

World Heritage Sites

Protected Areas and World Heritage



MOUNT EMEI SCENIC AREA AND LESHAN GIANT BUDDHA SCENIC AREA SICHUAN, CHINA

A double site of great cultural significance. The first Buddhist temple in China was built in the 1st century A.D. in the beautiful surroundings of Mount Emei from where Buddhism first spread across China. As other temples accumulated the site became the westernmost of China's four holiest Buddhist mountains. The most remarkable structure is the Giant Buddha of Leshan, 35 kilometres away, carved in the 8th century out of a mountain cliff over looking the confluence of three rivers. At 71m high, it is the largest carved stone Buddha in the world. Mount Emei is also notable for its exceptionally diverse vegetation and large number of endemic species ranging from subtropical to subalpine forests. Some of the trees are more than 1,000 years old.

COUNTRY China -Sichuan

NAME Mount Emei Scenic Area and Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area

MIXED CULTURAL AND NATURAL WORLD HERITAGE SERIAL SITE

1996: Inscribed on the World Heritage List under Cultural Criteria iv and vi and Natural Criterion x.

IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

V: (Protected Landscape)

BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE

Oriental Deciduous Forest (2.15.5) / Chinese Subtropical Forest (2.1.2)

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Located in south-central Sichuan Province, 150 km south of Chengdu. The site comprises Mount Emei Scenic and Historical Area 10 km northwest of Emei city, and the Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, 25 km northeast of Emei city at 29°16'N to 9°43'N by 103°10'E to 103°37'E.

DATES AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT

Mid 10th century: Mount Emei has been protected ever since an agency was set up at the Baishui Temple (now the Wannian Temple) for management and conservation of the area;

1982: An area of 11,500 ha approved as a Scenic Area by the Sichuan Provincial People's Government under the provisions of Approval Document Chuanfufa (1982) No.1;

1982: Mount Emei Scenic Area approved as an Area of Scenic and Historical Interest by the State Council of the People's Republic of China;

1988: The State Council appointed Emei City responsible for protection and administration of Mount Emei Scenic Area;

1995: A general plan and regulations for the sites drafted by the provincial government was approved by the State Council.

LAND TENURE

State. Administered by the Mount Emei Administration of Emei city.

AREA

15,400ha (Mount Emei Scenic Area). Five nature reserves have been established within Mount Emei Scenic Area: one for landscape protection (85 ha), and four for the conservation of threatened plants, of 400 ha, 70 ha, 30 ha and 20 ha.

ALTITUDE

~500m to 3,099m (the Wanfoding summit of Mt. Emei).

PHYSICAL FEATURES

Mount Emei rises abruptly 2,600m from the western edge of the Chengdu Plain. Its topography is a very varied and scenic range of undulating hills and valleys, deep gullies and high peaks. The three summits of Mount Emei form a characteristic landscape when viewed from a distance. The bedrock is of well developed and easily identified Late Precambrian sedimentary strata. These contain a large number of fossils and are an important source of geological information. Of particular stratigraphic significance are the Late Precambrian to Cambrian Maidiping section, the Triassic Longmendong section and the Mount Emei basalts. These are part of the extensive Emei flood basalts or volcanic trappe, widespread in southwest China, created by a mantle plume in the period of the Permian-Triassic boundary. A wide range of soils exists, the best represented being yellow earth, mountain yellow earth, yellow brown earth, mountain dark brown earth and subalpine podzolic soil.

The principal rivers are the Black Dragon, Emei, and White Dragon and there are many brooks, rivulets, pools, springs and waterfalls. Longmendong and Yixiantian gorges are the direct result of water erosion. The abundant rainfall on carbonate rocks has developed a number of karstic features, including the Shisungou karst forest, Jiulaodong karst cavern and Jiaopenba underground river. There are also hot springs. The Leshan site (2.5 ha) is a mountainside cliff overlooking the confluence of two rivers, the Dadu and Qingyi, with the Minjiang, tributary of the Changjiang (Yangtze river).

CLIMATE

The climate ranges with altitude from sub-tropical to cool-temperate and from an annual mean of 3°C in the cold-alpine zone to an annual mean of 17.2°C in the subtropical zone. The weather in spring and fall is very changeable. The mean annual precipitation, much of it falling in summer, is 1,992mm and as the Sichuan Basin is prone to temperature inversions, the mountain is frequently covered in dense cloud, or by fog in winter, with a high humidity of 85%.

VEGETATION

The vegetation of Mount Emei has been spared deforestation because it is one of Chinese Buddhism's four most sacred mountains and, until the 1990s, because of inaccessibility. It is subtropical but on the cusp of the temperate zone, containing flora of both the Oriental Deciduous and Chinese Subtropical Forest provinces, with altitudinal variety and relict vegetation as well. Its cloudy humidity even in the alpine zone, creates the conditions for biological richness. As a result, both flora and fauna are exceptionally diverse, particularly the flora. The mountain is 87% forested. The vegetation grows in five belts defined by altitude: from subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forest below 1,500m, through evergreen and deciduous broad-leaved mixed forest, coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forest, subalpine coniferous forest to subalpine shrubland above 2,800m (MoC, 1995). Some trees are said to be more than 1,000 years old.

