

Mountain Study Teams: Roles and Tasks

Each group member should plan a two-minute presentation of his or her work on the Mountain Study Team.

Arts Specialist

(choose one)

1. Using the photograph provided or other resources, draw a poster-sized picture of the mountain that expresses what you consider most important about it.
2. Illustrate the quotation that begins the profile or another relevant quote you find. (For example, there are many haiku and tanka about Mt. Fuji.)

Environmentalist

(choose one)

1. Document current environmental threats to the mountains and their people that are cited in the Profile sheet. (For example: coal and uranium mining at the Navajo mountains)
2. Describe future threats to the mountain's environment if present trends discussed in the Profile sheet continue. (For example: trekking at Mount Kailas)

Faith Keeper

Retell legends and religious beliefs about the mountain, after researching more thoroughly its significance to one or more faiths. (For example: after reading in the Profile sheet about the circumambulation of Mount Kailas, gather more information about the Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain faiths).

Geographer

Using an atlas, make a map of the mountain and its surrounding region. When you present your map, show how it addresses these four Themes of Geography:

Location: Absolute location (latitude and longitude). Relative location: What is near the mountain and what is the relationship of these landscape features to it?

Place: Climate and vegetation zones. Describe the environment on your mountain and how it differs from mountains in other parts of the world.

Movement: What are some of the forms, routes, and problems related to transportation in this region?

Region: What is common to the people living in the area of which the mountain is a part?

Historian

(choose one)

1. Research the political history of this mountain region. (For example: to what nations has the Sinai Peninsula belonged? Have wars or conflicts taken place there, and if so, why?)
2. Research some aspect of this region's social or economic history. (For example: how have the people of this mountain supported themselves at different times in history?)
3. Contemporary history: Using periodical indexes or the Internet, find newspaper articles that deal with controversial events in this mountain area. (For example: Research the current dispute over coal mining profits on the Navajo Reservation)

Policymaker

The Mountain Agenda of 1995 (see Lesson 4 in this pull-out) makes recommendations on the Sacred, Spiritual, and Symbolic Significance of Mountains. Included are: consulting with indigenous peoples about conservation and management of sacred sites; indigenous control of pilgrimage issues; and crosscultural research and education projects. How might you apply these issues to "your" mountain?

Scientist

(choose one)

Botanist: What grows in the vegetation zones found on this mountain? Have there been environmental changes that impact these plant species? What are they and what was the impact? How do these changes affect the local people and how are these plants used by the local people?

Geologist: When and how was this mountain formed? Which continental plate is it part of? What kinds of rock are found on the mountain? Is there mining activity in this mountain range?

Biologist: What animal species inhabit the mountain? Have there been environmental changes that affect these animal species? What are they and what was the impact? How does this affect the indigenous population?

Profile: Mount Fuji

*When I take the path
To Yogo's coast, I see
Perfect whiteness laid
On Mount Fuji's lofty peak
By the drift of falling snow.*
—Hyakunin Isshu (100 Tanka by 100 Poets, 13th century)

Mount Fuji (Fujiyama), a conical volcano reaching 12,888 feet into the sky, is holy to Shinto and Buddhist faiths and breathtakingly beautiful to all visitors. The volcano last erupted in 1707, but sometimes steam still emerges from its crust. The Japanese reverence for beauty in nature, an integral part of religious observance, bestows upon Mt. Fuji a symbolic meaning for the entire nation.

Fuji combines many of the roles of sacred mountains the world over: it is the seat of the gods, home to the souls of the dead, and a source of physical purification that one attains by climbing it. Shinto and Buddhist sects developed rituals of ascending the mountains of Japan as transformational religious experiences. The route up, past mountain huts that lodge pilgrims at ten stations, takes up to eight hours and is often traversed in the dark so that one may witness *goroiko*, the rising sun (a Japanese symbol like Fuji itself), from the top of the mountain. After the Meiji Restoration of the 1860s, women were welcome to join men in the ascent.

Some Japanese may save for a lifetime to make the pilgrimage. In all, almost half a million people climb Fuji every year. Unfortunately, litter has defaced the mountain top – which now contains vending machines to feed visitors.



