

Lawrence S. Hamilton

The Mountain Protected Areas Network

Because of the three-dimensional nature of mountains, their heterogeneity of environments within short distances, their geologic dynamism, their being usually less accessible, and their climatic extremes, the management of mountain protected areas (MtPAs) around the world has many common elements not usually shared by other kinds of protected areas. They also have a higher proportion of inhabitants from vanishing cultural minorities and a higher concentration of sacred sites. There are tough problems of search and rescue and altitude health problems. Fragile alpine environments are difficult to restore if overuse occurs. They are the critical upper watersheds of the world's rivers. These and several other special characteristics of mountain environments create a strong community of interest and concern among managers of protected areas and scientists who work in them.

"Parks, Peaks and People" was the title of a pioneering workshop held in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park in 1991 to focus on these common problems and suggest solutions. Under the sponsorship of the East-West Center (a nonprofit educational institution in Honolulu) and IUCN-The World Conservation Union, it brought together 44 scientists and managers working in mountain protected areas in 30 countries around the world. Out of this working meeting two important documents were produced: *Parks, Peaks and People*, and *Guidelines for Mountain Protected Areas*, which is Publication No. 2 in IUCN's Protected Areas Series (1992). The exciting synergism and collegial support which were forged there on the slopes of Mauna Loa and

Kilauea volcanoes called for on-going contact—and a fledgling network was born. Jim Thorsell, IUCN's senior advisor for World Heritage, and Bing Lucas, who was then the chair of IUCN's Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (now the World Commission on Protected Areas), were co-organizers of this event with me (at that time I was with the East-West Center).

The commission encouraged the formation of a formal network, and in 1992 appointed me vice-chair of the mountain theme within the commission. Armed with a small budget provided by the commission to stimulate mountain theme activities, my wife and professional partner, Linda Hamilton, and I began to expand the network and to put out a newsletter

on a regular basis. This replaced the periodic circular letters which had followed the workshop. *Mountain Protected Areas UPDATE* became a quarterly publication in 1994, prepared at desktop and photocopied. It is the principal device for nourishing what has become a group of 360 individuals working in MtPAs. It usually runs 10-12 pages and contains short (two- or three-paragraph) articles on various problems of management, recent research, success stories, descriptions of an unusual MtPA, a brief profile of a relevant organization, and sections on publications of interest and forthcoming meetings, as well as a "Bits and Pieces" section with news of network members or other brief items. *UPDATE* is produced in hard copy and mailed, since over 85% of the members prefer this form of communication. According to our 1996 survey, these copies are commonly circulated to other colleagues. Members who do have Web pages are welcome to insert any material from *UPDATE*, and some, such as The Mountain Forum, do so. We have been reluctant to put this newsletter out on the Internet, since, as volunteers, we feel unable to handle the volume of feedback and inquiry from non-network members which would result. Moreover, we feel that the strong sense of personal connection with other colleagues which now exists in the network would be lost if it went out into a large electronic void. This desire to maintain the benefits of

an interactive community also raises the question of how large the network can grow. At some point, personal connection can be lost to anonymity, and we are probably close to the maximum size now. The mailing list is culled of inactive members every two years, but continues to grow strongly.

A gratifyingly large number of network members have been able to engage in workshops and conferences sponsored by WCPA or other parts of IUCN, and this strengthens our interaction and sense of community. In 1995, for instance, with WCPA seed money of only \$4,000 and heroic fundraising efforts by Australian partners, we were able to organize a traveling seminar and workshop on "Transborder Cooperation in Mountain Protected Areas" (see Figure 1). This was held at several sites in the Australian Alps and brought together 35 network members from sets of border parks around the world. The working groups produced a set of guidelines to which we added case studies, and produced the book *Transborder Protected Area Cooperation* (L.S. Hamilton, J.C. McKay, G.L. Worboys, R.A. Jones, and G.B. Manson, published in 1996 by the Australian Alps Liaison Committee) which was a joint effort between the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and WCPA. In 1996, I organized a MtPA workshop on the topic of "Large Protected Area Mountain Corridors" at the World Conserva-

tion Congress in Montreal. The 15 papers presented were all by network members, and roughly 70 other networkers participated in the two large plenary sessions and two working-group sessions.

