**

The Mountain of Montserrat (in Catalan 'serrated mountain') in Catalonia, characterised by a multitude of astonishing rocky pinnacles, has been considered a holy mountain for centuries. It was initially declared a Picturesque Landscape, but was subsequently awarded Natural Park status (including a natural reserve) by the Catalan Government in 1987. Two Catholic monasteries are situated on the mountain's slopes, of which one, devoted to the Holy Virgin, has been an important centre of pilgrimage since the fourteenth century. The Benedictine community at the monastery of Santa Maria has had over the centuries a significant spiritual and cultural influence on the region and today the Natural Park receives almost three million visitors per year, of which the vast majority visit the area of the main monastery.

### **Holy Island of Arran, United Kingdom**

Holy Island is a small island lying off the coast of the Isle of Arran and was the site in the sixth century of the hermitage of St Molaise, an important figure in the early Christian church in Ireland and Scotland. In the twelfth century it also housed a monastic community. For many years the island was uninhabited, but has recently been purchased by a Tibetan Buddhist organisation, which is in the process of setting up a retreat and interfaith conference facility. The island is also home to a breed of traditional livestock, also in need of conservation since the island has become severely overgrazed. Conservation efforts have included the restoration of native woodland and the implementation of more appropriate grazing regimes on the moorlands. A marine protected area has recently been established offshore.

### **The Oconaluftee River Trail - Great Smoky Mountains National Park, USA**

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve and is shared between the states of Tennessee and North Carolina. It experiences a wide range of the climates and habitats to be found in the eastern USA between

Georgia and the Canadian border and boasts extraordinary levels of biodiversity.

The site has particular spiritual and cultural significance for two local groups, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and the descendents of the Scottish-Irish settlers who created what is known today as 'Appalachian culture'. The discovery of gold in 1828 led to the main part of the Cherokee Indians being forcibly removed to Oklahoma along the infamous Trail of Tears, a journey which many did not survive. After the forced removal, a separate group of Cherokees who had been

allowed to stay behind, settled in the area to form the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation.

### 3.4 Participation

Over 50 people attended the opening session, although numbers eventually levelled off to a stable core group of around 25. The diversity within the group was considerable: in all, eight countries and four continents were represented, with two-thirds of the group connected to scientific/conservation organisations or agencies and the rest to

*Participants in the wWorkshop at the Sant Joan lookout point.*



religious bodies. There was also a good age balance, with both very young and elderly participants, although only 15 % of participants were women.

Of particular significance was the participation of monks from three monasteries –Montserrat (Catholic-Benedictine), Santa Maria de Poblet (Catholic-Cistercian) and Sakya Tashi Ling (Buddhist-Vajrayana)– located inside protected areas near Barcelona.

The IUCN was well represented by Purificació Canals, IUCN Vice-President, and Gonzalo Oviedo, Senior Advisor on Social Policy.

### 3.5 Outcomes

The conclusions of the workshop are summarised in the Montserrat Declaration (see page 311), drawn up collectively by all participants as a firm statement of the need for closer collaboration between the custodians of sacred sites and those in charge of the management and conservation of protected areas. The strength of the Statement lies in the diversity of people from a broad array of fields of work and organisations who have endorsed it.

Additional outcomes include guidance on planning for the future development of the

Delos Initiative, growing contacts between monastic communities (for the moment in Catalonia, Greece and Scotland), and the strengthening of the Delos Network, which will replace the initial Delos Working Group.

## 4. Perspectives for the future

The Montserrat Workshop, held approximately two years after the inception of the Delos Initiative, marks the completion of the first phase of the Initiative. However, it should be stressed that the Initiative might well have ended up as just another innovative research and analysis project if there had been no interest in or further need for its activities. The success of the workshop at Montserrat, however, has confirmed the significance of the initial propositions and the interest it has generated in both spiritual and nature conservation circles will ensure that work will continue into a second phase.

An important future date is the World Conservation Congress of IUCN to be held in Barcelona in October 2008; the intervening period will be useful for broadening and expanding the analyses of the pilot sites, for determining what kind of technical guidance is needed and how to obtain it, and for consolidating views on major issues. Sometime in 2007 a second workshop

will be organised –probably in Greece– to review the progress of the work under way. The outcome of the activities planned for this workshop will be presented to the World Conservation Congress and laid open for debate and criticism. The results will be evaluated by the Delos Network and a third phase will then be planned, if it is deemed to be necessary and worthwhile.

#### 4.1 Deepening the case studies

During the next biennium, monitoring of the pilot studies analysed during the first phase will continue. This will allow us to identify developments –both positive and negative– that may lead to a better understanding of the specific situation of each case study.

In certain cases, it might be possible to become further involved and to provide advice or even guidance on the implementation of some of the recommendations made regarding, for example, the promotion of integrated management policies and synergy between the custodians of sacred sites and managers of protected areas. This will have to be done with great care and only at the request of those officially in charge of the pilot sites. It will also depend to a large extent on the background of the person in charge of

each site and on the contacts that this person can establish with its custodians and managers.

#### 4.2 New case studies for a more balanced representation

During its second phase, the Delos Initiative aims to add further case studies in order to improve the balance between the faiths and countries in the list of sites under study.

Mainstream faiths found in technologically developed countries as yet not included in the Delos Initiative include Islam, other branches of Buddhism, Protestantism and Judaism. On the other hand, despite being technologically developed, a number of huge countries such as China and India that are undergoing great transitions are still a world unto themselves. Nevertheless, in these countries there are numerous experts working on sacred natural sites and the results can be found in the proceedings of the Xishuangbanna International Workshop (2003). There is thus no need for the Delos Initiative to become involved.

Australia, Canada and New Zealand, however, are quite different cases. Their

protected areas share many features with those already analysed and these countries possess experts who are interested in preparing case studies within the framework of the Delos Initiative.

### 4.3 Towards technical guidance

During the workshop, some of the participants argued convincingly for the need to go deeper and to start developing serious guidelines for the management of sacred natural sites in developed countries. This position seemed to have general support, although some strong reservations were

raised concerning the legitimacy of attempting to provide guidance to those who have been managing sacred sites since long before the existence of modern protected areas.

The Delos Initiative has already started looking into guidance as part of an effort to incorporate its inputs and perspectives into the UNESCO/IUCN Guidelines on the management of sacred natural sites, which will be developed further in 2007 and published probably in 2008.

However, it was generally agreed that this is a very difficult task that will require

*Workshop session. From left to right: P. Canals, T. Papayannis and I. Soria.*



important backing and that a pragmatic discussion of the issue, based on experiences gained in representative cases, should be initiated in early 2007.

#### 4.4 The way forward

The World Conservation Congress (Barcelona, October 2008) constitutes a key event for the Delos Initiative. Not only will it allow its views and suggestions to reach a wider public in the field of conservation, but it will also provide the opportunity for in-depth critical assessment of the initiative's achievements, positions and

plans. As such, the Initiative may well play a significant role during the Congress.

For this reason we feel that the activities of the Delos Network during the intervening period should focus on organising its participation and contribution to this major event. During the Montserrat Workshop various possibilities were discussed, including the possibility of organising a parallel event, which would include visits to three sites around Barcelona, all –it is to be hoped– previously analysed as case studies within the framework of the Delos Initiative.





## 4. Speeches

### Nature and spirituality

Jesús García-Varela

*"It is not birds that speak,  
but men learn silence".*

*Kathleen Raine*

At first sight, the title 'Nature and Spirituality' would appear somewhat contradictory, since at times it seems as if it were no longer possible to view the natural world from a spiritual standpoint. In today's world, nature is thought of as a purely material concept that the human race takes advantage of for economic purposes or simply for pleasure. Nature is absorbed into a machine to be used, thereby becoming a simple resource to be exploited. This concept is the result of a dominant materialistic ideology or mentality based on the idea that only that which can be empirically or scientifically proven actually exists. Scientific knowledge becomes 'orthodox' knowledge, which in turn becomes exclusive and totalitarian. This 'scientificist' mentality that believes that scientific reason is

the only way of approaching reality has gradually imposed its hegemony since the seventeenth century<sup>1</sup>, hand in hand with a belief in the concept of material 'progress' –poorly defined and born out of our increasing dependence on technological advances– that continues to use and abuse the world's natural energy sources. Nature is exploited and then squeezed dry. This misuse of science and the concomitant 'progress' are the two external pillars of the modern materialist mentality and two important factors in the world's current ecological crisis (which is nothing but a manifestation of the current predicament in values caused by a disregard for the spiritual dimension of life). This ideology has led, logically, to a general lack of respect for the immaterial values found within the natural world in the dimension of what might be called the 'invisible'<sup>2</sup>. Today the dominant vision of the world provides a stark contrast to the more traditional world views or visions found in the Bible and other sacred texts:<sup>3</sup> "The World is no longer seen as the work of God."<sup>4</sup>

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**1** An early view of this process in the western world can be found in the work of René Guénon, published in 1927, *La crise du monde moderne*. See also: Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, above all chapters 5 and 10, and Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. For the origins of the scientific mentality and its founding tenets in the seventeenth and following centuries (Descartes, Boyle, Bacon ...), see Mary Midgley "Putting Nature in Her Place". *Science as Salvation*, pp. 75-83, reproduced in Harry Oldmeadow, *The Betrayal of Tradition*.

**2** See the complete dossier on sacred sites and threats to their conservation that has been drawn up by the World Wildlife Fund, *Beyond Belief* (2005).

**3** Seyyed Hossein Nasr *Man and Nature*, p.17-50, for a lucid vision of the destruction of sacred and spiritual values in nature. See also by the same author *Religion and the Order of Nature*, pp. 29-79 y 191-234 and "The Cosmos as Theophany" in *Knowledge and the Sacred*", pp. 189-220.

**4** Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane*, p.179.

Scientific knowledge, quantitative and centrifugal, is diluted in a myriad of applications, each a poorly defined fragment of reality.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, knowledge based on an authentic spirituality is qualitative and centripetal and proceeds via synthesis and symbols. The traditional mindsets that form the basis of the world's many different religions and spiritual beliefs appear at times to be but a distant memory of an all but forgotten dimension. Traditional knowledge recognises the presence of invisible spiritual values within the natural world that demand respect and deep veneration, the latter one of the main tenets of the oldest traditional religions (as explained a couple of years ago at the Europarc Congress).<sup>6</sup> All spiritual traditions look on nature as a theophany, that is, as a divine manifestation: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:2).<sup>7</sup> This is a sacred world with its symbolism and, given the opacity of materialism, spiritual beings have to contemplate the world via manifestations of phenomena and via the metaphysical transparency of the Cosmos.<sup>8</sup> Nature is a mirror of the divine world and as such is sacred: the desanctification

of nature is one of the chief characteristics of modern times.

Looking from an authentically traditional perspective, the first misunderstanding to resolve is that there is in fact no conflict between nature and God. Without the concept of a divinity we cannot talk of sacredness.<sup>9</sup> Nature cannot be worshipped in isolation or be attributed spiritual values beyond those conferred on it by a divine Creator. This anomaly occurs in the modern pseudo-spiritualist (or New Age) thought that sprung up in the twentieth century as part of the uncontrollable psychism that has taken advantage of the growing spiritual vacuum present in modern society. It cannot be denied, nevertheless, that many shades and subtleties exist in these modern forms of thought, which range from those that pay homage to nature as the source of all life, to those centred on psychic forces that are more akin to magic than anything else.<sup>10</sup> However, from a traditional point of view nature is the reflection and symbol of the manifestations of the divinity. Nature is not 'independent' of God, but rather one of the most obvious of all divine manifesta-

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<sup>5</sup> Marco Pallis. *The Way and The Mountain*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> *Naturaleza y Mundos Tradicionales*, Europarc Congress 2004, Roses.

<sup>7</sup> Many biblical references can be found that express the same idea, including: *Psalms* (24:1, 148), *Isaiah* (40:26), *Leviticus* (25:23) and *Wisdom* (7:22-23).

<sup>8</sup> See Nasr, *Man and Nature*, op. cit., Chap. 3 'Some Metaphysical Principles Pertaining to Nature', pp. 81-113, rev. ed.

<sup>9</sup> See also the work of one of the most significant voices of Orthodox Christianity: Philip Sherrard, *The Sacred in Life and Art and The Rape of Man and Nature*, above all chapter 4 of the latter: 'The Desanctification of Nature', pp. 90-112.

<sup>10</sup> For conceptions of nature from the post-medieval world to the present day, see: Harry Oldmeadow, 'The Firmament Sheweth His Handiwork' in *Seeing God Everywhere*.

tions. "All of Nature speaks of God"<sup>11</sup>, the entire Universe is a sign, a reflection of a invisible Reality.<sup>12</sup>

A spiritual vision of the natural world is one of the essential traits of all authentic spiritual traditions. Man lives in harmony with the Cosmos, venerating and respecting it. The men and women of traditional cultures are an integrated part of the natural environment; it is their temple, their place of worship. They are not the owners of the natural world; rather they are its custodians and guardians: "This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth".<sup>13</sup>

The second point to take into account in this context is the necessary distinction between the spiritual world and the psychic or supernatural world. We have already mentioned the modern neo-spiritualism whose main characteristic is precisely its choice of the physic dimension as an alternative to the spiritual dimension. This is an important distinction because the physic dimension, restricted only to the human dimension, shuns and

even tries to substitute the divine experience.<sup>14</sup> We live in a modern world characterised by both materialism and psychism. Both are distant from the spiritual world and therefore, from what constitutes the essence of humankind and the world's different spiritual traditions. As Frithjof Schuon has explained so clearly, modern man has 'usurped' religious feeling and replaced it with other idols, one of which is science.<sup>15</sup> The qualitative vision of the world has been lost along the way; we have lost the criteria of spiritual orientation and are stumbling progressively closer to internal self-destruction. This is one of the obvious signs of the crisis of our civilisation that has been remarked upon so often in recent decades.

The ability to penetrate nature's symbols and reach into the essence of its spiritual dimension requires *contemplation*, an archetypal activity that, above all else and as we have mentioned already, explores the divine origins of phenomena. If we contemplate the natural world via authentically spiritual criteria we will see the universal values that are present. A

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**11** Hugo de San Victor. 'Omnis natura Deo loquitur', *Eruditio Didascalica*, 6,5 p. 176, 1805, quoted in Nasr, *Man and Nature*, p.10.

**12** See chap. 1 of *The Way and the Mountain* by Marco Pallis for an approximation to the sacred character of nature from a genuinely traditional point of view, pp.13-35.

**13** The indigenous peoples of the North American Great Plains possess the most existential conception of the natural world. This quote comes from the famous speech by Chief Seattle, of which numerous versions exist in many languages, pp. 31-32.

**14** Jung is mistaken when he tries to place the spiritual dimension within the "collective subconsciousness". A profound criticism of Jung's thesis can be found in Titus Burckhardt, *Modern Science and Traditional Wisdom*, in the chapter "Modern Psychology and traditional wisdom", pp. 88-103

**15** Frithjof Schuon 'Usurpations of religious feeling' in *The Transfiguration of Man*, pp. 39-48.

flower is not merely an association of certain physical elements that together create a material object, but something that transmits a permanent state of which the flower is a symbol. The beauty of the flower is a manifestation of an invisible quality — Beauty as a divine Quality. Beauty becomes a representation of the infinite within the finite. “To see the infinite in the finite is to see that the flower we see before us is eternal, because an eternal spring reaffirms itself in its fragile smile”.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the mountain will be the reflection of divine Majesty, and the ray of light

the symbol of the divine Power. By contemplating the flower, the mountain, the ray or the current of a river we can feel the Presence of God and his distinct Qualities. Beauty becomes then a manifestation of the infinite in the finite and evokes the metaphysical transparency of the phenomena mentioned above. He or she who contemplates sees beyond the dual external vision that separates the subject from the object and can interiorise positive phenomena into his or her soul. To continue with this metaphor, the external beauty of a flower will help whoever

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16 Schuon, *Gnosis; Divine Wisdom*, p. 100

*Ramon Llull's cave, Serra de Tramuntana, Mallorca, Balearic Islands.*



contemplates it to undergo a spiritual transformation that will allow its beauty to be assimilated and recognised. This external beauty will thus be an aid and support for achieving greater internal beauty.<sup>17</sup> The beauty of Nature will therefore have a direct influence on the transformation of the soul.

The contemplative vision of the natural world can be reinforced via two universal spiritual exercises, *pilgrimage and eremitism*. Both practices have been performed here in Montserrat for centuries and are wonderful ways of cultivating a deep spiritual relationship with nature.

*Pilgrimages* are dynamic events. A trail takes the pilgrim to a sacred site that is both a physical place and a representation of the Centre or Origin: the *pilgrimage* is clearly a symbol for human existence: life viewed traditionally as a *peregrinatio*. We come from the Origin and return to it. On route to holy sites where a sacred presence is manifest, pilgrims travel through the natural world and enjoy the opportunity to perceive the spiritual dimension of nature and be a part of it. Some of the great pilgrimage routes of the western world such as the medieval ways to Saint James of Compostela are still

alive and are –or, at least, should be– at heart journeys of transformation for the soul based on prayer and the contemplation of one’s natural surroundings. Likewise, a pilgrimage implies certain values and spiritual attitudes such as solitude, silence, sobriety, strength and perseverance that will coalesce in a unique fashion during the journey. The pilgrim will never be the same at the end of the journey if he has undertaken the pilgrimage in the appropriate frame of mind.<sup>18</sup>

If a pilgrimage is a *dynamic* manifestation of spirituality, then a more *static* manifestation of direct contact with the natural world can be found in eremitism. Hermits close themselves off from the outside world, be it temporarily or permanently, and live a life dedicated to prayer and contemplation<sup>19</sup> amidst their own personal temple of nature. The hermit lives the natural world as a theophanic manifestation of everyday life. Nature becomes the perfect support for the hermit’s inner life and helps to achieve the vocation of all hermits –the discovery of God. As is well known, eremitism has always been a part of both eastern and western Christianity, from the first century after Christ and on through Saint Mary of Egypt and the Desert Fathers. Within the eastern branch

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<sup>17</sup> In this sense, see the marvellous chapter entitled ‘Flowers’ in Lord Northbourne’s *Looking Back in Progress*, pp. 90-106.

<sup>18</sup> The recommendations to pilgrims contained in the annual pamphlets published by the Abbey of Montserrat are of great use.

<sup>19</sup> As a comparison of eremitism with monastic life, few lines as inspired as those of Frithjof Schuon have ever been written: ‘Universality and actuality of monkhood’ in *Light on the ancient worlds* pp. 137-155.

of Christianity it is worth making special mention of Mount Athos (one of the case studies in the Delos Initiative) and, in the west, of the mountain of Montserrat, which was once and one day will be again –it is to be hoped- an important centre of eremitism. The modern world lies at the antipodes of eremitism and does nothing to either understand or encourage it. Nevertheless, we should not forget that in all traditional worlds the most spiritual of people who isolate themselves in the natural world and dedicate their life to prayer and contemplation have always been considered a blessing and an essential element in the well-being of communities.

Achieving the essence of the natural world, however, should not be a possibility reserved only for hermits or pilgrims; rather, it must be a possibility open for all provided that certain profound spiritual criteria are taken into account.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Sioux author Charles Eastman ‘Ohiyesa’ wrote that silence was the “voice of the Great Mystery”<sup>20</sup>, the voice of God, and it is highly significant that silence is one the great absentees from today’s society. To listen, first you have to be silent. All spiritual disciplines highlight

the importance of silence as one of the attitudes that is most needed if any attempts at reapproaching the natural world are to be fruitful.<sup>21</sup> First we must listen in order to be able to hear the birds, the wind, the rushing water of the streams ... This silence must be more than just a lack of spoken words for if we are lost in the tide of our thoughts, memories, hopes for the future –distracted by mental activity- then we will still not hear. One of the greatest spiritual calamities of our age is this loss of the silence that enables us to establish full contact with nature and our inner selves, a loss that has had many consequences.

Another of the important attitudes that enable us to enjoy fruitful contact with nature is the *power of observation*, that is, the ability to concentrate and appreciate what is occurring around us. We have lost this ability in a world in which we are constantly being disturbed by the intensity of everyday life. Living as if we had no spiritual centre, we are now governed by other, false centres that deprive us of the possibility of achieving the calmness and serenity needed for moments of introspection and self-awareness. Modern society is dependent on qualities that are completely

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Eastman ‘Ohiyesa’. *The Soul of an Indian*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> We had the opportunity to discuss this point further in our presentation entitled ‘*The immaterial values of the natural world*’ given at the Esparc Congress 2005 held in Cangas de Narcea, Spain.

opposed to observation and thus to contemplation. This inevitably leads to the entrenched tendencies of dispersion, superficiality and trivialness that surround us today.

The periodical need for *solitude* is another of the important attitudes needed in any attempt to renew contact with our spiritual dimensions. The opportunity to retire to nature must be made available to everyone and protected areas should reserve spaces where this practice can be carried out.

*Silence, contemplation and solitude* are vital for the perception of the invisible spiritual dimension of nature and without their presence it is very difficult to appreciate the sanctity of the natural world as a manifestation or as an open book in which the work of God can be read.

Sacredness can be perceived by minds that are accustomed to discerning expressions of spirituality in the negative and positive phenomena that occur in the world. Via daily contemplation of the natural world we can regain the possibility of perceiving the divine qualities present in the manifestation: Beauty, Power, Peace, Purity and Mercy. All form the transcendental and immanent dimen-

sions of the Cosmos. Here it is worth recalling that the root of the word 'cosmos' is 'order' and as such it can be understood as a symbol full of the possibilities frequently described in spiritual texts of the 'omnipresence of God'. '*Seeing God everywhere*' and '*seeing everything in God*' are two complementary attitudes and the latter is a necessary consequence of the former. Both in their deepest senses imply an awareness of the essential unity of the divine creation of the world. In the words of Schuon: "Seeing God everywhere ... is just that: seeing that we are not, and that only He is".<sup>22</sup> Seeing everything in God is also a way of embodying in our souls the reflections of the divine qualities that are virtues. This was mentioned above when we discussed how the transformation of the soul leads to contemplation.

Once upon a time in the now distant past people were accustomed to performing regular spiritual exercises. They would retire every year for a number of days to the wilds, away from the world, and pray in silence and solitude. It is no exaggeration to say that today such spiritual exercises in the western world are now principally the province of monastic communities, although they have not disappeared altogether.