Courtesy of the City of Fujiyama, Japan

Profile: Mount Sinai

*And Mount Sinai was altogether in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly...
And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount; and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up."
—Exodus, Chapter 19, 18-20*

Mount Sinai in the south central portion of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula is revered by three faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—as the site where Moses received the Ten Commandments. This identification of Jebel Musa (Mount Moses) was made as early as the 3rd century A.D., when Christian monks and hermits built a monastery at the base of the mountain. In the 4th century, Byzantine empress St. Helena constructed the Chapel of the Burning Bush, and Emperor Justinian added a basilica and fortress in 542 A.D. Mohammed is said to have guaranteed the safety of the monastery after the Muslim conquest of the region.

The monastery was named for St. Catherine, an early Christian martyr whose bones were discovered on another of the Sinai peaks, Jebel Katerina, and brought there during the 7th century. Pilgrims descend from the summit of Mount Sinai along the *Sikket Saiyidna Musa* ("Path of Our Lord Moses"), also called the Steps of Repentance, 3,750 steep steps which were cut into the mountain by a penitent monk.

Various plans to commemorate the history of Mount Sinai have not come to fruition. The plan of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism to build an ecumenical center there was abandoned out of fear of reaction from religious fundamentalists. Advocates of more intensive touristic development of Mount Sinai have encountered opposition on the ground that the hotels, restaurants, shops and places of entertainment that accompany tourism would threaten the mountain's sanctity.



Kenner L. Stone

Profile: Mount Kailas

As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of humankind by the sight of the Himalayas.

—Hindu proverb

Mount Kailas, in the Ngari region of Tibet, is one of the most inaccessible places in the world. It is also one of the most sacred mountains in Asia—in Hindu scripture, the physical embodiment of Mount Meru, the center of the universe or "axis of the world." The headwaters of four major rivers of the Indian subcontinent—the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Kamali (tributary of the Ganges), and the Sutlej—flow from this region.

Mt. Kailas rises 22,000 feet high from the edge of the Tibetan Plateau as part of the Himalayan Mountain Chain formed by the overlap of two massive tectonic plates on the earth's surface. The high Himalayas catch the snows, which melt to start the great rivers. Kailas, where the great god Shiva lives, is a domed mountain, and Hindu temples that bear the name of Kailasanth (Lord of Kailas) are modeled on its domed shape.

Mount Kailas is connected to the history of ancient India in the Hindu epic of the Ramayana. In this poem, Prince Rama, the god and founder of India, sends Hanuman the monkey god to fetch medicinal herbs from Mount Kailas in order to revive the casualties in Rama's war against the evil Ravana. Hanuman does not know which herbs to pick, and so brings the entire mountain to Rama, who collects the herbs and then hurts Kailas back into the Himalayas.

A pilgrimage to Kailas represents a journey to the very center of the cosmos, and a step in the constant Hindu evolution from the frailty and sin of the human state toward the divine. Pilgrims of the Hindu and other eastern faiths walk on the plain surrounding Kailas in a kora, or clockwise circumambulation, of the mountain. Today, these pilgrims are joined by a growing number of tourists who voyage to Mount Kailas, usually by way of Nepal.



Profile: The San Francisco Peaks

Our spiritual center is a sacred mountain site our prophecies say will have a special purpose in the future for mankind to survive, and now should be left in its natural state. All nations must protect this spiritual center.

—Thomas Banyacya, *The Hopi Message to the United Nations General Assembly*, December 10, 1992

The Hopis, who live on high mesas in northern Arizona, revere the San Francisco Peaks—a cluster of summits (the highest being Mount Humphreys at 12,633 feet) which they regard as a single mountain. The Hopi name for the mountain is *Nuvatukya'ovi*, "the snow mountain higher than everything else."

Nuvatukya'ovi is the central dwelling place of the kachinas, gods whom Hopi dancers impersonate in ceremonies. The Hemis Kachinas wear collars of sacred spruce brought down from the San Francisco Peaks to remind worshipers of the mist and cool rain that come from the peaks to water their crops and ensure survival for the entire community.

To the Hopi, the mountain represents a *kiva*, or ceremonial center, of enormous size. Its importance in everyday life is primary, and every morning the Hopi cast cornmeal in its direction. The defacing of the mountain by ski trails, fought by the tribe in three successive lawsuits, is regarded as an affront to worship.

To the Navajo, Humphreys' Peak, or *Doko'o'slid*, is one of the four sacred mountains in their religious cosmology. Both the Navajo and the Hopi believe the San Francisco Peaks to hold medicinal power and to control the weather and well-being of both land and people. But uranium and vanadium mining in sacred mountain areas have tainted Navajo reservation lands, exposing the miners to radiation poisoning. Coal mining has also destroyed sacred mountain lands, which have been slurried away to leave barren landscapes.

