

Green Pilgrimage Network. Newsletter 6
ARC, April 2013



Dear Friends and Fellow Pilgrims

Last week we had a phone call from a small group in Wales which is thinking of developing a new pilgrim path across the country linking Bardsey Island of Saints in the north with St David's cathedral in the south. They had been inspired by what they had read about the Green Pilgrimage Network to think that they could make their own efforts sustainable and ecological from the very beginning. So, thank you to all those who have shared their news with us. We're always delighted to hear of how the Network idea is taking root. But more than that, we know that at some point people – many of whom we might never hear about – will be inspired by your stories to make a difference in their own holy places.

“Sharing our experiences” will be the theme of our meeting in Trondheim, Norway from July 25-29. But it will be more than that: it will be about sharing experiences with the aim of doing better ourselves right now, and inspiring others in the future. Official invitations will be with you very shortly, but please remember to keep the dates free. The meeting will also do what many of you have individually raised with us, which is to provide a platform for everyone to discuss how the network should, and can work in the future.

This is the first chance, since the idea was born, and launched, in Assisi, for all the founder members of the GPN to come together. It is an extraordinary privilege to have the funding from Trondheim, and we urge you all to make the most of it to look at what we all want this network to be and discuss how it can itself be sustainable and share some fascinating things. How do we make this the best that we can, as an excellent opportunity?

1. GREEN PILGRIM JERUSALEM

Meanwhile, [Green Pilgrim Jerusalem](#) will host the first international Jerusalem Symposium on Green and Accessible Pilgrimage from April 21-26 at the Jerusalem International YMCA. It costs US\$300 for a three-day pass and there are still a few places left. It is organised by our GPN Ambassador, Naomi Tsur. I will be attending, and I look forward to meeting up with those of you who are able to come – and sending a report next time.



The meeting has its own logo with the banner “green pilgrim Jerusalem Love our City”, and maps to symbolise the confluence of three faiths and three continents. You can read more here:

<http://greenpilgrimjerusalem.org/symposium2013/about/our-logo/>

2. GPN GOES TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

The original heart of the conservation movement is the issue of wildlife and wild places; and although many of our Green Pilgrimage Network members are urban, we are often fascinated by, and concerned by, your stories of how pilgrims can have a real impact on wild places – mostly negative, but sometimes it can be positive. In India, for example, many pilgrimage places, attracting tens of millions of pilgrims in short periods of time, are extremely close to wildlife reserves.



So last February, ARC had a meeting about wildlife at [Buckingham Palace](#) with our founder, HRH Prince Philip. We also had the opportunity to brief him on GPN developments in China, India and elsewhere. The photo shows Prince Philip being given a book on the life of Confucius by deputy director of the Confucius Foundation in Beijing, Li Zhi.

The Confucius Foundation hopes to join us in Trondheim to explore whether, and how, its pilgrim places in China can join the Network. These might include Confucius’ birthplace in [Qufu](#), Shandong province, which has millions of pilgrim visitors every year.



3. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE CELTIC SAINTS

Dane Sherard reports from Luss, Scotland.

“At a meeting of Argyll and Bute Council in February at which I was invited to make a presentation, a number of councilors asked if we would think about a pilgrimage from Luss to Iona during 2013. The significance of this year is that it is the 1450th anniversary of Columba's arrival on the island of Iona in 563. [Columba was an Irish monk who set up a community on the remote island of Iona, which became a centre of Celtic Christian spirituality for many centuries].

I said that I would do what I could. I had a meeting in February with several ministers from Argyll (not all Church of Scotland) and the plan that we came up with for the longer term was of a pilgrimage route around Argyll to walk in the footsteps of the Celtic Saints.

The route would go from Luss to Iona and from there to Dunadd taking in so much history -- one can easily imagine this appealing to visitors from abroad with Scottish blood in their veins. Parts of the route would be appropriate to walk, but parts would use mini-buses, coaches and boats. Every church along the way which wanted to be involved would be able to be involved -- the exciting thing about pilgrimage is to have lots to stop and see. The project could bring economic benefit to the smaller communities as people require a place to stay and food to eat. Eventually the pilgrimage will become a major industry -- there is so much to see and a story which people will delight to hear. The Footsteps of the Celtic Saints trail will become as famous as The Way of St James (Santiago) in Spain....

Meanwhile churches throughout Argyll are researching their stories with a view to putting a book together later in the year. Its title will be In the Footsteps of the Celtic Saints -- Argyll's Place in Scotland's Story.

News from India



ARC's Chantal Elkin has just returned from India where she and Gopal Patel of the [Bhumi Project](#) have been talking to many Hindu pilgrim cities about joining the Green Pilgrimage Network India chapter.

In the pilgrim city of Haridwar they met Swami Samvidanand who organised a clean up at the Kumbh Mela this year. In the February edition of the newsletter we had news of the Kumbh Mela and its tens

of millions of pilgrims who make it the largest gathering of human beings on earth. Through his ashram he is engaged in green activities: he puts out a magazine on environmental issues, and organised a clean up at the Kumbh, where this year they gave out 1 million paper cups in exchange for peoples' plastic cups. He has taken 200 people on March 14th to the Kumbh to do a final clean up. He is also planning to initiate a cleaning and recycling program in Badrinath in the Himalayas, one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in India.

Swami Samvidanand explained some of the problems in Haridwar: “At pilgrimage times, the current waste management system is completely overwhelmed. At peak pilgrimage times (March to July), there are between 20,000 and 100,000 vehicles in the city, many with loudspeakers. There are no toilet facilities. This is why we have to do cleaning programmes around the main pilgrimage spots during this period.”

At the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Arvind Padhee , Administrative Head of the Temple, told of similar problems. “During the Jagannath festival in July, a huge amount of waste gets generated. Crowds can be 1 million on this day. In 2015 when they change the deities in the temple, the crowds are estimated at up to 2.5 million in one day. There are no proper waste, sanitation or traffic systems.”

We look forward to hearing more about much needed initiatives to tackle such huge scale environmental issues at the GPN meeting in Trondheim where new GPN members from India will be sharing their work to become green pilgrim cities.

Kindling an Extravagant Hope



Changing people’s behaviour in caring for the environment is, of course, the only lasting solution to tackling such seemingly insurmountable problems of waste, litter or pollution. And how to go about inspiring such change is at the heart of the thinking behind the Green Pilgrimage Network.

I’m always struck by the quotation from Eric Hoffer, the American moral and social philosopher, *“You can’t inspire revolution by telling people what’s wrong, what to do, facts and figures. To create a revolution you have to kindle and fan an extravagant hope”*. Some time ago I shared this quote with GPN advocate, Rev Dr Richard Frazer of Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh, Scotland. And he wrote an article in response.

In it, I love the phrase: ‘The slow conversion of our manners as St Benedict put it, occurs when our journeys lead us to new perspectives about ourselves and the world we inhabit.’ We’d like to think that our pilgrimage together in the GPN might be such a journey. Our thanks to Richard for the reminder of the purpose of our Network.

Next time there will be more news on Trondheim, Jerusalem and we hope an introduction to someone in the Iranian pilgrim city of Mashhad who is working to make pilgrimage green. And of course please keep us up to date with your news – email me at alisonh@arcworld.org or Victoria Finlay at victoriaf@arcworld.org

Alison Hilliard, April 4, 2013