

A MODERN DAY PILGRIMAGE



Top:
Dawn, Gallipoli Beach. A quiet moment of reflection.
Photo: Katie Hird

Middle:
Shrapnel Gully Cemetery
Photo: Julie Ager

Bottom:
Didgeridoo being played at 'unofficial' Lone Pine ceremony, 25 April 1995
Photo: Doug Carney

In 2003 the National Museum of Australia called for donations of material from young backpackers who had travelled to Gallipoli for Anzac Day. Cinnamon van Reyk explores the story behind these modern day pilgrims.

I had already been travelling for 6 months in Europe and Africa, and had been through some pretty amazing experiences, but it soon became apparent to me that something very special was about to happen.

David Carney, 1995

David Carney was one of many travellers to Gallipoli who contributed to the Museum's Anzac pilgrims project. His reflections reveal how Anzac Cove has become one of the destinations on backpackers' 'must do' list, along with other adventures such as the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona. However, David's thoughts also reveal how different the experience of Anzac Day in Turkey becomes for the thousands of Australians who travel there. As part of the Gallipoli experience Anzac pilgrims retrace the steps of the fallen through Shrapnel Gully, and by bathing in the waters off the peninsula. Today's pilgrims find the going tough up the steep terrain until they ashamedly realise that the Anzacs had to also deal with heavy packs and enemy gunfire. The thousands of gravestones not only have impact en masse but individually touch pilgrims' hearts. For example Jan Croggan relates in her letter home that 'One gravestone, particularly, I remember – "You left Baby and I alone". He was only 21 killed 25/5/1915.' Words like these make pilgrims realise that the Anzacs who died were real people with families, just like them. This new awareness and feeling of personal connection to fallen soldiers changes the way many pilgrims feel about Anzac Day.

This change in attitude can be so profound for many of the Anzac pilgrims that they often liken it to a spiritual experience. For instance, Pam Coogan visited in 2001: her material revealed how she came back from Anzac Cove wanting 'to spread the "Gospel of Gallipoli"'. As you read the reflections of pilgrims who contributed to the Museum's project you discover Pam's feelings are not unique. Many pilgrims have rewritten their journals and letters for speeches and published their thoughts on the web and in newspaper articles. The intense emotions that pilgrims experience are what make travelling to Gallipoli more than tourism.

Left to Right: Kelly Hammond, Rhys Haynes, Luke Frost, Katie Hird, moments after the Dawn Service finished on Gallipoli Beach.
Photo: Rhys Haynes



The other thing that makes Anzac Cove different from other backpacker destinations is that it has become a sacred site. The battlefield contains memorials, a museum, cemeteries and a visitors' book that allow pilgrims to pay their respects to the war dead and reflect on their sacrifice. The site still contains the remains of trenches, ammunition, shrapnel and, according to some witnesses, even soldiers for the pilgrims to behold. Some respondents to the Museum's 2003 Anzac pilgrims' project offered relics such as shrapnel or stones from the beach that they had brought home to Australia. This souveniring of artefacts from culturally significant sites is similar to medieval pilgrims bringing home sacred relics from religious sites. It is also something that does not seem to occur at other tourist destinations: Can you imagine bringing home your own piece of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris? What souveniring at Gallipoli reveals is the ownership over Anzac Cove that Australians feel and their desire to bring a part of Gallipoli – and perhaps the spirits of the Anzacs – home. Of course, souveniring of relics is not encouraged, as Gallipoli is a significant heritage site and should be preserved with relics in situ.

So how did Anzac Cove become part of the backpacker itinerary? Indeed, when Jan Croggan went with a friend in 1978 they had to join an official party to tour the battlefield. Jan's photographs of the deserted beach are in marked contrast to the scene in recent years of 'mass of bodies, strewn over each other, heaped on backpacks, hats drawn over eyes...' (Rebecca Fortescue, 2001), waiting for the Dawn Service to begin. This dramatic change in visitor numbers can be explained by events in Australia's recent history. Most obvious was the production of publications and movies during the 1970s and 1980s that brought the story of Gallipoli back into popular culture. Many Australian schoolchildren would have watched Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* when their teachers put it on as a wet weather alternative on sports carnival days. Naturally, when these children and teenagers of the 1970s and 1980s desired to see the world one of their

destinations was Gallipoli. The exact moment Anzac pilgrimage began on a larger scale can be identified as 25 April 1990, the 75th anniversary of the landing. This event was commemorated by the Hawke Government taking a group of veterans back to the site and televising the ceremony in Australia. This was the first year that a few thousand rather than a handful of young Australians were inspired to converge on Anzac Cove.

The phenomenon of the modern day pilgrimage, or cultural tourism, is also explained by historians and anthropologists as something that for many can help resolve a national identity crisis. Personally, as daughter of a migrant, conscious of Australia's frontier violence and living in suburbia, I find it hard to relate to an Australian identity personified in *The Man from Snowy River*. Before going to Gallipoli I'm sure many of the pilgrims felt the same way. After experiencing Anzac Day in Turkey many feel a new or renewed sense of patriotism. Rebecca Fortescue says it best in her journal entry: 'A grateful, free nation thanks you for your ultimate sacrifice, rest in peace, you [make] me proud to be an Australian'.² Perhaps this reconnection with a heritage site in a foreign country gives pilgrims a firm place to stand and feel pride in their Australian identity. When one reads these pilgrims' thoughts it is not hard to be inspired to travel to Gallipoli yourself to experience these patriotic feelings. I hope to travel to Anzac Cove one day and, after reading the thoughts of Anzac pilgrims, you will too. 🇦🇺

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¹ West, Brad, (2005) 'Independent travel and international civil religious pilgrimage: Backpackers at the Gallipoli battlefields' in Brad West (ed) *Down the road: Exploring backpackers and independent travel*, Perth: API Press on file 03/542.

² Rebecca Fortescue journal entry, Tuesday 24 April, 2001.