



# Walking until the End of the World

A sacred landscape  
under threat in Mexico

Daniel Stone

*Above:* Huichol pilgrims walk across the sacred landscape

The Wirrikuta is an ancient pilgrimage route in Mexico. The original pilgrimage route started on the western coast of Mexico and stretches 300km to the desert of San Luis Potosi, ending at the Quemado, the sacred mountain. It was and is a pilgrimage route for the Huichols and other tribes of the area. Around 30km of the pilgrimage route is over desert terrain, passing by various natural ceremonial sites, before reaching the mountain itself. The desert is famous for the peyote cactus, and part of the reason for the pilgrimage is to harvest the plant, which is used in visionary ceremonies.

In Huichol cosmology, both the peyote and the sacred mountain are parts of a return to 'where the sun was born.' The mountain is the physical expression of their creation myth, it is the sacred connection to their original light, and indeed the original light of all humans. They see it as the place of their true father, the place of the origin of their seed, their ancestors - and they see these ancestors

also as our ancestors - yours and mine - since they believe this place holds the history of humanity.

## THE PLACE OF THE DEAD

One of the sacred pilgrimage sites the Huichols pass by is called Bernalejo, this is the place of the dead. Bernalejo is a mound of volcanic rock in an area which has no volcanic activity. Geologists describe the rocks as meteorites, but the Huichols describe the

rocks more like messengers from the stars - their ancestors. Offerings are made here to the ancestors that come from the sky.

Having worked with this site myself now for fifteen years, it is clear to me that if you open your heart to the stones, the earth 'opens' and the holographic texture of this planet is revealed; there is not just one time and space, there are multi-times and multi-spaces; lives upon lives, like bubbles within bubbles, or dreams within dreams.

This site is sacred to the Huichol dead, and I sense this site also attracts the dead from all over this planet; they come here to find a bridge to the 'other side.' It is seems possible to both see and feel the bridges through which the dead pass, and I have a phenomenal feeling of unconditional love towards the dead finding their homes.

Many of the ancient shamanic ceremonies for the dead are no longer performed in the world, due to the death of traditions. Ancient death

*Right:* Huichol marakame (shaman)



rituals would originally have served to make a bridge like the one naturally offered in Bernalejo. Now, with ancient cultures declining all over the world, there are many spirits of the dead who need help.

In Mexico, indigenous cultures still account for ten per cent of the population, but every year their cultures are diluted because of the pressures of poverty and materialism. With their decline comes also the ending of crucial ceremonial rituals normally performed for the dead. In Europe, these ceremonies for the dead are barely remembered since there are very few indigenous living traditions, however, that does not mean that they cannot be remembered or re-dreamed. If the dead do not find their paths, if they are not able or don't know how to cross the 'bridge of dreams,' they stay here, lost. And what does a dead spirit do if it doesn't know where to go? It looks for another body, or another place to hide, creating possession of both humans and places.

When I go to other lands, I consciously make a dreaming bridge between the rocks in those places and the rocks at Bernalejo, so that dreaming tracks can be created for the dead. This enables them to find that bridge they look for, the bridge between dreams. Bernalejo - being worked and alive - is a jewel for the dead, and when people come to retreats here, they also bring attached lost spirits of the dead with them; from their families, their cultures and their land.

I have always believed that, on a fundamental level, people come here on retreats to die on many

levels. They come here to let go, to release themselves from their past and from their karma. At Bernalejo there is an opportunity to look death in the eye, and in doing so, let go of the fear of dying. When a life is seen and understood as being just a dream within dreams, then death becomes a breeze.

#### **POINTS OF POWER**

The pilgrimage walk goes from Bernalejo towards the Quemado and the sacred mountain. Walking long distances in Mexico is a time-honoured way of 'changing the doors of perception' and of raising one's level of consciousness. The continuous rhythm of your steps takes you into a trance, and this allows your mind to calm. You become aware on other levels, and in particular, the pilgrim seeks to become more aware of the spirit world - the animals, the plants, the rocks, the beings of the sky and of the earth.

