

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY  
Religious Studies 338

# Pilgrimage on the AT

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## *Introduction to the Course:*

Traditionally, pilgrims have been drawn to centers that have specific significance in relation to a particular religion. The major religions of the world each recognize sacred sites--Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca, the Ganges River to name a few--that have the power to transform those who devote themselves to a sacred journey. A relatively new sacred center, wilderness, is drawing pilgrims in the same way that traditional spiritual magnets have. Hiking the Appalachian Trail can be understood as a kind of modern spiritual journey with many of the same features as traditional pilgrimages.

This class will be an experiential exploration, hiking the Appalachian Trail, comparing and contrasting the experience of walking through the wilderness with traditional pilgrimages, and communicating with others who are themselves not in the class but hiking the trail for their own reasons. Class members will learn, through reading, journal writing, and interpersonal communication, how pilgrim backpackers experience *communitas* in relation to both persons and their environment. Cindy Ross writes in a reflection of her trek on the AT, "freshness and wildness must be ever present in my life, or I know part of me will die--the most essential part of me--my spirit. . . The trail leads not merely north and south but upward to the body, mind and soul of [wo]man."

Prior to hiking the trail each class member will read Victor and Edit Turner's anthropological study of Christian pilgrimage titled Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. We will spend about two weeks hiking in Tennessee and Virginia, getting onto the trail at a place where we will encounter many thru-hikers--those who are journeying from Georgia to Maine in one summer--and find out about their experience at the same time that we are discovering things about wilderness, the trail, and the significance of such journeys in religion. There will be informal talks around the camp in the evenings, talks along the way, and everyone will keep a trail journal. We will participate in a festival in Damascus, Virginia called "Trail Days," a celebration of the AT. Finally we will hike up to Mount Rogers, the highest mountain in Virginia, and end the hike. After returning home everyone would write a paper and submit it.

## ***Goals:***

The means and media for coming to an understanding of the Appalachian Trail as a spiritual journey site will be reading, writing, interpreting, analyzing, critically evaluating and/or experiencing the trail itself, various texts, handouts, images, interviews with hikers, trail registers, and engaging in informal discussions. The following are general goals that individuals should incorporate into the learning experience (note that each goal should be preceded by the statement “the improvement of”): reading comprehension, interpretation skills, analytical ability, critical thinking, evaluation of problems, ability to synthesize, writing both formally and informally, and participation in group discussion and problem solving. Specific goals related to the Appalachian Trail are (again, each goal should be preceded by the statement “the improvement of”): an understanding of ethnographic research, an understanding of symbolic communication, an understanding of sacred place/space, an understanding of sacred time, an understanding of spiritual journey and pilgrimage, an understanding of the concept of wilderness, an understanding of rites of passage and the stages thereof, an understanding of the history of the Appalachian Trail.

## ***Objectives:***

Students will learn to recognize the existence of cultural and environmental differences; to acknowledge the perspective of others; and to compare the physical, social, and cultural environments. The following objectives are closely related to the general goals listed above; they are simply a distillation of those goals. Keep these short statements outlining the course objectives in mind as a way of reminding yourself of the goals listed above. I will list the statements below and then offer a brief explanation of each.

1. Developing the skill of clearly expressing ideas orally and in writing.
2. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity.
3. Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking questions and seeking answers.
4. Developing skills in working with group members.

One objective of this course is to help you develop the skill of clearly expressing your ideas orally and in writing. This class requires discussion, as well as informal and formal writing. Acquiring an understanding of concepts related to this class requires an ability to clearly communicate your ideas. A second objective of the course is to gain a broad understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity. In the case of interpreting the Appalachian Trail as a pilgrimage site, we will be attempting to understand it within the context of the intellectual and cultural activity associated with the relatively new phenomenon of extended hikes in the wilderness and the well established tradition of religious pilgrimage. A third objective of this humanities course is that the student begins to move away from a teacher centered learning

environment to the kind of learning that is driven by the student's desire to gain knowledge through discovery. Learning by discovery requires skills of asking good questions and seeking answers. This is an upper level course and the student should work to sharpen skills that have been developed up to this point. A final objective of the course is that students gain skills in working with team members. Much learning takes place as the student searches for knowledge while sitting quietly with a book, or through quiet reflection, or in producing a piece of writing. However, much learning also takes place in a group environment where people share ideas, critique each other's ideas, and offer constructive criticism concerning a piece of writing.