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<sup>22</sup> *Gnosis; Divine Wisdom*, p. 124 and the whole chapter: "Seeing God everywhere", pp.109-126.

All in all, opportunities to retrieve one's inner self have been all but lost or are reserved for a small minority: however, the possibility of reaching deep into our beings can be enhanced by a spirituality that is fully in tune with the natural world. Given that we are here today in Montserrat, we feel it is appropriate to add that the Church can play an important role in this process. By this we do not only mean the importance of a "theology of the natural world"<sup>23</sup>, a topic much discussed in Protestant Christian circles in the United States, but the vital need for a message or a 'pastoral' for nature to enable believers to fully appre-

ciate the profound spiritual dimension of the natural world. In recent years there has been a significant convergence of ideas on the subject and we hope that they will continue. Good examples of this *rapprochement* are the joint declaration by Pope John Paul II and the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I<sup>24</sup> and a recent message from Pope Benedict XVI<sup>25</sup>, made during the symposium organised by the orthodox churches in the Amazon, that underlined the importance of both an attitude of veneration towards creation and an awareness amongst believers of the need for a spiritual response to the current ecological crisis.

*Adam's Peak, Shhri Lanka, sacred mountain for Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians.*



The rediscovery of nature that we are proposing would be incomplete if the spiritual consequences of all of the banal actions of everyday life were not also taken into account. We must move towards a change in mentality -that in turn will bring about a change in lifestyle- via the assumption of new habits and customs. Greater awareness of the natural world without any inner change or change in our souls and ways of life will necessarily only be superficial. The forgotten values of the modern mindset such as sobriety, the control of the continual desire for more material objects and discipline are all linked to this change in mentality and a rediscovery of nature can help bring it about. These values are inherent in the natural world and form part of the harmony of the universe. Living in harmony means a life with a correct balance between our internal and external selves.

This harmonious dimension of life has been lost as we increasingly confuse effects and causes. We live shallow lives, distanced

from the primordial mission of man: to act as a 'pontifex', the bridge between Heaven and Earth, to represent God, to preserve our principles and to remember their importance. In order to achieve this difficult task we must live in harmony with the natural world and if we lose our inner balance, our external aspect will suffer immediately: "Man's inner self is reflected in his external order ... When our interiors are full of darkness and chaos, the beauty and harmony of nature in turn also becomes unbalanced and disordered".<sup>26</sup> If we want to change the world or, at least, to ensure that some of the worst manifestations of the current crisis abate, then we must first change our inner selves. We can change ourselves and this is the essential meaning of any type of spirituality. This is a universal need that goes beyond the external differences between religions. Only in this way will a coherent and effective integration of the spiritual values of protected natural areas into current ways of thinking be possible.

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<sup>23</sup> There are many references to this in the collective work *Christianity and Ecology*, Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. Neither should we forget the existence in Christianity of the powerful Franciscan current of thought directly connected to a spiritual vision of the nature. See also J. Antonio Guerra for an edition of the work of Saint Francis in *Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos* and the connection to Saint Francis in the Christian mystic of nature that goes back to the Desert Fathers (see Edward A. Armstrong). Let us not forget either that Pope John Paul II proclaimed Saint Francis the "patron of the ecologists" in the papal bull *Bula Inter Sanctos*, 29 November 1979.

<sup>24</sup> "Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics" by Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Rome-Venice, 10 June 2002.

<sup>25</sup> On 6 June 2006 during the symposium "Religion, Science and the Environment Symposium VI: The Amazon River". See also the address by Metropolitan John of Pergamon during the same symposium: *Humanity and Nature: Learning from the Indigenous* and the declaration on the environment by the Australian bishops: *Australian Catholic Bishops Statement on the Environment (2002)*..

<sup>26</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *Man and Nature*, op. cit., p. 96.

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# The reenchantment of nature

## Spiritual values and the history of protected areas: the Spanish experience

Santos Casado

The *fin du siècle* at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries saw western civilisation having to face up to awkward questions regarding its increasingly evident decadence (Cerezo Galán, 2003); axiomatic of this was the crisis in Spain in 1898 caused by defeat in the war with the United States over Cuba and the Philippines. This decadence was as much moral as it was social, as people found themselves caught up in a decomposition of established sets of values and in the sudden changes taking place in an increasingly industrial and urban world. An obvious refuge for many in face of this sickness of civilisation was nature, characterised by its permanence, organicity, authenticity, purity and innocence.

Nature also provided a base for the renewed spirituality that occurred in midst of the end-of-century traumas. The epoch of the certainties of positivism was over: the mid-nineteenth century had seen the triumph of the

belief in rationality, science and demonstrable –or in the language of the day, positive– facts, which had provided firm foundations for cementing the achievements of a modern society. However, as the century drew to a close, the solid positivist bastions began to shudder as the dry principles of materialist thought began to be challenged and a somewhat confused nostalgia for past ideas blossomed. As had happened a century earlier with the romanticism that derived from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, new irrationalist spiritual movements and styles such as Modernism, Symbolism, Nihilism, Theosophy and Spiritualism arose.

Even some of the movements of the era that in appearance were explicitly materialist and anti-religious chose certain philosophical beliefs founded on concepts relating to the natural world to replace –and in some cases imitate– the old religious beliefs. The Monist philosophy of the German biologist Ernst Haeckel is just one, but perhaps the best known, of many manifestations of nature-centered ‘alternatives’ to religion that can be found in late nineteenth-

century European thought. In the case of Spain, a good example of this trend is that of the biologist Odón de Buen, a materialist with pronounced anti-clerical ideas. It is “to nature”, writes Buen, “that I pay fervent homage and where human knowledge must find its inspiration if it is not to leave the orbit in which human thought must move” (Buen, 1890, page XVI). As a scientist, his motivation was allegedly to be able to offer “a sumptuous temple to Progress” (Buen, [1896-1897], page 8). His contemporary, Ramón y Cajal, Nobel prize-winner for Physiology or Medicine in 1906, also fantasised about the “great church of nature whose roof is the blue sky, whose light is the sun and whose altar is the soil” (Ramón y Cajal, 1899).

## The reenchantment of the world

The return to nature, the growing appreciation of its most majestic and savage manifestations and the plans to create protected areas can all be seen as part of an attempt to halt the consequences of encroaching modernity, which was sometimes described as the “disenchantment of the world” after a phrase apparently used by Max Weber during a lecture on “Science as a Vocation” at Munich University in 1918.

Naturally, as we have already commented, from a certain point of view this was merely a revival of the romantic reaction to the modern world that had already occurred a century earlier. Some of these latter-day romantics, as we will see shortly, were forerunners of this rediscovery of the spiritual and romantic values inherent in the natural world. “As any student of Romanticism recognizes, there are good reasons for thinking that in a secularized era like our own, some part of that ostensibly aesthetic attachment to ‘nature’, or to natural phenomena, is an expression of repressed, sublimated, or somehow redirected religious feelings” (Marx, 1999, page 325). According to this view, religious inspiration and aesthetic emotion are closely related in the common appreciation *in situ* of the natural world in its wildness. The influence of aesthetics can be seen in the emergence of modern environmental awareness and, above all, in the origins of protected areas. Aesthetics act on an emotional plane via feelings of awe, admiration and reverence and inject a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity, often in the form of nationalism, as well as thoughts of transcendence and, for some, religious communion, into our relationships with natural spaces.

It is interesting to note how this injection of airs of spirituality into the rude materialism of the industrial age has been used by

both detractors and defenders of religious authority. The former look for freer forms of religious practice and thus to some extent promote secularism by questioning the moral and intellectual hegemony of the established churches. The latter, on the other hand, react to all attempts at secularisation by renewing and –if necessary– adapting the preponderant role of religious belief and obedience as the ultimate origin of individual moral consciousness and of the whole social and political order.

In the mid-nineteenth century Emerson and New England Transcendentalists, stubborn defenders of religious freedom and implacable critics of the established order, believed that in the natural world they had found the way to restore contact with the divine. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which was to become one of the 'holy texts' of the world ecological movement, is undoubtedly the best example of this way of thinking. Thoreau, who despised the "restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century" (Thoreau, 1854, 1939 edition, page 331), found true wisdom in the gaze of a partridge's chick:

"The remarkable adult yet innocent expression of their open and serene eyes is very memorable. All intelligence

seems reflected in them. They suggest not merely the purity of infancy, but a wisdom clarified by experience. Such an eye was not born when the bird was, but is coeval with the sky it reflects"

(Thoreau, 1854, 1939 edition, page 230).

John Muir, another of the lay saints of the ecological movement, combined a predilection for the wild with a profound sense of religious feeling forged by an strict Calvinist upbringing in his native Scotland that continued to influence his thinking after he emigrated to the United States in 1849. There he developed his radical and pioneering conservationist thought, founded upon a vehement admiration and deep respect for the wild natural world. For Muir nature was a manifestation of the character and the glory of God and as such was worthy of devotion and protection as a means of glorifying the Lord and saving mortal souls. The thoughtless destruction and rapacious exploitation of nature were nothing but sin and depravation (Williams, 2002).

Meanwhile, in Spain new styles of religious manifestations were also to be found in the development and emer-

gence of a new awareness of the natural world.

Few would deny Francisco Giner de los Ríos, frequently thought of as the leading figure in the Spanish philosophical current known as Krausism, the merit of having been one of the first thinkers in Spain to preach a love for nature. His whole work, as well the 'Institución Libre de Enseñanza' (Free Education Institution) he created in 1876, was characterised by a radical desire to promote freedom of thought, which was clearly at odds with the desire of the Catholic church to pro-

long its role as Spain's dominant intellectual and moral guiding force. Giner de los Ríos' religious beliefs were undoubtedly heterodox, but were still nonetheless deeply held and consubstantial with his projects and work. As is recognised today, Giner and the staff and children of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza were some of the first people to hike through the mountains of the Sierra de Guadarrama north of Madrid for pleasure: their first experiences in the 1880s left indelible memories etched in their minds. On a summit at sunset, "to our eyes New Castille was tinged pink; the purple sun

*Monastery of San Juan de la Peña, Natural Monument of National Interest, Aragon, Spain.*



hid behind Siete Picos, which, merged with the mountains of Riofrío into a single mass, turned pure violet with a delicate white glaze and cast a deep shadow over the flat valley of Segovia, dark and livid as if the ancient lake that once covered the valley was still there.” Behind Giner de los Ríos’ contemplation of this sunset lies a feeling of communion with nature. “I do not recall ever before having experienced such a deep, solemn or truly religious feeling of spiritual absorption” (Giner de los Ríos, 1886).

Nevertheless, the founder of the Spanish national park system was neither Giner nor any of his disciples, but the aristocrat Pedro Pidal, staunchly monarchic and Catholic in his ways. His version of the communion with nature originated from a very different source from Giner’s, for Pidal had visited the United States and had witnessed the wonders of Yosemite and Yellowstone. He wrote very revealingly in exaltation of the “national parks or sanctuaries to the natural world, where the American people are aroused by the eternal beauty of the landscapes and the sublime delights of the forest, meadows and rocks, true temples to our Lord. Here, they oxygenate their souls and lungs and find the strength to continue their jobs in the large cities surrounded by buildings twenty, thirty, forty and even fifty storeys high” (Pidal, 191, page 51). Nature was

thus a temple for regenerating both the spiritual and physical health –the ‘soul’ and the ‘lungs’ – of the men of the twentieth century, all potential victims of the dehumanising ultra-urban modern industrial society characterised by the skyscrapers of New York and Chicago. However, his ideas should not be taken as a criticism or a questioning of the social model of the time; rather Pidal was offering a remedy or a cure. His aim was to restore the inspirational effects of contact with nature as part of a therapy for modern man that would allow him to restore his ‘strength’ and thus be able to return to his rightful place.

If any doubt remained, Pidal goes on to say: “the religion of nature contrasts greatly with the religion of the cities [and] the NATIONAL PARKS not only provide a way of appreciating nature, but also help us to value the urban life that so absorbs us as the centre of society and our work” (Pidal, 1919, page 52).

As a Senator, Pedro Pidal was responsible for the first Spanish national park law (1916), which set up in 1918 two national parks, Montaña de Covadonga in the region of the Picos de Europa (provinces of Asturias and León) and Valle de Ordesa, in the Pyrenees (Huesca province). The two metaphors he chose to describe these parks reflect perfectly his ideas as described above:

“Montaña de Covadonga, true Olympus of the gods, and Valle de Ordesa, true paradise in the heart of the Pyrenees” (Pidal, 1919, page 54).

## Natural sanctuaries

If the creation of the first protected areas can be seen as part of an attempt to achieve a certain reenchantment of the world, then it is logical to expect that the actual choice of sites to protect should take into account the dimension provided by spiritual and religious elements: this new idea of protecting the most majestic and wildest parts of the natural world as a way of safeguarding their ability to regenerate personal experiences would be even more effective if there was already a site of spiritual inspiration in the area.

Thus, the first formal (but initially unsuccessful) proposal in Spain to create a protected area was made by a Catalan, Rafael Puig i Valls, a forest engineer of great prestige and well known for his great love for trees. He attempted to propagate his ideas through education and innovative civic events such as collective tree plantings and at one such event, the ‘Fiesta del Árbol’ in 1902 in Barcelona, organised by one of the many association of friends of the trees that existed then throughout Spain, he proposed for the

first time the protection of the mountain of Montserrat. The national park which Puig i Valls conceived for this “jewel” and “wonder” of nature could be justified by the fact that Montserrat was “an ideal for the pious, a marvel for the naturalist, a prodigy for the true believer and a monument for the patriot” (Puig y Valls, 1902, page 45) or, to put it another way, a repository of faith, science, beauty and nationalism.

In other words, it was not only the amazing jagged outline of the mountain that was behind the proposal, for Montserrat was, above all, a centre of spirituality laden with powerful patriotic symbols. At the turn of the century, in a climate of regeneration exacerbated by the disastrous war of 1898, many tried to revitalise the collective soul of the nation. In addition, in Catalonia, as in other urban industrial settings, the tensions caused by the juxtaposition of great economic growth and the appearance of an uprooted but combative working class were to some deeply worrying. To this we can add a broad-based resurgence in Catalan nationalism dating back a number of years that aimed, amongst other things, to rediscover the country through an active outing and hiking movement. As we argued above, for some one of the possible solutions to this mixture of fears and worries, to a large degree part of a widely shared

perception of a crisis in the western world, could be found in nature. The moralising force of contact with nature was seen as a source of patriotic identity, civic values and spiritual elevation and it is in this light that the rhetoric with which Puig i Valls formulated his proposals should be seen.

In the same way as Pidal trusted the parks to oxygenate “the soul and lungs”, for Puig i Valls, another conservationist ahead of his time, Montserrat could provide physical and moral health “for those who are worn out by the demands of life and who need to reinvigorate their bodies and re-idealise their souls”. They would be able to do so in “a place for regenerating life, with pure air that will slake the thirst we all feel on contemplating our country’s noblest monuments and on seeing what our natural heritage is and should be.” Just like Muir, Puig i Valls established a link between the admiration for and care of nature, as well as a religious sense of moral elevation and, even, salvation. To put it another way, “whoever despises or vilifies the works of nature corrupts the divine reason for things and diverts man from his road to religion, science, art and that great synthesis of life, the need to be intelligent and good on Earth and perfect in a better world” (Puig y Valls, 1902, page 45).

Although Montserrat was the object of the first proposal for protection, the first area to receive effective protection was in fact Covadonga in the Picos de Europa. This was due as much to the undeniable beauty of its landscapes and the attraction Pidal felt for these mountains in the heart of his native Asturias (Fernández, 1998), as to a strategic choice of one of the most powerful emotive symbols in Spain, resplendent with nationhood, tradition and religion.

Indeed, the declaration of the National Park left no room for doubts: the text of the law spoke above all of the celebration of the 1200 years since the beginning of the Christian Reconquest at the battle of Covadonga. Various artistic, educational and cultural acts were proposed to mark the occasion, as well as the declaration of the ‘Parque Nacional de la Montaña de Covadonga’ (Ley, 1918). When a subsequent royal decree created the Parque Nacional del Valle de Ordesa, the preamble of the text stated explicitly the idea that “these mountains and valleys should preserve the unique landscape of the Nation, in its primitive natural state as a reminder of its origins and a living witness of its traditions” (Real Decreto, 1918). Thus, it was made clear that, aside from scientific conservation, the protection of natural resources and the promotion of tourism, one of the main objectives of this

decree was the renewal of man's contact with nature and tradition as a means to spiritual, civic and patriotic inspiration and regeneration that all, from the most conservative to the most liberal, agreed was necessary. The decree was clear in its aim "to encourage people to visit the countryside, so important for the revitalisation of the race, the improving of certain customs and the pursuit of science" (Real Decreto, 1918).

On occasion of the declaration of these first two national parks, Pidal continued to discuss his general ideas regarding the virtues of nature as moral and social therapy. "Nature, splendid, exuberant and wild," he wrote, "is a necessary contrast or counterpart to the excessively artificial and urban lives we lead" (Pidal 1919, page 55). Likewise, almost following to the letter the words of the declaration of Covadonga, which were in part inspired by his writings, he emphasises his special predilection for Covadonga, with its combination of emotionally charged elements of natural, religious and historical significance.

"In the Parque Nacional de la Montaña de Covadonga Nature reveals herself as a unique and sublime framework in which the hopes of our Religion merge with the memories of our History and the Sanctuary celebrates its union with the

Great Crusade in a cave. The immortality in the contemplation of Beauty –Religion– seems to derive from the Rebirth and Reconquest of Spain, discoverer and conqueror of worlds –History–..." (Pidal, 1934, page 5).

The 1916 National Park Law was executed via the 1917 Royal Decree, which also foresaw the possibility of applying a different but lesser degree of protection known as a National Site (*Sitio Nacional*). However, this new figure of protection was only ever employed in the case of the *Sitio Nacional del Monte de San Juan de la Peña*, a monastery situated in the Pyrenees of Huesca. The site was and is "a splendid forest of pines, beeches, yews, limes and other trees, with a beautiful understorey of holly", which, furthermore, possesses an "imposing series of Palaeocene conglomerate cliffs, broadly concave and with an ancient and sacred monastery hidden away under a rocky overhang" (Hernández-Pacheco, 1933, page 33). The ancient monastery of San Juan de la Peña, closely associated with a past hermitic tradition, dates from the height of the Middle Ages and owes its origins to the Kingdom of Aragon, whose first kings chose this holy place as their pantheon.

It is indicative that the protected sites of Covadonga and San Juan de la

Peña should both revolve around a cave in a cliff, as if fate through the intervention of some divine command had wanted to emphasise the origin of these two Christian kingdoms in the very mother rock of the Earth itself. Covadonga is the name given to the holy cave in a limestone cliff where, according to tradition, King Pelayo hid an image of the holy Virgin. Later, walls were erected to complete an enclosure that would protect the Virgin and, subsequently, the tombs of Pelayo and Alfonso, the first kings of Asturias. The name 'San Juan de la

Peña' is another geological reference: the old monastery is encrusted in a cave beneath a cliff ('peña') and a rocky overhang, both protective and threatening, that also forms part of its roof. The cave has been further excavated and so from the outside the visible human structure seems to consist of nothing other than a small facade closing off a natural cavity, as if in its humbleness it was offering thanks to the mountain for the protection it provides. The monastery also provides a resting place for the remains of the first kings of Aragon.

*San Bartolomé, Ojo de Guareña Natural Monument, Castilla y León, Spain.*



## The secularisation of conservation

Nevertheless, despite the above, it should not be thought that the spiritual side of nature was the only or even most important reason behind the first conservationist ideas in Spain. Various other types of conservationist thought existed at the same time that accepted the concept of natural spaces as beneficial for modern man, but emphasised those elements that today we might call secular, civil or social. These non-spiritual conceptions began slowly to gain importance and today are preponderant.

Thus, if the conservationist thought of the Catalan Puig i Valls at the end of the nineteenth century lies very much within the framework of the cultural movement known as Modernism, then in the first third of the twentieth century there were other conservationist ideas afoot that, to simplify, were associated with the Noucentisme movement promoted by the Catalan cultural elite. A good example was that of Cebrià de Montoliu and his followers in the Sociedad Cívica La Ciudad Jardín, who launched a proposal in 1914 for “protecting our natural and artistic monuments, above all the former” whose “aesthetic, health, social, cultural and even scientific” importance was emphasised above all else without any thought of mentioning spiritual values (Güell & Montoliu, 1915).

In Montoliu's proposal, part of series of wide-ranging ideas on urban development, a more technical language calling for territorial planning based on rational economic and social criteria replaced the previous romantic exhalations and grandiloquent notions of sacred temples and sanctuaries. It is no coincidence that Montoliu's source of inspiration was not so much the American model “of such great proportions”, but the European, and in particular the German, way of doing things as embodied by the Prussian office for the protection of natural monuments and its efficient if “complicated German technicalities” (Güell & Montoliu, 1915). Inspired by this model, Montoliu argued for the setting up in the province of Barcelona of a “plan for forest reserves” whose aim was to “guarantee for the growing urban centres sufficient health and leisure spaces, for the country's fields healthy and regular rivers and rains, and for our science and art the conservation of the natural monuments of most interest” (Güell & Montoliu, 1915). In other words, protected areas were to become part of social, economic and cultural politics.

A similar comparison can be drawn between Pidal and the proposals of Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco, a geologist linked to the Institución Libre de Enseñanza of Giner de los Ríos and politically active in republican –and mostly

anti-clerical– circles. Hernández-Pacheco was the spokesperson for the Junta Central de Parques Nacionales (Central National Park Authority), a body created to execute the law of 1916 that was headed by Pidal. Pacheco argued for a widening of conservationist politics by means of the introduction of other, more modest types of protected areas in tune with European models. He was successful and in 1927 a Royal Order ordained the creation of new types of protected spaces known as *Sitio Natural de Interés Nacional* (Natural Site of National Interest) and *Monumento Natural de Interés Nacional* (Natural Monument of National Interest), which were subsequently applied to over a dozen different sites scattered throughout mainland Spain (Casado de Otaola, 2000).

