

Mountains across Borders: A Summer School in Environmental History

DATE/VENUE 17–21 August 2013, Lavin, Switzerland

SPONSORS European Society for Environmental History; International Association for Alpine History; Rachel Carson Center /Ludwig Maximilian University Munich; Swiss Federal Institute of Technology ETH Zurich; University of Zurich, Institute of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies.

CONVENORS Marcus Hall and Patrick Kupper

PARTICIPANTS

<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Students</i>
Peter Coates (Bristol University)	Ben Anderson (Keele University)
Chris Conte (Utah State University)	Cosmina-Maria Berindei (Babes-Bolyai University)
Philippe Forêt (University of St. Gallen)	Guillaume Dumont (University of Colorado)
Marcus Hall (University of Zurich)	Philippe Frei (University of Lucerne)
Patrick Kupper (ETH Zurich)	Maria Gago (University of Lisboa)
Jon Mathieu (University of Lucerne)	Robert Gross (Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt)
Richard Tucker (University of Michigan)	Martin Gutman (University of Lucerne)
Emily Wakild (Boise State University)	Robert Hearn (University of Genoa)
Tamara Whited (Indiana University)	Barbara Henning (University of Bamberg)
Guest:	Bianca Hoenig (University of Basel)
Mei Xueqin (Tsinghua University)	Seth Peabody (Harvard University)
	Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto (University of Alcalá)
	Daniel Svensson (KTH Stockholm)
	Troy Vettese (New York University)

ABOUT THE SUMMER SCHOOL

The ESEH Mountain Summer School took place in Lavin, Switzerland. Participants included 14 students from 10 different countries across Europe and North America, as well as established scholars from Europe and overseas. The international group of students gave presentations that encompassed a wide spectrum of topics, time periods, and geographical areas, with a particular focus on the interaction between mountains and borders. A special guest, Mei Xueqin (2013 Carson Fellow) from the People's Republic of China was invited by Jon Mathieu; she supplemented his presentation on Holy Mountains with Chinese poetry. Nationalities and topics covered all corners of Europe and beyond, including the Angola coffee plantations from the Portuguese colonial period. Gold extraction near Mt. Rosia in Transylvania (Romania) offered a look at local, small-scale community historical analysis, while a dam disaster on Mt. Toc on the Piave River (Italy) illustrated large-scale historical analysis. Presentations included areas as expansive as the (German-French-Italian-Swiss) Alps covering several national borders, and as small as the Tatra Mountains located between Poland and Slovakia, considered the "smallest Alpine landscape in Europe."

Arriving at Lavin was itself a cross-border adventure due to its remote setting, requiring several train changes from Munich. As the trains became smaller and more intimate, the landscape became more and more embracing for participants as they arrived in the town nestled in a valley. Lavin is a small, quaint town dominated by peaks above and a river below in the heart of the Swiss Alps, where Italian and German are spoken fluently. A topaz blue river connects it with other small communities. It is emblematic of the many towns that dot the slopes of European Alps and contribute to the iconic landscape, famous for its clean air and water as a refreshing, inspirational break from an urban lifestyle. (Later we would hear from Philippe Frei about this unique name “Switzerland” in his project that investigated this idealized vision of the Alps). Lavin with its picturesque mountains as the backdrop for the Mountain Summer School was an immediate source of inspiration for the event and was a successful choice of venue, emphasizing the role of the Alps as the origin of the major headwaters of Europe and the giver of life for food and energy production.

<i>Discussion Issues</i>	<i>Fields of Expertise</i>	<i>Areas of Expertise</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of mountain cultures and ecosystems • Topography, elevation, and seasonality as dividing or uniting people • Dependencies and conflicts between highland and lowland peoples • Contamination, congestion, preservation, and restoration of mountain systems • Mountains as loci of disaster • Mountains as refuges during times of war or global warming 	Environmental historians working on social, political, and conceptual questions of mountainous areas	Eurasia Africa South America North America

During the orientation on the first night (17 August) Marcus Hall and Patrick Kupper gave a warm welcome to the wide array of participants over an informal dinner at the rustic camp lodging. Faculty included experts from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, environmental history, and the history of science. Students represented a variety of cutting edge projects at various stages in their career as graduate and post-graduate students. Each group of two or three presentations was followed by discussion; the guided format offered students to receive feedback from their peers as well as suggestions from faculty on how to solve research challenges. The open dialogue proved to be fruitful to all those present, as they discovered new perspectives, data sources, and methodologies. The interdisciplinary structure gathered experts and blossoming scholars to embark on a journey.

INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS

Meal time and coffee breaks encouraged informal discussions among scholars, faculty, and students, leading to academic stimulation of the group on a whole and incubating future projects and collaborations across fields and nationalities.

FIELD TRIPS

Two field trips to the local communities near Lavin and interactive dialogues with local members were informative and refreshing after hours of academic excellence in a classroom setting. Jon Mathieu, who is a native of the area, added commentary based on firsthand experience. On the first field trip participants were taken on a walking tour of traditional grain terraces on the slopes above the river and an abandoned village site to enrich the outdoor seminar for creative dialogue amongst students and professors, who noted the receding glacier in the background as local evidence of global changes. All participants had the unique opportunity to further their historical agricultural knowledge. Jon Mathieu moved between his rural homeland in this valley (near Lavin) and the urban intellectual atmosphere of the University of Lucerne, giving us a unique perspective of the area. The second field trip to an organic farm proved delightful. Our host explained that part of his business income came from the hotels that engaged in tourism for his flowers, and noted that he could exchange goods from his garden with his brother who had a meat business in the valley. Both brothers are graduates from Swiss universities and had returned to make a successful lifestyle based on agriculture. Jon Mathieu pointed out the design of the greenhouses on the property—his architectural training complemented his self-taught gardening skills.

The last field trip was a visit to the Swiss National Park near Lavin with Patrick Kupper and Marcus Hall. The extremely limited access for human traffic and clearly-marked narrow footpaths highlighted the strict protection aimed at keeping the environment pristine. All participants enjoyed the outdoor seminar on the history of the park. Richard Tucker asked about the red deer species in the park, and Patrick Kupper explained how the historical conflict between hunters and scientists was finally resolved over a long period of time through dialogue and negotiation.



FACULTY

The faculty was balanced between representatives from Europe and North America. With his background in American studies, Peter Coates from the UK (ESEH) was a connecting link in the transatlantic group. Likewise, Marcus Hall successfully managed both groups with his US American background and adopted land of Switzerland. Philippe Forét is a transnational scholar born in the Congo, raised in Marseilles, France, and stationed in Zurich; he also straddled the disciplinary boundaries between history and geography and challenged both groups.

The greatest contribution of the faculty was their openness to share past challenges as well as expertise and advice. Richard Tucker drew upon 40 years of experience in Indian forestry and data collection while living in Dhamasala. Chris Conte's love for Africa brought him to diligently learn Swahili; he was able to share his experiences working alongside translators of local languages in Kenya to obtain his data and was quite candid about the possible errors of what might have been “lost in translation.” Similarly, Tamara Whited, who also worked in a second language, French, shared experiences and challenges that led her to take up cheese-making based on ancient practices—knowledge she accumulated over her years of research in the area and a testament to her integration into the culture through her love for their food.

SEMINARS

Day II: 19 August

Faculty Presentations:

Marcus Hall presented his two major areas of research from past and present, asking the key question, “What is a mountain?” He was interested in what the defining characteristics were: elevation, steepness, isolation, rural, backward, cold, or wet? This question returned during the wrap-up session on the last day. Marcus Hall explained that his first research area was in Piedmont, Italy, dealing with restoration and exotic or invasive species. He also discussed the history of “re-wilding” and “re-naturing.” His current research investigates parasite ecology with the human body as the host. He highlighted the contradiction between the high incidence of malaria in Sardinia and the longevity of the population despite this parasite-host relationship. Marcus Hall concluded by extrapolating his questions to the greater host “Earth” and remarked that we might contemplate “taking better care of our host.”

Emily Wakild raised the question of “scale” as a challenge to environmental history. She began with the comparison of scale as it related to Costa Rica and Brazil: all the parks of Costa Rica could fit into a soy bean field in Brazil. Emily Wakild argued that “talking about scale gives us a way to focus.” Scales were defined as:

- Temporal
- Spatial
- Cultural/organizational
- Institutional

Emily Wakild's question of scale came up repeatedly in the Mountain Summer School and proved to be pertinent to the research projects. Highlights of her research of National Parks in South America and its challenges included the immense boundless Amazonian forests that could only be tackled by outer space

photos. She demonstrated in her presentation the challenges of understanding the limited catalogue of biodiversity measured from ground level and the new technologies that enhance the precision from a satellite perspective. Her concluding question: How do we organize the story? She encouraged participants to “embrace scale.”

