



# PILGRIMAGE AT CONTESTED SITES

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**Abstract:** Pilgrimage, whether traditional and religious or modern and secular, is experiencing a resurgence around the world. Increasing indications suggest that there is contest for access and use of sacred sites. This contest sometimes involves traditional owners who likewise hold these sites sacred, with their managers and commercial operators also drawn into this conflict as the case study on Uluru (Ayers Rock) illustrates. The comparatively recent “no-climbing please” campaign, coupled with the fact that some modern secular pilgrims are illegally entering sacred sites, presents many dilemmas for Park managers and the traditional owners, the latter reaping significant financial rewards from the half a million tourists who come to Uluru annually. **Keywords:** pilgrimage, contested sites, Uluru. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Les pèlerinages aux sites contestés. Les pèlerinages, soit traditionnels et religieux, soit profanes et modernes, connaissent un nouvel essor partout dans le monde. Il y a des indications qui suggèrent que l'accès et l'utilisation des sites sacrés sont de plus en plus contestés. La contestation concerne parfois des propriétaires traditionnels qui tiennent au caractère sacré de ces sites, avec l'implication des administrateurs et des directeurs commerciaux dans le conflit, comme on voit dans l'étude de cas sur Uluru (Ayers Rock). La campagne relativement récente de “ne pas gravir s.v.p.”, et le fait que quelques pèlerins profanes modernes entrent illégalement dans les sites sacrés présentent bien des dilemmes aux directeurs des parcs et aux propriétaires traditionnels, dont les derniers tirent des récompenses financières significatives du demi-million de touristes qui viennent à Uluru chaque année. **Mots-clés:** pèlerinage, sites contestés, Uluru. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

At the height of European medieval pilgrimage activity in the 13th century, approximately half a million people visited the shrine of Saint James at Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Seven centuries later, between 4.5 and 5 million visited the same shrine in 1993 (Murray and Graham 1997). Whether or not all these visitors (tourists hereafter) were “true” pilgrims undertaking religious devotions is unknown (Stoddard 1997). Nonetheless, indications are that pilgrimage is still as popular as ever, experiencing a marked resurgence around the globe over the last few decades. Long established shrines still continue to act as magnets for those in search of spiritual goals, and new ones, such as Medjugorje in Western Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia

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(with its estimated 3,000 to 5,000 daily tourists) are also attracting the faithful from all parts of the globe (Vukonic 1992). An increase in book titles on combining one's spiritual search with a physical journey is indicative of the popularity of pilgrimage. These volumes feature not only popular routes or sites from traditional religions, but also cater to spiritual seekers interested in a pilgrimage journey less steeped in sectarian traditions.

The focus of this paper is on the interaction between pilgrims and their journey's goal: a site that is revered and sacred within their own individual cosmology or belief system. At some pilgrimage places, there may be contest for access by the local residents, visiting pilgrims and mass tourists. "Contested sites" are defined here as sacred locations where there is contest over access and usage by any number of groups or individuals who have an interest in being able to freely enter and move around the site. There may also be elements of conflict between those who own and those who manage it on their behalf, or perhaps those who depend on it for their livelihood. However, for the purposes of this paper, the emphasis falls on the first two categories. The notion of contested sites as applied to the phenomenon of pilgrimage has been accorded scant attention in the literature, particularly from a tourism perspective. Pilgrims may encounter difficulty in accessing their sacred sites and at some the quality of devotions could suffer because their needs are being sacrificed at the expense of the ubiquitous mass tourist.

While there is a considerable body of literature on traditional religious pilgrimage, this paper does not revisit this work, but rather draws upon selected examples to illustrate this discussion. Besides traditional religious pilgrimage, there are two others: prehistoric and or/tribal pilgrimage and a more relatively contemporary process termed here as "modern secular pilgrimage". Both traditions are important within the context of Uluru (Ayers Rock, Australia) examined in this paper. The former tradition is important because it explains its earlier ancient uses as a pilgrimage site, while the latter draws both on Uluru's tribal lineage and a current global sociological trend known as the "New Age" movement. "Modern secular pilgrimage" differentiates it from "traditional religious pilgrimage", and reflects the view that this newer tradition is a child of the secular social system where empirical knowledge, rationality, and logic are to the fore.