Pacheco's plans differed in technical details from those of Pidal. Firstly, he aimed to use a more scientific vision, far more aware of a great variety of natural values, to broaden protection criteria. Secondly, he was more realistic and modest in his ideas and tried to circumvent the political and economic conflicts that had arisen with the declaration of the first national parks, which had been mistakenly taken to be virgin territory, free of any human economic interests (Casado de Otaola, 2000). His plans also differed inasmuch as they associated conservation with cultural, civic and democratic values

instead of with the old religious and patriotic ideals. These lay ideas came to the fore, above all, during the early 1930s with the advent of the new republican regime. In 1931 at the time of the change from monarchy to republic, Hernández-Pacheco was preparing the first publication of a series entitled 'Guide to the Natural Sites of National Interest'. On its cover, he opportunistically wrote:

"This book on Spanish nature, published by the *Ministerio de Fomento*, was begun when Spain still laboured under the yoke of the monarchy; it was finished when the sun of liberty began to shine through and the Republic was born, serene and strong, in our nation. All those who have worked on this guide are happy to be able to freely express here their enthusiasm for the Spanish Republic" (Hernández-Pacheco, 1931).

Pacheco achieved the protection of Natural Monument of National Interest in 1930 for a strangely shaped rock outcrop in the Sierra de Guadarrama in the province of Madrid; his aim was to associate the site with the Archpriest of Hita, author of the famous book *El Libro del buen amor*, in which the Sierra is depicted. The rock in question was hereafter referred to as La Peña del Arcipreste de Hita (Rock of the Archpriest of Hita). A number of commemorative inscriptions

were carved on the rocks and a ceremony held *in situ* was addressed by Ramón Menéndez Pidal: in terms of their association with protected areas, the saints and heroes of the past were now being replaced by figures of national cultural significance. As already mentioned, Pacheco was a geologist and logically was also interested in including science amongst the long list of important national cultural symbols and as such, he instigated the building of Fuente de los Geólogos, a spring located in the Sierra de Guadarrama adorned with a simple monument dedicated to four notable sci-

entists, Prado, Macpherson, Quiroga and Calderón. The inscription dedicated to these “sowers of culture and love for nature” can still be read today. The spring was inaugurated in 1932 with a ceremony at which the socialist Julián Besteiro, President of the Republican Parliament and the second-ranking state dignitary (and also close to the Institución Libre de Enseñanza), was present.

Obviously, the whole picture changed after the Civil War. Continuing with the case of Spain as an example of the his-

*Lakes of Covadonga, Covadonga National Park, Asturias, Spain.*



torical evolution of protected areas, it is interesting to note that Franco's regimen, despite its notable religiosity and profuse ideological use of the Catholic religion, seems not to have attempted to use religious motives to justify the half dozen or so new national parks it declared over a period of 30 years.

The *secularisation* of conservation, a paraphrase of a expression used by the French science historian Pascal Acot (Acot, 1988, page 40), was consolidated after the end of Franco's regime. From the 1980s onwards conservation in general and protected areas in particular make a giant leap forward, above all with the transfer of jurisdiction to the new regional autonomous communities.

Although specific studies are lacking, it could be said that during this period of expansion of conservationist ideas, scientific arguments based on objective criteria came to the fore in the theory and practice of protected areas, even if other criteria and factors were still operating at the same time. Although references to cultural manifestations were often cited as being of importance, these generally referred to material elements such as popular architecture, handicrafts or agricultural landscapes and today the language of conservation seems to leave little room for any symbolic or spiritual concepts.

Nevertheless, the possibility that some protected areas are still being declared with spiritual concepts in mind cannot be ruled out. On occasions, for example, the creation of the Parc Natural de la Muntanya de Montserrat in 1987, these concepts are explicit, although even in this obvious case the rules and regulations of the protected area are not particularly sensitive to the spiritual dimensions of the site (Josep-Maria Mallarach, *pers. com.*, 2006). In other cases of recently declared protected areas, there is no recognition at all of the spiritual dimension, whose relationship with the protected area in question is at best a side-effect of the protection of other more tangible values with which they coincide. It seems that modern aesthetic and scientific criteria now and again rediscover the very sites that are also important to traditional concepts of spirituality.

Spiritual and natural values often coincide in caves and grandiose cliffs that have been conferred religious or patriotic importance: a good example is Ojo Guareña in the north of the province of Burgos, declared a Natural Monument by the Castilla y León regional government in 1996. Its protected status is justified essentially by the presence of a karstic cave system, apparently the largest in Spain, whose sheer size has only recently been fully revealed by fresh explorations.

However, the caves that are visible to the outside world have for time immemorial been a focus of popular interest, centred above all in recent centuries on the chapel of San Bernabé (formerly dedicated to San Tirso) that occupies the entrance to one of the caves. This building, whose importance to local people is palpable during the famous annual pilgrimage, is also symbolically associated with civil authority due to the fact that the local town council once held its meetings in the cave, which was also used to store the municipal archives. The chapel's religious tradition dates back to the height of the Middle Ages, although there is a spiritual continuum going even further back in time in the form of cave paintings and inscriptions from various epochs that depict pre-historical beliefs and practices. In terms of what might be called its civil symbolism, the name of the local municipality –Merindad de Sotoscueva (“under the cave”)– is eloquent testimony of a significant local identity and its important historical past: the seven *merindades* of Old Castile were in fact the original medieval nucleus of the powerful kingdom of Castile.

Visits to this Natural Monument are centred on the chapel and its cave, although recently a small part of the underground cave system has been opened up to the general public. The emblem or logo of the

site depicts, as logic dictates, its best-known symbol, the façade of the chapel.

The amount of attention paid –or rather not paid– to the religious significance of the site in the official information on this protected area is extremely revealing. In both the official exhibition and audio-visual display in the information centre, Casa del Monumento, opened in 2006 in Quintanilla del Rebollar, as well as in the official information brochure published by the Castilla y León regional government (no date, c. 2004), there is only the briefest of mentions of the chapel and its importance and no discussion of any of the religious, spiritual or symbolic aspects of its history. In addition, in the leaflet on the site entitled *Cueva y Ermita de San Bernabé* published by the regional government in 2004, references to the chapel are superficial and few and far between: indeed, the question “Why protect Ojo Guareña?” posed in the leaflet is answered purely in terms of geological, archaeological and biological concepts, with no mention of the chapel and its associated traditions.

Yet, this is no isolated case. In Australia as in Spain “in park services western scientific thought predominates and promotes a normalised secular vision of the landscape” that leads to a “tacit assumption that protected areas have no religious or

spiritual significance” (Byren *et al.*, 2006, pp. 112 and 103). This is all the more surprising given that groups of Australians, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, are maintaining or establishing spiritual links with certain landscapes and natural elements that are often located in protected areas.

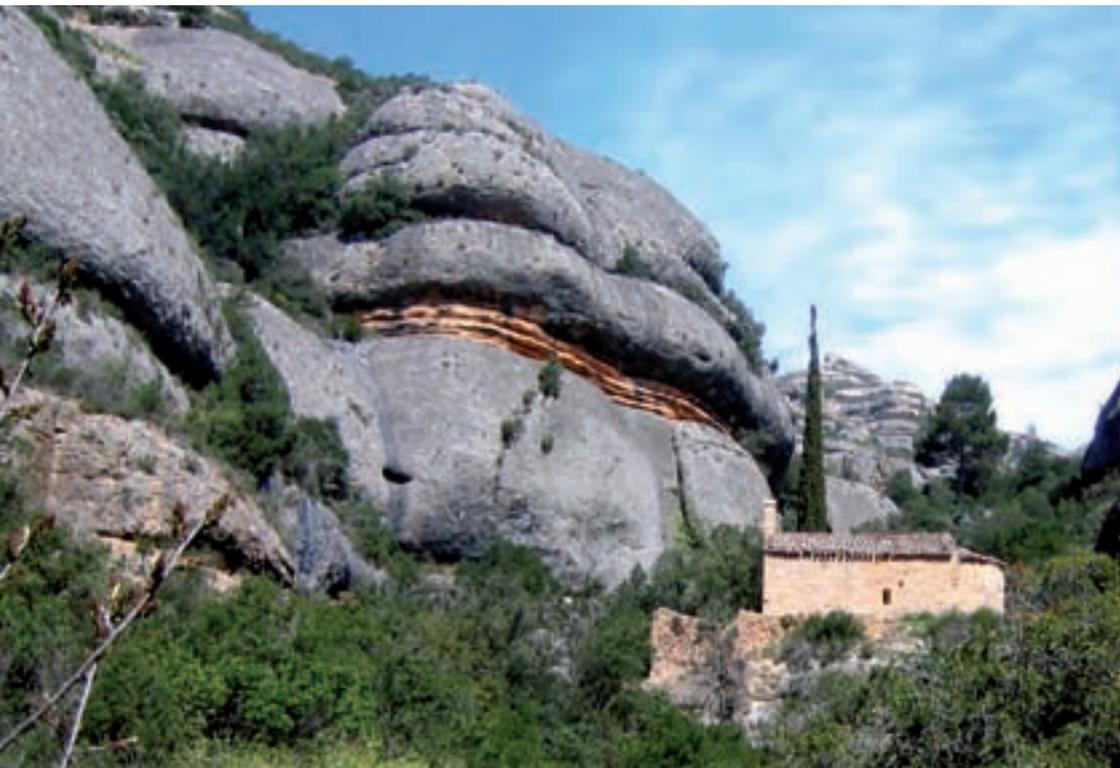
Following on from the ideas, words and actions of the nineteenth century, when western culture entered into crisis as a result of an excessively secular and technical society, perhaps with the advent of this new millennium it is now time to evaluate the possibilities that remain of reenchanting the world, albeit partially, and the help that nature can lend us in this task.

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*Sant Bartomeu, a millennial area of hermitages, Montserrat Natural Park, Catalonia, Spain.*





# Protecting Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples

*Gonzalo Oviedo and Sally Jeanrenaud*

## Introduction

Ideas of the spiritual and sacred are not new within conservation paradigms. Early conservationists were often inspired and awed by what they termed 'the wisdom of wilderness', and 'the infinite capacity of nature to uplift the human spirit'. Such values were frequently invoked and appealed to in the early protected areas movement. However, although early conservation efforts were undertaken 'for the benefit of all mankind', as part of the 'universal human heritage', the sacred natural sites were either overlooked or alienated from their traditional owners as they were assimilated into official protected areas.

The rekindling of interest in the spiritual within conservation paradigms does not preclude scientific knowledge or approaches. Nature is, of course, 'a system' that can be studied, understood, and protected. It is also 'a set of resources' which are to be sustainably and equitably managed. But, it can be contemplated in other ways which may be

more significant to people. It is a mystery, beyond the bounds of contemporary science, which engenders awe; a source of pleasure to be enjoyed; a creative power to be praised – and more. Nature's many dimensions provide opportunities to engage with people in other meaningful ways.

IUCN has been working for some time for the protection of sacred natural sites, through its Secretariat offices and its Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas of the World Commission on Protected Areas, and involving a wide range of partners, globally and nationally – government agencies, indigenous and community organizations, inter-governmental bodies, and others.

Sacred natural sites are natural areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. They include natural areas recognized as sacred by indigenous and traditional peoples, as well as natural areas recognized by institutionalized religions or faiths as places for worship and remembrance. Many sacred sites have survived for hundreds of years and act as important biodiversity reservoirs. However, their contribution to conservation

has been largely overlooked and undervalued by state and conservation agencies, policies and laws, and currently many of such sites face difficult threats which may not be overcome by the efforts of their traditional owners and managers alone. A concerted international effort is needed to support effective protection of the world's sacred natural sites.

The growing appreciation of the contribution of sacred natural sites to environmental protection has prompted renewed interest in them as tools for biocultural conservation. IUCN's Vth World Congress on Protected Areas (Durban, September 2003) paid close attention to the issue and produced relevant outputs and recommendations, which were reaffirmed at the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress (Bangkok, November 2004). These have been followed by several field and policy actions; two of which are the *Project Conservation of Biodiversity Rich Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples*, and *The Delos Initiative for the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites in Developed Countries*.

## IUCN and Sacred Sites

IUCN – The World Conservation Union has been working for some time for the protection of sacred natural sites. Its inter-

est in the subject emerged in the context of highlighting non-material values of protected areas; this work led to the realization that many sacred sites had been integrated in formally declared protected areas, due to their biodiversity, ecosystem and aesthetic values, and that such integration, however, had often happened at the expense of the interests of the living cultures linked to the sites, and of the rights and interests of the traditional site owners and users. At the same time, IUCN was involved in many field activities that supported the conservation of specific sacred sites.

Following the UNESCO International Symposium on Natural Sacred Sites (Paris, 1998), where IUCN and WWF among others were represented, these organizations started discussing options to develop collaborative work for the protection of sacred natural sites, building on their field experience, IUCN's work on cultural and spiritual values of protected areas, and WWF's experience in working with major faiths. Both organizations agreed that a new policy approach and a more systematic action were required. The process that followed is described later in this paper.

IUCN's work on sacred sites is done from its Secretariat offices in several regions, and its World Commission on Protected

Areas (WCPA), specifically its Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA). IUCN works with a range of partners and members, globally and nationally – government agencies, indigenous and community organizations, faith-based groups, inter-governmental bodies, and others.

### What is a sacred natural site?

Sacred sites<sup>1</sup> may be defined as *areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities*. They may include primarily natural areas (such as forests or rivers), or primarily built or monumental areas (such as temples). IUCN focuses on areas which are primarily natural, as they link to its mission, but generally supports the cause of conserving both monumental and natural sacred sites as valuable elements of human cultures.

For the purposes of this paper and of IUCN's work, sacred natural sites may be defined as areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. Many of such sacred natural sites are areas of great importance

for the conservation of biodiversity. In fact, very often the reasons for protecting the spiritual connections between people and the earth, and for conserving biodiversity in their lands, are inseparable<sup>2</sup>.

### The sacramental relationship with nature

As a result of spiritual beliefs, many traditional communities throughout the world have given a special status to natural sites such as mountains, rivers, lakes, caves, forest groves, coastal waters and entire islands. Many of these have been set aside as sacred places. The reasons for their sacredness are diverse. They may be perceived as abodes of deities and ancestral spirits; as sources of healing water and plants; places of contact with the spiritual, or communication with the 'more-than-human' reality; and sites of revelation and transformation. They are sometimes temple sites, the burial grounds of ancestors, places of pilgrimage, or sites associated with special events. Particular plant and animal species may also be considered as sacred by some communities. While

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is a working concept proposed only for the purposes of this paper and for facilitating an operational understanding of the issues.

<sup>2</sup> Oviedo, G. (2001) 'Notes on the Panel's Presentations and Discussions'. Symposium on the Importance of the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites (SNS) for the Conservation of Biodiversity. Mexico City, June 12, 2001. WWF International. Gland, Switzerland.

### **Box 1. Sacred Mountains: The ‘Dragon Hills’ of Yunnan Province, China.**

The Dai (T'ai), an indigenous ethnic group in South-West China, inhabit the Xishuangbanna region in Yunnan Province. According to their traditional concepts a Holy Hill or *Nong* is a forested hill where gods reside. All the plants and animals that inhabit the Holy Hills are either companions of the gods or sacred living things in god's garden. The Dai also believe that the spirits of great and revered chieftains go to the Holy Hills to live, following their departure from the world of the living. Their management of the Holy Hills through informal and informal norms, ethical rules and spiritual beliefs has resulted in biodiversity and habitat conservation within the area. There are hundreds of well preserved seasonal rainforest areas, which are characterised by species of *Antiaris*, *Pouteria*, *Canarium*, and others. A large number of endemic or relic species of the local flora have also been protected, including about 100 species of medicinal plants and more than 150 economically useful plants. The large number of forested Holy Hills distributed throughout the region form hundreds of 'green islands'. This pattern could help the natural reserves, which were established by the state government in recent years, by exchanging genes and playing the role of 'stepping stones' for the flow of genetic materials (Pei Shengji. 1999. 'The Holy Hills of the Dai'. In UNEP, 1999).

many of the sacred natural sites have historical significance, they are not static in time or space; new sites can be created in response to changing circumstances and environment.

Access to sacred natural sites is often taboo and restricted to a small circle of

people, such as priests or pilgrims<sup>3</sup>. In Maharashtra in India, customs relating to the management of sacred groves are set down by priests with knowledge of forest deities and their influence on life.

Ancient folklore and stories are told which include details on the supernat-

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**3** Schaaf, T. (1999) 'Environmental Conservation based on Sacred Sites'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

## Box 2. Sacred Seas: Customary Maori Fisheries

In Maori culture all elements of the natural world originate from the gods, and are thus imbued with *mana atua* - the presence and the power of gods. Fish, like all living things, are possessed of *mauri* – the physical life force. The fisheries are *mahinga kai* – places of customary food gathering, and because of their origins and utility, they are *taonga* or valued resources. The customary rules and practices by which Maori managed their waters and fisheries reflected the significance of this view. Conservation has always been important to the Maori, and traditional Maori fishing practices included measures intended to maintain the habitat, preserve fish stocks, and regulate fisheries use (Nga Kai O Te Moana. 1993. 'Customary Maori Fisheries', in UNEP, 1999).

ural penalties that will result if the groves are desecrated<sup>4</sup>. In some cases sacred sites provide a range of products used in rituals by traditional priests or shamans, or in healing, such as the medicinal plants used in Indian Ayurvedic medical system. In other areas, the harvesting of plants or the hunting of animals is not permitted in consecrated areas. As a consequence of their taboo status and access restrictions, many sacred places have served as important reservoirs of biological diversity, pre-

serving unique and/or rare plants and animal species. Sacred natural sites such as forest groves, mountains and rivers, are often visible in the landscape as vegetation-rich ecosystems, contrasting dramatically from adjoining, non-sacred, degraded environments. In the Western Ghats (mountains) of India, sacred groves are the only remaining patches of greenery over vast stretches of otherwise devastated countryside<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Bharucha, E. (1999) 'Cultural and spiritual values related to the conservation of biodiversity in the sacred groves of the Western Ghats'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton, L. (1998) 'Forest and Tree Conservation through Metaphysical Constraints'. In UNESCO (1998): 'Natural' Sacred Sites. Cultural Diversity and Biological Diversity. Proceedings of International Symposium, Paris, 22-25 September 1998.

### Box 3. Variations in Size and Tenure of Sacred Groves

The Mawal and Mulshi Talukas of Maharashtra are communities who have lived in close association with forests for thousands of years, and have venerated deities associated with sacred groves. Of the 40 groves in the area, most are extremely small. Each grove by itself cannot be said to be of great species richness. Taken together, however, they include most of the plant species that are present in this region of the Western Ghats, which is an acknowledged biodiversity hot spot. Research has indicated that the size of each grove does not correlate with their species richness, suggesting that the number of species is more closely related to the level of protection rather than to size.

Many sacred sites are thus of great value for ecological research and nature protection. In some areas sacred natural sites are valuable genetic reservoirs<sup>6</sup>, and can be useful indicator sites, which are helpful in assessing the potential natural vegetation of degraded ecosystems. They are also useful sources of genetic material that can be used for rehabilitating degraded environments<sup>7</sup>. For example, sacred sites in the savannah of Ghana have been used for reviving degraded ecosystems. Afforestation schemes that included the establishment of fodder banks for live-

stock and the planting of cash crops on the periphery of sacred groves have also helped to enlarge the sacred groves through an additional buffer zone around the holy site<sup>8</sup>. In other areas, sacred sites may play a role in safeguarding critical sites in watersheds, or helping to preserve the ecological integrity of entire landscapes<sup>9</sup>.

Sacred natural sites vary in size, biodiversity value and tenurial status. In some cases, sacred sites are very small areas found on private land. For example,

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<sup>6</sup> Schaaf, T. (1999): op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Malhotra, K. C. (1998) 'Cultural and Ecological Value of Natural Sacred Biodiversity Sites in Orissa, India: threats and opportunities'. In UNESCO (1998): op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> Schaaf, T. (1998) In UNESCO (1998): op.cit.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO (2000) 'Culture-Based Environmental Conservation for Sustainable Development'. UNESCO Draft Project Document.

#### **Box 4. Contributions to Livelihoods: Sacred Groves in India and Ghana**

In several sacred groves of the Western Ghats of India, people are allowed to collect fallen dry wood, fruit from the forest floor, honey, sap (by tapping *Caryota urens* to make an alcoholic beverage) and other products. In some groves, cattle grazing is permitted. In most groves however, timber cannot be felled without the express permission of the deity, which is obtained through a ritual process known as *kaul* (Bharucha, E. 1999, in UNEP, 1999). In Ghana, the use of products from sacred groves varies between and within communities. It partly depends on the power of the spirit of the grove in question. In the village of Nanhini, no villagers enter the grove of the goddess Numafoa or ignore her taboos. In the same village, a second deity has less influence and so the taboos are not so strictly followed. Each grove has particular governing rules. In some cases, entry to a sacred grove is strictly limited, but in others the area may be exploited or restricted for certain forest resources. In one sacred grove in Nanhini, palms can be tapped for wine, and medicines and other specified products can be gathered, but it cannot be used for farming or hunting (Falconer, J. 1999, in UNEP, 1999).

sacred groves in Uganda are very small forests mainly found on private *mailo* 'land tenure'. In other cases, traditional peoples view whole landscapes as sacred, and it is difficult to identify self-contained sites. Taken alone, the significance of smaller sites may be quite limited for biodiversity conservation, but taken together they can

represent sizeable protected areas. For example, some researchers think that there might be between 100,000 and 150,000 sacred groves throughout India<sup>10</sup>.

Although many sacred natural sites contribute to the conservation of biodiversity,

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**10** Sudipto Chatterjee (2001) *pers. comm.*; Malhotra, *et.al.*, 1999, *cit.* by Gaikwad, S. S., S. N. Paralikar, Vishwas Chavan and S. Krishnan (2004) "Digitizing Indian Sacred Groves – 'An Information Model for Web interfaced multimedia database'", in: Focus on Sacred Groves and Ethnobotany, Ghate, Vinya; Hema Sane, and S. S. Ranade (eds.), Prisma Publications, Mumbai, India, pp. 123-128.). Yogesh Gokhale (2003) reports the existence of 14,436 sacred groves in 19 states of India, based on preliminary research by Malhotra *et al.* ('Communicating importance of sacred groves to broader audience for conservation of biocultural heritage', WPC, Durban).

it would be false to assume that complex cultural and social traditions are the same as conservation objectives in environmental agendas determined by outside interests<sup>11</sup>. In the case of sacred natural sites, any conservation effect is probably best seen as one of many effects, or even a side effect, of social and spiritual traditions. Traditional peoples are usually attempting to benefit from the protection and goodwill afforded by the deity in return for not disturbing the sanctity of the sacred area, rather than explicitly managing resources for conservation goals<sup>12</sup>.

