



Green Pilgrimage Network newsletter November 2012

You can read this newsletter and previous newsletters [here](#)

It's amazing to think that exactly one year ago many of us were in Assisi in Italy launching the Green Pilgrimage Network. So much has happened since!

Two weeks ago I was in India for the launch of the India Chapter of the Green Pilgrimage Network – with 11 of India's pilgrim towns and cities present. In two weeks time, 20 Hindu pilgrim cities will meet in Rishikesh to form a Hindu network which will be the backbone of the new Indian Chapter along with the two Sikh holy cities of Nanded and Amritsar. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is leading the way in its use of solar power so that the kitchens, which feed 30,000 people a day, will be an even greater blessing to the earth.

It was my first visit to India and I was struck by the scale of pilgrimage and how pilgrimage is part of the very fabric of life. This is a sacred geography with pilgrimage sites in every corner of the country. It's common for cities to swell to double their size with pilgrims, and up to 100 million people are expected in Allahabad for the Kumbh Mela this coming January. It's certainly the only country I have ever visited where there's a box to tick marked "pilgrimage" as a reason for entry at the airport.

Elsewhere, the year has seen huge steps forward in our vision of pilgrimage places becoming models of care for the environment. We have a new logo and a new vision statement for members old and new. In our last newsletter I reported on my visit to the sacred Daoist city of Louguan which is becoming one of China's most ecological urban destinations.



Looking forward, there's news of a gathering in Jerusalem around Earth Day in April to explore launching an Israel Chapter of the GPN and focusing on biodiversity and green accessible pilgrimage. Then preparations are underway for the next meeting of the Green Pilgrimage Network in Trondheim from July 25-29. Those in the "European chapter" of the GPN – St

Albans, Scotland, Armenia and Norway – joined ARC to meet in early October for a few gloriously autumnal days in beautiful Trondheim to start planning our meeting to coincide with the St Olav's festival.

Pilgrimage in Scotland has been flourishing too as has the uptake of the Green Guide for Hajj in Muslim countries from Nigeria to Indonesia to Malaysia.

We'd love to hear your news and views as this second year of the Network unfolds. But on this first anniversary, thank you for spreading the message of "leaving a positive footprint" on this earth and for being such inspiring travelling companions!

Alison Hilliard, ARC, alisonh@arcworld.org

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1. Firm dates for Trondheim meeting next July

The Municipality of the City of Trondheim, the Diocese of Nidaros, the Church of Norway and ARC, are inviting founding members of the Green Pilgrimage Network to come on pilgrimage to the ancient holy city of Trondheim, Norway for the second official international meeting of the Green Pilgrimage Network and to Northern Europe's largest pilgrimage event, the St Olav festival.

For the diary: Arrivals 25 July 2013. Departures 29th July, which allows guests to attend the opening events of the St Olav's festival on 28th July.

2. A new Indian chapter of the GPN

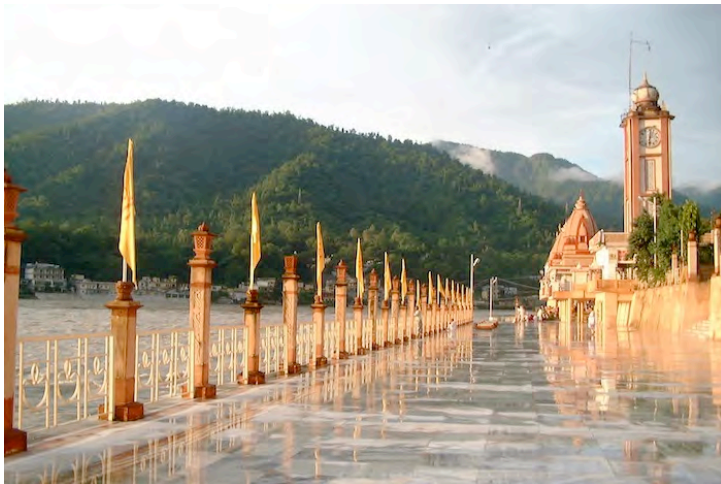


XI Conference of Parties
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
HYDERABAD INDIA 2012

On the seventh day of the UN's COP 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Hyderabad, 11 of India's holy towns and cities came together to launch an India chapter of the Green Pilgrimage Network. ARC joined with Emani Kumar from ICLEI to host the one-day meeting, and brought together representatives of Amritsar, Bodhgaya, Guntur, Haridwar, Howrah, Ladakh temples, Nanded, Rishikesh, Shirdi, Ujjain, Varanasi and Visakhapatnen. You can read more about it in our press release [here](#) and as we hear more from the cities themselves we'll add details to our website [here](#).