Jon Mathieu and Mei Xueqin: Jon Mathieu presented his idea of mountains based on his book, *3D*, with Chinese poetry read and explained by Mei Xueqin. Jon Mathieu compared the perceptions of mountains in different parts of the world: while in Asia they are seen as a place of enlightenment, in Europe and North America they embody wilderness. Mei Xueqin explained how mountains and water are always associated with one another because the mountain is the source of water for the river. She continued with the imagery of mountains and human, “your reputation is as high as the mountain as long as the river continues” and “may your age be like a mountain and your happiness like the Eastern Sea—boundless as the Eastern Sea.” Mei Xueqin read poems from early poets who were inspired by mountains and elaborated on their meaning. She described the essence of the Holy Mountain culture in China as respect rather than control, for it emphasizes harmony, and she discussed the old Chinese proverb that “a foolish old man wants to move the mountain because it is a barrier to his path.”

Student Presentations:

Alpinism: Ben Anderson, Martin Gutmann, and Seth Peabody

These presentations all focused on the Alps, exploring tourism, national identity, and entrepreneurship and the mixed landscape use in the same ecosystem along the long corridor from Germany to Italy. Lively discussions ensued on how mountaineers and the local mountain population interacted with each other through investments, innovation, and risk (physical and economic). Ben Anderson’s analysis dispelled the perception of mountain communities as “backward” by uncovering the sophisticated investments and services provided by the guide associations, which were on par with urban organizational structures. Martin Gutmann, who is both a researcher and Alpinist, proved to have extraordinary skills, especially on the face of Mt. Eiger. He looked at historical funding sources for Mt. Eiger expeditions and the expansion of climbing routes. Seth Peabody presented a comparison of early German films from the 1920s and 30s that featured mountains and mountaineering as the backdrop. He analyzed on one hand the mechanical visual effects on the environment with skiers and on the other hand national identities related to conquering peaks with early Alpinists; he offered a nighttime film screening for participants.

Mountain Sports: Daniel Svensson and Guillaume Dumont

These presentations were juxtaposed in the sense that Daniel Svensson compared the scientific view of high altitude sports with the aesthetic impact on athletes, while Guillaume Dumont delved into the sociological aspects of bouldering as social networking groups impacted a bounded landscape. The landscape usage issues were centered on overcrowding on a local mountain in Dumont’s case, and landscape conservation in Daniel Svensson’s comparison of the impact of cross-country skiing tracks vs. downhill skiing runs. He also investigated the science of high-altitude training in a laboratory setting compared with the authentic outdoor experience and its effect on athletic performance. Dumont compared bouldering in Joshua Tree, California in the 1970s and 1990s, noting that the “crash pad” invention changed the sport into a commodity. The

commodification of the area and the commercialization of an area were brought up as conflicts between local values and climbers' values.

Day II: 19 August

Faculty Presentations

Chris Conte discussed the research challenges of working in Kenya in the Eastern Arc using local archives that were in poor condition, oral histories with local language translators, and time markers (based on famines). Information was incomplete and had to be searched for from other sources, such as a German soil erosion project and colonial government reports. Botanical experts in ornithology helped fill in gaps with their extensive prior knowledge based on 15–20 years of experience with the land and the people. Chris Conte explained his process of understanding this environment, which included walking 4–6 hours daily and conversing with the people. Volunteers helped him with his research; however, the oral history surveys were in a local dialect that he could not understand, so that he was dependent on translators for responses and questions, even though he had mastered Swahili in his anthropological studies in the USA and while living as a Peace Corps volunteer prior to his research project.

Tamara Whited, who specializes in French rural history, explained how she had to navigate between two fields, namely rural history and environmental history of the French Alps. Launching forward into the challenges of her research, she highlighted the differences that arose with cultural representation of the rural and institutional structures that regulated the environment. According to the foresters, the “Alpine” peasants did not care for the environment, while the “upland” peasants valued the agro-pastoral aspect of the forest. Foresters represented the state, while the rural community claimed the mountains and forests as their cultural collective property and resented what they felt to be the state’s encroachment on their territory between 1860 and 1940. Tamara Whited asked, “What is a forest? What is a mountain?” Currently she is embarking on a new project on sustainable food that brings her back to the mountains of France. The questions in this research centers how a rural cheese eventually became an urban commodity with the onset of refrigeration. She emphasized the need to integrate the non-human with the human as well as how new markets (such as cheese) were opened to sustain livelihood of Alpine rural communities along with tourism.