I first came here in 1996. I had travelled to different sacred sites around the world - Uluru, Lake Titicaca, Stonehenge, Mount Shasta, being just some of the highlights at that stage.

Sacred sites can be seen as being like power points on the global surface; the human body has certain energy points which healers - such as acupuncturists - use to balance the meridians that pass through the body. I think the earth's planetary body works in much the same way.



*Ceremonies that take place at sacred sites are not just for humans, they can be an act of healing for the whole planet - like a kind of planetary earth acupuncture*

Ancient sacred sites are places divined by ancient shamanic explorations to have a particularly powerful energy field.

Another way of describing these energy fields is to use the term 'dreaming.' In the Australian Aboriginal tradition, dreaming lines cross over vast tracts of land, and each part of the landscape has its own 'dreaming,' with a relationship to other times and spaces. The ancient pilgrimage route of Mexico follows the Mexican equivalent of these dreaming lines. Bernalejo and the Quemado are two of the most important sacred sites in the whole of Turtle island - The American continent.

Ceremonies that take place at sacred sites are not only for the benefit of humans, they are also for the planet as a whole. By working at sacred sites, it is possible to activate points on the Earth's planetary body which stimulates the flow of energy, like

*Above: offerings to the spirits high in the hills of Wirrikuta*

*Below: Huichol perform ceremonies at Bernalejo*

*The Huichol sacred site Bernalejo is the place where they make offerings for the dead. Scientists say the rocks are meteorites, the people say they are messengers from the stars*



*Below:* Huichol pilgrims in the hills of Wirrikuta

*Inset:* traditional yarn painting made by pressing coloured yarns into wax. The painting shows many of the Huichol's main cosmological figures, including Tewexika - the Sun and Tamatzí Kauyumarié - the Blue Deer. Peyote cactus are also shown under the deer, which are said to be its footprints

an acupuncturist works on the energetic points of a body. For planetary acupuncture to take place, there is a need for clear access to sacred sites, and it is particularly important that those sacred sites are not damaged.

I feel I was called to Mexico to build a retreat centre in the desert because of the energy of the sacred sites here. I had heard about this sacred site in Mexico and I wanted to sense its relationship with the other places I had visited. The impact it had was so powerful, and the messages I got from the desert were so clear, I had no doubt that this is where I was supposed to work

#### THE SACRED MOUNTAIN

The main reason for being here is the Huichol sacred mountain, La Quemada. As Bernalejo is the place

of the dead, La Quemada is the place of rebirth. The pilgrimage route from Bernalejo to the mountain is like a passage from your death into a new dream. The place where the sun was born is the place where the new life is given.

For the Huichols, this mountain has many roles. One of them is that this is the place where initiates come in order to receive their vision - which will explain who they are and what their role is within the tribe. The visionary guide is called the Blue Deer, and a *maracami* (shaman) leads the initiates in a peyote ceremony under or on the mountain. The vision that the initiate receives is their new life, it encapsulates what they need to know about their role within the tribe.

The kinds of messages that I and others have received from the

mountain has also literally changed lives. You don't argue with this mountain, it's like a real, true, deep sage, like the father sun, coming down and bringing the wisdom from the sky. I cannot express the level of deep reverence I have for this mountain.

#### CHANGING TIMES

In February 2012, the Huichols came en masse to make a ceremony on the sacred mountain, passing through Bernalejo on their way. Usually, the Huichols don't make pilgrimages together. Different villages - indeed, different families - have specific times in the year when they come. But this year they came together, as one tribe, in order to attempt to save their sacred land because Bernalejo and La Quemada are now under threat from mining.

Canadian mining companies want to mine this mineral rich mountain and desert area, and the



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mining would cause very significant physical and energetic damage to both the sacred sites and the pilgrimage route.