Ideas of the spiritual and sacred are not new within conservation paradigms. Early conservationists were often inspired and awed by what they termed 'the wisdom of wilderness', and 'the infinite capacity of nature to uplift the human spirit'. Such values were frequently invoked and appealed to in the early protected areas movement. However, although early conservation efforts were undertaken 'for the benefit of all mankind', as part of the 'universal human heritage', sacred natural sites were either overlooked, or alienated from their traditional owners, as they were assimilated into official protected areas.

The rekindling of interest in the spiritual within conservation paradigms does not preclude scientific knowledge or approaches. Nature is, of course, 'a system' that can be studied, understood, and protected. It is also 'a set of resources' which are to be sustainably and equitably managed. But, it can be contemplated in other ways which may be more significant to people. It is a mystery, beyond the bounds of contemporary science, which engenders awe; a source of pleasure to be enjoyed; a creative power to be praised – and more. Nature's many dimensions provide opportunities to engage with people in other meaningful ways.

### Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Sacred Natural Sites of Institutionalised Religions

Generally, two types of sacred natural sites can be found in the world: those established by indigenous and traditional peoples in the context of their spiritual beliefs and customary institutions, or created by institutionalized religions or

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**11** Agrawal, A. (1995) 'Dismantling the Divide between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge'. *Development and Change* 26:413-439.

**12** Laird, S. (1999) 'Forests, Culture and Conservation'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit. See also Richards, P. (1999) '*Musanga cecropioides*: biodynamic knowledge encoded in mythic knowledge'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

### Box 5. Whole Landscapes as Sacred Sites

The Atacameño people of Chile conceive places as sacred insofar as they share relationships with other places. The ancestor-mountains (*Tate-Mayllkus*), with the precious water they hold, are sacred insofar as they share relationships with mother earth (Pachamama), which they impregnate and make fecund. Both entities represent opposing male and female principles and form a unity (Barros, A. 1998. 'Desert bio-scape: biological and cultural diversity in the Atacama, Chile', in UNESCO, 1998).

faiths<sup>13</sup>. The relationship between the sacred natural sites of indigenous and traditional peoples with the world's major faiths has in some cases a complex and troublesome history. Many traditional sacred natural sites have been appropriated or destroyed because they were considered pagan or idolatrous by newly emerging world faiths. In some instances religious buildings were forcefully superimposed upon traditional sites. While it is important to guard against 'demonising' the involvement of major faiths with

indigenous and traditional peoples, it is important to acknowledge that the erosion of sacred natural sites can be directly related to the expansion of the dominant faiths in many cases.

On the other hand, it is also important to recognise that some institutionalised religions, on their own, and in collaboration with others, have established areas important for biodiversity conservation and have initiated or subscribed to a variety of conservation programmes<sup>14</sup>.

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**13** Some scholars associate the first category of sacred sites to the expressions and practices of animism, understood in anthropology as the belief in the existence of "spiritual beings" embodied in natural elements – plants, animals, or inanimate constituents of nature (concept originally coined by anthropologist Edward Tylor in 1871), or more modernly as "a relational ontology in which the world is found to be, and treated as, a community of persons not all of whom are human" (Nurit Bird-David, 'Animism' Revisited", 2002, in 'Readings in Indigenous Religions', ed. Graham Harvey, 73–105. London: Continuum; cited by Harvey, Graham (2006), *Animals, Animists, And Academics*. Zygon (r) 41 (1), 9-20. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9744.2006.00723.x. In other words, in 'animist' spirituality there is an intrinsic sacramental dimension in natural sites themselves. The second category of sacred sites corresponds to places dedicated by religious institutions or communities to worship and remembrance, where sacredness is not embodied in natural elements as such.

**14** Some of this is reflected in the Delos Initiative. For a broader approach to conservation and religions, see Nigel Dudley, Liza Higgins-Zogib and Stephanie Mansourian (2006) 'Beyond Belief: Linking faiths and protected areas to support biodiversity conservation'. WWF International: Gland, Switzerland.

There are a number of important differences between sacred natural sites of indigenous and traditional peoples and sacred sites of institutionalised religions. These include:

*Age of sites.* Many indigenous and traditional peoples' sacred natural sites may have their origins in Palaeolithic times, whereas most sacred sites of institutionalised religions are a more modern phenomenon, many of them having been established only within the last few centuries, in connection with the expansion of Christianity and other major faiths.

*Relationship with nature.* Indigenous sacred natural sites are often associated with a belief in the inherent sacredness of nature, whereas the sacred sites of the world faiths often bestow their own particular symbols upon nature.

*Property Relationships.* In general, indigenous and traditional peoples cannot be said to 'own' sacred natural sites. Rather, sites are valued and guarded by people through traditional beliefs and practices. World religions, on the other hand, often own sacred sites in terms of legal property institutions.

*Offering in Bear Butte State Park, a sacred mountain for the Lakotas, South Dakota, USA.*



*Links to the landscape.* Many traditional sacred natural sites are considered part of broader sacred landscapes, and have intimate connections with all-encompassing concepts such as Mother Earth and nature's sacredness. Sacred sites of institutional religions do not recognize such landscape or cosmological dimensions and links. Sacred natural sites of indigenous and traditional peoples have certain common features throughout the world, while the exact nature of these features varies within and between communities:

- Sense of sacredness associated with place

- Identifiable spiritual authority in charge
- Limited access and restricted use especially for common people
- Contributions to livelihoods
- Relatively undisturbed nature
- Variable size
- Variable tenure
- High degree of acceptance and respect from communities
- Threatened status in many cases
- Search for appropriate protection

Sacred natural sites are important for the vitality and survival of the cultures that created them. There is an indissoluble link between the protection of sacred sites

### **Box 6. The Ironies of Successful Conservation: Sacred Groves in India**

It is ironic that the most successful Asian conservation programmes have in many cases already cut out the middleman – in this case the government. Sacred groves, or 'life reserves', as some locals call them, survive today without benefit from government gazettelement, without government nature wardens, without government education centres and sometimes even without government goodwill. Even when establishing new woodlands near busy towns, it has been as found that when specially carved 'deified' markers are placed next to newly planted trees, and sprinkled with powder used in worship, people start treating the special trees with respect and 'worship' them. Even more importantly, they water the deified saplings. Woodlands flourish because they serve peoples' physical and spiritual needs. Sacred groves reflect a refreshing view of nature for the people, by the people (Sochaczewski, P. 1986. 'God's Own Pharmacies', in BBC Wildlife Vol. 14, No. 1 pp.68- 71).

and the right of peoples, communities and cultures to continue to manage and control the places that connect them to their spirituality and cultural expression<sup>15</sup>.

The spiritual connections between indigenous peoples and the earth are more than a reflection of traditional views on nature – they are also integral parts of ethno-cultural identity. In virtually every society, nature provides powerful symbols used to create strong links between the social and the natural. To the people of Orissa in India, the sacred grove is more than a mini-nature reserve. It is the keystone in a way of life. It is both locus and sign of the regeneration of body, land and community. It stands for the integration of the human community in nature<sup>16</sup>. To the Hopi people, natural springs are seen as the ‘soul’ of their people, representing their very identity<sup>17</sup>.

Sacred natural sites are often focal points for social and cultural celebrations and religious rituals, establishing social cohesion and solidarity within communities. In many indigenous and traditional communities it is difficult to separate out cultural identity, kin

and social relations, livelihoods, and traditional environmental knowledge from the ritualistic use of the land and protection of biodiversity – they are all strongly interdependent.

It would be misleading to assume a complete ban on using resources from sacred natural sites. Many sacred places provide useful products for livelihoods. In Madagascar, many communities have depended almost exclusively on sacred forests in times of drought<sup>18</sup>. Respect for the spirit in nature does not always mean that communities take a no-touch approach to animals. In many cases, it is recognised that it is the nature of things for one organism to feed upon another, creating relations of indebtedness in the process. For instance, in Japan a whale that has been killed is regarded as having given itself up to mankind so that we can live, and in return, the whalers become indebted to the whale. Thus whaling activities become intimately bound up with religious beliefs, and as a gift the prey has to be utilised to the fullest. To

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**15** Oviedo, G. (2001) ‘Notes on the Panel’s Presentations and Discussions’. Symposium on the Importance of the Protection of Sacred Natural Sites (SNS) for the Conservation of Biodiversity. Mexico City, June 12, 2001.

**16** Apffel Marglin, F. & Mishra, P.C. (1993) ‘Sacred Groves: Regenerating the Body, the Land, the Community’. In Sachs, W. (Ed) (1993) *Global Ecology. A New Arena of Political Conflict*. London: Zed Books.

**17** Whiteley, P. & Masayesva, V. (1999) ‘*Paavahu and Paanaqso’a*: The Wellsprings of Life and the Slurry of Death.’ In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

**18** WWF Madagascar Programme (2001): ‘Linking Faiths and Conservation in the Madagascar Dry Forest Ecoregion’. Draft English Executive Summary of Final Report.

### Box 7. Sacred Wetlands in West Africa

In the forest and savannah zones of Guinea, traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in everyday village life. Here, several lakes are sacred to local communities, and strict taboos and local rules shape the use of wetland resources. At Lake Wassaya it is forbidden to hunt, there is a very short fishing season, and even the Wassaya's crocodiles are sacred. People wishing to see the lake must first gain permission from a group of village elders. These traditional beliefs are still followed today and have helped maintain the ecological integrity of these wetlands (Ramsar, 2001. 'Wetlands and Spiritual Life', in Ramsar, 2001). For coastal peoples on the Ivory Coast, the great fishing period (May to October) is initiated by an opening rite over the 'Aby' lagoon, sometimes carried out simultaneously in the different areas. The priest of the spirit called *Assohon* opens the fishing in May and closes it in October. Sacred catfish of *Sapia* are sheltered in the Dransi River which is formally forbidden to fishermen. Together with the sacred crocodiles from Gbanhui, all the aquatic species are covered by food prohibitions to villagers. During the day it is forbidden to go to the Yonyongo River because it is dedicated to venerated crocodiles (Zoundjihékpon, J. & Dossou-Glehouenou, B. 1999. 'Cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity in West Africa: the case of Benin and Ivory Coast', in UNEP, 1999).

do otherwise would be an insult to the animal and the creator<sup>19</sup>. Resource use often depends on the degree of 'sacredness' of the site or species, as well as the perceived power of particular deities<sup>20</sup>.

In sacred natural sites spiritual values of the communities are the foundations of their commitment to protect their natural heritage and of their motivation to actively engage in the conservation of such sites. Further, there is an emergence of

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<sup>19</sup> Kalland, A. (1999) 'A Japanese View on Whales and Whaling'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> Falconer, J. (1999) 'Non-timber forest products in Southern Ghana: traditional and cultural uses of forests'. In UNEP (1999): op.cit.

the 'spiritual' as a new motive force within wider debates about sustainability, and a growing appreciation of the need to re-engage with the sacred within international conservation efforts. This was reinforced at the Vth World Congress on Protected Areas (Durban, September 2003) and the 3rd World Conservation Congress (Bangkok, November 2004), and has been recently the motive of many discussions and initiatives within

the conservation community at global, regional and national levels.

### Threats to Natural Sacred Sites

Many sacred natural sites enjoy no legal protection and are faced with threats, broadly related to the impact of modernisation and globalisation. These include: agricultural expansion; demo-

#### **Box 8. Sacred Forests: Naimina Enkiyo of the Maasai**

"The *Naimina Enkiyo* indigenous forest is the centre of our lives. It means our survival, our spirit, our past and our future. As we are part of it, it is part of us. The forest is the holy temple or shrine of our people, a place of worship and communion with our deity. In the centre is the Cathedral of the Seven Trees, a sacred place where the *Laibons* or prophets bring offerings to *Enkai*, our Maasai God. Many ceremonies essential to our way of life are performed within or at the edges of our sacred forest. *Emowuo Olkiteng*, the beginning of a new age group when boys begin their rite of passage as young adults is marked by initiation rites. *Enkitainoto Olorrip Olasar Lolporror* – when the chosen spiritual leader of the new age group, accompanied by an elder spends the whole night awake standing motionless under a sacred tree deep within the forest. *Emayian oo Nkituak/ Ntomonak* – where Maasai women are blessed and cleansed to enhance their fertility under sacred trees of the forest. *Ilpuli* – in which morans partake of meat feasts deep within the forest to convalesce and restore their strength, commune with God, develop brotherliness and test their courage. Our spirituality is ultimately at one with the forest and everyday life. Our culture has preserved *Naimina Enkiyo* since it is the spiritual centre of our lives". (Reeve, 1994).

### **Box 9. Culture and Science in Marine Protected Areas: Western Melanesia**

Recent collaboration between Torres Strait Islanders and Australian conservation authorities has helped establish a number of indigenous marine protected areas. These have integrated sacred, totemic sites and distinctive coral reef habitats. The experience suggests that cultural and ceremonial sites in the seas can work to enhance marine conservation and, reciprocally, how marine protected area approaches can protect sacred sites and traditional environmental knowledge (Cordell, J. 1998. 'Managing Culture Sites and Marine Protected Areas in Western Melanesia'. In UNESCO, 1998).

graphic changes; erosion of traditional values, particularly associated with widespread diffusion of institutionalized religions brought in by colonization processes, and which considered traditional beliefs as 'superstitious'; modern land reform programmes which have liquidated traditional land ownership; the expansion of the petroleum and mining industries; tourist development; changing social and economic aspirations of communities; immigration patterns, administrative and policy changes – particularly within the last 20 years. Many traditional beliefs and practices that acted as effective controls in protecting the environment are now being overwhelmed by these changes.

To date, sacred natural sites have not been formally reflected in protected area designations and management plans, and existing policy and legal frameworks do not adequately support the sacred natural sites of indigenous and traditional peoples. In cases where sacred sites have been included in official protected areas, they do not usually remain under traditional ownership and management, which creates conflicts between protected area agencies and indigenous and traditional peoples, thus limiting the effectiveness and the survival of these sites. There are also questions of how to manage sacred natural sites on public land ceded by treaty. Several countries are in the process of exam-

### **Box 10. Finding the right legal frameworks: the Sacred Kaya Forests of Kenya**

The sacred *Kaya* Forests are situated in the coastal plain and hills of Kenya, and have a very high conservation value. They tend to be residual patches (between 10–200 ha) of once extensive lowland forests. The *Kayas* owe their existence directly to the culture and history of the coastal Mijikenda ethnic groups, and have been maintained by the Elders as sacred places and burial grounds. However, over the past 30 years a number of internal and external pressures have threatened the remaining forests and groves. National Park status was originally considered as a means of protecting them, but this designation would have denied the Mijikenda peoples access to their sacred groves. Another option was to have the *Kayas* declared as forest reserves under the jurisdiction of Kenya's Forest Department. However, local people were aware of the Forest Department's shortcomings, and were fearful that their rights would be denied. Since 1992 some of the *Kaya* forests have been gazetted by the government, and declared as national monuments under the Antiques and Monuments Act, which comes under the National Museums of Kenya. A special Coastal Conservation Unit, funded by WWF, has been set up at the museum. This is helping to conserve the forests as well as stimulate interest in the cultural values and traditions that sustained these forests. It remains to be seen how effective the national monuments status will be for protecting the forests. (Githitho, A. 1998. 'Destruction of Sacred Forests as a Reflection of Changes in Society: The *Kaya* forests of Coastal Kenya', in UNESCO 1998; Wilson, A. 1993. 'Sacred Forests and the Elders', in Kemf, E. 1993).

ining the possibility of incorporating provisions for the protection of sacred sites into their national biodiversity laws and policies, but in general, there has been very little achievement to date. However, where existing policies and laws can be reformed, it is anti-

pated that more effective protection of sacred natural sites could bring additional and important benefits at local, national and global levels.

While sacred natural sites are known to be highly important for biodiversity conserva-

tion, there has been no co-ordinated attempt, to date, to accurately assess their contribution to biodiversity; no global inventory of sites exists, and very little is known about the socio-cultural matrix of traditional belief systems that have helped conserve such sites, or how to integrate them into existing protected area networks to help safeguard them without affecting the rights, wishes and traditional practices of traditional owners. The ability to influence international and national policies and legal frameworks in favour of sacred natural sites is also hampered by the lack of knowledge about legal, policy and technical tools, consistent with indigenous peoples' own cultures, values, knowledge and practices.

Despite the relevance of sacred natural sites to biodiversity conservation, and evidence of significant local level protection and management, their role has been widely overlooked by state agencies, conservation agencies, environmental conventions<sup>21</sup> and legislation and wider civil society.

While several activities have been carried out in recent years for protection of sacred sites by organisations like UNESCO,

IUCN, WWF, ARC, and others, no substantial progress has been achieved on the ground. In the context of unequal power relationships, indigenous and traditional peoples frequently lack the means to promote their rights and responsibilities as stewards of their land and resources. They are often excluded from decision-making processes which affect their lands, and they frequently lack information, organisational and financial support to develop and defend their interests.

## Protecting Sacred Natural Sites

As indicated before, sacred natural sites have enormous value for biodiversity conservation. They are often places with limited access and restricted use that have preserved species of flora and fauna. Although they have a high degree of acceptance and respect from local communities, their contribution to conservation has been overlooked and undervalued by state and conservation agencies, policies and laws.

Sacred natural sites are important for the vitality and survival of indigenous

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**21** While conventions such as Ramsar on Wetlands of International Importance, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, have included recently some provisions or instruments relevant to sacred sites, the issue remains marginal and receives no significant support, politically, financially or technically.

and traditional people's cultures. There is a fundamental link between the rights of people to control natural sites - which symbolise their cultural and spiritual identity, and their continuing protection. Understanding of the sacred beyond the frontiers of the dominant world faiths, and to win respect and support for the spiritual visions and commitments of other peoples, particularly of indigenous and traditional peoples – which are frequently overshadowed or derided by the major religions, is fundamental for effective protection of sacred natural sites, as it is for the respect and strengthening of cultural diversity.

One of the possible avenues to support the long-term survival of sacred natural sites is to explore how they can achieve similar status to protected area networks. This goal is to enhance their protected status, but at the same time to support the belief systems and sustain the cultural heritage and integrity of the communities that created them. These efforts will need to consider how to protect large sites in their integrity, how to integrate series of smaller sites, and how to preserve the ecological and sacramental links to the landscape.

Against the background described herein, and building on past and ongoing work, IUCN, in partnership with the Rigoberta

Menchu Tum Foundation (FRMT) started in 2005 a project called 'Conservation of Biodiversity-Rich Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples'. The project goal is to achieve a strengthened enabling environment to support conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of sacred sites of indigenous and traditional peoples, focusing on five sub-regions (Meso-America, South America, South Asia, East Africa, and West Africa). The specific objectives of the project are to: (i) Increase awareness globally and nationally, through improved information, knowledge sharing and communications, (ii) Strengthen legal and policy frameworks, globally and nationally, (iii) Improve the institutional capacity of relevant actors to work at the national and local levels, and (iv) Make available lessons and field-tested tools.

The Project engages with the political core of the problem. In the context of unequal social relations, and historical inequities, the project recognises that indigenous and traditional peoples require support to establish and defend their rights to protect and manage their sacred areas, and that the conservation community can and should be a partner and ally in this struggle.

*Sun Dance lodge in the great prairies of North America. >*

**Box 11. Project sites include:**

**Mexico:** Wirikuta, the Huichol Sacred Natural Site in the Chihuahuan Desert of San Luis Potosi.

**Mexico:** Taheojc the Comcaac Sacred Space, Tiburon Island of Sonora.

**Mexico:** The Sacred Caves of the Wind and Fertility, “Tam Bokom Mim”, Huehuetlan, Huastecan region of San Luis Potosi

**Peru:** The Vilcanota Spiritual Park

**Guinea-Bissau:** The Boloma-Bijagós Biosphere Reserve

**Ecuador:** Pambamarca, Quito Loma and Puntayachil, sacred sites of the Cayanpi people

**India:** “Devarakadu”, the Kodagu District Sacred Groves of Karnataka State in Southern India

**Kenya:** Tiriki ceremonial sites

**Kenya:** Taita skull caves



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- A seminal meeting was the UNESCO International Symposium on Natural Sacred Sites (Paris, 1998).
- In Mexico in 2001, a meeting hosted by WWF and with the participation of IUCN, UNESCO, FRMT, indigenous organizations from Mexico, and Mexican non-governmental organizations (NGOs), decided to explore further coordination and collaboration.
- UNESCO organized an event on Asia-Pacific Sacred Mountains in 2001, and an International Symposium on Sacred Sites in 2003 in Kunming, China, with widely circulated reports.
- The Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention (COP) on Wetlands (Ramsar), held in November 2002, adopted resolutions related to the cultural aspects of wetlands, including specific references to sacred sites. Work on this subject was furthered at the Ninth COP in 2005.

## Annex 1: Benchmarks in International Action to Protect Sacred Sites

Issues related to the protection of SACRED NATURAL SITES have gained more attention in the last few years.

- At the Fifth World Parks Congress, organized by IUCN in 2003, substantial discussions on sacred sites were held, which resulted in various products and gave impetus to new initiatives from IUCN. This was reaffirmed at the Third IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2004.

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted, at the Seventh Meeting of its Conference of the Parties (COP 7), the *Akwé:Kon Voluntary Guidelines for Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Regarding Sacred Sites and Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities* (February 2004).

- The same meeting of the CBD COP adopted a Programme of Work on Protected Areas, which, although not addressing specifically the issue of sacred sites, provides a very important framework in relation to integrating cultural and spiritual values and the rights and interests of indigenous and local communities.

- In Mexico, in May 2005, an International Meeting convened by the Mexican NGO *Música por la Tierra*, with technical sup-

port from IUCN, produced the Playa del Carmen Declaration, which raises important issues for the protection of sacred sites ('The Playa del Carmen Declaration').