***Course Texts:***

Turner, Victor and Edith L. B. Turner. Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.  
Lane, Belden C. Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001.  
Benson, Bruce Ellis and Norman Wirzba. The Phenomenology of Prayer. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2005.

***Reading for discussion and class schedule:***

Read the assigned text. There will be a body of supplemental texts and articles placed on reserve in the library and given to you. Upon returning from the hike, each participant will start writing a paper. These supplemental texts will serve as a beginning in researching for writing papers. Also, any papers that are assigned should be read.

***General Policies:***

**Grading:**

Participation during the hike will involve discussions and conversations amongst class participants, as well as interviews of hikers who are not in the class. Participation will comprise 30% of the course grade. Each student will keep a journal and it will comprise 35% of the course grade. Finally, each student will submit a paper that will make up 35% of the course grade.

***Assignments:***

**Reading and Reflection Journal:**

Each student will keep a reading and reflection journal. Journal entries will be considered informal writing assignments and as such will be graded more in relation to content than style. Journal entries will contain questions, answers to questions, and reflections which relate to daily discussions, conversations, assigned readings, and interviews with hikers who are not in the class. Each journal entry should be dated. Each day's journal entries will be divided into two sections: ethnography and personal reflection. The ethnography section is mostly objective writing and will include a narrative that describes interviews with hikers and reflections resulting

from the student connecting the class readings to phenomena encountered on the trail. The personal reflection section is subjective and will be composed of personal thoughts about the student's own interaction with the trail, characterizations of the people the student meets and the places we all journey through, each student's own thoughts directed toward themselves. This class journal will reflect the quality of the student's daily class participation and will be graded with this in mind.

### **Paper:**

Research papers will conform to the MLA Handbook and are to be ten pages, typed with 12 point font, double-spaced, and have a bibliography. They will be written on a topic of choice that has been approved. The student must have at least five bibliographic sources not including encyclopedic, dictionary, or required texts. Students may use Internet sites as a source but they will only count as one source. The student is responsible for choosing a topic and getting it approved. The student is encouraged to write a personal reflection of at least a page within the body of the paper.

### **Hiking, Discussions, and Interviewing**

We will be on the trail, walking and talking with each other, twenty-four hours a day for two weeks. We are not "in the classroom" for that whole period. The discussions and interviews that we have will be both in the class setting as well as outside that setting. Walking on the trail with a good attitude is important. Conversing with hikers who are not in our class is also important.

### **Equipment**

Students will be required to supply their own equipment and food. Below is a list of suggested items and an estimate of their cost. The overall weight of your load is of primary importance. It is possible to carry everything you need and have a pack that weighs between 35 and 45 pounds. The less weight one carries, the more pleasant the experience.

The most basic equipment needed will be:

1. Backpack with hip belt, either internal or external frame, and places to strap things to the pack. Also a packcover to keep the pack dry in rain. This will cost between \$150 and \$300.
2. Sleeping bag, lightweight, rated down to between 35 and 25 degrees. This will cost between \$80 and \$200.
3. Hiking shoes, sandals, or boots depending on whether your ankles need support. If your boots are new, start wearing them to class now and break them in. Some hikers walk in sandals and others wear running shoes. You may consider a low-top hiking shoe as long as your ankles are strong. This will cost between \$40 and \$300.
4. Wool socks, at least 3 pair: get these as a backpacking store, and get high-tech socks, you won't regret it, they will prevent blisters. Socks will cost about \$10 a pair.
5. A tent is optional. If a third of the class members have tents, it will be possible to share. A tent will cost between \$40 and \$200. However, we need to have enough tents so that everyone has a shelter.
6. Water bottles, carry at least two two-liter bottles, there are many types and sizes. They will

cost about \$10 each.

7. Cooking utensils, there are many options but weight is the most important consideration. This will cost between \$20 and \$50.