This was a very unusual ceremony. It was not only unusual because many different Huichol villagers came, it was also unusual because outsiders were invited to witness it. Huichols are very secretive. They were only able to travel to the site because of financial contributions from people who care about the plight of the Huichol. Because of this help, the Huichol invited all who had come to the site to witness the ceremony. The ceremony involved a lot of song. It is through song that the spirits are given voice. After the ceremony, a spokesman for the Huichols made a speech which is now on YouTube<sup>1</sup>.

The mining is a threat to the sacred sites and the sacred pilgrimage route. However things are not simple, or black and white.



There are also many Mexicans who live in the area who have no work, living on the poverty line. Many young men have to leave their families to look for work, some of them go to the cities, and some of them risk their lives by walking over the high desert in order to cross the border to the US. The mining companies offer jobs, and this is a really important fact for all of the people in the area where I live. These people cannot simply be ignored, as their concerns and their lives are also relevant.

There is a developing tension in the area between the Huichols, together with ecologists, on one side, and the people who need work on the other. This tension will not go away, and nor will the threat of mining unless there is an alternative employment possibility for the people who live here. Looking at how things are in Mexico, it is unlikely the Huichols or anyone will stop the mining, which comes from a deep human need and hunger to eat the earth. If alternative economics can be offered then we have a real solution - one that would protect the sacred sites, respect mother earth, and provide alternative employment.

There are various projects on the way which seek to offer



alternative employment possibilities.

A project I initiated from donations given by people who come on retreats here, involves collecting and buying plastic, glass, metal and paper waste, and preparing it for sale to recycling companies. This, for a community that treats the desert like a public dustbin, is literally ground-breaking!

Help is needed with these projects. The amount of money received from donations so far is only enough to start projects on a small scale, and help is needed to sustain and develop them. That is what has motivated me principally to write this article. It is important that more people are aware of what is happening here in the desert of Northern Mexico, and important to have the opportunity to ask you for your help.

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For more information about the Wirrikuta, or to make a donation:  
<http://goo.gl/QHn9U>

NOTES:

1: to see the speech (in it's original Huichol with Spanish subtitles)  
<http://youtu.be/xKtZJYPPWo>

### Extract from the speech made by a Huichol spokesman

"Tatewari Tutzi (Grandfather Fire) spoke to us about ancestral creation. In the beginning in Reu-kaunx (the sacred mountain), our gods made the fire and there left their mirrors, so they could see [themselves].

Tatiwari Tutzi, Tamatzi Kauyumarie (Blue Deer) and Tewexika (Father Sun) are the guides for humanity, and of all the beings in the universe... From the place of the four elements of the universe they made the sacred sites from where the new ages are born.

Wirrikuta is at the east and is one of the four ceremonies that unite us. Wirrikuta is the place that gives us balance in the universe. Tatiwari Tutzi, Tamatzi Kauyumarie and Tewexika sung through us the message that we need to take great care not to damage the sacred sites.

They are the nucleus of mother earth, and inside of her are gods preparing for the rebirth which will be the flowering of the new celestial world.

The gods leave messages in the atmosphere and humans can perceive the preoccupation and anxiety. The gods made mirrors on earth which are sacred sites. The gods ask us to flourish or flower again so that we can flow with the mother earth. The song of Tatiwari Tutzi, Tamatzi Kauyumarie and Tewexika asks us to renovate the language of the gods as the voice of the celestial universe, so that no one disturbs the vibration and the balance of the universe, and - through the voice of Tatewari and Tewexika - that there are no disruptions to the sacred sites, that nothing crosses the path of its birth, that we keep the spirit clean and we do not have fear, as fear traps us in illnesses of the spirit, soul and body.

They ask us to keep the balance inside of ourselves so that we receive the birth of the celestial universe. They ask us that we ask ourselves what was the energy that made us germinate, what strengthened us and made our evolution possible. They ask us that we are the midwives [in the renovation] of our ancestral deities...

We live in the world of yesterday and today, and who knows about tomorrow; this depends on us and our actions. We ask all the people who are against our own creator, that we leave the sacred sites in peace to the gods of the celestial universe."