- The Tokyo International Symposium 'Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes', May 2005, issued also a Declaration on the "Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes in the Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity" (Annex 3) co-organized by UNESCO and the United Nations University (UNU) in collaboration with IUCN, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



# The Heights of Inspiration: The Cultural and Spiritual Meaning of Mountains as a Basis for Interpretation and Conservation<sup>1</sup>

*Edwin Bernbaum*

## Introduction

For assurance of long-term sustainability, conservation programs and messages need to be grounded in deeply held values and beliefs. As the highest features of the landscape, mountains have tended to become associated with the highest and deepest ideals and aspirations of societies around the world, making them ideal places to initiate such programs and messages. The remote Himalayan peak of Mount Kailas, rising aloof above the Tibetan Plateau, directs the minds of millions of Hindus and Buddhists toward the utmost attainments of spiritual liberation. Mount Sinai occupies a special place in the Bible as the imposing site where Moses received the Ten Commandments, the basis of law and ethics in Western civilization. For many in the modern world, Mount Everest symbolizes the highest goal they may strive to attain, whether their pursuit be material or spiritual. In the

United States, pristine mountain environments within such parks as Mount Rainier National Park and Yosemite National Park enshrine cultural and spiritual values basic to American society. As the writings of the early American conservationist John Muir demonstrate, views of mountains as places of inspiration and renewal helped give rise to the modern environmental movement and have played a key role in galvanizing public support for national parks and the protection of wilderness (Bernbaum 1996, 1997).

The Mountain Institute (TMI) is therefore working with the U.S. National Park Service (USNPS) to develop interpretive and educational materials and activities that draw upon diverse views of the cultural and spiritual significance of features of mountain landscapes — from rivers and mountains to forests and wildlife — in mainstream American, Native American, and other cultures around the world. The addition of these materials enriches visitors' experiences of national parks and gives them deep-seated reasons for conserving the environment — both in the

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<sup>1</sup> Paper for Vth World Parks Congress Durban, Republic of South Africa, 2003

< *Mount Rainier and wild flowers, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, USA.*

parks and back home. Since mountains include features of almost all other environments and ecosystems, ranging from jungles and deserts to tundra and glaciers, the project has applications beyond mountainous areas and encourages people to value and protect wilderness and nature in general.

## Project History and Methodology

The first, planning phase of the project was to make contacts, select a pilot site, and initiate sample interpretive products. During this phase, from May 1999 to May 2000, we met with the directors and interpretive staffs of the Pacific West, the Intermountain, and Southeast regions of the USNPS, the superintendents and staff of three major parks, the USNPS chief of interpretation, and the manager of the USNPS Harpers Ferry Center. The response far exceeded our expectations. We received strong interest and enthusiastic support from all of them and letters of endorsement from the former and current directors of the USNPS. They saw the project as an innovative way of connecting with the interests of the general public —by providing multiple perspectives on park resources— and the traditions and concerns of specific cultural and ethnic groups, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and

Hispanics, that have not been coming to national parks.

As a result of these meetings and our site visits, we selected three parks —Mount Rainier National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park— rather than the one initially envisaged, and began developing model interpretive materials with interpretive staff. These three pilot sites represented three major regions of the USNPS that span the country from the East to West coasts with the Rockies in the middle. Their geographic distribution, high profiles in the park system, proximity to urban areas with culturally diverse populations, local Native American tribes, and their different mountain environments made them good places to develop interpretive products that would serve as models with a broad range of potential application to other parks and protected areas in succeeding phases of the project, both within the USNPS and elsewhere in the United States and abroad. Establishing these models at three sites rather than one also helped ensure the success of this phase and provided access to a wide and diverse audience.

The success of the planning phase enabled us to secure funding for the second and third phases of the project — to develop a variety of model products and

activities at the three pilot parks and use them to spread the approach to other parks in the national park system. In the third phase we expanded our operations to Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, North Cascades National Park, Yosemite National Park, and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, while continuing work at Mount Rainier and Great Smoky Mountains. Our intent was not to replicate the products and activities developed at the pilot parks, but to present them as examples to stimulate people elsewhere to come up with their own ideas for applying this approach to the particular needs and characteristics of their unique sites and environments. This methodology has the added advantage of developing a wider range of models for use in the fourth phase — expanding the project to parks and protected areas outside the USNPS and the United States. We have recently begun work on this fourth phase with TMI's Asian Program and other partners, developing a Sacred Values and Biodiversity Conservation initiative that focuses on national parks and sacred sites in South Asia. During the second and third phases of the project, we received a Partnership Achievement Award from the USNPS for our work with Mount Rainier National Park.

In dealing with traditional sacred sites on park lands, the preferences of the indige-

nous peoples who revere them, such as Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, take first priority so that interpretive materials present only what they want to reveal about these sites and the beliefs and practices connected with them. The involvement of representatives of these groups, as well as other stakeholders, from the beginning is key. A major purpose of the project is to highlight the importance of park resources to indigenous peoples today, engendering understanding of and respect for their traditions. We encourage the development of interpretive materials and activities that draw wherever possible on the voices of living representatives of these traditions. Too many waysides and exhibits in too many parks and protected areas refer to indigenous peoples in the past tense, leading visitors to believe that they no longer exist or have any connections with the land.

## Examples of Interpretive Products and Activities

The following is a sampling of the various products and activities completed or initiated so far in the project. We have prepared and distributed packets with descriptions and illustrations of these samples as one means of spreading the approach to other parks and protected areas. Other means

have included presentations to various audiences and more detailed workshops for interpreters and rangers.

### Offsite Traveling Exhibit:

The first finished product at Mount Rainier National Park was an 8x10-foot collapsible display entitled “Mountain Views.” Interpreters are taking this traveling display to fairs, community centers, conventions, and other venues in the Seattle–Tacoma area in an effort to reach a wider audience for the park. The exhibit has, superimposed on a large image of Mount Rainier, three sections: “The

Mountain,” “Mount Rainier National Park,” and “Mountains of the World.” Each section employs images of a number of people with evocative quotes by them. “The Mountain” section, for example, has, as one of its images, a picture of John Muir with an evocative quote from him on Mount Rainier:

*“Out of the forest at last there stood the Mountain wholly unveiled, awful in bulk and majesty, filling all the view like a separate newborn world, Yet withal so fair and so beautiful it might fire the dullest observer to*

*The goddess Pélé, painted by a contemporary Hawaiian artist, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.*



*desperate enthusiasm.”*

(Muir 1997, 110-111)

The quotes in the “Mount Rainier National Park” section show how ‘The Mountain’, as Rainier is known to people in the Pacific Northwest, has inspired staff from different divisions of the park to work at Mount Rainier. For example, the following words of Chris Trotter, a park ranger:

*“It was never a question of if I would ever work here; growing up, ‘The Mountain’ was in my backyard. It was a place to play, camp and hike. Always the nature lover, I knew that I wanted to be a park ranger and work at Mount Rainier.”*

In an effort to provide multiple perspectives and connect with the heritages and traditions of African and Asian Americans, the left-hand section, “Mountains of the World,” focuses on three mountains that stand out as cultural icons like Mount Rainier: Mount Kailas in Tibet, Kilimanjaro in Africa, and Mount Fuji in Japan. Along with a painting of Fuji, it quotes a Haiku poem by the famous poet Basho:

*“Delightful, in a way,  
to miss seeing Mount Fuji  
In the misty rain.”*

(Bernbaum 1998, 220)

The interpretive text adds: “Residents of the Pacific Northwest can relate to similar sentiments on “not seeing” Mount Rainier in frequent mist and cloud.”

A line at the bottom of the exhibit asks viewers to write down their comments on “What does the Mountain mean to you?” Park staff plan to use these comments in future exhibits at Mount Rainier.

### **Additional Outreach Products:**

Mount Rainier asked us to design and produce a bookmark for the park that incorporates inspirational quotes and mountain images as a takeaway for people viewing the offsite traveling exhibit. One side has images of and quotes on ‘The Mountain’; the other has more general images and quotes, such as a picture of Yosemite and the following quote by the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas:

*“A people who climb the ridges  
and sleep under the stars in high  
mountain meadows, who enter the  
forest and scale peaks, who  
explore glaciers and walk ridges  
buried deep in snow — these peo-  
ple will give their country some of  
the indomitable spirit of the moun-  
tains.”*

(Douglas 1951, 328)

We also collaborated with the interpretive staff at the park to create a PowerPoint presentation for the superintendent to use on a trip to Japan to forge a sister mountain relationship with Mount Fuji. The presentation compares and contrasts Japanese and American views of the two mountains and of mountains and nature in general. We have used this presentation as one of a number of modules we have developed for the park that integrate spiritual and cultural perspectives into PowerPoint presentations for particular audiences, ranging from general to African American and Japanese American.

### **Experience Your America Exhibits:**

Based on the theme of the sacredness of mountains, the Experience Your America exhibit at Sugarlands Visitor Center at Great Smoky Mountains has photographs of 24 mountainous national parks, ranging from Acadia National Park in Maine to Haleakala National Park in Hawai'i and Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska. Each panoramic photograph has an extended caption with a description of the particular park and an inspirational quote, ranging from conservationists such as John Muir to Native American elders. The exhibit is on permanent display in the foyer of a new theater built at the main visitor center of the most heavily visited park

in the national park system. The chief of interpretation, who initiated the collaborative project, has since moved to Yosemite and wants us to expand the Experience Your America exhibit there to include landscape photographs of all 57 designated National Parks with inspirational, spiritual, and cultural captions by TMI. The theme of the exhibit will be the spirituality of nature; it will be housed at the Yosemite Museum — one of the most popular in all of the national park system. Here is an example of the caption for Great Smoky Mountains:

#### *Great Smoky Mountains — 1934*

Here, in the grandest expression of the Appalachians, sixteen mountain peaks rise over 6,000 feet in elevation. The largest federally protected mountain ecosystem east of the Rocky Mountains, Great Smoky Mountains National Park preserves the greatest diversity of plant and animal life in the temperate regions of the United States. Amid this natural grandeur stands an impressive collection of 19th century log and frame buildings — architectural remnants of southern mountain culture.

*“The Great Smoky Mountains are a sanctuary for the Cherokee people. We have always believed the*

*mountains and streams provide all that we need for survival. We hold these mountains sacred, believing that the Cherokees were chosen to take care of the mountains as the mountains take care of us”.*

Jerry Wolfe, Cherokee Elder, 2000.

### **Oconaluftee River Trail:**

A meeting convened in February 2001 by TMI and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, initiated a collaboration among Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Friends of Great Smoky Mountain National Park, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, and TMI that will use wayside exhibits and a booklet to link Cherokee spiritual and cultural traditions and stories to features of the natural landscape along the 1.5-mile Oconaluftee River Trail that runs into the Qualla Boundary (the tribal lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee). The waysides will be in English and Cherokee and will make use of artwork by local Cherokee artists. Since many Cherokees, both adults and school children, walk this trail for exercise, the signs will provide an opportunity to strengthen and pass on their traditions to the younger generation. The project will also help them to reach

the wider public through park interpretive materials. Subsequent meetings have enabled the collaborating partners to raise funds and form a working group that has selected and begun work on the following themes for five waysides along the Oconaluftee River Trail:

1. The legend of a supernatural snake with a jeweled eye on Rattlesnake Mountain, visible at the beginning of the trail.
2. The story of the creation of the Cherokee mountains and valleys by the great buzzard (buzzards are often seen circling above this spot).
3. Traditions of the Long Man, the personification of the Oconaluftee River, with his head in the mountains and his feet in the sea, unifying the various features of the environment
4. The going to the water purification ritual and its use in traditional stick ball games played next to the river.
5. The story of how certain trees, such as the spruce and the laurel, came to stay green all year round.

In addition, two orientation panels will provide a trail map and introduction at both ends of the trail, pointing out the impor-

tance of Cherokee stories and traditions for encouraging people to respect and care for nature. Two additional waysides on Clingman's Dome, the highest mountain in the park, will present the following themes:

1. The creation of the mountains and valley story with a panoramic view over the Smokies.
2. Clingman's Dome as a sacred place of healing and a sanctuary for the Cherokees, relating traditions of a magic lake that heals wounded animals and historical stories of Cherokee refugees finding refuge on the mountain when others were forcibly removed to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears.

### **Traditional Hawaiian Artwork for Kilauea Visitor Center:**

This broad-ranging collaboration integrates indigenous Hawaiian perspectives of the volcanoes Kilauea and Mauna Loa and the volcano goddess Pele into traditional artworks commissioned for the newly renovated Kilauea Visitor Center at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. The project comes out of park meetings with the Kupuna Committee of Native Hawaiian elders advising the park on cultural matters and advances a mutual interest in emphasizing the importance of Native Hawaiian views of park resources. As a

result of collaboration with TMI, a call for proposals went out for a major work of sculpture depicting the important Native Hawaiian concept of *wahi kapu* — sacred places — as it relates to Mauna Loa and Kilauea, as did a call for submissions of traditional Hawaiian paintings of Pele. The Kupuna Committee is selecting the works for installation in the Kilauea Visitor Center, and the Volcano Art Center had a month-long exhibit of 62 of the paintings submitted (as many as could be accommodated). The sculpture will be placed in a prominent place just outside the entrance to the visitor center and the painting will be hung in a special alcove inside next to a panel with quotes from Kupuna Committee elders on the importance of Pele in Native Hawaiian culture.

Interest from artists throughout the Hawaiian Islands was very high and the submissions greater than originally anticipated. In fact, the Park was overwhelmed with a 'tsunami' of Pele paintings — 140 in all — and the Kupuna Committee selected one by a local artist. The main newspapers in Hawai'i, based in Honolulu, ran front-page articles on the project. TMI played a key role in raising funds for the artwork and consulting on the process. The participants in the project include: Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, the Kupuna Committee, Volcano Art Center, County of Hawai'i Department of Re-

search and Development, and TMI. An important byproduct of the project has been the formation of a committee of Native Hawaiian members of the interpretive staff to act as a liaison with the Kupuna Committee and to work closely with the park and make sure that Native Hawaiians have input from the beginning in all future interpretive projects.

### **Spirit of the Mountains Wayside:**

As a result of talking with us and seeing examples of products at other parks, interpretive staff at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area came

up with a wayside exhibit that presents traditional Chumash views of Boney Mountain and encourages the general visitor to experience the mountain in a deeper, more spiritual way. In order to connect the wayside with a living tradition, they consulted with the Chumash and put a picture of Charlie Cooke, a current hereditary chief, in the upper right-hand corner with the following quote by him:

*“Boney Mountain is a sacred spiritual area, a shaman’s retreat, and a place for vision quests. It is a place for meditation. From up there, you can see everything.”*

*Panel in Santa Monica Sacred Mountains, California.*

**Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area**

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

**Boney Mountain is a sacred spiritual area, a shaman’s retreat, and a place for vision quests. It is a place for meditation. From up there, you can see everything.**

*Charlie Cooke, A Hereditary Chumash Chief*

# Spirit of the Mountain

Boney Mountain stands as a majestic beacon filling the day and night sky. The mountain’s spirit pervades the plants, animals and sense of place around you. It is in the cycle of the seasons, and the past and present generations of people. Whether alone or with others, this place anchored by the mountain invites you

to pause, reflect, and look inward. Taste the salt maling in on the morning sea breeze. Smell the pungent sage warmed by the afternoon sun. Witness the magical interplay of dark and light shadows. What insights, ideas and feelings does the spirit of the mountain evoke for you?

The interpretive staff titled the wayside “Spirit of the Mountain” and added the following text in the lower left-hand corner, superimposed on a large image of the mountain itself:

*“Boney Mountain stands as a majestic beacon filling the day and night sky. The mountain’s spirit pervades the plants, animals and sense of place around you. It is in the cycle of the seasons, and the past and present generations of people. Whether alone or with others, this place anchored by the mountain invites you to pause, reflect, and look inward. Taste the salt rolling in on the morning sea breeze. Smell the pungent sage warmed by the afternoon sun. Witness the magical interplay of dark and light shadows. What insights, ideas and feelings does the spirit of the mountain evoke for you?”*

TMI played a minimal role in the concept and design of the wayside, which was done almost entirely by park staff in collaboration with the Chumash Tribe. The genesis of the exhibit shows how this approach to interpretation can be spread through examples that stimulate people to come up with their own products and activities.

## **Mountains and People, People and Mountains:**

TMI has begun work on the design and production of a publication for interpreters, teachers, naturalists, environmental educators, and the general public. Titled “Mountains and People, People and Mountains,” the handbook complements natural history information by bringing evocative quotes, beliefs, folktales, and cultural practices from American, Native American, and other cultures around the world to bear on various features of mountain environments, such as peaks, forests, eagles, and bears. It is based on the seasonal interpreters’ handbook at Rocky Mountain National Park used by staff to prepare evening campfire talks, guided walks, and other visitor-related activities. It is organized around the same categories of flora, fauna, and natural features, and for each category it provides quotes, stories, and traditions arranged for easy reference in the following groupings:

- Native American, Hawaiian, and Alaskan
- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- European and European American
- African and African American
- Latino and Chicano
- Asian and Asian American

The content can be adapted to various teaching environments from classroom to trail to home. Quotes, ideas, and stories can be easily selected to help relate to particular audiences and provide multiple perspectives on features of the natural environment.

## Conclusion

We have learned a number of valuable lessons from work on various phases of the project. One of the quickest and most effective ways of implementing this approach is to integrate inspirational and cultural themes into products and activities that parks are already planning or have in production. For example, Great Smoky Mountains already had funding and plans in place to mount a major photographic exhibit on 22 mountainous national parks in their main visitor center. As a result of discussions with us, they decided to shift the theme of this exhibit to the sacredness of mountains and wilderness and had us work with them to prepare panels and select quotes. We have found it advisable to initiate a variety of different products and activities at a number of parks and let each one mature at its own pace, not burdening the already busy interpretive staffs. It is important to keep people excited and energized; in fact,

one of the important outcomes of the project has been the personal inspiration and renewal that interpreters get from working on it. The strategy of using products and activities developed at pilot sites as evocative examples works well to inspire people to come up with their own ideas on how to implement this approach in their parks. Encouraging creativity and innovation, rather than straight replication, has had the additional benefit of creating even more models to stimulate thinking at other parks and protected areas.

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*Mount Rainier National Park, offsite travelling exhibition, Washington.*





# Belief in Protected Areas: Overlooking the Spirit in Conservation

*Liza Higgins-Zogib*

## Introduction

The natural world is simply full of sacred places, and protected areas are no exception to the rule: from the ancestor spirits that inhabit the trees and water sources of many of Madagascar's parks and reserves; to the millions of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims who trek through protected areas to reach their place of worship; to the Holy Mounts sacred for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. There are thought to be hundreds of thousands of such sacred sites around the world, inside and outside official protected areas, all of them contributing to global conservation efforts. These are places that millions of believers hold in reverence. Moreover, practically all religions and belief systems, from the mainstream to the local, encourage their followers to respect and care for the natural environment. Yet despite less than five per cent of the world's popula-

tion declaring themselves 'atheists', the many threats to the environment and its natural resources continue to grow at an alarming rate.

Perhaps it is because the relationship between faith and nature conservation is riddled with complexity that it has not been included in the conservation debate until recently. But even though the importance of this issue has been raised now by a number of influential institutions<sup>1</sup>, it is still a fact that the spiritual values of important natural sites are frequently not considered when planning for conservation and sustainable land-use. In addition, conservationists (protected area managers, policy makers, NGO staff, etc.) often lack the skills or knowledge needed to deal effectively with sacred sites and the people for whom they are sacred.

Although 'we' (the conservationists) are slowly coming to terms with the fact that the 'human' aspect of the environment must be taken into consideration in our conservation work, the 'spiritual' aspect is

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<sup>1</sup> Including but not limited to: The Convention on Biological Diversity; UNESCO; WWF and IUCN.

*< Hindu Trishula (Lord Shiva's trident) in front of the mountains of Lachung, Sikkim, where the land is still protected and managed by indigenous management systems.*

still largely ignored. All over the world, issues like poverty and development, equity, and justice are increasingly being tackled (with varying degrees of success) in conservation projects and programmes. But there are relatively few conservation projects that deal adequately with issues of spirit and religion, even in places where these issues are in the forefront of peoples' lives and relationships with their natural environment.

We could view this oversight as a problem –but we could also regard it as a great opportunity to build further support for the conservation movement. This paper highlights the importance of the sacred in conservation (in protected areas in particular), and reflects on the problems of ignoring the spiritual dimensions of the natural world.

## The link between Sacred Sites, Faiths, and Protected Areas

Protected areas are still referred to as the backbone of conservation. And in practice, work on protected areas still constitutes a large part of the international conservation agenda and expenditure. Organisations like WWF still spend most

of their resources on this core subject. As such, in the recent WWF/ARC report entitled *Beyond Belief: Linking faiths and protected areas to support biodiversity conservation*<sup>2</sup> we attempted to explore in detail just to what extent the interplay between faiths and protected areas is important.

The report includes a survey of a hundred protected areas around the world that contain important values to one or more faiths, as well as more detailed case studies from Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Lebanon, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Mongolia, Europe, Finland, Australia, and Colombia. *Beyond Belief* calls on protected area owners, managers and supporters to recognise the importance and legitimacy of sacred values in nature and to work cooperatively with faith groups to ensure that non-material values are also effectively preserved. It also calls on the faith groups themselves to put the fine statements they have made about protecting the environment to practical use by supporting global efforts to help conserve the abundance of creation through the designation and good management of protected areas.

There are many links between spiritual traditions and protected areas. Long before offi-

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<sup>2</sup> Dudley N., L. Higgins-Zogib and S. Mansourian (2005); *Beyond Belief: Linking faiths and protected areas to support biodiversity conservation*, WWF/ARC, Switzerland

cially protected areas as we now know them existed, people were protecting their sacred lands. Indeed sacred sites are probably the oldest method of habitat protection and they still form a large and mainly unrecognised network of sanctuaries around the world. Some researchers suggest that there may be as many sacred sites as there are protected areas. If expert opinion is to be believed, which indicates the possibility of there being over 100,000 sacred groves in India alone, then this is certainly the case.<sup>3</sup>

Sacred Sites exist in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the world's 'official' protected areas. This means that people have a special regard for hundreds or thousands of protected areas not necessarily because of their importance to biodiversity, but because of their 'less-tangible' spiritual values.