Some 3,200 plant species in 242 families have been recorded, of which 31 are under state protection, and more than 100 species are endemic (IUCN, 1996). These are approximately one third of the total number of plant species in Sichuan province and a tenth of those found in China. They include some 1,600 species of medicinal plants, and 600 species of economic or scientific value. Local species include *Magnolia omeiensis* (CR), *Tetradoxa omeiensis* (EN) (Hilton-Taylor, 2006), Chinese yew *Taxus chinensis*, spiny tree fern *Cyathea spinulosa*, *Sibbaldia omeiensis*, *Piper omeiensis*, *Betula trichogemma*, *Salix omeiensis*, *Pericamphylus omeiensis*, *Itea omeiensis*, *Puerartia edulis*, *Dryopteris omeiensis*, *Ctenitis pseudorhodolepis* and *Acrophorus omeiensis*. A total of 29 *Rhododendron* species has been recorded, some being endemic. The five nature reserves or protected management zones comprise one zone for *Abies* sp., *Kingdonia uniflora* and *Trillium tschonoskii* (400 ha), one for *Azalea* spp. (70 ha), one for *Tetracentron sinense*, handkerchief tree *Davidia involucrata* and katsura tree *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (30 ha), one for a patch of *Phoebe zhennan* (VU) woodland (20 ha), and a protected reserve for natural landscapes covering 85 ha. Where Mount Emei is well wooded, Leshan supports only remnant patches of climax forest vegetation. A list of protected species and a list of endemic plants is given in the nomination document (1995).

FAUNA

The fauna is unusually rich in species, with some rarities, though most of these are typical of the region rather than exceptional. Some 2,300 species have been recorded of a fauna comprised of 51 mammals, 256 birds, 34 reptiles, 33 amphibians, 60 fish, 42 oligochaetes and over 1,000 insect species. Of these, 29 species are under state protection and 157 species are threatened or endemic to China. A number of type specimens come from Mount Emei.

A number of internationally threatened species are found on the mountain. Among the mammals are Père David's or Tibetan macaque *Macaca thibetana*, lesser or red panda *Ailurus fulgens* (EN), Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temminckii* (VU), Asiatic black bear *Ursus thibetanus* (VU) and mainland serow *Capricornis sumatrensis* (VU). Among amphibians are the Chinese giant salamander *Andrias davidianus* (CR) and the Omei toothed toad *Oreolalax omeimontis* (EN). Among the rarer birds of restricted range are the golden-fronted fulvetta *Pseudominla variegaticeps* (VU), grey-hooded parrotbill *Paradoxornis zappeyi* (VU), three-toed parrotbill *Paradoxornis paradoxus*, grey-cheeked liocichla *Liocichla omeiensis* (VU), red-winged laughing thrush *Trochalopteron formosum*, Martens's or Emei golden-spectacled warbler *Seicercus omeiensis* (VU), Emei leaf warbler *Phylloscopus omeiensis*, rusty-breasted tit *Poecile davidi* and slaty bunting *Latoucheornis siemsseni* (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2007; Hilton-Taylor, 2006; Stattersfield *et al.*, 1998). A list of notable animals is given in the nomination document (MoC, 1995).

CULTURAL HERITAGE

There is archaeological evidence that the area, documented for almost 3,000 years, was inhabited as long as 10,000 years ago, but the mountain became of exceptional cultural significance as the place where Buddhism was first established in China from where it spread widely throughout the east. It is a place of natural beauty and diverse wildlife, originally sacred to Taoists, where man was seen integral with nature, linking the seen with the unseen. Since the first Buddhist temple in China was built here in the 1st century A.D., Mount Emei and later the Leshan Giant Buddha have been places of spiritual and historical importance as one of the four holy lands of Chinese Buddhism, known as the Buddhist Paradise.

Later, especially in Ming and Qing times, a rich Buddhist cultural heritage accumulated, preserved in relics, calligraphy, paintings, tablet inscriptions and earthenware, and more than a hundred temples of which over thirty remain, most of them active and many built into the mountain. Some of the monasteries have a famous tradition of martial arts. The Leshan sitting Giant Buddha is 71m-high, carved into the west cliff of Mount Lingyun overlooking the confluence of three rivers and made to placate the rivers' dangerous eddies. This is the largest carved stone Buddha in the world, begun in 713 AD and taking 90 years to complete. When new, the statue was covered with gold and bright paint. There are also more than 90 stone carvings in Buddhist shrines made during the Tang Dynasty; the Lidui, a large rock cut in the centre of the river for irrigation purposes; also Han dynasty tombs, Tang and Sung dynasty Buddha statues, pagodas, temples and city walls. A list of the relics and monuments is given in MoC (1995).

LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION

In 1995 some 2,000 people lived inside the Scenic Area, including a number of monks and nuns living in the temples and monasteries. Small scale farming occurs on the edges of the site (MoC, 1995).

VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

Mount Emei is a place of pilgrimage, visited by the pious, by artists, writers and scientists but also by increasing numbers of tourists. Some 300,000 visitors, mostly Chinese, visit the summit yearly, with 100,000 using the traditional arduous 5 km pilgrim trail up the mountain, and 200,000 arriving by minibus to halfway up the mountain, then by cable car to the wide platform of Jinding (Golden) summit. From there a 2.1 km-long monorail runs along the ridge to the slightly higher Wanfoding summit. Several monasteries which take in visitors and guest houses are scattered along these approaches. There are also 50 km of trails and stepped paths on the mountain. A visitor centre is located at the base of the mountain and an entrance fee to the Reserve is charged. The major tourist services are provided in Emeishan city. The Leshan Buddha, 35 km east, is linked by road. It is across the river from the town of Leshan and is best seen from the water. Access from Chengdu is by rail and road.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES

Biologically, the site supports a high diversity of plant and animal species including a number of endemic and globally threatened species. Much national and international scientific research has been conducted on the area's geology, geomorphology, biological resources, architecture, religious culture, history and art. These studies have provided the scientific basis for the protection, management and development of the Scenic Areas. Numerous botanical studies have been undertaken in the Mount Emei area with the result that many samples have been added to collections worldwide. There are 15 specialised institutions in the area such as the Forests and Seeds Centre, the Biotic Resource Experimental Station, and the Emeishan Museum (MoC, 1995).

CONSERVATION VALUE

The site is a long well preserved landscape containing a rich cultural heritage of historic importance as the first Buddhist temple in China and one of the four holy sites of Chinese Buddhism, embowered in a diverse species-rich forest with a large number of endemic plants. The mountain lies within a WWF Global 200 Eco-region and a BirdLife-designated Endemic Bird Area.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Mount Emei has benefited from a long tradition of conservation, having begun to receive protection as a sacred place as early as the mid 10th century. The present responsibility for the preservation and management of the area is vested in the Mount Emei Administration, under the leadership of the Emeishan People's Government jointly with the governments of Sichuan and Leshan. A general plan for the site with regulations was drafted by the provincial government in the Proposal for Approval of the General Plan of the Mount Emei Scenic Area (Chuanfufa (1994) No.91) and approved by the State Council in 1995. It is subject to both national and provincial Provisional Regulations for the Administration of Scenic Areas, and to the Forest Law, the Law of Environmental Protection and the Law for Protection of Cultural Relics. A number of local legal instruments are also in force.

The Sichuan Provincial Construction Commission is responsible for conservation, construction, management, planning and works on site. The Mount Emei Administration has four branch administrative offices, at Baoguo Temple, Jiulaodong, Wannian Temple and the Jinding (Golden) Summit. These are responsible for management and implementation of the conservation plans. The General Plan includes specialised plans such as the Plan for Conservation and Management of Mount Emei Wild Animals and Plants, the Plan for Conservation and Management of Mount Emei Cultural Relics and Ancient Buildings, and the Plan for Mount Emei Fire Prevention. It establishes three management zones, comprising the scenic area, a buffer zone from 2 km to 7 km in width and a third transitional zone of unknown size. In 2004 there was no monitoring of any impacts.

MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS

Pressure from tourism is evident at the Golden Summit of Emeishan aggravated by the increased accessibility due to the cable car. Even in 1995 many of the trails were already overcrowded and development was growing around the edges of the site. Construction of a 2.1 km monorail was completed in 1998 between the Jinding and Wanfoding Summits along the line of an existing trail. Erosion and damage to the forest was caused but mitigated by restoration. There is a proliferation of drink stands and souvenir stalls which detract from the natural state of the mountain and cause a waste problem. Traditional religious custom and authority could be called on to help as with the Taoist monks of Qingchenshan near Chengdu who restrict tourist access and keep their mountain clear of tourist rubbish (IUCN, 1996).

STAFF

In 1995 this comprised 158 professionals and personnel, 40 of them being scientists. Training is needed in ways to monitor and mitigate the impact of tourism and to learn methods of wildlife protection (UNESCO, 2000).

BUDGET

No information is available but there is a charge for entrance.

LOCAL ADDRESSES

The Mount Emei Administration, Emeishan City, Sichuan Province, 614200, People's Republic of China.

Ministry of Construction, People's Republic of China, 9 Sanlihe Road, Beijing 100835, People's Republic of China.

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