## CONTESTED SACRED SITES

One of the prerequisites for pilgrimage is consecrated sacred space that sets the journey apart in both place and time; a sacred site where an individual finds access to God or the divine figure(s) in their cosmology. It is a place where the profane has been transformed into the sacred over time and, according to Eliade (1959), is set apart with boundaries that delimit where profane time and space make way for the sacred realm. A countervailing view is held by Chidester and Linenthal (1995), namely that sacred space is not necessarily the opposite

of the profane because it is inextricably intertwined with everyday political and social realities operating in the global environment. This secular postmodernist view sits well, for example, with Graburn's (1989) perspective that touristic journeys constitute a pilgrimage; because they represent the nonordinary and sacred interludes which make life worth living. Formal sacred space is usually associated with temples, cathedrals, and palaces. However, the natural landscape, particularly mountains, is also an important locus for sacred sites, including Schama's (1995) concept of landscape's cultural memory and Tuan's concept of geopiety (Knowles 1992). Passive gazing at distant peaks and trekking to the summit both offer a glimpse of the sacred, transcendental world of mountains. John Muir, the "Father of America's National Parks", was one individual whose writings highlight the depth of personal religious experience sought in mountains. In "challenging himself to survive in the wilderness like biblical hermits, he sought personal transcendence in communion with God and Nature" (White 1999:xx), feeling "a 'Spirit' speak in every whisper of wind on each summit" (Ewart 1999:8). It should also be reiterated that those making this type of journey may not be deserting their own religious tradition, as was the case with John Muir, but rather making that visit to tap into the strong spiritual and reverential energy believed to be inherent in the site. Uluru is frequently cited as being a sacred mountain by authors discussing the modern experiences of mountain spirituality (Bernbaum 1992; Cooper 1997; Westwood 1997).

A review of the literature supports the view that the various dynamic processes operating within any individual indicate that there is seldom one dominant, over-riding motive explaining solely why people chose to travel at that particular point in his or her life. Pilgrimage comes under the broad banner of religious tourism where the motivation is to visit religious sites or events, although Rinschede (1992) notes that increasingly this is usually linked with other types of tourism (particularly cultural). These journeys are multifunctional, and are particularly more so today when trying to delineate individual motives (Nolan and Nolan 1989; Smith 1992). Turner and Turner's often cited maxim in relation to pilgrimage best sums up this dichotomy: "a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist" (1978:20). In his work on pilgrimage to Fátima, Rinschede (1988) places pilgrims into three categories based on their visitation patterns to sacred sites and other attractions, with "pure" pilgrims being those who interact only with the holy places. By contrast, pilgrim-tourists and tourists spend much less time at these sites because they want to visit other tourism attractions. The latter could perhaps be Turner and Ash's (1976) rapacious mass tourists who unselectively graze on tourism icons, or Rojek's polar opposite of "travelers" who are "associated with refined values of discernment, respect, and taste" (1993:175).

Access to and/or usage of sacred sites may very often involve vested interests negotiating over space and who has their legitimate ownership and their symbolism. Ancient sites, according to Chidester and Lindenthal, all too frequently have ended up becoming "modern sites of struggle over nationality, economic empowerment, and basic civil

and human rights to freedom of religion and self-determination" (1995:3). They see money as having "become the primary symbol of mobility, access and ownership in the production of modern American sacred space ... [which is often inevitably] entangled in politics" (1995:15). They posit two reasons why sacred space is contested: because its spatial quality means that there will always be issues about how it is organized and controlled, and because its very sacredness leaves it open to many claims about its significance. This is particularly so because such sites supposedly exude "spiritual magnetism" which develops at shrines for a variety of reasons. However, Preston cautions that spiritual magnetism does not reside in the shrine alone "but in the people who attend it, the journey to it, and the village or town that sends and receives pilgrims" (1990:21).