The links between sacred places and conservation are not restricted to traditional or indigenous belief systems. They in fact occur all over the world and across all faiths, from the 'mainstream'<sup>4</sup> to the localised. The conclusions and recommendations of the report are summarised below:

## Beyond Belief – Conclusions

- Faiths have been involved in some of the earliest forms of habitat protection in existence, both through the preservation of particular places as sacred natural sites and through religious-based control systems such as the *himas* system in Islam<sup>5</sup>.
- A proportion of these sites (probably a large proportion) are also highly successful at conserving natural ecology and biodiversity.
- Links between faiths and conservation of land and water exist throughout the world and involve every faith system that we have examined.
- Many areas of sacred significance and faith-based land management systems are currently under threat because of cultural breakdown, pressures on land and resources and poor governance that permits deleterious use.
- There is still a lot to be learned about where sacred sites exist, what level of risk they face, and about how exactly they relate to biodiversity conservation.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://ecoheritage.cpreec.org/04\\_02\\_\\_sacred\\_groves.html](http://ecoheritage.cpreec.org/04_02__sacred_groves.html)

<sup>4</sup> Palmer, Martin with Victoria Finlay (2003); *Faith in Conservation*, The World Bank, Washington DC. In alphabetical order: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism

<sup>5</sup> *Hima* is an ancient system of community based protected areas, common property, pre-Islamic, which at some point of History became integrated with the Islamic sacred law. *Himas* usually include critical resources, such as water, wells, wetlands or pastures.

- Sacred natural sites and other places of importance to faith groups exist as protected sites both inside and outside official 'protected areas' as recognised by IUCN The World Conservation Union and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- Bringing a sacred area into a national system of protected areas can increase protection for the site but sometimes only at the expense of some of its spiritual values. The existence of a sacred site within a protected area can also create challenges for managers. But other cases show a good integration between the needs of faiths and conservationists.

- The spiritual values of a site are frequently not considered when planning conservation and conservationists (protected area managers, policy makers, and even NGO staff) often lack the skills or knowledge to deal effectively with sacred sites and the people for whom they are sacred.

- Sacred areas can usefully be integrated into protected area systems using any recognised management models and governance types and can be suitable for both large and small areas and for terrestrial and aquatic sites.

- Decisions about whether or not to seek to convert a sacred natural site or a land or sea area important to a faith into an official protected area therefore need to be made on a

case-by-case basis, after consultation with the custodians of the sacred site.

- Success in co-managing for faith and nature is almost always a matter of developing effective and trusting partnerships between the different stakeholders involved.

- Making such areas an explicit part of biodiversity conservation strategies has the additional and very important function of bringing conservation issues into the mainstream thinking of faith groups.

- Further guidance is needed about how this integration can best be achieved, and some suggestions are outlined in the following section of recommendations.

## Beyond Belief - Recommendations

- Many sacred natural sites can and should contribute to biodiversity conservation strategies, although whether this contribution should be inside an official protected area or as part of wider landscape/seascape conservation strategies needs to be determined for each case in turn.

- Given the influence of faith communities, including the direct ownership of land and resources, conservation organisations should be working much more closely with faith groups to identify ways of collaboration.

■ Decisions about individual sites need to be taken by all the stakeholders, that is by faith groups in terms of their own desires and perceptions of what impacts will affect the sacred nature of the site and by conservation specialists about whether the site will be a useful addition to protected area systems.

■ By protecting natural areas with sacred significance we are also in many cases protecting a culture and traditions that have existed for centuries. For this reason, the protection of sacred sites can sometimes be an effective way of also protecting a people, culture or ethnic group, while also recognising the role that they play in protecting nature.

■ Where a sacred site exists within a protected area, care of the site should always be an important element in management plans and practice.

■ There is still much to be learnt about the links between sacred sites, biodiversity, and protected areas and further research is required, particularly with respect to:

- the location and status of sacred natural sites
- the influence of mainstream faiths on land and water and options for conservation

*A sacred tree sporting a zebu skull in the Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar.*



- the biodiversity value of sacred natural sites

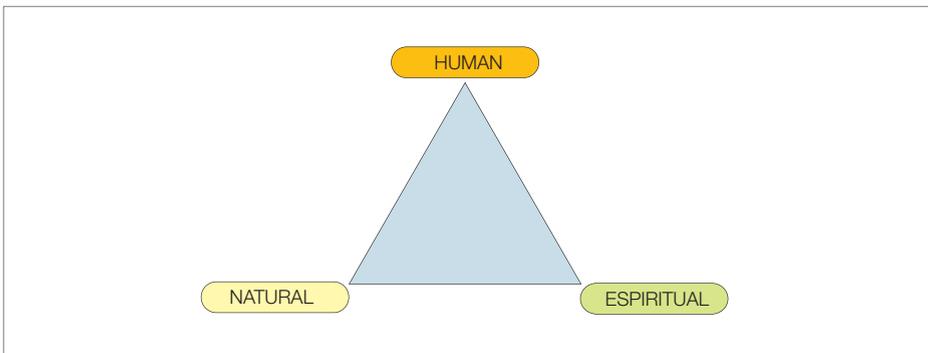
- The value that protected status for sacred sites can bring to faith groups should not be neglected.
- Current guidelines are useful but remain only general; further guidelines are needed specifically for major stakeholders, including faith groups, protected area managers, and governments.
- Such guidelines need to be based on direct field experience and we propose the establishment of a learning portfolio of new and existing protected areas containing sacred natural sites that specifically looks at the challenges of managing for both values together.

## The forgotten triangle

The overriding trend currently within conservation organisations that work at a local level is to ensure local participation in projects and activities. It has been recognised beyond doubt that if local support is not attained, then conservation efforts will be of limited impact and their sustainability questionable. However, in many cases when we approach people we only have our conservation objectives in mind. When we think about a place we view it through our conservation lenses and as such we are not necessarily in tune with how people themselves view their place. Here I argue that if we want to be truly relevant at local level, we must first get this right.

In most instances, people tend to view the world in a three-dimensional manner. This can be visualised as such:

*A three-dimensional worldview*



It could certainly be argued that the modern worldview has moved away from this model; increasingly, the spiritual dimension has much less of a role to play and even the role of the natural dimension is ever-diminishing as the human/materialistic aspect has taken over. But essentially I argue that these three aspects always remain, despite the emphasis that may be placed by any individual. We can never get away from the 'natural'. Granted we may no longer live so closely connected to the land –but we still rely on the air we breathe and the natural resources we consume to maintain our lives and our increasing standards of living. Similarly, we can never really get away from the spiritual either. Few are those who have never thought about the bigger questions in life (Who am I? and Why am I here?) or who have not wondered about or wished for something higher on their deathbed.

Whatever the case, in terms of conservation and the important cradles of biodiversity that we are all striving to protect, the great majority of people we need to work with maintain this three-dimensional worldview on a more or less equitable level.

These three dimensions are integrated and cannot be separated. As humans we need

social interaction, we depend on the natural world for our very survival, and instinctively we need some kind of explanation as to why we are here. Yet despite the logical integration between the three dimensions, we often fail to take them all into consideration in our conservation endeavours.

Let us take one of many examples. The Heart of Borneo<sup>6</sup> is a place of high conservation value: the last remaining intact tropical forests in a region of such biodiversity. Straddling Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the threats to the area are huge... and growing. There are many indigenous and local communities living in the area who depend on forest resources for their livelihoods and practice their religion on the land. There are many sacred places in the area –probably many of which remain unknown to the scientists and conservationists working there. So, in order to fully appreciate the place and its peoples; in order to grasp how the people there understand their place; and therefore in order to work with them to ensure that their place remains their place of livelihood and worship, we need to understand all three dimensions –the natural, the human and the spiritual.

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<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/asia\\_pacific/our\\_solutions/borneo\\_forests/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/asia_pacific/our_solutions/borneo_forests/index.cfm)

Unfortunately the conservation movement as a rule, shaped by the rational Western scientific method, has all too often ignored 'less-tangible'<sup>7</sup> aspects of nature. Yet to truly be relevant to people, we must start approaching our work in a more holistic, all-encompassing manner.

If we think again about the three-dimensional worldview, we can identify our place within it. The conservationists have traditionally concentrated on the 'natural'; the development agencies have focussed on the 'human'; the theologians have appropriated the 'spiritual'. But in all of these cases, where an exclusive focus is taken, the results are certainly of limited value. What good is conserving an area when people outside it are hungry? What use is there in accruing material wealth, when the heart and soul are not content? So, it all works together and I argue that the future conservation model must necessarily be a holistic one that takes all three dimensions into account.

One inspiring example of how the modern, rational model can work alongside the traditional, spiritual model comes from Indian medicine. Modern methods and traditional Ayurveda (the ancient science of health and living) work in parallel and are both fully

recognised by the state. In the same vein the ancient plant science of Vrکشayurveda is now becoming appreciated as an invaluable complementary knowledge system that people can relate to.

## The spiritual breakdown

Sacred natural sites are often places where voluntary protection is afforded by the local communities who hold the place in reverence. Many sacred places outside official networks of protected areas are more rigorously protected than those run by the state. Even so, sacred places the world over are coming under an increased level of pressure hailing from large-scale development projects, perverse lending policies, poor state planning and management, and other outside influences. But problems are also emerging as a result of growing local demand for natural resources and what we might call a cultural and spiritual disintegration. The world is getting smaller. Few are the natural places that remain untouched by human presence or unscathed by mounting global problems such as climate change. And few are the places that remain culturally intact and far from the global stamp of similitude.

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<sup>7</sup> I use the term 'less-tangible' as opposed to 'non-tangible' for spiritual values because the spiritual, in terms of place or other, is absolutely tangible to the person who experiences it.

In the remote areas of Lachung and Lachen, Sikkim, India, there are indigenous natural resource management systems that have never been documented. Under the *Dzumsa* system, ruled by the head *Pipon* (head man), the two valley communities of this Eastern Himalayan state keep a tight reign on all of their land and the socio-political and environmental processes and systems that govern it.

However, even in these remote parts, the influence of a rapidly modernising India is increasingly felt among these communities. In Lachung there is a steady outflow of Lachungpa<sup>8</sup> youth to Sikkim's capital, Gangtok, or further afield, in a bid for new levels of education and employment<sup>9</sup>. While this may be a natural and healthy development, the endogenous systems and knowledge that have remained present through history and resisted the challenge of integrating into the folds of the Maha Bharat (Great India) are slowly starting to decline.

This type of cultural disintegration is happening everywhere. From the diminishing influence of the monasteries in the Buddhist world, to the breakdown of aboriginal communities, to a more general world-shift

towards a global economy and 'californianized' aspirations. Because people with strong spiritual beliefs have traditionally been the voluntary protectors and guardians of the natural world, this cultural disintegration is certainly taking its toll on the natural environment.

A 2002 SWOT analysis on the potential role of sacred sites as tools for biodiversity conservation concluded that one of the main threats and weaknesses in this field was cultural change:

"Sacred natural sites are subject to changing value systems and cultures and therefore may 'lose or gain their sacred value' and with this any conservation function that might exist. Modern development and changes of societal systems may significantly reduce their number and integrity. Moreover, transmission of traditional knowledge is collapsing."<sup>10</sup>

Conversely it may be argued that strengthening endogenous knowledge systems, cultural diversity and spiritual heritage could well contribute considerably

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<sup>8</sup> The people of Lachung are referred to as Lachungpas and the people of Lachen, Lachenpas.

<sup>9</sup> Ghose D., S. Chatterjee and L. Higgins-Zogib (2006). Interview with ex-Pipon, Lachung and personal observation.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO (2003); International Workshop on *The Importance of Sacred Natural Sites for Biodiversity Conservation*, Kunming and Xishuangbanna Biosphere Reserve (People's Republic of China), 17-20 February 2003, UNESCO/MAB, Paris.

to the conservation of biodiversity and natural systems of the planet.

It is the spiritual heritage of place that renders it so special and so important to preserve. People throughout time have been much more inclined to safeguard their natural environment when it is linked with their deep-rooted belief systems. Although it would be unfair, and indeed untrue, to make any kind of sweeping statement that indigenous knowledge for natural resource management is always the right/best way, there are countless cases where endogenous knowledge of natural place and resources has proved to be a welcome and even superior addition, to scientific conservation measures. This is true for example in Aboriginal Australia, where the use of indigenous fire techniques has proved critical not only in terms of fire management, but also in terms of encouraging growth of certain useful species and in general maintaining a healthy equilibrium in the landscapes.

Protected areas have a role to play here. When well-managed they do not solely conserve biodiversity, but also the cultural and spiritual values that go with the place. While protected areas are not always the answer, they can be instrumental in safeguarding the sanctity of sacred places from, for example, large-scale developments that could otherwise jeopardise the area.

## Protected areas: where the spirit cannot be ignored

The importance of getting it right becomes very apparent when you consider the extent to which 'belief' lives and breathes in protected areas. Detailed in the following table are just a few examples of protected areas where the spirit cannot be ignored and where getting it wrong would have disastrous effects for the place and the people. In all of the cases conflicting 'place-views' are at play. A place-view is how an individual or group views a particular place. As we have seen earlier in this paper, most people living in and around important places of biodiversity view it in the three-dimensional way –human/nature/spirit. But as we have also seen, when others do not take the time to also try to see a place in such a way, then conflicts can arise and the place as a result becomes threaten.

The following table summarises a few pertinent examples of where the spiritual place-view runs up against other place-views resulting in problems both for the biodiversity and the cultural and religious values of the area. These problems are common the world over wherever sacred sites and protected areas meet.

- *Pacific*

### Australia

**Protected area name and other data:** Kata Tjuta National Park (within which lies Ayers Rock – or Uluru). Declared: 1977; size: 132,566 ha; IUCN category: II and World Heritage Site.

**Faith and significance to the faith:** Traditional. The traditional owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta are the Anangu Aboriginal people. The National Park, and in particular the Uluru monolith, is of religious significance to the Aborigines<sup>11</sup>. In Aboriginal mythology Uluru is the Intelligent Snake from the universe who emerged from a rainbow and slithered down to Earth; in other traditions it arose suddenly out of a larger sandhill<sup>12</sup>. Uluru is depicted by Aborigines as a symbol of fertility. It is shaped like a horseshoe lying on its side. The lower part of the ‘U’ undulates and is filled with eggs. Thus the figure symbolises both male and female and is considered to be the father and mother of all forms of life. The Anangu believe that Mount Uluru is hollow, and that it contains an energy source that they call ‘Tjukurpa’, the ‘dream time’. They believe that the area around it is inhabited by ancestral beings whose activities are recorded at many separate sites<sup>13</sup>.

**Conflict of place-view:** The Park was returned to Aboriginal management in 1985. Although visitors are asked not to climb the rock, many still do. When this results in injury or death, it is particularly trying for the indigenous hosts as they subsequently observe a ‘worrying time’.

This place-view conflict arises from ignorance. Visitors simply do not understand that Uluru for the local people has the same significance as a church, a temple, or a mosque. The result is detrimental to the spiritual values of the site.

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<sup>11</sup> Mountford, C. and A. Roberts (1965); *The Dreamtime*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide

<sup>12</sup> Roberts, M. J. and A. Roberts (1975); *Dreamtime Heritage*, Rigby Books, Adelaide

<sup>13</sup> Layton, R. (1989); Uluru: an Aboriginal history of Ayers Rock, Reprinted edition with additions, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra (ACT)

▪ *Pacific*

**Papua New Guinea**

**Protected area name and other data:** Various, Papua New Guinea; IUCN Category VI

**Faith and significance to the faith:** Traditional. Papua New Guinea's population of 5.5 million people live largely in rural areas and most follow a subsistence lifestyle based on farming, hunting and collection of forest and sea produce. More than 50,000 years of human habitation in New Guinea has resulted in a rich and holistic understanding of the natural environment. Each of the country's 820 language groups has developed its own mechanisms for protecting and using its resources and these in turn have fostered the creation of untold thousands of traditional protected areas and protective practices which include:

- Restriction or prevention of gardening, hunting, gathering, or general access in the domains of forest spirits or *masalai*.
- Controlled reefs that are recognised as the domain of water spirits.
- Areas that have been restricted to respect the site of past sickness, historic events, or to mark the death of an elder.
- Areas where seasonal restrictions on the hunting of species have been installed or where certain animals (such as clan totems) may not be hunted.

The constitution of the modern state of Papua New Guinea recognises customary ownership of ninety-seven per cent of the land area of the country. Community control of inshore fisheries is also tacitly acknowledged though legal recognition is much less clear. Customary protected areas remain powerful in many parts of the country and offer examples of conservation through an informal system<sup>14</sup>.

**Conflict of place-view:** It was revealed during a recent survey of protected areas in Papua New Guinea that logging concessions had been granted over no less than twelve of the fifty-one protected areas assessed. The communities concerned were not aware of these developments.

The place-views at play in this situation are at totally opposing ends of the spectrum. The community objective is to be able to continue to live, hunt, and garden on the traditional lands of their ancestors. The objective of the government departments in question is to make money from the country's natural wealth, in this case timber. Fortunately there is another place-view in the country that has adopted a middle ground. The view of the nature conservationists is that we must start to bridge the gap between place-views to make room for development, spirit and the natural world.

It is hoped that strengthening the protected area system in Papua New Guinea and helping to develop the capacity of local clans to better protect their areas within a climate of increasing threats to the nation's natural resources will respond to the issues raised by conflicting place-views.

The following is a vision for the TransFly ecoregion (Papua New Guinea and Papua, Indonesia) that starts to build the bridges.

*"We, the peoples of the TransFly, are proud of our land, our stories, our heritage, and our natural environment. Our children learn to look after our land through the law of our ancestors, with careful management and by joining hands across borders. May our monsoon forests and savannas continue to teem with birds, our rivers with Barramundi and Saratoga, and our swamps with crocodiles. Let our spirits fill our children's dreams and may we dwell in communities of wealth and beauty."*

- *North America*

## USA

**Protected area name and other data:** Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming, USA; America's first declared National Monument, 1906; 545 ha; IUCN category III

**Faith and significance to the faith:** Traditional. Native American Indian. Long before Western settlers laid eyes on the dramatic monolith now known as Devils Tower, this was sacred land for native American tribes including the Arapaho, Crow, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Lakota, and Shoshone.<sup>15</sup> Native names for the monolith include Bear's Lair, Tree Rock, and Bear's Lodge and in 2005 an initiative to recognise the name 'Bear's Lodge' as an additional designation was thwarted for fear of jeopardising the tourist trade. There are several traditional legends about the rock. One of these tells of two Sioux girls who were out collecting flowers when they were chased by bears. Taking pity on the girls, the Great Spirit (Supreme Being) made the earth rise up on the spot where they were, leaving the bears clawing down the sides of the rock. This is an area where people still come to worship and pray for their ancestors.

**Conflict of place-view:** The protected area is managed by the US National Park Service who allowed the Native Americans to come back to worship this place after having been banished completely for many years. But despite this attempt by the Park Service, conflicts persist. The bears' claw marks in the monolith have made the rock ideal for rock climbers. And of the 400,000 visitors to the area every year, hundreds come to climb. This activity is of course sacrilegious for those who hold the place sacred. Again the Park Service has attempted to reconcile the differences by instating the 'June voluntary closure' to rock climbers<sup>16</sup>, as this is a particularly special time in the Native American calendar. This has apparently reduced the number of climbers by eighty per cent. Efforts

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<sup>15</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devils\\_Tower\\_National\\_Monument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devils_Tower_National_Monument)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/deto/>

of the Park Service however are not always appreciated by the local, non-Native American residents of the area, who also see this place as theirs, who cannot understand the religious significance of the rock, and who often take offence at the prayer bundles left by the Native Americans and at their attempts to reclaim the land.

There are many distinct place-views interacting and conflicting at this site: the Park Service; the local communities; the visitors; the climbers and tour operators; and the Native Americans for whom the place is sacred. All view the place in very different ways and without some major efforts to reconcile these, the conflicts will continue to the detriment both of the place and its spiritual values<sup>17</sup>.

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- *Asia*

### Japan

**Protected area name and other data:** Sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii Mountain Range; declared 2004; size: 495 ha; World Heritage Site, 2004.

**Faith and significance to the faith:** Shinto and Buddhism. Three sacred sites –Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan– are linked by popular pilgrimage routes to the ancient capital cities of Nara and Kyoto.

The sacredness of the site has resulted in important ancient trees and groves being preserved, including: an ancient *Podocarpus nagi* at Kumano Hayatmam Taisha, planted according to legend in 1159; the Nchi primeval forest, part of the Kumano complex, has been protected since ancient times as a sanctuary; giant trees of up to 500 years old around a cemetery in Koyasan; natural silver fir forests along a pilgrim route, protected since the fifteenth century; 108 ha of protected *Magnolia sieboldi*; and a group of ancient cedar trees said to be ca. 3,000 years old<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> McLeod C. / Earth Island Institute (2002), Bulfrog Films, DVD, see [www.sacredland.org](http://www.sacredland.org)

<sup>18</sup> Evaluation report to the World Heritage Centre carried out by ICIMOS, May 2004.

**Conflict of place-view:** 15 million tourists visit the area every year, of which around 26,000 come from outside Japan. Infrastructure for the tourists and pilgrims (car parks, museums, and other facilities) has increased accordingly. Evidently the intents and purposes of the hikers differ from those of the pilgrims. And both these place-views differ again from those of the World Heritage and protected area management. Like many protected areas that have to deal with heavy pilgrimage or uncontrolled tourism, there are imminent threats to the biodiversity and sanctity of the places in question. These must be managed carefully, with everyone's interests and place-views taken into proper consideration.

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- *Asia*

### **Cambodia**

**Protected area name and other data:** Mondulkiri Protected Forest, Mondulkiri Province

**Faith and significance to the faith:** Traditional. The forests of Mondulkiri used to be part of a logging concession until the country's logging ban in 2002. The indigenous people who live here worship burial forests and spirit forests, where foreigners are rarely allowed to venture. These are places where ancestors dwell and can be offended by the wrong use or non-respect of the forests; the result is bad luck for the entire village (bad crops, disease, etc.). These places are still very much part of the villagers' lives. Worship and offerings are performed regularly.<sup>19</sup>

**Conflict of place-view:** Only a few years back (prior to the country's logging ban in 2002), the logging company that was given the concession was very much

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<sup>19</sup> Higgins-Zogib L. (2006). Interviews with villagers in Mondulkiri Protected Forest, and personal observations.

active in the forests. Although informed of the burial and spirit forests, these were not always respected. The villagers complain of bad luck befalling the village after the forests had been disrespectfully penetrated and disturbed by the loggers. The area is now under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries, unlike most of the other protected areas in Cambodia, which are governed by the Ministry of Environment. Sacred places were never taken into consideration in the land-use planning of the area. Now two major international NGOs work in the area, WWF and WCS<sup>20</sup>. Due to a relatively recent concern by conservation NGOs about local communities, livelihoods, and development issues, the indigenous peoples are now consulted and considered partners in conservation. Spirit and burial forests and other sacred natural elements of this protected area are therefore taken into account and respected .

