

GEOG 63: Nature and the Problem of its Preservation

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Location: CH 204, MWF 9:05-9:55am, Carolina Hall 204

You know the feeling: fresh air, the crunch of leaves under your boots, the birds chirping and the springs gurgling in the forest. This is the feel of untouched nature and freedom from civilization. The idea of this pristine nature is convincing and enticing, but is it “natural”? Some scholars argue that nature “untrammelled” by people is, in fact, an idea created by particular human cultures at particular moments in human history. In this First Year seminar, we will examine the geographies and histories of places we count as examples of “untouched” and “polluted” natures to address questions about what counts as nature in modern society, and how this powerful idea matters to the organization and future of different societies.

Throughout the semester, we will explore how different meanings of nature help create the landscapes and societies in which we live and evaluate the implications of efforts to transform and preserve Nature. The readings and discussion will address conceptions of nature-society relations around the world, from food production, to resource extraction, to biodiversity conservation. Through short fieldtrips, films, readings, writing exercises and discussions, students will engage scholarly debates and develop informed perspectives about the interdependence of nature and society.