Four strategies can be employed in the battle for supremacy in deciding ultimately who has access to sacred sites: appropriation, exclusion, inversion, and hybridization (Chidester and Linenthal 1995). The underlying assumption behind the first two is that a site will be considered sacred if it can be stolen or physically defiled. Claiming authentic ownership of it confers a legitimate power to appropriate the site, and then using strategies to exclude people from it in the name of purity reinforces these rights to sole sovereignty. These two particular strategies are both frequently and effectively used by those charged with prioritizing conflicting claims relating to right of usage and access to sacred sites around the world. In turn, this may lead to conflict between pilgrim and tourist, traditional religious pilgrim and secular pilgrim, commercial interests and volunteer organizations, and so on. The latter two strategies of inversion and hybridization "are particularly suited for resistance to domination" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:19). Inversion strategies favor reversals of, or innovative interpretations to, existing dominant spatial relationships (for example, millenarian movements who forecast cataclysmic events). Hybridization strategies mix or fuse existing conventional boundaries (for instance, Pearl Harbor is a hybrid of a "national park, patriotic monument and military cemetery") (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:20).

### *Traditional Pilgrimage and Contested Sites*

During the high point of medieval European pilgrimage, it is most likely that conflict may well have existed between the Church's institutional control over access and devotions at the shrines, and the desire of the pilgrims to experience the sacred, witnessing a miracle, or being healed. Medieval pilgrims were the equivalent of today's mass tourists; and while the available literature appears to be silent on the matter, it appears likely that parishioners may have found it difficult to access their local church, particularly if it was an important religious shrine. This occurs even today at some popular shrines where tourists frequently outnumber local residents at regular religious services.

Today, mass tourists, pilgrims, and locals compete with each other for use of the resource base, such as transport infrastructure and parking space around shrines and cathedrals. In their work on Western

European Christian shrines, Nolan and Nolan (1989) raise the complex issues involved when discussing three groups who visit religious sites: traditional pilgrims, members of packaged religious tours, and mass tourists ticking off sites from their vacation itinerary. Griffin poses the difficult question: how does “one distinguish a visitor in genuine need of prayer and spiritual peace, from one admiring the work of eleventh or twentieth century builders, or contemplating the tomb of some famous person?” (1994:31). In their paper on route-based tourism along the *Camino de Santiago*, the traditional pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, Murray and Graham discuss the mélange of different demands and motivations, noting in particular that many “make the entire journey on foot as ‘pilgrims’, occasioning conflicts of motivation which complicate the marketing of the *Camino* as a tourism complex” (1997:517). This conflict in motivations was reflected in a television documentary on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela where a Dutch pilgrim complained that the large number of tourists along the *Camino* had detracted from his appreciation of the sacredness of his journey, finding their very presence intrusive and unwanted (Lodge 1993). Gesler also sees as misplaced the idea that Lourdes is “visited by a mass of people with a single-minded devotion to Mary, full of *communitas* and religious fervor” (1996:102). At Lourdes, conflict is inherent in the system because of the involvement of different interests: pilgrim versus tourist, cleric versus secular commercialism, organizers versus helpers.

In 1979, an English Tourist Board study found that there could be as many as 20 million annual people (excluding those attending religious services) visiting cathedrals and greater churches in England. The main themes that emerged from that study were that:

...tourism is seen as a helpful source of revenue for cathedral maintenance and repair; but that [it] tourism must be managed so that the religious atmosphere and activities of cathedrals are spoiled neither by the tourists themselves nor by commercialism; and that the presence of tourist visitors in cathedrals provides an opportunity to engender a spiritual experience (1979:94)

In amplifying the last point, the report notes that every person is “a possible pilgrim, and it is the task of the Church to draw him [sic] into the spiritual dimension of the experience of visiting a cathedral”. Particularly in relation to Canterbury Cathedral, this 1979 study noted that noise seemed to be a particular problem when there were a large number of visitors, and during the peak summer months of July and August, “nave and choir become congested...the atmosphere of the Cathedral is thereby spoiled” (1979:8, 56).

Contest over access and/or usage can also be seen at a destination. Walsingham, a small village in England, with its two popular shrines for Roman Catholic and Anglican pilgrims, is one modern example of a destination which is a contested site. The Anglican Our Lady Shrine (restored in 1931) is in the village center whereas the Roman Catholic Shrine (built in 1061) is approximately 3 km away in the countryside, and thus while theoretically there is no contest between the two faiths

over access/usage of their own shrine, anecdotal evidence indicates that there is conflict about use and/or access to the village and its precincts between the two faiths when scheduling and holding annual pilgrimage processions and events (notably in the Abbey grounds located in the centre of the village). It is also understood that large popular pilgrimage events (such as the Anglican National Pilgrimage which may attract upwards of 10,000 pilgrims) can cause severe traffic congestion in and around the village itself. There are no exact figures of the number of pilgrims to Walsingham, the only reference found indicating that in 1983 the English Tourist Board estimated that approximately 500,000 had visited the Anglican shrine alone (The Guardians of The Shrine of Walsingham 1990; Walsingham 1999).

