

**—European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) Summer School—
“Mountains Across Borders”**

17-21 August 2013. Lavin, Switzerland

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

Conveners: Marcus Hall & Patrick Kupper

Participants:

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

The ESEH Mountain Summer School was organized in Lavin, Switzerland with the participation of 14 students from 9 European countries, as well as participants from USA and overseas representatives. The international student body gave presentations encompassing a wide spectrum of topics, time periods, and geographical areas, by way of a special focus on the interaction between mountains and borders. A special guest, Prof. Mei Xueqin (Rachel Carson Fellow 2013) from the People’s Republic of China was invited by Prof. Jon Mathieu to enhance his presentation on Holy Mountains with Chinese poetry. Nationalities and topics were represented from all corners of Europe and beyond including the Angola coffee plantations from the Portuguese Colonial period. Local small scale community historical analysis was offered from gold extraction near Mt. Rosia in Transylvania (Romania) to large scale historical analysis of the Vajont dam disaster on Mt. Toc on the Piave River (Italy). Mountain topics included areas as expansive as the (German-French-Italian-Swiss) Alps covering several borders to the limited area of the Tatra Mountains located between Poland and Slovakia, considered the “smallest Alpine landscape in Europe.” In addition to European mountains, faculty presented their own challenges of doing environmental history of mountainous areas in South America, Central Asia, and East Africa.

Arriving to Lavin was a cross-border adventure due to its remote setting and several train changes from Munich. As the trains became smaller and more

intimate, the landscape became more and more embracing for participants as we arrived to the town nestled in a valley. Lavin is dominated by the peaks above and a river below as one reaches into the heart of the Swiss Alps, where Rumantsch, German, and Italian are spoken fluently. Lavin is a small quaint town situated on a topaz blue river connected to other small communities and emblematic of the several towns that dot the slopes of European Alps contributing to the landscape of the immense symbolic icon that boasts clean air and water as a refreshing inspirational break from the urban lifestyles around the world. (Later we would hear from Philippe Frei about this unique name “Switzerland” in his project that represented this ideal.)

Lavin with its picturesque mountains as the backdrop for the Mountain school was an immediate point of inspiration for the event and was a successful choice of venue highlighting the Alps as the origin of the major headwaters of Europe, the giver of life for food and energy production. The panorama intake of fresh air above us and crystal running waters beneath our feet was ever present to remind us of the inter-linked (ecological) relationship that mountains provide watersheds to communities and serve as the inspiration for scholars, students, and professors side by side with the farmers and consequently the 2013 ESEH Mountain Summer School.

The strength and attraction of the ESEH Mountain School was to “promote rich methodological discussions with a goal to gather 20 graduate (and post-doctoral) researchers with a half-dozen junior and senior scholars to give formal and informal presentations, individually and in groups.”

Discussion Issues	Fields of Expertise	Areas of Expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of mountain cultures and ecosystems • Topography, elevation, and seasonality as dividing or else 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 refugia during times of war or global warming 	Environmental historians working on social, political, and conceptual questions of mountainous areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eurasia • Africa • South America • North America

The orientation presented by Marcus Hall and Patrick Kupper on the first night (August 17th) was a warm welcome to the wide array of participants including faculty and students in an informal dinner setting on-site at the rustic camp lodging. Faculty included experts in the field from social sciences---i.e. anthropology to environmental history---i.e. history of science. Students represented a variety of on-going cutting edge projects at various stages in their

trajectory process as graduate and post-graduate students. Presentations were assigned by the conveners to groups of two or three students. Students were given a balanced structure to enhance their research. Open discussions were organized first by having a comment from one of their peers from presentation group and then the floor was open to comments from faculty to help guide students to solve their research challenges. After these aforementioned comments, a full open dialogue amongst all participants was encouraged by the conveners and proved to be fruitful to all those present learning new avenues for data sources or perspectives. Naturally this phenomenon occurs with interdisciplinary structures that gather experts and blossoming scholars to embark on a journey together for new ideas that may prove useful in each participant's trajectory (faculty or student) whether to secure research grants or light up new lines of research to pursue.

