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# Contemporary Pilgrimages: The Human-Environment Connection as a Double-Edged Sword

A Conservation Psychology webinar



# Contemporary Pilgrimages: The Human- Environment Connection as a Double-Edged Sword

- Overview & Introductions
- Presentation
- Q&A



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University New England



# Contemporary Pilgrimages: The Human- Environment Connection as a Double-Edged Sword

## Presenter: Dr. Heather Warfield

Dr. Heather Warfield is an Associate Professor in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program and Scholar-in-Residence within the Conservation Psychology Institute at AUNE. One of her research foci is the development of a psychology of pilgrimage. She is the series editor of *Pilgrimage Studies* and the volume editor of the forthcoming textbook *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Pilgrimage: Historical, Current, and Future Directions*. Dr. Warfield is a member of the *Ruines de guerre* research initiative funded through the French Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR) and is exploring pilgrimage journeys to war ruins in France. Additionally, she is the creator and host of *Meaningful Journeys*, which is a podcast dedicated to conversations with pilgrims, pilgrimage studies scholars, and people who live at pilgrimage sites.



Photo: Photo Travel + Leisure



## Contemporary Pilgrimages: The Human-Environment Connection as a Double-Edged Sword

Dr. Heather Warfield  
Conservation Psychology Institute  
October 7, 2020





Photograph: Sherry Spitsnaugle

What is a pilgrimage?

- The oldest form of travel
- Hyper-meaningful voyages (Di Giovine, 2020)
- Can be religious, secular, or any combination of both (Collins-Kreiner, 2009)

# 2 Types of Pilgrimage Sites



Photograph: Western Wall Heritage Foundation

Sacred Human-Made Site  
Example: Kotel/Western Wall, Jerusalem

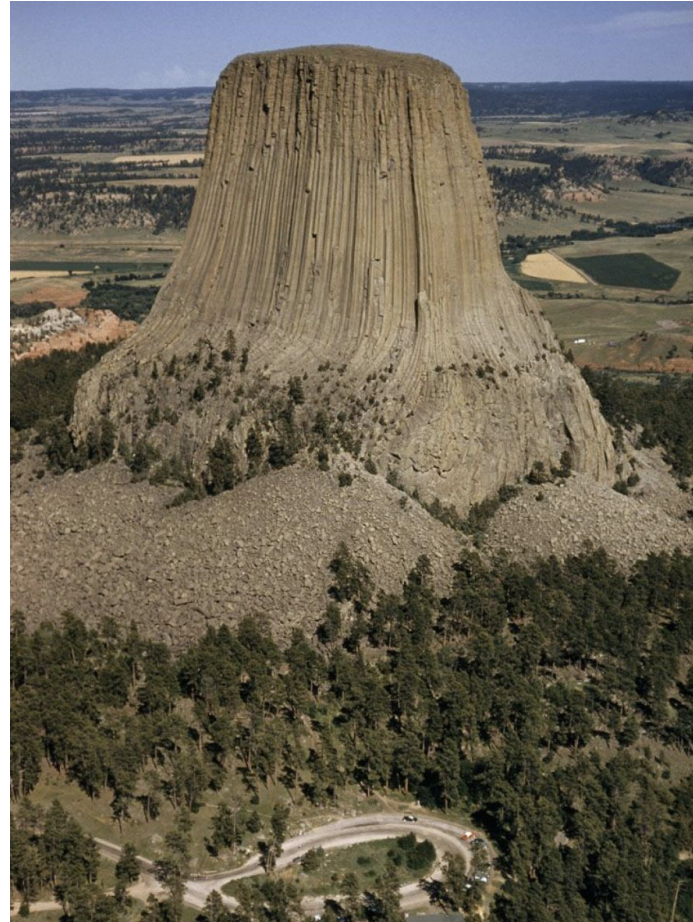


Photograph: Trip to Kyrgyzstan

Sacred Natural Site  
Example: Suleiman Mountain, Kyrgyzstan

# Conservation and Pilgrimage

- Indigenous communities have focused on conservation efforts for millenia
- The nexus between many conservation movements and pilgrimages begins with Sacred Natural Sites (e.g., Bear's Lodge/Devil's Tower, Wyoming, First US National Monument, 1906)
- In addition to Sacred Natural Sites, conservation efforts now include Sacred Human-Made Sites
- Over the past 10 years, the pilgrimage studies community has invested efforts to better understand, promote, and research conservation and sustainability.
- Exemplars of this work have emerged from tourism management, geography, and religious studies