### *Modern Secular Pilgrimage*

Contemporary pilgrimage and social change provide evidence of an increasingly resacralised world, according to Ferrarotti (1979). Bryan Wilson, one of the leading commentators on the secularization of modern society, notes that the process itself does not speak of the disappearance of religiosity, but rather “indicates the decline in the significance of religion in the operation of the social system” (1985:14). The emergence of the New Age movement in the 60s and 70s, where the emphasis is on transformation of the self, reflect such social change. Heelas (1996) labels this as “Self-spirituality” where the search for meaningful experiences, coupled with the need for introspection to discover one’s own spirituality, are considered the norm. Like traditional religious pilgrimage which is often described as an individual quest, spiritual rebirth and the establishment of a new identity are the intrinsic rewards awaiting modern secular pilgrims at journey’s end (Osterreith 1997). The search for the miraculous is a shared common trait by both religious and secular pilgrimage alike despite the latter’s emphasis on rationalism. As noted earlier, modern secular pilgrimage has been used so as to distinguish it from traditional religious, and prehistoric/tribal pilgrimage traditions. However, it is not regarded as New Age pilgrimage because the modern secular type encompasses many other civil or secular interests apart from it. Questing for the sacred was, and still is, reflected in little-studied movements from the West to the East where the New Age secular pilgrim is “motivated by a search for meaning, for values hidden outside the college textbook, in Native American ways, or from the Eastern gurus” (Smith 1992:11).

Some writers describe the New Age as a new religious movement (Wilson 1990), while others strongly reject the notion (Frost 1992). Discussion of the merits of both view points clearly falls outside the scope of this paper; however, suffice it to say that the New Age movement has been very adroit in drawing on religious traditions from a variety of sources such as shamanism and Buddhism. Burrows puts this another way: “the ‘New Age’ movement has been fed by many tributaries but cannot be reduced to any single one” (cited in Chandler 1988:49). Such a stance explains how and why this type can seemingly enjoy the best of both worlds in what has been described by Ahrlstrom

as “harmonial religion” (cited in Heelas 1996). Thus, followers of the New Age movement tend to gravitate to sites held sacred by prehistoric and/or indigenous peoples. Here they tap into this spirituality, sacredness, and tradition but without the confines existing within those traditions. In so doing, they purloin what ritual, ideas and practices they consider to be consistent with their inner search and their quest to connect with the Other. This can be analogous to a “supermarket approach” used to choose one’s self-help “fix”; “spiritual-smorgasbording” (McColl 1989), or “spiritual promiscuity” (Solomon 1999).

The quest for an individual spiritual experience and insight may involve visits to ashrams in India or Stonehenge, one well-known English site where there is contest for its use even by the mass tourist. The Egyptian Pyramids have become a pilgrimage center for thousands of modern secular pilgrims who come to bathe in the mystical energy of the pharaohs (Chabert 1995). Locals call them “the meditators” who flock to Egypt not only to ponder its ancient past but to explore the mystic future (O’Connor 1997). Those undertaking secular spiritual pilgrimage look to engage actively with the site itself rather than being content with mere photographs or the obligatory souvenir postcard: a mystical experience is the Holy Grail rather than just crossing the site off one’s tour itinerary. Catering for this need is a small group of specialized niche market tour operators promising spiritual experiences at both built attractions and natural settings (such as the megaliths of the United Kingdom or Native American sweat lodges).