8. Clothing, do not wear cotton. Most people have clothing made out of synthetic material. There is probably no need to buy anything.

9. Rain gear, poncho or rain suit, costs between \$10 and \$40.

10. A water filter is optional. If at least four people in the class have a filter, we will share. The cost is about \$40.

### **Food**

Various kinds of noodles, dried fruit, nuts, oatmeal, and other kinds of light weight food work well. Below is a menu for 14 days of hiking, although I would only carry 5 days of it. I also bring powdered soy milk, powdered milk works just as well and this is a great source of protein. I also buy some things in bulk and then package individual meals in zip lock bags; things such as brown rice, the quick cooking kind. You can buy packaged dry sauces to go with plain noodles or rice. Dried instant tea, hot chocolate and coffee also work well. If you don't like tea, try instant sports drinks, etc. Below is a sample of a 14 day hiking trip wherein no food is purchased along the way.

Days:

1: Dried pears, oatmeal, ramen noodles, tuna.

2: Figs, oatmeal, ramen, beef jerky, Lipton teriyaki noodles.

3: Oatmeal, corn meal, tuna, rice, Knorr Pesto Pasta Sauce.

4: Dried apples, oatmeal, ramen for lunch, ramen for dinner.

5: Corn meal, ramen, jerky, Lipton Creamy Garlic noodles.

6: Figs, oatmeal, ramen, rice, Knorr Four Cheese Pasta Sauce.

7: Dried apples, oatmeal, peanut butter, Rice, Knorr Vegie Soup.

8: Dried pears, oatmeal, ramen, Lipton Teriyaki Noodles.

9: Oatmeal, corn meal, tuna, ramen, jerky, rice, Knorr Pesto Pasta Sauce.

10: Dried apples, oatmeal, ramen for lunch, ramen for dinner.

11. Figs, oatmeal, peanut butter, humus (dried), rice, Knorr Four Cheese Pasta Sauce.

12. Corn meal, ramen, jerky, Lipton Butter Herb Noodles.

13. Oatmeal, ramen, rice, Knorr Garlic Herb Pasta Sauce.

14. Dried apples, oatmeal, ramen, potatoes.

Food for 5 days will weigh between 5 and 10lbs depending on your diet.

The following is a list of thing that I have carried on past hikes.

This is probably more than each person would need. I carry some extra stuff for emergencies.

The general idea is that you don't carry what you won't use. I did not use some of these things and would normally not carry those things that I rarely use.

**Clothes totaled 5 lbs 11oz**

Light weight wind shell/ rain jacket  
 1 button-up shirt  
 1 long-sleeve-pullover fleece  
 1 pair of shorts (not cotton)  
 1 pair of long trousers, convertible to shorts (not cotton)  
 1 fleece vest  
 1 watch cap  
 1 t-shirts (not cotton)  
 2 pair of wool socks  
 2 scarves (dew raggs)  
 All of this was kept in a waterproof compression stuff sack.

### **Weather gear**

|                                   |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Water proof jacket/shell (14 oz). | 6lbs 9oz   |
| Pack cover (8oz)                  | 7lbs 1oz   |
| Hammock Tent (2lbs 5oz)           | 9lbs 6oz   |
| 8 Tent stakes (4oz)               |            |
| Insulated sleeping pad (1lbs)     | 10lbs 10oz |
| Sleeping bag (2lbs 1oz)           | 12lbs 11oz |

### **Foot wear**

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| 1 pair of sandals (2lbs)  | 14lbs 11oz |
| Trekking shoes (2lbs 6oz) | 17lbs 1oz  |
| Waldies/ crocks (11oz)    | 17lbs 12oz |

### **Water gear** (water weighs 6 lbs per gallon)

1 2 liter platypus (5lbs 12oz)  
 1 one liter nalgeen (2lbs 10oz)  
 1 water filter (13oz)

### **Food and Cooking**

|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Stove (13oz)                   |            |
| Wind shield (2oz)              |            |
| Fuel and bottle (1lbs 4oz)     |            |
| 1 one qt pot for cooking (7oz) |            |
| Drinking cup (5oz)             |            |
| Spoon                          | 29lbs 12oz |
| Water proof sack (8oz)         | 39lbs 12oz |