Wherever there is a significant regional protected areas meeting, a small amount of money, and a key network member organizer, we encourage a subsidiary workshop, or at least an informal gathering of those with mountain interests. Examples

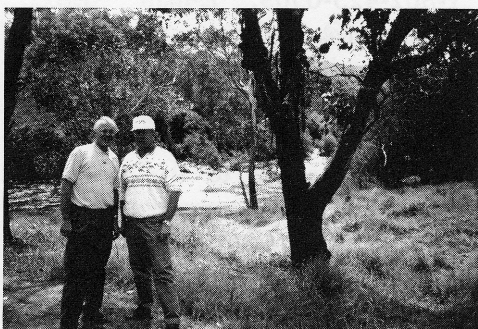


Figure 1. Two network members sharing a MtPA workshop experience in Australian Alps National Parks. Merv Syroteuk, superintendent (at that time) of Waterton Lakes National Park, Canada, and Dave Mihalic, superintendent of Glacier National Park, USA—jointly the world's first International Peace Park. Photo Larry S. Hamilton.

include the First Latin American Protected Areas Congress in Colombia in May 1997, and the North American WCPA Conference in 1995 in Banff (a very appropriate location). And we look forward to seeing many network members at the Andean Mountain Association con-

ference, being held in Quito in December 1998 on the theme of "Andean Cultural Landscapes."

A very real product and benefit of the network, which is more difficult to quantify, is the function of putting people with similar interests in touch with one another. But good examples come to light from time to time. For instance, a formal park partnership between National Park Alpi Marittime (Italy) and Huascarán National Park (Peru) was initiated through *UPDATE*, and it is now sanctioned by both governments and financially supported by Europarc. A partnership between New York State's Adirondack Park and Italy's Abruzzo National Park also grew out of contacts made through the network. [Ed. note: see Paul M. Bray, "Italian Park and Protected Areas Experience and Twinning," *THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM*, 15:2 (1998), 20-23.] Collaboration on publications and development of joint research proposals have also been facilitated by the network. Appeals for information or expertise also go out via the newsletter and are responded to, e.g., familiarity with a nominated World Heritage Site for evaluation.

Mountain protected areas are usually the most isolated in a protected areas system. Researchers and managers working in them find few, if any, professional networks which deal with the unique problems common to mountains. The practical benefit of

sponses to a September 1997 evaluation survey in *UPDATE*.

In the spring of 1998, regional coordinators were appointed for Africa and for Australia-New Zealand. These individuals, Peter Blignaut and Graeme Worboys respectively, are encouraged to marshal the power of the network members in their regions to implement regional or sub-regional activities, and to address problems that have a more local geographical focus. These and new ones might gradually evolve into the major players as regional MtPA networks, but I have some personal reservations about "over-regionalization." IUCN is, after all, a WORLD Conservation UNION, and there is value in inter-regional exchange. The common challenges in MtPAs are global in nature. Under its mountain theme,

WCPA has also been attempting to find substantial financial support for a MtPA task force that would implement specific projects, drawing on the network membership in doing so.

Though we are not anxious to greatly expand the network, readers who are working in MtPAs and wish to be part of this network are invited to send particulars on their interests and expertise, along with contact information, to 342 Bittersweet Lane, Charlotte, Vermont 05445 USA, fax 1-802-425-6509, E-mail <LSx2_Hamilton@together.org>. Please keep in mind that network members are expected to share information of potential interest to others via periodic submissions to the newsletter *UPDATE*, and to engage in local or regional mountain activities whenever possible.

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