Contest over access to, and usage of, traditional pilgrimage sites was reviewed earlier, but only a few references were found to sites where secular or New Age pilgrimage is occurring. In Europe, Stonehenge is a well-known example and it appears that those managing the menhirs of Carnac in Brittany, France, may be under similar pressure (Aviva and White 1998). In the United States, the National Park Service now request non-native American tourists visiting Rainbow Bridge National Monument to neither approach nor walk under Rainbow Bridge because it is a sacred Navajo site (National Park Service 1999). The recent United States Court of Appeal decision in relation to climbing Devil’s Tower, Wyoming, illustrates the difficulties site managers face when trying to balance the competing needs of approximately 500,000 tourists annually (including 6,000 climbers) and 20 Native American Plains tribes for whom Devil’s Tower “is also a pilgrimage site where important liturgical functions are performed” (Bear Lodge Multiple User Association v. Babbit 1999).

*Uluru.* Along with the Sydney Opera House, Uluru (or the Rock) is one of Australia’s best known tourism icons, echoing the unspoken call for many Australians to escape to the Outback, supposedly “Australia’s geographic and spiritual or emotional centre” (McGrath 1991:115). In 1998, a quantitative (motivation surveys) and qualitative research at Uluru was carried out for this study. The latter included interviewing local staff, informal chatting with tourists during survey administration and while taking two half-day Anangu Tours, making field observations, and examining Uluru’s visitor book. Because of the

comparatively small data set obtained, what is reported in this paper largely reflects findings from the qualitative data gathered. At Uluru, there is an opportunity for conflict for both access and usage of the site between the traditional indigenous owners, the Anangu (Western Desert Aboriginal peoples who have traditional affiliations with the area around Uluru); mass tourists (including local and international); site managers and commercial operators, and modern secular pilgrims.

Uluru is a monolith composed of sedimentary rocks, formed at least 400 to 500 million years ago (Sweet and Crick 1996), and is located 335 km southwest of Alice Springs in the Western Desert of Central Australia. The first European credited with sighting Uluru was the explorer William Gosse in 1873, but human settlement in the area around it could go back as far as 53,000 years when people would have come from Asia during the period of low sea levels (Terrill citing Flood 1983). Until the middle of the 20th century, Uluru was almost the sole preserve of the Anangu, punctuated by a variety of non-indigenous tourists, including anthropologists, missionaries, welfare officials, adventurers, and the “doggers” who traded dingo scalps with the Aborigines. After World War II, tourists began to slowly trickle into the area, their numbers trebling between 1986 and 1996 (Hooper 1996). In 1999, approximately 500,000 tourists (half international) visited Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (the park) and the annual growth rate of 11% is expected to continue well into the years ahead. In October 1985, inalienable freehold title to the park was granted to the Anangu, and it is jointly managed by the traditional owners and Parks Australia North, which manage the day-to-day operations (in consultation with the Anangu). Parks Australia North is a division of Parks Australia within the Federal Government Department of Environment Australia headquartered in Canberra. The park has dual World Heritage listings (1987 for natural values and 1994 for cultural values) and was also recognized in 1977 as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Uluru is at the cross-roads of several ancestral groups or “dreaming tracks” for the Anangu, and has social, economic, and religious significance for its traditional owners. The “Dreaming” (often erroneously referred to as the “Dreamtime”) or the *Tjukurpa* is a network that binds the Anangu and is reinforced in their culture by ceremony (Breden 1994). The *Tjukurpa* has been handed down in an oral tradition from generation to generation, and represents “a cluster of sacred sites ... incorporat[ing] the actions, artefacts and bodies of ancestral heroes celebrated in Anangu religion” (Layton and Titchen 1995:177). Many of these sites may also contain the spiritual power of ancestral beings, thus kept clear of grass and other plants unless the ancestral being is malevolent. Its spiritual power can be released through ritual, as well as by rubbing the rock (Layton 1989).

The first ranger at Uluru from 1957–1962, goes back to the beginning of organized tourism at Uluru, or around 1947 (Harney 1974). In those early days of tourism to the Rock, tourists really had to “rough it”, coming to see outback Australia, the Rock itself, and being able to meet and interact with the Aborigines (Raymond 1995). It could be argued that those motives still hold true today; however, the strong



educative element now seems to be becoming more important, as well as the desire of tourists to experience the area's cultural authenticity. In the 50s, the Northern Territory Government evicted Aborigines from the areas in vicinity of the Rock, and in 1959 an airstrip was built close to the northern side of Uluru and the first motel leases granted. Aborigines became increasingly involved in the tourism industry, chopping firewood and cooking food for the early tourists who camped in tents close to the Rock, and from the 60s, selling their artifacts, men helping in motel construction and women working as housemaids. It was also through an increase in popularity of tourism at Uluru that problems started to arise with trespassing onto sacred sites, with one area (Warayaki) being fenced in 1974. It took another 10 years for additional sites to be similarly protected. Today, sacred sites are clearly marked, with a sign recording the name of the site, its importance as a sacred place, and the penalties for disobeying the wishes of the traditional owners by taking photographs and/or entering the enclosed area. In 1982, the Northern Territory Government bought 100 km<sup>2</sup> of freehold title land just outside the park, and by 1984 all accommodation and commercial leases had been transferred to this area now called Yulara. Despite the adoption of Anangu names, the Northern Territory Government still retains the names Ayers Rock and the Olgas (understandably, something the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Board of Management is not happy with) because these have recognition within the tourism industry (Raymond 1995).

One area that has particularly caused concern is the fact that many come to just to climb Uluru (Brown 1999). Whitakker views the climb as a form of initiation ceremony for tourists, notably white Australians for "whom the spiritual quest, even dying for it, is tantamount to being a true Australian" (1994:318). In recent years, both the traditional owners and park authorities have actively discouraged people from climbing the Rock, instead promoting the 9.4 km Basewalk. However, operators do park their coaches near the climb; during this research study in the park, some companies were handing out an "Ayers Rock Climber's Certificate" which their passengers could complete, have witnessed, and dated. One certificate obtained by the writer listed three climbing options, and a "took one look and gave up" option. Anecdotal evidence suggests that half of those coming to Uluru climb the Rock, with Japanese tourists more likely to climb than European tourists (Stevenson 2001). There are clearly worded signs at the base asking people not to climb, and then if they must climb, to take certain safety aspects into consideration. In the event of certain weather conditions (above 36 °C, too windy, and in/after wet weather), the climb is closed to everyone. According to Breeden (1994), to climb the Rock contravenes the *Tjukurpa* and is sanctioned only on very special occasions when initiated Anangu men can make it. Could the mere contact of feet on the Rock, albeit uninitiated *minga* (the Anangu word for "ants", a desultory term used frequently to describe those tourists making the climb), release some of the power of ancestral beings noted earlier by Layton? Interestingly, the study found anecdotal evidence to suggest that some were climbing the Rock not because it was a physical chal-

lenge, but rather because it represented an opportunity for a spiritual connection with the site. Any future decision by the traditional owners and park management to place a permanent ban on climbing Uluru will have important repercussions for the tourism industry in Central Australia, as well as for the traditional owners who earn significant royalties from those entering the park. Twenty-five percent of income coming into the park, or approximately US\$2.75 million in 1997–1998 (the average exchange rate on the date of interview was AUS\$1=US\$0.6254), goes to the traditional owners (Uluru–Kata Tjuta Land Trust), and from that 20% (or 5% of the total) goes towards the running of the local community. The remainder is distributed among the traditional owners on a family unit basis (interview with Paul Josif, coordinator of the Mutijulu Community’s Office for Joint Management, in November 1998).

The large number of tourists coming to Uluru has raised concerns relating to the physical and social carrying capacity (McIntyre and Boag 1995). Park managers and the traditional owners may, at some point in the not too distant future, be forced to decide whether or not their numbers should be regulated via a quota system. Such a system would act to reduce pressure on the fragile ecosystem and fauna, particularly as half of the species previously known in the area have disappeared since European settlement. The new 2000 Plan of Management also notes that growing “levels of visitation are placing increasing levels of demand upon the groundwater systems of the dune plains and southern aquifers” (Uluru–Kata Tjuta Board 2000:73).

Mercer (1994) describes the tensions between Parks Australia North and the Northern Territory Government who, like those operators earning their livelihood from the Rock, have strong vested interests in ensuring the economic viability of Uluru as a tourism commodity. Aboriginal response to this commodification has generally been ambivalent, seeing intrusion on their living spaces as needing to be weighted against the profits that can be earned through tourism: in 1996, \$103 million (the average exchange rate on the date of magazine publication was AUS\$1=US\$0.793) was estimated to have come into the park from tourism alone (Hooper 1996). The tensions between cultural and commercial interests was clearly demonstrated in May 2001 when one of Uluru’s senior traditional owners died. Parks Australia North closed the climb mainly as a mark of respect, and to give the local community time to grieve. The length of the closure was originally to be 20 days; however, the Northern Territory Government claimed that closure could damage the industry, pressuring the park and Anangu to allow tourists back on the Rock as soon as possible.

For whatever reasons, it appears that the climb was only closed for approximately 12 days. However, one leading tour operator felt that the very public clash between government officials and traditional owners could generate more long term damage to the industry than closing the climb for a few days (Stevenson 2001). The Joint Board of Management recently reviewed its guidelines relating to film and photography permits after receiving a record 300 plus requests in 2000. This was because, according to Paul Josif (local staff), it was concerned

that “a lot of people do want to use Uluru as a backdrop without regard for the values of the place.... we are trying to protect its integrity. If you turn it into Disneyland you just lose that” (Hill 2001). Josif’s comments hark back to those made by Gesler in relation to Lourdes where he refers to a clash of religious and secular interests over commercialism.

Also coming to Uluru is a small but growing number of modern secular pilgrims who see it as a sacred site in its own right: one “where the traditional owners, local and international tourists and ‘New Age’ mystics are in conflict as to the use and the meaning of the Rock” (Hawthorne 1998:5). Marcus (1988) notes that recently Uluru and Aboriginal Australians have joined the international mystical tour circuit, calling these tourists ‘Aquarian pilgrims’. Attempts to incorporate Uluru into their own cosmology has often led to conflict with Parks Australia North and/or the Anangu community when they demand access to sites off limits to all but the traditional owners. For example, regulations do not allow tourists to remain in the park between sunset and sunrise, and anecdotal evidence suggests that many New Age pilgrims have endeavored to stay overnight anyway, particularly at designated Anangu sacred sites. In 1990, Earthlink made an application for access to part of the Rock in connection with Solara’s (the facilitator of Earthlink) visit the following year. Their request was refused on two grounds. First,

the strong beliefs of Anangu about origins of the park, and a wish that these beliefs [are] not pushed aside by people presenting their sacred places as part of Harmonic Convergence, or Earthlink or other religions, and secondly, bad behavior on the part of the Harmonic Convergence Group in 1987, including entering restricted sacred sites without permission [as well as] ignoring Park Management signs and entering environmentally sensitive area” (Hill 1994:270–271).

More recently, in 2000, “a big mob of hippies called the Rainbow Family upset traditional owners when they tried to camp out at the Rock” (Hill 2001). In most situations, it appears that visiting secular pilgrims must breach park regulations and risk incurring a substantial fine if they want to conduct unauthorized “religious” ceremonies in the park. The writer is aware of one group in 1997 who were refused permission to hold their ceremony at the base of Uluru. However, they still went ahead and held their event elsewhere within the park. As well, while administering surveys at one of the sunset viewing sites at Uluru, it became apparent that two interstate tourists had come to the park with the express purpose of illegally accessing sacred Anangu areas. They had just visited Kakadu National Park where they claimed to have illegally visited culturally sensitive sites, expressing the view that they were not harming the sites in any way. Their only wish was to complete their spiritual pilgrimage without upsetting anyone, despite acknowledging that what they were proposing to do at Uluru was against park regulations.

Many modern secular pilgrims may merely be content to engage the sacredness of a site, such as Uluru, in a discrete, non-confrontational

(but sometimes illegal!) manner, using their own universalistic rituals as a way of connecting with the Other. Park Rangers reported “unusual activities” (such as coming across those meditating at dawn in the Sunrise car park and/or at various places around the Rock), but also finding strange objects on, in, and around the Rock. These included an urn containing ashes, as well as rice, flowers, boar tusks, and crystals which were no doubt deliberately placed there as votive offerings to spirits and ancestral beings dwelling in the Rock. Another ranger also mentioned often seeing little cruxifixes in the rock fissures on the upward climb path. Were people leaving offerings or prayers as a way of ensuring their safety on the climb, or perhaps they were a Christian form of votive offering to more ancient ancestral spiritual energies? The “Visitor Books” kept at the Cultural Center Information Desk also revealed a variety of motives for being at Uluru, including many who came to connect with the spiritual energy of Uluru, perhaps even on a pilgrimage. For example, one read: “I made a pilgrimage from Yulara—my life beings anew with 1998” and “I have had a most wonderful morning enjoying your land. The walk around [Uluru] was very spiritual for me”.