Photograph: Bates Littlehales

Photograph: India Times



Photograph: AFP



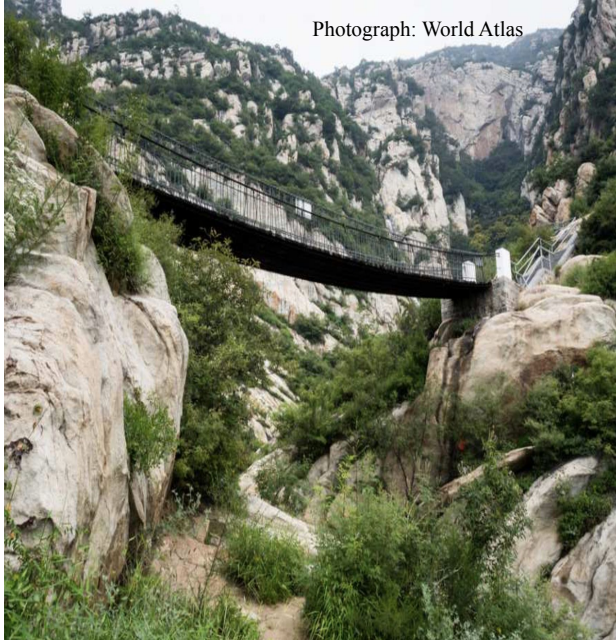
# Kumbh Mela, Allahabad, India Ganges River