Richard Tucker transported the group to India and his challenges working on forestry history near a sensitive border: Kullu in Himachal Pradesh, India, which, as the local tourism corporation notes, was once known as Kulanthapitha—the end of the habitable world. He discussed the problems of vocabulary choice such as management vs. degradation: it depends on how we perceive it. Richard Tucker described the red tape he had to negotiate in order to access sources such as the local forestry archive or the princely state records, and talked about how to gather valid information and the obstacles that an outsider may encounter from local communities who were unsure of how the information may be used. Through walking and talking to villagers and foresters, he was able to form social relationships, which in turn enabled him to acquire information kept within the community. His current work involves war and environmental history considering the impact and degradation on the forests and humans, whether it was ideological (Afghanistan) or ecological (Vietnam).

Student Presentations:

Mountain Tourism: Robert Gross, Bianca Hoenig, and Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto

This group examined various forms of tourism, including national symbolism in the Tatar Mountains between Poland and Slovakia, the impact of the Marshall Plan on Alpine community ski resorts, and literary tourism as an alternative to downhill ski runs in a limited environment. Robert Gross presented the reactions of Alpine villages to tourism laws and how the 1968 *Sportgesetz* changed the face of the mountain activities seasonally as farmers had to put up and take down fences at their own cost to accommodate ski runs on their property or nearby. He looked at the effects of stakeholder investment resulting from the Marshall Plan and how the socio-economic historical land use and cultural ties to the land created a unique situation in Austria for attracting foreign currency from Germans to pay back loans with ski resorts. Bianca Hoenig brilliantly explained the nuances of a conflict between a national park prohibiting sheep grazing and the cultural identity of the *górale*, dwellers of the region in Podhale at the foot of the Tatras, who raise sheep. The socio-political issues were well explained through a complex web of Eastern European historical events culminating in the strange concept of “the Alps without sheep.” This led to questions of landscape and the cultural expectations of tourists after the establishment of a park. Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto introduced the natural and cultural heritage value that literary routes can bring to mountain tourism with possibilities of quantifying the cultural heritage for an added value to the natural heritage values. She gave the example of the Guadarrama Mountains near Madrid. This innovative approach to both humanities (art) and environment friendly sustainability based on walking a route was welcomed with comments about ecosystem services and inclusion of literary GIS mapping by Barbara Piatti (building on Franco Moretti) to broaden and enhance the research area. Rosalinda indicated that her research tools have a broader application beyond literary landscapes to include all arts (dance, painting, music, etc.).

Mountains beyond Europe: Barbara Henning, Philippe Frei, and Maria Gago

These brilliant and intriguing presentations took the group beyond Europe to the Ottoman Empire, the Portuguese colony in Mozambique, and Switzerland as an idealization of pristine nature across the globe. Philippe Frei began by discussing the word “Switzerland,” a term not chosen by the Swiss people, but rather assigned to them and stuck over centuries. However, over the course of time, it came to be a positive image representing the high, pristine Swiss wonderland and used to refer to any landscape with similar qualities; in other words a transportable “landscape virtue” that could be found in the UK, Argentina, and so forth. Barbara Henning told a story of the Hamawand tribe in the late nineteenth century with their Sufi relationships spread throughout the Ottoman Empire. They were able to survive over time despite their small numbers by retreating to the desert. The landscape of the borderlands was crucial for the Hamawand people in two ways: it offered an opportunity for survival, and was a mark of identity. Maria Gago approached her subject of coffee growing in the mountains of Angola from the micro level to the macro level beginning with the indigenous plant itself. She described coffee production in Angola during Portuguese colonial times and discussed the role of John Gossweiler (1873–1952) from the Kew Gardens, a British botanist who was stationed in Angola most of his life, from 1899 to the 1940s. Indigenous methods for growing this local species of coffee (*Robusta*) were advised in contrast to Java or Brazilian techniques. The mountain region was

the preferred environment for plantations and as such required “forced labor” sources. However, she hypothesizes that one-third of the coffee was produced by Africans. Each mountain contributed to the overall group knowledge of mountains: its people, flora, and fauna.