Success in co-managing for faith and nature is almost always a matter of developing effective and trusting partnerships between the different stakeholders involved. In some of the protected areas detailed above the conflict is so deeply rooted in history and common sentiment that the gaps in understanding are often very difficult to bridge. But the values of these places are worth that additional effort to ensure at least a common understanding of the whole range of issues.

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**20** World Wildlife Fund for Nature and World Conservation Society.

## Some conclusions

*"The 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage of national parks is not separate. This is an artificial 'white-fella' separation. They are still boxing the whole into sections; we need to integrate management into a holistic view of the landscape".* (Phil Sullivan, Aboriginal Heritage Officer, National Parks and Wildlife Service, New South Wales, Australia).

What Phil Sullivan has put his finger on is that 'they' –or rather, 'we' the conservationists- haven't got it quite right yet when it comes to managing protected areas that have important sacred values to faith groups.

If we are to be truly relevant in a protected area or landscape, if we are to really engage local stakeholders, and if we are to respect the rights of indigenous peoples, different faith groups, and cultures, then we must learn to understand the environment as others understand it. We must, as Phil Sullivan puts it, move away from the 'white-fella separation' and think holistically about all the values of an area, both tangible and 'less-tangible'.

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## 5. The case study of Montserrat

### The point of view of the monastic community

Ramon Ribera-Mariné,  
Prior of the Monastery of Montserrat

Montserrat has multiple facets and many realities co-exist here in peace, although not necessarily without a certain tension on occasions. Those of us who live here are used to the difficulties that those who visit have in appreciating the full variety of the site with all its inherent ambiguities. My aim with these words is to stimulate debate and to provide an answer to the question “What is Montserrat?” for those interested in the spiritual value of natural protected areas. The search for an answer to this question was also the motive behind the choice of route for the walk we have just completed. Now it is time to discuss this question indoors, comfortably sat down!

I would like to begin with a couple of reflections.

**1.** To be honest, I do not look on myself as an authority on anything that could warrant addressing this forum. I am neither a biologist nor a naturalist; rather, I am a

simple monk and man of God, a student of Semitic languages who has ended up as the prior of the community of monks on Montserrat. I have lived here for over 38 years and have written a number of books about this mountain, and I have thought long and hard about nature and geography in general. I am, when it comes down to it, an amateur.

**2.** I will refer to Montserrat as the ‘mountain of Montserrat’, instead of the ‘holy mountain’, because the main problems of the place are physical: not everyone in civil society or the Administration is aware of the extreme fragility of this natural wonder, which we must pass on to future generations. Only a few days ago we witnessed what I would call (non-professional opinion) an attack on a *natural reserve*!

Two further initial considerations (I did say that the reality of Montserrat was complex!) before I begin.

Firstly, the mountain of Montserrat has been a *sacred mountain* since ancient times and has always had this special transcendental value. This should not surprise anyone, given the unique outline of

the mountain, with its natural rock pinnacles full of symbolism. The names given to these strange petrified shapes offer some clues as to the mountain's symbolic value, although we must humbly confess that we know nothing of its pre-Christian spiritual connotations. What we do know, however, is that for over a thousand years (since 1025) and without interruption, a Christian monastic community has been present on Montserrat and during this time has attracted multitudes of people from the surrounding towns and from even further afield.

Secondly, Montserrat lies within the densely populated and expanding Barcelona conurbation. As you will have noticed, this active industrial area also boasts large commercial areas, as well as our remarkable mountain and tourist attraction, which is on a par with many of the great sights of Europe. This helps to explain why Montserrat receives over two million visitors annually: major infrastructures are needed to welcome such large numbers of people, above all because their presence is very seasonal.

Montserrat is not and never has been a remote *sacred mountain*, isolated from the whims of history, as the fact that it has been sacked on more than one occasion demonstrates.

We have just visited three different sites on the mountain and looked at some of the different realities that co-exist here. I'd like

now to take you back there and add a few simple remarks.

### A. View from the terrace of the Sant Joan Nature School.

**a.** Above the Sanctuary there is an area containing a number of old hermitages (an area traditionally known as Tebaida, after the Egyptian hermitages in the region of Thebes). Around 50 years ago a proposal was made to fence off these hermitages and restore them to their original use. Fortunately, the idea never prospered owing to its unpopularity. The mountain of Montserrat has always been perceived as open to all and the monks that have been living here for a thousand years have always accepted this notion in full! Nevertheless, there are two hermitages (Santa Creu and Sant Dimes) that we consider to be an integral part of the monastery and which are inhabited temporarily by hermits (monks or other people connected to the community). Sant Dimes (closed to the public) also boasts an automatic weather station!

**b.** A chapel was built on the site of the hermitage of Sant Benet at the beginning of the twentieth century. After repeated attacks by vandals, at the beginning of the 1980s it was converted into a hut for climbers. Due to the nature of Montserrat,

climbing groups have been a very important part of the mountain over the last 75 years and they must be taken into account. Our community has always appreciated that the mountain belongs to them also.

**c.** The mountain is crossed by a long-distance footpath, which reminds us that for 150 years hiking has been a popular activity in Montserrat. Half a sport, half a cultural activity, walking as practiced by the Catalan walking clubs is well established in our country. The mountain, which lies at the heart of a geographical and political region, is criss-crossed by many excellent footpaths.

**d.** You will have become aware that the Sanctuary consists of a variety of buildings of differing ages, all clustered around the Holy Image, a site of pilgrimage that often seems too small for so many visitors. There is also the Monastery complex, where the monks live, and various areas designed for pilgrims and visitors that provide services (cells, hotels and restaurants) and souvenirs of the mountain.

## **B. View from Pla de les Taràntules (the area of Tebes):**

**a.** This area is visited by hundreds of thousands of people every year, who

take advantage of the wonderful rack-and-pinion railway to reach this spot. Some of those that come here walk the two tracks that meet here or the path of Sant Jeroni to visit in comfort the upper parts of the mountain and enjoy the magnificent views.

**b.** The old Saint Joan restaurant is a reminder of problems we have had in the past. One such problem is the amount of rubbish that has accumulated at this spot, a blemish that has been exacerbated by delays caused by legal questions of ownership and distant disputes in town councils.

Another problem I recall is that of the squatters who illegally occupied some of the hermitages (or coves, as they are known), from where they would descend on unsuspecting tourists and climbers. Fortunately, this problem has been partially resolved, although we are aware that it will not be by any means the last such problem.

**c.** With the destruction of the hovels inhabited by some of the squatters, an insult to all civilised people, the former sites of the hermitages of Sant Joan and Sant Onofre have been uncovered. The idea of restoring the site by preparing information panels and opening up a walking circuit around the hermitages in

the area (for example, Santa Magdalena and its lookout point, and the curious Jacob's Ladder) would seem to be a good one, although it is above all a cultural project with a historical perspective.

### C. A third site is a visit to the Path of the Rosary and the Holy Grotto:

**a.** The one place, even more so than the Sanctuary, where the two currents discussed during this assembly come face to face is along the Path of the Rosary, a path hewn from the rock and constructed at great cost to provide access to the Holy Grotto. According to a legend dating from the Renaissance, the original image of the Mother of God was found in this chapel. It is still used for religious purposes by a multitude of people, who visit to fulfil their vows, often barefoot or with push chairs. I would like to highlight, above all, two groups of people who visit here: young families and couples, and people who have just arrived in Catalonia, either from other parts of Spain or Latin America. This site still maintains its former aspect, but has been restored and is perfectly integrated into the surrounding environment.

**b.** The Holy Grotto is one of those rare places in our society that you can only reach on foot along a steep mountain path. For the unaware, the walk can

turn into a veritable pilgrimage! A question that has yet to be resolved is the lack of services at the cave: there is but one source of drinking water in this spot which according to the day and hour can fill up with large numbers of visitors.

**c.** Some of the sculptures –paid for by popular subscription- are of notable artistic value and blend in beautifully into the landscape. I consider to be of particular value the sculpture of Saint Domenec, the Cross and the Mystery of the Resurrection.

I've led you on a quick tour of Montserrat, with sites chosen by this member of the family who have been living in this place for a thousand years, caring for the Holy Image to a background of the changing seasons and the rhythmic cadence of the day and night.

The mountain is visible and recognisable from afar and, aside from its natural value, is the throne and palace, the visible reference (in a sacred sense) of an invisible reality. One hundred and twenty-five years ago a poet gazed upon the mountain and taught us to look upon its remarkable forms as having been chiselled out by the angels, and as a reference point (a star in the east or a Sinai) for a whole nation.

A key question remains: How can we transmit all the values of this mountain to future generations? I make no apologies for repeating that I am referring to the mountain as a whole and its entire rich and varied heritage: the pale-coloured mountain clothed in green; the cultural and historical treasures left behind by previous generations; the spiritual treasure of

the site that is the Holy Image; and the peace and quiet that one respires here. The task of us monks as custodians of this natural wonder is to ready the mountain for the large family of men and women that come to visit us. And I firmly believe that this assembly can help us in this task.

*Father Ramon Ribera-Mariné briefing participants in the Workshop beside the Sant Joan station of the rack-and-pinion railway train station.*



# The view point of the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat

Jordi López,  
President of the Executive Committee of  
the Board

I would like to try and explain from the point of view of an administrative institution, the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat, which is part of the Catalan Government, why it is important and justifiable to promote and finance certain specific policies here on Montserrat. First, however, I'd like to recall the theory of Gaia, as proposed by James Lovelock, which is becoming relevant in this place that is part today of a society dominated by chaos. Montserrat is like a metaphor emerging from amid the chaos.

Four aspects of Montserrat are of particular interest to the Government of Catalonia. Prior Ramon Ribera-Mariné has already reminded us that Montserrat is an exceptional place from natural, cultural and spiritual points of view. Nevertheless, these three concepts exist in a specific context and moment in time and generally interact pacifically and successfully, although at times they clash and tensions arise.

I would like to explain what the Government is doing for Montserrat, and how we

support the projects concerning natural, cultural and spiritual aspects of Montserrat that will benefit a reality that is far more than just the sum of its parts. Once again I would like to remind you of the theory of chaos and offer a holistic vision of Montserrat. What can we do in each of these different dimensions?

**Nature.** We have to ensure that future generations inherit the wonderful natural heritage of Montserrat whilst guaranteeing that it is accessible to current generations. Montserrat is not only a mountain to be admired from afar; rather, it should be enjoyed in full *in situ*. It can be reached by public transport from Barcelona and for this reason the Natural Park is subject to great human pressure. Public use must be organised, not with prohibitions, but with controls and effective small-scale actions such as those that have been carried out at Can Massana and Sant Joan designed to make visits to the mountain much more enjoyable.

**Culture.** For centuries Montserrat has been home to a community that lives and breathes Culture with a capital 'C': it always has, it is still doing so and I hope that it will continue to do so in the future. It is part of the heritage of our country. The

Monastery of Montserrat also has one of the best landscape painting art galleries in Catalonia. At the same time, Montserrat acts as symbol of identity for Catalonia as a country and the Catalans who live there, as the Director of the Directorate-General of the Natural Environment mentioned this morning. Montserrat is a living symbol that allows people from the different walks of life who make up this country to recognise their common sense of identity.

**Spirituality.** Montserrat is home to a group of people who provide us all with living testimony of their beliefs. Here, I must also recognise that I speak as Director of the Directorate-General of Religious Affairs, my other position of responsibility. From this point of view, Montserrat is of the utmost significance to our society and the people who live here offer us so many important fundamental values. Someone once said that they were “living stones” and I agree that this is a good definition of the spiritual values and ideas of identity that are found in Montserrat.

**Territory.** Everything that I have explained takes place in a physical space where many other things also occur. Montserrat is an economic entity and point of reference, as well as a tourist attraction. It generates tangible financial benefits for many people who live in the area. At the moment we are promoting agricultural parks in the area

surrounding the mountain that may be very beneficial for local people, and we hope that they will be seen as an opportunity and not a restriction. Montserrat is a place to be lived in and, above all, to live in as a part of a group. It lies at the confluence of four municipalities and three *comarques* (counties); the initiative ‘Portals de Montserrat’ (Gates of Montserrat), a company set up jointly by the four municipalities that cover the mountain, is a demonstration that cooperation at local level can work.

Otherwise, Montserrat also represents a chance to resist the increasing pressure from built-up areas. In face of the spread of the concrete that is devouring much of the rural landscapes of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat helps local town councils to take decisions such as refusing to grow further –the case of the town of Marganell- that seem to go against social dynamics and whose aim is maintain the value of the natural heritage of this magnificent mountain.

Montserrat is a place where people can exercise the responsibility they have to live in harmony with all the physical and human elements of their surroundings. Public bodies must take decisions that maintain this harmony that is only possible if there is a permanent state of cooperation between the private and public sectors. We must all

work together to make this collective project that is Montserrat work. This implies a number of different specific actions such as the work we will carry out to renew the whole water supply system for Montserrat and some of the towns at the foot of the mountain.

A society such as ours in Catalonia, which has experienced a sudden recent increase in cultural diversity and religious plurality, must not repeat the errors in integrating immigrants that have been committed in other countries. We must talk to people from other cultures who hold different

beliefs to ours. Dialogue will always be possible if we have a truly positive attitude towards this question and prepare not only our minds, but also our hearts –or our souls, some might say. In this sense we need places such as Montserrat to be able to enjoy the spiritual dimension of our lives (that everyone will choose to fill as they see fit) and to help us connect to all the people of different cultures and traditions that go to make up the diverse and plural reality that is Catalonia today.

Many thanks.

*Art Nouveau sculptures representing one of the mysteries of the Rosary at Montserrat.*



# The standpoint of a company providing services

*Josep Altalló,  
Managing Director of  
L'Agrícola Regional, SA*

A convenient way to begin is to ask exactly how we define Montserrat. We view Montserrat as a multi-faceted reality with different overlapping meanings for different people. The main facets of this wonderful mountain can be summarised as following:

- A unique natural park
- Historically, one of the most important cultural sites in Catalonia
- The sanctuary of the patron saint of Catalonia and a place of pilgrimage, peace and prayer
- A monastic community
- A symbol of identity
- A tourist destination.

L'Agrícola Regional, S.A. (LARSA) is a private company belonging to the monks of Montserrat that provides services and manages the buildings, facilities and the operations within the confines of the sanctuary. The company was set up in 1920 to manage the heritage of the site, although it has also gradually become involved in the management of the visitor

facilities. Currently, LARSA is in charge of the running of all the facilities around the Monastery of Santa Maria, which are open 365 days a year. LARSA, has over 300 direct employees (with on average 210 working every day) and an annual income of 18 million euros.

LARSA aims *"to offer services to the visitors who come to Montserrat as part of the welcome provided by the Monastery and the Sanctuary. The running of these services must be profitable and provide finance for any necessary investments. As well, it must collaborate in the maintenance of Montserrat as a whole"*.

## Services for visitors

- The accommodation includes hotels and apartments with 700 beds and 120,000 overnight stays per year; the bars and restaurants provide 300,000 meals and around one-million bar services annually.
- Cultural: an art gallery, with a good collection of landscape painting, an interactive exhibition and an open-air museum. The art gallery receives some 110,000 visits per year, while about the same number of people visits the interactive exhibition.

Furthermore, 7,000 children visit in school groups and 4,000 people follow guided tours every year.

- The souvenirs shops have some 8,000 products on offer and issue 600,000 entrance tickets per year.
- The Montserrat Reservation Centre is a fully fledged outgoing and incoming travel agency.
- Annually, the technical office issues 3,500 maintenance work orders and oversees work to the value of 1-2 million euros.
- Some of the other services provided by LARSA to this area include the annual supply of 4 GW of light and 140 million litres of water from the Llobregat River, all extracted, treated and then pumped up 750 m to the monastery of Santa Maria. As well, the company accumulates 600 tons of road sweepings per year and provides security and cleaning services for all the buildings and facilities in and around the sanctuary and the monastery.

## Product management

- We manage everything from the bar and stores, to the queues and tourist circuits. We look after visitors during their whole stay and hope that this 'captive public' will

one day become a 'faithful public' to Montserrat.

- LARSA has had long experience in managing the site and works within a framework based on culture, nature and spirituality in the development of its brand and image.

## Management of the visit

A typical visit consists of the queue at the car-park and then visits to hear the choir singing and see the Image of the Virgin, followed by the purchase of the local curd cheese. From a tourist point of view, this product could be considered as mature. However, we aim to develop new products that include:

- The Museum as part of the attraction of the visit
- Temporary exhibitions
- An open-air museum (circuits)
- An interactive exhibition 'Inside Montserrat'
- Special products for schools
- Packages for travel agencies such as 'Montserrat in a day', 'Vespers at Montserrat', etc.
- Packages for individual visitors: 'Guided visit to Montserrat', 'All of Montserrat',...
- Tailor-made guided visits for groups
- Services for companies with special accommodation needs.

## Management of the product

In terms of the general public, we operate two basic strategies: the management of quality via word of mouth and the management of communication via selective advertisements in the media aimed at our target market.

For those with special interests, we offer pastoral services to pilgrims and congregations, as well as acting as travel agents for specialised groups (schools, hikers and cultural tourists) and the general public.

The main markets for Montserrat are tourists visiting Barcelona and the Costa Brava and they are usually targeted by offering Montserrat as a 'complementary destination'.

Our travel agency works in the commercialisation of the product via the development and promotion of packages. As well, we manage everything from the rack-and-pinion railway to the car-parks.

Three main bodies work in a concerted fashion to promote Montserrat as a tourist destination: Turisme de Catalunya, Turisme de Barcelona and Turespaña.

## Price management

We face two problems when it comes to setting the prices in our hotel, restaurants and shop facilities. Firstly, our location, halfway up a mountain and part of a religious site, increases costs and, secondly, we have to offer and maintain services such as light, the boys' choir, cleaning services and garden maintenance that are not covered directly without charging entrance fees.

Our approach is based on four strategies:

- Control basic prices, thereby keeping them lower than in other tourist destinations.
- Stimulate demand in order to combat rising prices.
- Offer a good price for packages.
- Take into account the market prices with which we must work and control our costs appropriately.
- Negotiate on the basis of the added value and value for money we offer.

LARSA bases its communication strategy on its long experience with nature, culture and spirituality.

For the general public, we offer the people, activities and location of Montserrat,

and provide a good global image of the services (brand) we offer.

For a more motivated public, we offer the Monastery (pilgrimages, congregations, etc.), a travel agency for specialised groups (schools, hikers, cultural tourists, etc.), specialised material and different treatment.

For tourist groups, we target visitors' countries of origin by visiting trade fairs and collaborating with catalogues and familiarisation trips for travel agents. We also produce specialised material in col-

laboration with external tourist boards. More locally, our communication strategy is based on packages for individuals and incoming travel agencies, the production of display material and catalogues distributed to hotels, promotions and, above all, lots of information on schedules, changes and new features.

*Up to 20,000 people gather at the Monastery of Montserrat during the main Christian festivals and celebrations*



# The view point of the Catalan Federation of Hiking and Climbing Clubs

*Xavier Ariño,  
President of the Catalan Federation of  
Hiking and Climbing Clubs*

I would like to wholeheartedly thank the organisers of this Seminar for the invitation: walking and climbing groups are not usually as well received in the other protected areas in Catalonia as we are here in the Natural Park of the Mountain of Montserrat.

Montserrat is a very special mountain, a fact that makes the relationship between us climbers and walkers and the mountain also very particular. We feel a special attraction –and in some cases an addiction- to this place and there are even specialist Montserrat climbers who we call ‘Montserratins’! The truth is that Montserrat from the outside seems inaccessible, but once in, you never want to leave! For historical reasons and due to the sheer wonder of the place, Montserrat has always been considered as the ‘cradle’ of Catalan walking and climbing groups. I’d like now to briefly describe how walking and climbing evolved in Montserrat and in this way

help you to understand the situation we find ourselves in today.

Around 150 years ago organised walking groups began to explore and enjoy the mountain of Montserrat. Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries a number of scientific naturalist societies emerged who, besides walking, aimed to try and find other values in outdoor activities. At the same time climbing as we know it today also began to be practiced and led to rivalry on the sheer faces of the much admired rock pinnacles of the mountain. Other outdoor groups went further than simple physical activity and looked for other reasons to come to the mountain: a century ago the society ‘Societat del Sol’, for example, went beyond walking and climbing and practiced nudism in the heart of the mountain in an attempt to establish a more intimate relationship with nature.

After the end of the Civil War (1936-1939), during which period climbing did not advance, new ideas began to arrive from other countries and, in turn, new techniques began to be developed in Catalonia that were subsequently exported to other countries. The rock faces of Montserrat have very few cracks and crevasses and it was neces-

sary to find new forms of progression and safety techniques, which were to become the precursors of many of the climbing techniques that are in use today.

In the 1960s climbing underwent great technological and terminological changes and at the same time the practice of climbing began to assume a more spiritual side. Climbers began to remark that climbing was a “way of life” and a way of “finding oneself”. Climbs were sought out that enabled the climber to better himself, both physically and spiritually. This is clearly indicated by a popular climbing guide published at the beginning of the 1970s that is still a good read even today. I’d like to read you a fragment: *“Climbing is a way of expressing yourself. The summits are catalysts that attract irresistibly and allow the climber to find God, himself and other men. As a means of expression, climbing demands that the climber is at one with himself and requires good physical condition and techniques, as well as spiritual and corporal strength. Climbing fulfils the man, and sport reinforces his social dimension.”*

This was written by Salvador Plans, a climber and one of the monks of Montserrat and shows how climbing has always been linked to the Monastery and the monks, as Prior Ramon Ribera-Mariné has already explained. The monks have helped the sport develop, as well as partic-

ipating in rescues and helping to promote climbing at difficult times.