And a meeting in Rishikesh

India has more pilgrims than any other country in the world. The largest pilgrimage in the world is the Kumbh Mela, which means the Festival of the Pot, and commemorates an ancient story that after joining together to collect immortal nectar in a pot, the demigods and demons then all fought bitterly for its ownership, spilling the nectar in four places: Prayag (Allahabad), Haridar, Ujjain and Nashik. The festival is celebrated every twelve years (with Half-melas every six years) and the most recent one in 2001 attracted 70 million pilgrims.



It is hoped that 2013 will be the first Kumbh Mela in history in which Hindu leaders will explicitly emphasise environmental considerations for pilgrims. ARC and the Bhumi project are working with the Hindu guru Pujya Muniji to hold a meeting later this month in Rishikesh, inviting key Hindu pilgrimage cities, as well as secular environmental

groups, to explore practical environmental action on waste, water, sanitation and transport in Hindu pilgrimage cities. There will also be a focus on how to protect India's forests and sacred wildlife such as the tiger, particularly during pilgrimage. We'll bring you news about this in the December newsletter.

3. An Israel chapter meeting and symposium in Jerusalem

One of the many exciting parts of being a member of the Green Pilgrimage Network is the access this gives us to some of the initiatives being made by our colleagues around the world. One such initiative is led by Naomi Tsur, deputy mayor of Jerusalem and an ambassador for the GPN, to set up a possible Israel chapter of the network.

We attach an invitation to any of our members to participate at their own expense in the first Jerusalem Symposium on Green and Accessible Pilgrimage, and to submit papers. One of the key themes is the challenges of infrastructure in historic pilgrim cities. Information and questions to Fiona Kanter at fionarachelkanter@gmail.com, and the invitation is attached.

And a breakthrough on the Kidron Valley/Wadi El Nar crisis

When Jerusalem decided to become a founding member of the GPN, one of the things the administration knew it needed to deal with was the huge problem of the pollution of the Kidron Valley/Wadi El Nar. It is hard to imagine what fifteen million

cubic metres of raw sewage would actually look like, but it is not hard to imagine that this quantity of sewage flowing, untreated, through a holy valley into the Dead Sea constitutes a serious health hazard (as well as an unforgiveable waste of critical potential water). The Kidron/Wadi El Nar passes through both Palestinian and Israeli land and so has been vastly complex, with a joint water committee from both sides looking at the problem.



This week, for the first time, a plan has been agreed by both sides, which could convert the area from an environmental disaster into a beautiful recreational area, providing irrigation, encouraging tourism, and giving pilgrims once more access to some of the world's most important spiritual icons and sites.

Naomi Tzur reports: "The breakthrough this week was that the Palestinian Ministry of Water and the Israeli Water Authority have adopted the solution that the joint team has been working on. To put this into context: the reason what we were doing in the Kidron was different from the outset from previous attempts to solve the problem, was the fact that this was bottom up collaboration between professionals and politicians at the local level. Then the Palestinian community began pressuring its high level ministers, and so did we on the Israeli side.

Now that the ministries on both sides are in agreement (and this is the breaking news), we can look forward to a positive recommendation from the Joint Water Commission, after which we can move ahead with building the treatment plant for sewage in the Kidron. So we are one more step closer to our long-awaited happy ending (or beginning) for the Kidron/Wadi El Nar Basin.

4. The Green Hajj Guide launched in Indonesia

This report from Dr Husna Ahmad, co-author of the Green Guide for Hajj which was launched at Assisi, who attended on our behalf:

As I was being driven to Soekarno-Hatta airport for my departure from Indonesia following the launch of the Indonesian version of the Green Guide for the Hajj, I was struck by the similarity between Jakarta and Cairo: both capital cities have a similar vibrancy. I last visited Cairo just a month before the Arab spring. It was interesting to observe that in both cities, which have a majority Muslim population, the interface between the western [or should I say US?] culture and Islam is quite poignant. People do not feel restricted by what they are wearing or their size or colour – they just love to embrace life.