Photograph: Dharmendra Chahar



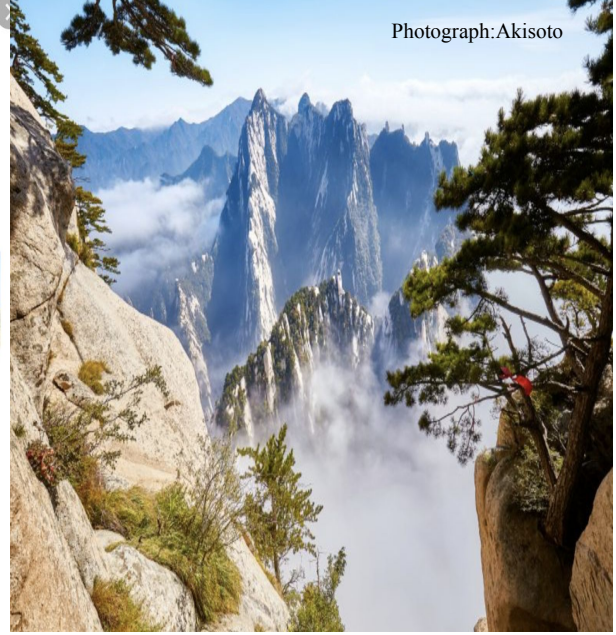
Photograph: World Atlas



Map of Five Great Mountains in China



Photograph: Akisoto

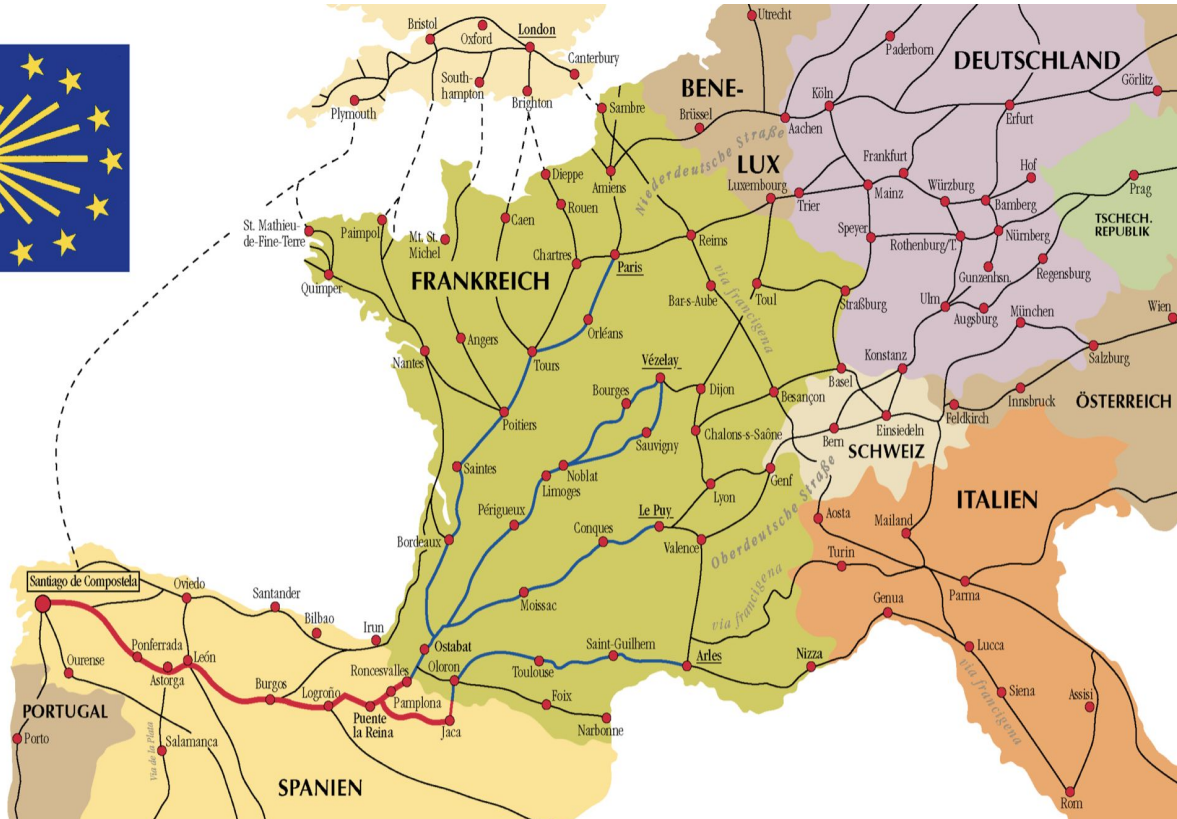


# 5 Great Mountains, China

Photograph: Spain.info



Photograph: Michael George



# Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage Routes Santiago Cathedral, Spain



Arba'een Pilgrimage, Iraq

Photograph: AFP



# Human-Environment Connection in the Context of Pilgrimage

Warfield (2018): Pilgrims across a broad sample of pilgrimages reported the therapeutic value of connections with the natural world/landscapes (e.g., clouds, water, animals, soil)

Eppig (2018): Camino pilgrims reported significant interactions with bird habitats, wetlands, and meaningful encounter with animals. “My pilgrim identity as an ecologist formed unique relationships that evolved as co-joined eco- spiritualities” (p. 55).

Ackerman (2019): Interviewed pilgrims from Walden Pond who reported connections with the natural world (e.g., water, birds, forest).

Tamashiro (2019): Autoethnographic work related to pilgrimages to sites of nuclear holocaust. Labeled “pilgrimage into witness consciousness” – (a) planetary peace consciousness arising from awareness of a connected universe, (b) “earth is my witness” affirmation, and (c) process of witness bearing (p. 194).



Photograph: Outsider

# Examples of Environmental Impact



Photograph: [joewalstours.ie](http://joewalstours.ie)

1. Waste
2. Pollution
3. Disease
4. Emissions
5. Destruction of habitat
6. Disruption of local community

# Examples of International Conservation Initiatives

- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (i.e., Article 12)  
[https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)
- UN World Tourism Organization - Sustainable Development  
<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>
- The Nature Conservancy - several initiatives focused on conservation of sacred sites  
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/search/?q=sacred%20sites>
- The World Conservation Union - protection of sacred natural sites via Secretariat offices and Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas of the World Commission on Protected Areas  
<https://www.iucn.org/commissions/world-commission-protected-areas/our-work/cultural-and-spiritual-values>

# Examples of Local Conservation Initiatives (1/2)



Photograph: Hillwalk Tours

## Camino de Santiago (Kunaeva, 2012)

Association for the Ecological Protection in Galicia (ADEGA) has published a “Best Practices Guide” that provides educational information about how to be more sustainable. It also provides practical tips and useful environmental information such as where to dispose of garbage, information about various plants and animals along the Camino, various landscapes, bodies of water, and cultural heritage and architecture.