Informal Discussions:

Meal time and coffee breaks encouraged informal discussions amongst scholars, faculty, and students through the outstandingly managed full open discussions leading to academic stimulation of the group on a whole. It seems that ideas were incubating for 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 the classroom setting. That experience was successfully carried out by Jon Mathieu, who is a native to the area and added commentary direct from his mother's experience. On the first field trip participants were led 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 noting the receding glacier in the background as evidence of global changes on a local level. All participants had the unique opportunity to further their historical agricultural knowledge with this first hand expert . He flows between his rural homeland in this valley (nearby Lavin) and the urban intellectual university atmosphere of the University of Lucerne, giving us a unique perspective of the area. The second field trip to an organic farm was enjoyed by the group of students and faculty with an open dialogue encouraged by our host in his garden setting. Several topics were raised during this field trip and a leisurely walk around the premises proved delightful including some rainfall to naturally water the vegetables and lovely flowers. Part of his business income came from the hotels that engaged in tourism for his flowers. He noted that he could exchange goods from his garden with his brother who had a meat business in the valley. Both brothers had been intellectually trained and were graduates from Swiss universities and had returned to make a successful lifestyle based on agriculture. Jon Mathieu pointed out the design of the green houses on the property highlighting his technical skills, which were impressive in the area of architecture to balance his self taught gardening skills.

The chance to visit the Swiss National Park near Lavin with Patrick Kupper and Marcus Hall was the theme of the last field trip. A pristine environment of protection was evident with extremely limited access for human traffic and narrow footpaths clearly marked within the park boundaries. The day was chosen according weather conditions, and all participants could enjoy another outdoor seminar guided by Patrick Kupper on the history of the park. Richard Tucker raised the question of the red deer species in the park, and Patrick Kupper explained the historical situation that involved a dilemma between hunters and scientists, which was finally resolved over a long period of time through dialogue and negotiation. Butterflies were abundant near our seminar site decorated with effervescent wing colours.



Faculty:

The balance between European and North American faculty was evident with four from universities and institutes in the USA and four from universities and institutes in Switzerland. Peter Coates from the UK (ESEH) served to harmonize the transatlantic group with his expertise in American Studies. Marcus Hall successfully managed both groups with his native background from USA and adopted land of Switzerland. Philippe Forét was a refreshing transnational scholar born in the Congo, raised in Marseilles, France, and stationed in St. Gallen for research challenging historians with geography perspectives and vice versa.

The greatest contribution of the faculty was their openness to share their challenges in the field of research as well as their expertise advice that comes from their *par excellence* curriculums with Richard Tucker leading the group with 40 years of experience in Indian forestry living in Dhamasala collecting data and Chris Conte's love for Africa brought him to diligently learn Swahili and

was able to share his expertise in working side by side with translators in Kenya with local languages to obtain his data and was quite candid about the possible errors of that experience with his “lost in translation” perspectives. Along these lines, Tamara Whited, who worked directly with her superb French (second language) in a mountain community, sharing her experiences and challenges leading her to take up cheese-making based on ancient practices accumulated over time with her research years in the area demonstrating her integration into the culture out of her love for their food.

Seminars:

Faculty Presentations:

1) **Marcus Hall** presented his two major areas of research from past and present. He asked the vital question, “What is a mountain?” He was interested in the definition, whether it was elevation, steepness, isolation, rural, backward, cold or wet? This question came back at the wrap up session on the last day. Marcus Hall explained his first research area was in Piedmont Italy dealing with restoration involving exotic or invasive species. He further dealt with the “history of re-wilding” and “re-naturing.” Moving on to his current research on pathways to parasites and restoring bodies working on parasite ecology with the human body as the host. He highlighted the contradiction of malaria stricken Sardinia and population longevity 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.”

2) **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, whereas all the parks of Costa Rica could fit into a soy bean field in Brazil. Emily Wakild's argument was “talking about scale gives us a way to focus.” Scales were defined as:

- Temporal
- Spatial
- Cultural organizational
- Institutional

Where to begin? Spanish Civil War, Darwin's Life, 1960's, round numbers? Human and non-human time scales. Settlements disrupted by non-humans---e.g. malaria parasite. Emily Wakild's question of scale came up over and over again in the Mountain Summer School as a point of reference that could be immediately recognized as pertinent in our 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 based on a ground level and the new technologies that enhance the precision from a satellite perspective. Her concluding question: How do we organize the story? She offered us to “embrace scale.”

3) **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 spoke about comparative perceptions; Asian [enlightenment] and European/American [wilderness]. Mei Xueqin gave us an explanation of how the mountain and water are always associated together as 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 as a mountain and your happiness be as the Eastern Sea---boundless as the Eastern Sea.*” Mei Xueqin read poems from early poets inspired by mountains and elaborated on their meaning. Mei Xueqin revealed the essence of the Holy Mountain culture in China as respect rather than control emphasizing harmony. She revealed the old Chinese proverb about “a foolish old man wants to move the mountain because it is a barrier to his path.”

Student Presentations:

Alpinism

Ben Anderson:

Martin Gutmann:

Seth Peabody:

These presentations carried the Alps on their backs linking tourism, national identity, and entrepreneurship with a mix of landscape use in the same ecosystem along the long corridor from Germany to Italy. Vital discussions ensued on how mountaineers or local mountain population interacted with each other with investments, innovation, and risk (physical and economic). Ben Anderson pointed out the social links and community identity questions during the comments forum. The “backward” perception of mountain communities was dispelled with Ben Anderson’s analysis that uncovered the sophisticated investment aims and services provided by the guide associations that were on par with urban organizational structures. Martin Gutmann’s extraordinary skills, especially on the face of Mt. Eiger, were pointed out as he is both researcher and Alpinist. Funding sources for expedition and the expansion of routes were revealed for Mt. Eiger considering the historical turning points. Seth Peabody presented a comparison of early films with mountains and mountaineering as the backdrop from Germany 1920-1930’s analysing 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 night time showing for participants with suggestion by Marcus Hall.

Mountain Sports

Daniel Svensson

Guillaume Dumont

These presentations were juxtaposed in the sense that Daniel Svensson compared the scientific view of high altitude sports with the aesthetic value impact on athletes, while Guillaume delved into the sociological aspects of “Bouldering” as groups of social networking impacted a landscape in a limited space. The landscape usage issues were centered on overcrowding a local mountain space in Guillaume Dumont 's case and landscape conservation in Daniel Svensson 's case of cross country skiing tracks vs. downhill skiing runs.

Daniel Svensson also opened the question of the science of high altitude training in a laboratory setting vs. the authentic outdoor experience and its result in athletic performance. Guillaume Dumont noted that the “crash pad” invention for “Bouldering” changed the sport into a commodity sport in the 1990’s spreading over large areas with social networking as compared to the 1970’s in Joshua Tree, California. The commodification of the area and the commercialization of an area were brought up as conflicts between local values and climbers’ values.

Day II; August 19

Faculty Presentations:

- 4) **Chris Conte** transmitted the research challenges of working in Kenya in the Eastern Arc with local archives in poor conditions, oral histories with local language translators, and time markers (based on famines). Information was incomplete in and the need to search for other sources such as a German soil erosion project and colonial government journals/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 to understand his environment with the habit of walking 4-6 hours daily and dialoguing with the people. From there, volunteers appeared to help him with his research. However, the translations for oral history surveys were a local dialect that he could not master and depended on translators for responses and questions, even though he had mastered Swahili in his anthropological studies in the USA and living as a Peace Corps volunteer prior to his research scope.

- 5) **Tamara Whited** specialized in French rural history and explained how she was in the perils of navigating between two fields, namely rural history and environmental history the French Alps. Launching forward into the challenges of her research, she highlighted the differences that arose with cultural representation of the rural and the institutional structures that regulated the environment. According to the foresters, the mountain was described as fragile, and debris slumps due to the Alpine peasants [sic] who did not care for the environment. On the other hand, the upland peasants [sic] valued the agro pastoral aspect of the forest. Foresters represented the State, while the rural community claimed the mountain and forests as cultural collective property and felt State encroachment between 1860-1940. Tamara Whited asked, “What is a forest? What is a mountain?” Currently she is embarking on a new project that brings her back to the mountains of France with sustainable food. The questions in this research centers on historical events in marketing a rural cheese that eventually became an urban commodity with the onset of refrigeration. In this research the challenges are linking food bellies to land bodies and faraway landscapes. She emphasized the need to integrate the non-human with the human as well as how new markets (cheese) were opened to sustain livelihood of Alpine rural communities combined with tourism.

Mountain Tourism

Robert Gross

Bianca Hoenig

Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto

This group gave a variety of scenarios involving tourism from 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 Alpine village reactions to the law, “*sportzgeitz*” that changed the face of the mountain activities seasonally with putting up and taking down fences for farmers to accommodate ski runs on their property or nearby at their own costs. The dynamics of the stakeholders as a result of the investment with the Marshall Plan was insightful given the socio-economic historical land uses and cultural ties to the land that created a unique situation in Austria for attracting foreign currency from Germans (Deutsche Mark) to pay back loans with ski resorts. Bianca Hoenig brilliantly explained the nuances of a conflict between the ideal behind a national park prohibiting sheep grazing and a cultural identity of the so-called *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 “Alpines without sheep?” This leads to the questions of landscape and cultural expectations of tourists after the fact of an established park. Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto introduced the natural/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 in 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 Ruiz Scarfuto did indicate her research tools have a broader application beyond literary landscapes to include all arts (dance, painting, music, etc.).

- 6) **Richard Tucker** transported the group to India and his challenges working on forestry history near a sensitive border; Kullu, Himachal Pradesh India described today by Himachal Pradesh Tourism Corporation as “Kullu (1220m) was once known as Kulanthapitha---the end of the habitable world.” His home base was Dharamsala, which he described as a delight presenting slides of the area. He also highlighted how writing becomes a challenge in choosing vocabulary such as management vs. degradation; it depends on how we perceive it. Richard Tucker described his work in this area as an outsider and his access to sources such as the local forestry archive or the Princely State records considering the red tape to gain permission. Richard Tucker shared his experience of 40 years in the field exposing how to gather valid information aware of the obstacles that an outsider may encounter from local communities who were unsure of how the information may be used. Part of the solution came through walking and talking to villagers and foresters. He was able to form social relationships, which in turn made him

successful to ascertain information that was 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).

Mountains Beyond Europe

Barbara Henning
Philippe Frei
Maria Gago

These brilliant and intriguing presentations took the group beyond Europe to encompass the Ottoman Empire, Portuguese colony in Mozambique, and ideal wonder of Switzerland across the globe. Philippe Frei began with the word, "Switzerland," that led the discussion of the pristine landscape that identified a fantasy that carried its way into various regions in Europe and beyond. In reality, it was not a term chosen by the Swiss people, but rather assigned to them and stuck over centuries. However, in the turn of events, it came to be a positive image representing the high, pristine, Swiss wonderland and used whenever such a pseudo landscape came close to the original; in other words a transportable "landscape virtue" could be found in the UK, Argentina, etc. Barbara Henning excited us with a story of resistance of intriguing survival complexities woven in the tapestry of the Hamawand tribe in the late 19th century with their Sufi relationships spread throughout the Ottoman Empire that enabled them to survive over time despite their small numbers by retreating to the desert. The landscape of the borderlands for the Humawand people played out in two ways: 1) opportunity for survival and 2) 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 explains how the coffee grown in Angola (Portuguese colonial times) had a special treatment for production due to its autochthonous nature. Maria Gago alerted the group to the long standing player, John Gossweiler (1873-1952) from the Kew Gardens, a British botanist, who was stationed in Angola most of his life from 1899-1940's. Indigenous methods for growing this species (Robusta) were advised in contrast to Java or Brazilian techniques. The mountain region was the preferred environment for plantations and as such required "forced labour" sources. Although, she hypothesizes that 1/3 was produced by Africans. Each mountain in its own scope contributed the overall group knowledge of mountains; its people, flora, and fauna.