Indonesians have a wonderful sense of humour which I discerned when I was at the Universitas Nasional. They enjoy a good laugh, are not politically correct but are respectful and kind. I believe strongly that the Indonesian population will embrace environmental action or environmental care soon because of the love they have of their nation and their natural outlook on life.'

The launch of the Indonesian version of the Green Guide for Hajj took place as part of a seminar on the 14th June 2012 at the National University of Indonesia. The programme was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. The audience consisted of students, teachers, journalists and environmental activists.



The speakers were made up of religious scholars, government officials and environmentalists. The chairman, Fachruddin Mangunjaya, is back as a lecturer at the University and is highly regarded as an expert on environmental issues. Link [here](#) for more details.

And possibly in Malaysia

According to Husna, Dato Sri Iqbal from Malaysia wants to share the Guide with prominent scholars in Malaysia with the aim of hosting a conference in Malaysia on Greening the Hajj next year as well as adapting the Guide to be used by Malaysian pilgrims. Again, we'll keep you posted on developments here.

At the launch of 27 long-term plans for environmental action by faith groups in sub-Saharan Africa in Nairobi, Kenya in September, the Qadiriyyah Movement (which is Nigeria's largest Islamic sect with around 15 million followers) also shared its new translation of the Green Guide for Hajj. This has been translated into Hausa and adapted for use for pilgrims in Kano and West Africa. Yassin Maisikeli spoke at the ARC organised meeting about progress towards greening the Maukib pilgrimage, which takes place in Kano every year.

5. More news from Scotland

Did you know that once, Scotland was one of the foremost destinations for pilgrimage in the whole of Europe? That's something that most Scottish people don't know either, but [here's](#) a video about new stirrings of interest in an almost forgotten heritage, and about a proposed Iona-St Andrews pilgrimage link.



We also had a letter last week from Dane Sherrard at Luss about all the things he is doing to raise the profile of Green Pilgrimage in Scotland. (Luss was one of our founding members a year ago in Assisi.) Here's a shortened version, which I think that some of our members might find inspiring.



“Last Thursday I made a presentation to Argyll and Bute Council to persuade them to become our partners in the Green Pilgrimage movement -- not to be supporters of Luss Parish Church, but to be equal partners in the movement with us and our village. This they agreed unanimously to do.”

They further agreed to: share in a project based in Luss to teach young people about pilgrimage and conservation; to work with us in developing faith tourism in our area; to take forward the idea of badging Luss as Scotland's first “Green Pilgrimage City”. They agreed one person from the Council will attend the GPN meeting in Trondheim and will get together with folk from other cities to take forward the ideals of the movement. I have persuaded them that they have a lot to offer the world and I think that they are quite excited by the whole idea. I told them about the electric green highway in Norway and other projects we have learned about from Armenia, Norway and St. Albans.

Two weeks ago we hosted the first AGM of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum. This brings together folk from a wide variety of backgrounds whose interest is in physical routes for pilgrims and walkers to enjoy. Our presence from the Green Pilgrimage Network will ensure that 'walking gently' on God's earth remains high on this agenda. On Tuesday I am delivering a 'Time for Reflection' at the Scottish Parliament. The theme, of course, is Green Pilgrimage."



Green Pilgrimage Network

6. New vision statement

And finally we've done some thinking about our vision statement, which we have also attached as a separate document. Please do use it, or make suggestions of what else it might need. This new vision statement will be what new and old members of the Green Pilgrimage Network will sign, so your feedback at this stage is important.

The vision of the Green Pilgrimage Network is of pilgrims, and the pilgrim cities and places that receive them, becoming models of care for the environment and leaving a positive footprint on this earth.

We, the members of the Green Pilgrimage Network support this vision, and commit to create an action plan to transform our pilgrim city, place or route into a green, sustainable model in keeping with the beliefs of our faith or the faiths of our pilgrimage place.

This action plan will be the roadmap for improving the environmental impacts of the city or place and pilgrimage routes. We will share this action plan with other members of the Green Pilgrimage Network.

Each of us also commits to bring faith and secular groups together to work in partnership towards this vision.

We pledge to promote this in the local media, and we will work with visiting pilgrims to make their journeys as environmentally friendly as possible. We will do this through greening our transport, accommodation, food, water supply, waste, sanitation and wild places, as well as encouraging green parks, environmental education and wildlife protection for and by local residents.

We also pledge to support and help each other, and to promote green pilgrimage ideas where we can.