## **First Aid**

1 first aid kit  
extra packs of mole skin  
vasaline (1oz)  
sun screen (1oz)  
medicine

## **Other miscellaneous stuff:**

3 bungee cords (highly useful)  
Camp chair (11oz)  
flash light (3oz)  
2 Caribeaners (2oz)  
50 feet of nylon line (for hanging food from trees and other activities) (8oz)  
Extra line (1oz)  
4 straps (4oz)  
Compass (2oz)  
1 scrub pad  
2 small rolls of toilet paper  
1 packet of clean wipes  
extra batteries  
1 candle (2oz)  
1 mosquito net for my head (1oz)  
duck tape  
extra boot laces (1oz)  
Knife Plyers set (7oz)  
tooth brush  
Floss (1oz)  
matches (1oz)  
needle and thread (2oz)  
insect repellent  
harmonica  
tie slips (1oz)

Bungee cords (highly useful)

## ***Final Notes***

### **Physical Requirement**

This class requires strenuous hiking over rugged terrain as well as camping in tents. We will also be carrying backpacks with all the equipment needed for our time away from campus. The weight of the pack will add to the physical aspects of the hike. All students should be prepared to be in

good physical condition for the hike.

### **The CNU Honor Code**

"On my honor, I will maintain the highest possible standards of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility. That means I will not lie, cheat, or steal and as a member of this academic community, I am committed to creating an environment of respect and mutual trust."

### **Make-up Examinations, Late Assignments and Incompletes:**

The student has the responsibility to request any form of departure from due dates for course work and to give reasons for the request. Late or *ex post facto* requests must be supported by the most convincing reasons.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

### **Discussion Concerning Syllabus:**

The student is encouraged to discuss items within the syllabus during the introduction week. This discussion should clear up any ambiguous or vague language that may be in the syllabus document. It also serves to clarify the students understanding of course expectations, goals and direction. If the student does not have questions or comments then it will be assumed that there is understanding. Remember the nature of discussion and the dynamic between instructor/peer and peer/peer. There is no reason to feel intimidated about getting into a discussion, even about the syllabus or course objectives and procedures.

### **Academic Support:**

The Center for Academic Success offers free tutoring assistance for CNU students in math, science, and languages, as well as other subjects. The center also offers individual assistance and/or workshops on various study strategies that can assist you at performing your best in your courses. The center also houses the Alice F. Randall Writing Center. Writing consultants can help you at any stage of the writing process, from invention, to development of ideas, to polishing a final draft. The Center is not a proofreading service, but consultants can help you to recognize and find grammar and punctuation errors in your work as well as provide assistance with global tasks. Go as early in the writing process as you can, and go often!

You may drop by the Center for Academic Success to request a tutor, meet with a writing consultant, pick up a schedule of workshops, or make an appointment to talk one-on-one with a University Fellow for Student Success. The Center is located in Newport Hall, first floor, room 123.

### **Student Success:**

I want you to succeed in this course and at CNU. I encourage you to come see me during office hours or to schedule an appointment with questions or concerns about the course and material. If I become concerned about your course performance, attendance, engagement, or well-being, I will speak with you first. I may also submit an Institutional Referral Form that will be received by the Office of Student Success. Depending upon the nature of my concern it also may be received by the Center for Academic Success or Counseling Services. Someone will contact you to help determine what will help you succeed. Please remember that this is a means for me to



support you and help foster your success at CNU.

**Students with Disabilities:**

In order for a student to receive an accommodation for a disability, that disability must be on record in the Dean of Students' Office, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, David Student Union (DSU). If you believe that you have a disability, please contact Dr. Kevin Hughes, Dean of Students (594-7160) to discuss your needs. Dean Hughes will provide you with the necessary documentation to give to your professors.

Students with documented disabilities are required to notify the instructor no later than the first day on which they require an accommodation (the first day of class is recommended), in private, if accommodation is needed. The instructor will provide students with disabilities with all reasonable accommodations, but students are not exempted from fulfilling the normal requirements of the course. Work completed before the student notifies the instructor of his/her disability may be counted toward the final grade at the sole discretion of the instructor.