Day III: 20 August

Faculty Presentations:

Peter Coates explaining how audits of environmental history research since the 1980s have evaluated output, collaboration (national/international), prizes, grant income, and regard for the field. He stressed that the assessments measured both scholarly and public impact, stressing the engagement factor in the latter. Securing grants possibility poses an unforeseen challenge, considering that single author works are more common in humanities. Granting bodies also take into consideration numbers of attendees in lectures, which implies student populations. He revealed that geography was the number one competition for environmental history. Mei Xueqin pointed out that her students were eager to tell a good story with environmental history and embrace the subject. Peter Coates pointed out that environmental historians are valuable for environmental policy, “thinking forward through the past.”

Philippe Forét invited the group to follow him on a valuable expedition led by Sven Hedin through central Asia that began with unexpected results and yet eventually contributed precise data for geographical study and environmental analysis useful for other fields. Philippe Forét described 40-year process of making an accurate map from expedition data that was collected by a Sino-Swedish group of geographers, biologists, methodologists, anthropologists, and medical doctors. This group was trained to carry out similar tasks and cartography was the common language. The expedition took eight years (1893–1908) and Philippe Forét admitted that consulting the documents of this expedition was an eye-opener; at times he had to cut open pages in the 64 volumes, indicating that no one had consulted the data prior to him. At that time, it was already clear that the Silk Route had a tremendous impact on the water sources and agriculture around Lake Lop-Nor, and the data collected on the expedition shows the difference between the area of the actual lake compared to the larger historical lake. Philippe Forét is currently involved in re-enacting the expedition for a comparative study.

Student Presentations:

Animals, Risks, and Disasters in the Mountains: Troy Vettese, Cosmina-Maria Berindei, and Robert Hearn

This group opened our eyes to how mountain communities deal with their surroundings in tandem with fauna, minerals, and water. Troy Vettese began with an historical review of a dam disaster in Italy on Mt. Toc bringing in Emily Wakild’s comments about the importance of scale. He described the disaster as the largest landslide in human history, causing damage equivalent to two bombs the size of Hiroshima on the environment and people of the area. The large scale also affected prevention; such a massive project had unforeseen risks due to the mechanics of speed. Cosmina-Maria Berindei transported participants to Transylvania, Romania, to gold mining in a local community, with a brief historical review of its property

management transfers from local to multinational. The socio-political factors were explained in terms of the post-socialist era and loss of community cohesion culminating in a dam proposal that would wipe out an important cultural site, a church. The issue was not just the building but also its important links to the social life of the community. Religion thus formed the basis for widespread opposition to the multinational mining company. She also discussed the techniques of extraction, which moved away from local methods towards full-scale high-tech operation. Robert Hearn elegantly introduced the re-wilding of animals and the way in which this is perceived and articulated, with focus on the wolf in the East Ligurian Apennines in northwest Italy. An important source was oral history, which revealed when this wolf species reappeared in the area. There was an interesting discussion about whether it had been reintroduced by humans or reappeared on its. Robert Hearn also examined continuity and change in management and conservation of the species. Changes in land usage have resulted in the reappearance of many species that had disappeared from Liguria, including the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) and grey wolf (*Canis lupus*). Nationalism also played a role in how people of the area felt about the reappearance of the wolf: some Italians were keen on its appearance if it were native, whereas they were opposed to non-native species.

Wrap Up (Last Day): 21 August

During this extraordinary week in Lavin, both professors and participants of the Mountain Summer School acknowledged mountains as special landscapes with a fragile ecosystem. The ESEH Mountain Summer School further confirms that environmental history is in the forefront of its discipline with up-to-date projects from all over Europe and beyond. Mei Xueqin from Tsinghua University commented that her students are more enthusiastic about studying environmental history than other areas of history. In addition, current global challenges that cross borders urgently require applying the insights of history to inform a wider audience of decision-makers who are currently making history for future generations.

“Lavin Declaration”

We hope that these reflections from young and seasoned scholars can help propel us all into a brighter future. The mountains' fragile ecosystem is the vital source of water and also replenishes the fountains of inspiration for many disciplines to continue striving for creative and innovative solutions together.

— Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto