

# Sacred Land Film Project

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## Allies in a New Movement

by Christopher McLeod

As our screening time approached, I saw the cavernous 3,000-seat hall in Jeju, South Korea, begin to fill. I was at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Conservation Congress to show excerpts from our new *Standing on Sacred Ground* series, along with three of the key indigenous people who appear in the films.

Ten thousand environmentalists, scientists and native leaders had come to this volcanic island, 300 miles northeast of Shanghai, China, to discuss strategies to change industrial society's course. For our part, we had gathered Dr. Noa Emmett Aluli from Hawai'i, Danil Mamyev from the Altai Republic of Russia and Winnemem Wintu Chief Caleen Sisk from northern California to meet each other and share their stories. Their larger goal was to build a new international network of sacred site guardians and allies to support each other's work.

As the massive Tamra Hall buzzed with anticipation, Gangjeong villagers streamed through the door: men, women and children in yellow t-shirts, a resilient group of local peace activists and resisters determined to provoke the ruling powers at every opportunity. Five miles from the convention center, the South Korean government is bulldozing Gangjeong village and its sacred sites to build a navy base—a port of call for U.S. ships armed with Aegis anti-missile technology. Samsung is building both the navy base and the



Emmett Aluli, Caleen Sisk and Danil Mamyev in Gangjeong, South Korea.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER MCLEOD

an important sacred natural site.

The long-planned IUCN conference was being thrown off-balance by visitors' dawning realizations about a local environmental justice issue with international implications. One Korean-American activist had been denied entry in Seoul as she tried to fly to Jeju. She was fingerprinted, foot-printed, searched and put back on a plane to the United States with no explanation.

As more than a hundred villagers streamed into Tamra Hall, we heard an announcement over the loudspeaker: the governor of Jeju was inviting all conference participants to a reception downstairs, with free food and alcohol.

Immediately, the huge room stopped filling up.



As we complete the four-part *Standing on Sacred Ground* series and prepare to deliver it to PBS in March 2013, all

convention center. The national-security-fixated South Korean government lured the World Conservation Congress to Jeju with \$21 million in subsidies. Samsung also donated cash to IUCN.

The day before, when we visited Gangjeong with our cameras rolling, the daily arrests of local protesters temporarily ceased. Police watched from a distance as our delegation of sacred site guardians offered prayers along the coast and witnessed the destruction of Gurumbi Rock,

## Finding Reciprocity in the Andes of Peru

by Jessica Abbe

Over the last five years, the residents of Qocha Moqo, Peru, have generously shared their time and stories with the Sacred Land Film Project. In March, 28-year-old filmmaker Fredy Flores Machacca headed toward California for a week of consultation on our film segment

on the Q'eros culture of the Andes. He got as far as Lima, twice, only to be refused a visa from the U.S. State Department. They assumed he was trying to immigrate, and refused to believe he was deeply committed to his family, his people, and his mountain homeland. *(continued on page 3)*

*Allies in a New Movement, continued*

eight of our stories are proving to be very timely. Each segment has the potential to help stave off exploitive, commercial threats to the sacred places and cultures we profile.

From the U.S. government's ill-advised plan to heighten Shasta Dam—which would store more water and flood dozens of Winnemem ceremonial sites, dance grounds and burials—to Russia's Altai Republic, where Gazprom has begun exploratory drilling to build a natural gas pipeline across the sacred Ukok Plateau, our films will broadcast indigenous voices of reasoned resistance.

We are committed to amplifying the *native voice*, ensuring that indigenous people hold the microphone, sit at the table and are quoted in the news reports.

Our Canadian tar sands campaign will put a human face on the debate over the Keystone XL and Enbridge pipelines and add a native perspective to an abstract controversy that has so far focused on the U.S. environment. In Papua New Guinea, Ethiopia, Australia, Peru and Hawai'i, we are working on local translations of the films, strategic legal campaigns and teacher's guides for local schools.

Where indigenous people hold their land, speak their language and conduct their rituals, biodiversity flourishes. In those landscapes, sacred sites are the beating heart connecting culture and nature. When the guardians of those sacred places meet for ceremony and



*Pointing toward Gangjeong village, Emmett Aluli from Hawai'i, Japarkul Raimkulov from Kyrgyzstan and Mphatheleni Makaulule (Venda) from South Africa look toward the 10-foot high white wall surrounding the navy base construction zone and concrete pylons that have been piled on sacred Gurumbi Rock.*

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MCLEOD

conversation, as Altaian leader Danil Mamyev says, “the sacred places are linked and we are strengthened and the sacred places are strengthened.” Hence, this new international network of traditional custodians and wisdom keepers is an innovative ingredient in the movement to protect planet Earth. This is an historic, important step. Whether it's education, preservation of traditional knowledge, film screenings, or meetings of sacred site guardians out in the wild, we have a roadmap and a plan, as exciting as it is significant.

Over four days in Jeju, many voices called for a strategic support network, organizing global resistance. “We are bound together by the threats facing our sacred sites,” said activist Mphatheleni Makaulule, from the Venda tribe in South Africa. Mongolian shaman Buyanbadrakh Erdenetsogt said, “We have a place where 108 sacred springs come out of the ground and the elders say we need to protect these springs. I felt there was no organized network to protect sacred sites. I am here

searching for that network.” Emmett Aluli, veteran of a long campaign against military devastation of native land in Hawai'i, spent hours sharing stories, questioning what we mean by the word “sacred” and talking strategy with the Gangjeong villagers.

As Danil Mamyev told the smaller but still-significant crowd in Tamra Hall: “The responsibility of indigenous knowledge holders is to find a way to integrate our ideas and values into the education system. Unless we work on this, future generations will not have this foundation.”

The response to the films was electric, and our partner communities are eager to put them to use. As our screening event drew to a close, Gangjeong villagers took the stage and unfurled a 200-foot banner in an attempt to break through the tightly-controlled Korean media. I was delighted but also terrified. Then I saw Caleen dancing with the villagers, and I joined them on the giant stage. No one was arrested that night.



*Felipe Gomez (Maya), on big screen, joins Gangjeong villagers for a closing prayer.*



### *In the Andes of Peru, continued*

So in August, Project Director Christopher (Toby) McLeod and I went to Fredy's country with our teenaged children, Miles and Fiona. We were warmly welcomed.

In Cusco, Miles served as translator as Fredy critiqued and improved the film segment, which documents the Q'eros' four-day pilgrimage to the Q'olloy Riti festival near sacred Mt. Ausangate. The life-giving glaciers of the Andes, ancient white blankets that have always covered the shoulders of the *apus* (the sacred mountains), are melting away, a consequence of global climate change fueled by first world habits.

After a day of rough travel by car, horse and foot, we all made it over a misty 13,400-foot pass as the sun was setting. Girls in full skirts hurried their alpaca homeward. Work must be done before dark in Qocha Moqo, where there is no electricity—except for a solar panel on the thatched roof of Fredy's one-room house, which powers one light bulb. Late that night, the mists cleared and we saw the Southern Cross in the brilliant Milky Way.

We visited a new Q'eros school for traditional knowledge, cooked potatoes with every meal and hiked high above the village with herds of alpaca. Miles and Fiona taught their new friends to play Go Fish.

We had walked into a culture where *ayni*, not money, is the preferred form of exchange. *Ayni* is reciprocity. Fredy and his young family were delighted with gifts of wind-up flashlights; they draped us

with handmade necklaces. Toby and I watched as the experience of traditional culture, thousands of years old and rooted in place, changed our children's lives. The joy and determination of people deeply connected to the revered landscape of home is a lesson that American high schools cannot teach.

The release of our films in 2013 will bring much-needed attention to critical concerns for the region, the planet, and indigenous cultures and sensitive ecology everywhere. *Ayni*, in the form of a respectful cultural exchange, is our goal.

Toby's efforts have produced a \$2,250 Global Greengrant for Fredy's work, but

Fredy explained to us that money is a disruption. A computer to aid his film documentation would be more useful. It's on the way, with a video camera and a book of Fiona's photos.

As we hiked up to Huamanlipa, the *apu* that watches over Qocha Moqo, Fredy told Miles that village elders had climbed there 18 months before to conduct a ceremony, because there was no snow on the mountain. Fredy smiled broadly as he reported that the following winter was much colder, and snows had returned to the *apu*. Water again streams down for the people, animals and crops.



*Fredy, Fiona and Miles enjoy a game of Go Fish with Fredy's family.*

PHOTOS BY JESSICA ABBE

## **Federal Charges Against Winnemem Dropped** *by Lynn Brown*

Throughout early 2012, the Winnemem Wintu organized protests, online petitions and letter-writing campaigns demanding the U.S. Forest Service close a small stretch of the McCloud River in northern California for a coming-of-age ceremony for the young woman who will be the next leader of the tribe. Past ceremonies had been disrupted by motorboats, drunken revelers and women flashing their breasts. Days before the ceremony, under mounting public pressure, Regional Forester Randy Moore agreed to close the river and grant the necessary permit. Despite this victory, the Winnemem were still subject to harassment by outsiders—including Forest Service law enforcement officers.

During puberty ceremonies, the Winnemem use a motorboat to ferry elders back and forth to visit the young initiate in her camp on the far side of the river. This use was clearly explained in

permit negotiations. In a classic Catch-22, the Forest Service claimed the tribe's own boat was a violation of the river closure prohibiting motorized watercraft. Over four days, the ceremony was repeatedly interrupted and delayed by Forest Service officers threatening to confiscate the Winnemem boat.

On July 4, at the end of the ceremony and shortly after Chief Caleen Sisk's attorney had departed, Forest Service agents swept into camp in SUVs to serve the Chief with two federal citations—each bearing a \$5,000 fine.

A federal court date was set for October 16 in Redding, and Chief Sisk planned to plead not guilty. On October 15, the federal attorney in Sacramento dismissed the citations, without explanation.

◀ *Marisa Sisk, the Winnemem initiate, is distracted from grinding medicinal herbs on Puberty Rock as Forest Service law enforcement agents approach in a motorboat.*