Day III; August 20

Faculty Presentations:

- 7) **Peter Coates** outlined the research assessment applied to Environmental history explaining how audits since the 1980's have evaluated output, collaboration (national/international), prizes, grant income, and esteem. He stress that the impact was measured for 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. However, Mei Xueqin pointed out that her students were enthusiastic 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.”

- 8) **Philippe Forét** invited the group to follow him on a valuable expedition that began with unexpected results and yet contributed precise data to the geographical field with environmental analysis available for other fields. Philippe Forét described the process of 40 years to make an accurate map derived from the expedition data that was collected by the 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 considering that he had to cut the pages in the 64 volumes at times indicating that no one had consulted the data prior to his request. At that time, it was already revealed that the silk route had a tremendous impact on the water sources and agriculture, showing the size of the actual lake compared to the historical extended lake through data collected on the expedition. Philippe Forét currently is involved in re-enacting the expedition for a comparative study embarking on the journey with the same “unexpected results” proposal.

Animals, Risks and Disasters in the Mountains

Troy Vettese
Cosmina-Maria Berindei
Robert Hearn

This group with its variety of subjects 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 the concept of Emily Wakild about scale. He explained that the disaster that was the equivalent of two bombs the size of Hiroshima on the environment and people of the area. Prevention could have related to scale; such a massive scale project had unforeseen risks due to the mechanics of speed. He described it as the largest landslide in human history. Methodology was his main focus on the issue outlining several theorists. Cosmina-Maria Berindei transported us to Transylvania, Romania to the 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 building was that the issue as much as the importance of the links to the social life. The opposition to the multinational (Canadian company) became broad based with this religious link. The techniques of extraction also were a focus of her discussion moving away from a local method towards a full scale high tech operation. Economics played another role in the scenario to mitigate property rights and community concerns. Robert Hearn elegantly introduced us to re-wilding of faunal assemblages 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 element was the oral histories and it was revealed that this wolf species re-appeared in the area. Questions to whether it had been re-introduced by humans or re-appeared on its own became in interesting discussion. Robert Hearn also extrapolated the elements of continuity and change in management and conservation of the species. The changes in the landscape usage have resulted in the reappearance of many species that had disappeared from the Ligurian faunal assemblage including the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) and Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*). A small indication of how people of the area felt about the reappearance of the wolf was nationalistic in nature, given the fact that some Italians were keen on its appearance if it were native and if a foreign species would react on the contrary. In summary, this group concluded the sessions of a long scholarly summer school with enthusiasm for future research in environmental history and mountains.

Conclusion: Wrap Up (Last Day) August 21st

During this extraordinary week in Lavin, both faculty and participants of the Mountain Summer School, recognized mountains as special landscapes with a fragile ecosystem through their extensive topics, exceptional papers and professional reviews offered. 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 commented that her students are more enthusiastic about studying environmental history than other areas in history. In addition, the urgent need for its application to confront the global challenges that cross borders can inform a wider audience of decision makers who are currently making history for future generations

"Lavin Declaration"

Participants of the 2013 Lavin Environmental History Summer School hope that hindsight reflections from young and seasoned scholars can propel us all into a brighter future as the Mountain's fragile ecosystem is acknowledged as the vital source of water and in some way replenishes the fountains of inspiration for many disciplines to continue striving for creative and innovative solutions together on personal and professional trajectories.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosalinda Ruiz Scarfuto
September 5, 2013