# Examples of Local Conservation Initiatives (2/2)



## Kumbh Mela – Godvari River (Balch, 2014)

- Elimination of plastic-based products
- Deployment of extra police to the bank of the Godavari River to prevent people from throwing ritual offerings and material waste into the river
- Pedestrian bridges affixed with nets to prevent pollution
- Additional steps to stop people washing clothes, animals and cars in the river.
- Public awareness campaign about water pollution will run before and during the event
- Education efforts aimed at schools and colleges



# Recommendations for Pilgrims – Eppig (2018)

- Research the websites of various conservation organizations in the area of planned travel and enhance understanding of environmental issues that are important in those regions.
- Research land use history, study Google Earth, and read up on cultural and industrial histories of the area.
- Get acquainted with online pilgrim discussion forums for recommendations of books and online resources in nature study.
- Study topographical maps and field guides that cover the pilgrimage route. Become a member of regional conservation groups to receive newsletters and access to publications.



Photograph: Sacredsites.com

# Example of Regional Conservation Initiatives

- The European Green Pilgrimage Network – “pilgrims leave a positive footprint on the earth, and that pilgrim places become models of care for the environment”

<https://www.greenpilgrimageeurope.net/green-pilgrimage.html>



Photograph: Joe Daniel Price/Getty Images

# Research Directions

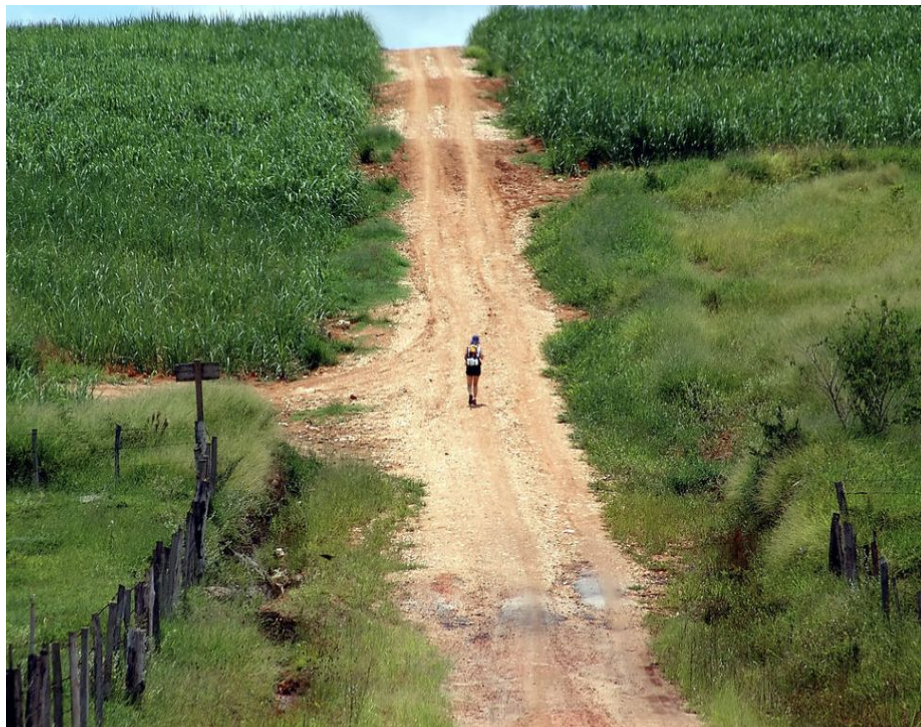


Photograph: Sacredsites.com

- Continue to explore the human/environment connection
- Efficacy of conservation programs
- How behavior and values change pre/post pilgrimage pertaining to conservation
- Experience of local inhabitants with the pilgrims, sites, and conservation
- Environmental impact pre/post COVID-19 at both Sacred Natural Sites and Sacred Human-Made Sites

\*\*\*Ensure indigenous voices are represented – integrate indigenous knowledge with scientific approaches

# Application & Policy Directions



Photograph: Sergio Luiz Furtado da Rosa

- Collaborate with local communities regarding development of conservation initiatives
- Balance economic benefits with sustainability best practices
- Involve all stakeholders early
- Bridge international conservation initiatives with regional and local initiatives
- Acknowledge a "one size fits all" approach will be ineffective

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**We are here for you!**

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