The 1980s were years of change for climbing in Montserrat. New styles emerged and sporting dimensions began to take precedent over philosophical values: the spirituality of the sport was being lost. The tendency over the last few years is towards massification. Adventure sports are promoted from all sides and people come to Montserrat as if it were a fun park, without having passed through a learning process as was the case with the climbing clubs of the past. Today the mountain is used in a much more frivolous manner.

As well, during this period of time things have changed in the mountain itself, some for the better, some for the worse, and we have experienced forest fires, floods and landslips, and seen new infrastructures built. In 1987 after the great forest fires, Montserrat was declared a natural park, although from our standpoint almost nothing has been done since then. Only in the last three or four years have things started to change. We have seen how the area around the Monastery has spread and how new infrastructures have been built to favour mass access by more and more tourists to the mountain. However, all this has been done without a thought for the mountain, which is not in good shape. We walkers and climbers have kept the paths

in good condition, but did not expect to be abandoned to quite such an extent.

Over the last few years it seems that things have started to improve, although good intentions –of which there are plenty- are not enough. More people and material destined to satisfy the needs of the mountain and its users are needed. Montserrat has become a virtual island within increasingly built-up and industrialised surroundings, a situation that can only be seen as a threat to the mountain. Some species of wildlife are already endangered and not just because of the presence of climbers and walkers; rather, it is the change in land-use

in the surrounding area that we are beginning to regard with worried eyes.

Nevertheless, our groups must remain optimistic and proactive. We are currently involved in a project aimed at regulating our activities in the Natural Park and, in collaboration with the Park Board and the Fundació Territori i Paisatge, with expert advice from the Catalan Institute of Natural History, we are attempting to identify an equilibrium between use and conservation in the Natural Park so as to be able to continuing climbing for many more years to come.

Thank you very much.

*Rock climbing has developed its own particular styles in Montserrat.*





# Montserrat

## Catalonia, Spain

*Josep-Maria Mallarach*

### Introduction and history of the legal protection of the site

The mountain of Montserrat is an outstanding landmark and is considered by many to be the spiritual heart of Catalonia (Spain). It is located about 50 km north of the city of Barcelona and within the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, a conurbation with a population of almost 4.5 million people. The mountain itself rises up over 700 m from the floor of the Llobregat river valley to its summit (Sant Jeroni, 1,236 m) and is characterised by a vast array of astonishing rock pinnacles.

Montserrat ('serrated mountain' in Catalan) has been considered a holy mountain since at least medieval times. In 1902, the forest engineer R. Puig i Valls proposed that Montserrat should be declared a national park, the first such formal proposal ever made in Spain. He argued that this "jewel of nature" was "ideal for devout people, a natural wonder for naturalists, a prodigy for believers and

a monument for patriots". However, he was unsuccessful in his bid and it was not until 1950 that Montserrat was declared a Scenic Landscape and a body was set up to take charge of its protection. Finally, in 1989 the Parliament of Catalonia enacted a law creating a governing body for the protection of the mountain of Montserrat.

In 1987 a devastating forest fire burned a large portion of the mountain's forests and threatened the monasteries and other facilities. In the same year, in a decree passed by the Catalan government, the mountain was declared a Natural Park (IUCN category V) with a single Natural Reserve (IUCN Category III) in its midst. However, to emphasise that Montserrat was different from the existing protected areas in Catalonia, it was decided that the new Natural Park was to be run directly by the Presidential Department of the Catalan Government, and that its management Board would be presided by the Catalan president, while the head abbot of the Monastery of Santa Maria would be its vice-president.

The existing protected area covers about 8,100 ha and includes a buffer zone of

*< Path to Sant Jeroni, one of the many different types of steps that link the main monastery to the old hermitages in the upper part of Montserrat.*

4,260 ha. A natural reserve of 1,760 ha covers the core area above the cliffs; the entire massif is included in the European Natura 2000 network. In light of requests from three of the four municipalities which share jurisdiction of the mountain, a project to enlarge the park by some 5,000 ha is currently being prepared.

Furthermore, the town councils of El Bruc, Collbató, Esparreguera and Olesa, with backing from the Diputació de Barcelona (Barcelona Provincial Council), are promoting the idea of protecting the land lying at the foot of the mountain via the declaration of an agricultural park (*Parc Rural del Montserrat*). This would be of great use both for conserving this singular site against urban encroachment, and for reinforcing the symbolism of peace and quiet that reigns in the extensive olive groves that surround the base of the mountain.

Within the framework of the Delos Initiative we visited Montserrat several times between October 2005 and September 2006 and met and discussed with over a dozen key stakeholders, including the prior, steward and hospitalier of the Monastery of Santa Maria, the parson of the Sanctuary, the president of the Steering Committee and the manager of this body, the director and biologist of the park's management team, the manager of

the company in charge of most public facilities, scientists, and representatives of pilgrimage organisations, ecologists, hikers and climbers. We had fruitful discussions with all on the basis of the questionnaire that was developed in 2005 and what follows is based upon those discussions and a study of available bibliographical sources.

## Natural heritage

The mountain of Montserrat is about 10 km long and 5 km wide, and covers some 45 km<sup>2</sup>. The jumble of hundreds of marvellous rock pinnacles (made up of Tertiary conglomerates and sandstones) that give Montserrat its unique silhouette makes the mountain a site of outstanding geomorphological significance. About 27% of the Natural Park and 47% of the Natural Reserve include geological heritage sites of national importance.

Most of Montserrat is dominated by rocky formations covered by Mediterranean vegetation, well adapted to this harsh environment, and evergreen holm oak forests dominate in areas where there is enough soil. The number of vascular plant species recorded from the park is surprisingly high, with over 1,200 vascular taxa identified, of which 40 are considered rare or endangered. Within the Natural Park a certain

number of endemic and/or rare plant species are found: *Erodium foetidum* subsp. *rupestre*, *Paronychia kapela* subsp. *serpyllifolia*, *Ramonda myconi*, *Linaria orig-anifolia*, subsp. *cadevallii* and *Saxifraga cal-losa* subsp. *catalaunica*. Furthermore, the park is home to 29 animal species considered rare, endangered or vulnerable, including the Spanish Ibex (*Capra hispani-ca*), which was introduced a decade ago; unfortunately, its current expansion is beginning to create problems for some of the fissure-loving plant species. Wild Boar are quite common and, largely because of the presence of nesting Bonelli's Eagles (*Aquila fasciata*), the site was included in the Natura 2000 network.

Natural risks are significant and quite common over much of the mountain and include landslides, rock falls –sometimes huge–, rain storms and less frequently forest fires. These natural risks have historically always been present; however, the increasing number of visitors means new security problems arise when these unpredictable events occur.

## Spiritual and cultural heritage

Since the era in which the first written documents appeared Montserrat has been venerated as a holy mountain. However, it was during the eighteenth century that the

spiritual character of this mountain began to spread over Europe and beyond. Thicknesse wrote about the mountain in English and Von Humboldt in German. Goethe considered Montserrat as a “symbol of the august peace of the spirit”, while the poet Schiller affirmed that “Montserrat suckles the man from the outer world to the inner world”. Similar reverences in Catalan and Spanish are much more numerous: it suffices to quote a great twentieth century Catalan poet, Joan Maragall, who wrote that the whole of “Montserrat is a temple, a liturgical mountain.”

Nesting on the mountainside on a narrow platform at 725 m of altitude we find the famous monastery of Santa Maria, next to the sanctuary where the holy image of the Virgin, patroness of Catalonia, is venerated. For many centuries this shrine was the main centre of pilgrimage within the kingdom of Aragon (which included Catalonia), above all between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, and to this day, with just short interruptions due to wars, it continues to be one of the best-known shrines to the Holy Virgin in the whole of the Catholic world. For almost one thousand years, a Benedictine monastic community has been at the service of the pilgrims from all over the world who come to worship the Black Madonna, a twelfth-century masterpiece of sacred art. The image of the Virgin,



used as shelters by climbers, while a few more are temporarily used by squatters. The tradition of pilgrimages on foot to venerate the holy image of Santa Maria dates from medieval times. In those days there were no other ways of reaching the sanctuary and religious zeal led many pilgrims, including kings and princes, to climb to the monastery bare-foot. Today, although the majority of people use a mechanical form of transport (rack-and-pinion railway, coach or car), there are still thousands of pilgrims that walk up to the sanctuary along some of these historical trails. The Catalan pilgrim's way to Santiago of Compostela starts at the Monastery of Santa Maria.

Over the centuries the monks of the monastery of Montserrat have had a significant cultural and spiritual influence on Catalan life. It can boast over the last four centuries a significant school of liturgical music, one of the oldest publishing houses in Europe, which has published thousands of books and many influential journals, a library with over 300,000 volumes, including a number of highly interesting and rare manuscripts, and a museum with one of the best collections of landscape painting in Catalonia. The cultural activities of the monks has centred on biblical studies, liturgy, theology, monastic history, musicology and pastoral themes, having had during the last centu-

ry a significant influence in conserving the Catalan language. The area surrounding the Monastery is also an open-air museum with a number of especially interesting trails –the Via Crucis, Degotalls and Rosary– that lead from the Monastery to the Holy Grotto, where, according to tradition, the image of the Virgin was found. These trails pass by a number of interesting sculptural groups dating from the nineteenth century that blend in with the natural rock formations.

## Development pressures

Catalonia is the most important tourist destination in continental Spain and currently receives about 15 million visitors a year. Local tourism to Montserrat started during the late 1800s, but the area only began to receive foreign day-trippers during the 1960s, when foreign mass tourism first began to take off in Catalonia. The monastery area now receives around 2.3 million visitors a year (tourists and pilgrims), whose numbers inevitably disturb both the monastic calm and the integrity of its natural surroundings. Visitor numbers peak at around 14,000 a day. The rest of the mountain is visited by about 500,000 people a year, mainly hikers and climbers, the latter drawn to the many sheer rock walls that are intensively used as climbing schools. Due to its location

and the quality and beauty of its cliffs and pinnacles, Montserrat was the birthplace of climbing in Catalonia. Following the lead of areas such as the Montsant Natural Park, an ongoing dialogue between climbers and the natural park managers is underway to define which areas are most appropriate for climbing, and areas where it should be restricted.

Of those that visit the mountain by vehicle, 70% come by car, coach or bus, 20% by train and 10% by cable car. Montserrat is a magnet for a variety of reasons. It is estimated that around 30% (some 600,000 people a year) of visitors come solely for religious purposes; most tourists who come with tour operators only stay for three hours in the main monastery area. The monastic tradition of hospitality is contrary to restricting access to the site, and the monks claim that some who come as tourists later return as pilgrims. They feel that one of their duties is to offer visitors, no matter who they are or where they are from, the chance to come into contact with a spiritual way of life. They point out as evidence of this desire the fact that large numbers of visitors listen in complete silence to the chants of the boy's choir every day.

On the other hand, all the public services around the Monastery are managed by a

private enterprise with over 300 workers. *L'Agrícola Regional* (LARSA) was created in 1912 by the monastic community, as a protection against the anti-clerical government of Spain, which during the eighteenth century confiscated all the properties of the Church and banned most religious orders for a while. Today, it takes care of all the facilities around the monastery of Santa Maria: one hotel, two apartment buildings, four restaurants, shops, museum, waste management, security, guided tours and environmental education packages in different languages, etc. It is presided by the Abbot and directed by the Steward of the Community, although the manager is a lay person. Most workers of the Monastery come from the four surrounding municipalities, and many of them are relatives. Montserrat has also been besieged several times over the centuries for political, military, cultural and even spiritual reasons. In 1812 the French army completely destroyed the monastery of Santa Maria and all the hermitages on the mountain. During more recent decades conflicts have included the intentionally provoked forest fire of 1987, which, due to strong winds, severely damaged the mountains forests. The monastic communities have always handled these problems in a discrete and effective manner.

Relationships between the Monastery of Santa Maria and the surrounding villages and towns have always been complex and multi-faceted. On the one hand, there is the appreciation and love of the mountain felt by local people, as shown by the fact that homes looking up to Montserrat are always regarded as more valuable. On the other hand, during the first few years after the Natural Park was created there was some resentment because it was felt that the Monastery was absorbing too much of the Park's resources. However, this situation has improved considerably over the last four years as a result of dialogue. One of the main strategies of the Park's managers aimed at improving cooperation with the local town councils is the *Portals de Montserrat* (Gateways to Montserrat) project that aims to create facilities in all four park municipalities so that all can benefit economically from the tourist trade. A good example of this is the climbing museum that is to be inaugurated soon in El Bruc. The attitude of the local town councils toward nature protection is clearly positive and three of the four, in collaboration with a private foundation, have in fact lobbied to extend the Park's boundaries.

Around 75% of the Natural Park either belongs to the monastic community (exceptional in Spain) or the Catalan government. Private property is quite frag-

mented and is mainly found in the low-lying areas that are more vulnerable to pressure from developers.

The relationship between the park managers and the monasteries is complex due to a number of political and historical factors. The current park management plan was drafted by the Catalan Ministry of Culture and a number of people feel that a natural park is not an appropriate designation for Montserrat, since, regardless of its geomorphological and natural significance, its main heritage is spiritual and cultural. Some feel that it would be more appropriate for the mountain to be designated a Spiritual or Cultural Park, or even a Natural Sanctuary, legal figures that do not exist under Catalan law. Many people visiting Montserrat do not even know that it is a natural park.

Currently the Park employs 20 people: a manager, director, biologist, two administrative staff and 15 car-park wardens, but no rangers. A large number of the public services are provided by LARSA, a company –already mentioned– that employs around 300 people under lay management and the stewardship of the Monastery of Santa Maria.

Throughout its history the Benedictine community has always respected the mountain's natural heritage, given that

they see it as a theophany or a manifestation of God. Several places on the holy mountain have biblical names taken from the Holy Land and the Egyptian deserts, birthplace of Christian monasticism. The hermits, who have lived in close contact with nature for so many centuries, have successfully fostered this attitude. Both hermits and monks have consistently referred to Montserrat as a *santa muntanya*, a holy mountain, over the centuries. It is also significant that the motto that the Monastery chose to define Montserrat is 'Nature, Culture, Spirituality'.

One of the main threats to the integrity of Montserrat is urban encroachment around the base of the mountain. There is one urban area inside the boundary of the protected area, which will require special measures if it is to be integrated into the landscape. On the other hand, there is a striking lack of rangers, who are much needed as a means of controlling sporadic damage to some of the hermitages and some of the other most vulnerable elements of the mountain's spiritual, cultural and natural heritage.

Overcrowding occurs occasionally, mainly during festivities, and some days it is impossible to reach the monasteries by car due to traffic jams. From both a natural and a spiritual point of view this is a problem, because many visitors do not

visit the site for spiritual or religious reasons and tend to behave in a way that is not coherent with the sacred nature of the mountain. During festivities public facilities often become overstretched.

## Conclusions

The concurrence of elements of such cultural, spiritual and natural significance in Montserrat provides a unique opportunity to try and develop positive synergies from the combination *in situ* of all these values, thereby strengthening the overall heritage of a place that has been recognised over the centuries as a holy mountain. This distinctive blend of spirituality and nature – a sanctuary and two monasteries perched high up a mountainside – is one of the core values of the site and the key to promoting synergy in the park.

Both the processes involved and the outcome of these synergies have the potential to exert a significant positive influence on many other protected areas that possess an outstanding spiritual heritage, whether they be in Catalonia or elsewhere in Europe, where Christianity is a significant force. The integration of all these values will not only broaden public support, but may also encourage a much-needed change

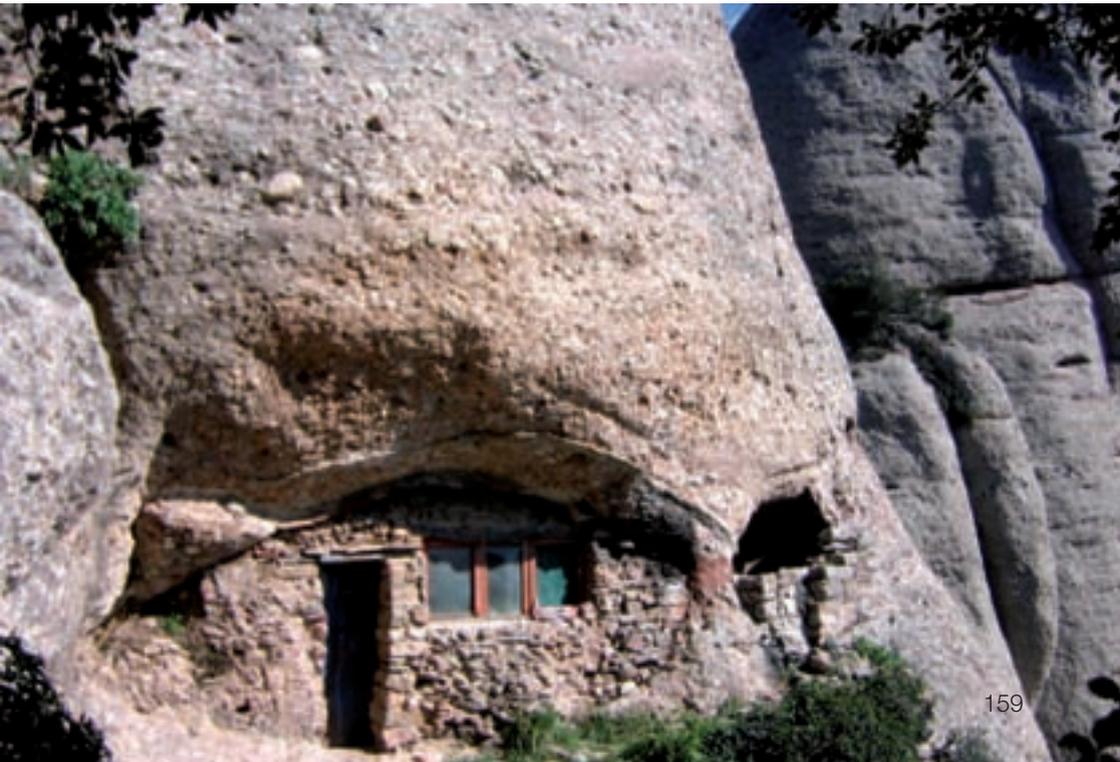
in personal and social attitudes towards nature based on these newly perceived intrinsic values.

Despite the generalised social recognition of the outstanding spiritual values associated with Montserrat, the Decree that created the Natural Park has a number of serious lacunae regarding, for instance, the goals set for the Park's single Natural Reserve, which neglect the fact that the mountain has been the most important site for the retreat of hermits in south-west Europe for over a thousand years. This initial legal weakness has led to a number of other deficiencies in the integration of the

spiritual and cultural heritage into the Park's plans and management programmes, although a willingness to improve all these deficiencies exists on all sides.

The Monastery of Santa Maria should take a leading role in the development and fulfilment of the recommendations that follow, since it is: a) the main spiritual authority on the mountain; b) the main landowner in the Natural Park; c) the owner of most of the public services provided; d) the oldest permanent settler of the mountain; and e) its abbot is the vice-president of the Park's governing body. This task is fully consistent with the fact

*Sant Salvador Hermitage, Montserrat.*



that the main aim of the Benedictine community is “to ensure that the mountain, the Monastery and the Sanctuary remain places where people can gather and worship”.

The Board of the Natural Park should play a leading role in the conservation of the natural heritage and in coordination with other stakeholders such as town councils, walkers, climbers and tour agencies. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that its management team is not sufficiently well-staffed to fulfil all its responsibilities in the existing protected area and will be even less so when the Natural Park and its buffer zone are enlarged.

## Recommendations

In light of the above analysis and diagnosis, we recommend:

**1.** An increase in the cooperation between authorities responsible for the protection of the natural heritage and those responsible for the spiritual and cultural heritage should be encouraged in order to be able to draw up as soon as possible a single joint management plan for the whole Natural Park and its Natural Reserve that is acceptable to the key stakeholders. This plan should fully integrate the spiritual and cultural values of the mountain by means of some of the proposals that follow here.

**2.** Appropriate planning instruments should be used to create zones devoted to silence, prayer and the contemplation of nature that link both monasteries, the pilgrimage trails and the ancient hermitages. One portion of the existing Natural Reserve could be set aside as a Hermitage Reserve and would include the possibility of rehabilitating a certain number of small hermitages as retreats for lay or religious people. One hermitage with its surrounding gardens, water channels, cobbled trails and ladders could be restored and used as an interpretation centre for the age-old tradition in Montserrat of living as hermits.

**3.** A strategic plan should be drawn up to gradually implement messages regarding the spiritual aspect of the natural world and the respect it deserves. This would be implemented at all levels, from within the facilities of the Natural Park, through to the monastery of Santa Maria and the convent of Sant Benet, the local town councils and all other aspects of the park’s functioning (educational programmes, web pages, the rack-and-pinion railway, tour operators, guides, signposting, and so forth). These messages should be planned in such a way as to help people discover the relationship between nature and spirituality via signs and realities such as the monastery’s bells, the hermitages

and little chapels scattered around the mountain and the peaceful atmosphere that reigns in the park, for three main groups of people: Christians who come for explicit religious reasons, people of other faiths or beliefs who have a general interest in spiritual matters and, lastly, people who feel attracted to Montserrat for a variety of reasons including its aura as a holy mountain and the possibilities for climbing and walking.

**4.** Use should be made of the opportunity provided by the enlargement of the Natural Park to increase cooperation with the four municipalities in the Park (Collbató, El Bruc, Marganell and Monistrol). One of the goals of this cooperation should be to promote positive synergies between aspects of the mountain's spiritual, cultural and natural heritage in all the messages designed for the general public (at the entrance of the Park, in the interpretation centres, and so forth). These messages should underline the essential concepts of respect, silence and tidiness that the Park wants to promote and their practical significance and implications.

**5.** A gradual integration of environmental and sustainability criteria into all public and private facilities already existing in Montserrat should be promoted to attempt to reduce dependence on fossil

fuels, to encourage the use of renewable energies, to increase the collection of rain water, and to reduce water consumption, the use of toxic materials and noise and light pollution. As well, ethical and environmental criteria should be included in all future decisions regarding the purchase of equipment and materials and the contracting-out of services. All new facilities that are built must be exemplary in this respect. The ethical and moral implications of these decisions must be explained.

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*Monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat*