There are, it is suggested, three reasons why the Anangu are unhappy with the increased interest by modern secular pilgrims wanting to conduct their own rituals and religious ceremonies at Uluru and Kata Tjuta. The sensitivity of their sacred sites has already been noted. The second reason is linked with the first: by allowing non-Anangu to tap into the *Tjukurpa*, they are giving away their power and control over their cosmology. One of the intrinsic appeals of Uluru is the Anangu’s connection with the *Tjukurpa*, and the often explicit message is that non-Anangu cannot access this merely because the outsider is not Anangu. Finally, the adverse publicity associated with use of the park by New Age groups and individuals could dissuade mass tourists from visiting the park.

## CONCLUSION

Pilgrimage and contested sites are an aspect that has generally received little attention in the tourism literature. Discussions of pilgrimage as a social movement have almost exclusively focused on traditional religious pilgrimage in the world’s major religions, from time to time articles of a more secular nature appear on pilgrimage to theme parks (Moore 1980), Graceland (Rigby 2001), US civil war battlefields (Zelinsky 1990), and shopping (O’Guinn and Belk 1989). Although secular pilgrimage has always existed, the New Age movement’s tendency to eclectically borrow from a cornucopia of religious and tribal traditions has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of tourists following their own spiritual paths outside the parameters of mainstream pilgrimage patterns. Lying at the crossroads of Central Australian “Dreaming tracks”, Uluru is no doubt an ancient mass tourism pilgrimage site much like its much later medieval counterparts. Today, there is conflict over access and usage of Uluru between its traditional owners and an assortment of different groups.

Because of significant economic rewards accruing to many interests through tourism at Uluru, the politics of development is constantly on the agenda as the events of May 2001 (cited earlier) clearly indicate. The Anangu have used appropriation (granted land title in 1985) and exclusion (non-Anangu excluded from sacred sites at Uluru and Kata-Tjuta, coupled with the comparatively recent “no climbing please” campaign at Uluru) strategies to assert their ownership and control of Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. However, the dominant mass tourism market (namely the Northern Territory Government and commercial operators) has appropriated the site for economic gain, with the local Anangu confined to living at the local community of Mutijulu, described by Christiansen as a “depressing township within the Park” (1995:21). Ensuring that tourists do not trespass into and/or take photographs of Anangu sacred sites presents a difficult task for the site managers because of the nature and size of the park, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that Aquarian pilgrims are illegally entering some sites. The multiple uses of Uluru indicate that it is indeed a hybrid sacred site in that it is sacred to both the Anangu and Aquarian pilgrim. The challenge facing park managers is to balance the various competing group interests highlighted in this paper, noting that above all else Uluru is in a national park managed by an Australian Federal government agency for, and on behalf of, all Australians.

The question of equality of access of all pilgrims is one that will, it is suggested, need to be addressed at some point by those having the custody, control, and care of pilgrimage (be they traditional religious, prehistoric/tribal, or modern secular) sites around the world. Freedom of religious worship is clearly enunciated in Article 118 of the 1948 United Nation’s Declaration of Human Rights, and constitutional statements of most nations guarantee this freedom. However, this individual right sometimes comes into conflict with countervailing rights enshrined within those constitutions. The growth of mass tourism since World War II, and increasing dependence on the industry as an economic mainstay in many towns, cities, and countries around the world, has already caused conflict as the literature amply testifies. This paper indicates that at some popular traditional religious pilgrimage shrines around the world, the interests of pilgrims may be subordinated to the needs of mass tourists, hence resulting in contest over usage and/or access to the site. Aquarian pilgrims are visiting sacred sites around the world in growing numbers, sometimes creating tensions between site managers and/or traditional owners when they want to access culturally sensitive sacred sites. More research is required into the modern secular pilgrimage at sites similar to Uluru, investigating the implications and ramifications of catering to the needs of these “new” pilgrims. As the case study of Uluru illustrates, some modern secular pilgrims are prepared to flout management strategies in their quest to commune with the Other at places which are increasingly being set aside as the sole preserve of their traditional owners. ▣

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