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Author: Walsh, Kevin

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Engineering Mountain Landscapes: An Anthropology of Social Investment

Edited by Laura L. Scheiber and Maria Nieves Zedeño. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2015. x + 201 pp. US$ 45.00. ISBN 978-1-60781-433-7.

This edited volume comprises a series of innovative and often inspiring papers designed to assess the ways in which North American indigenous communities have engaged with mountain environments and the manner in which economic, social, and cultural processes intersect; by "engineering," Scheiber and Zedeño explain that they mean "agency and deliberation in the physical, social and spiritual transformation of mountain landscapes" (p 1).

The first paper, by María Nieves Zedeño et al, presents research from the area around Beaver Lake, Montana. The authors consider the network of relationships between places across this mountainous landscape. Within these landscapes, the notion of place is obviously different from that in low-lying areas with their villages and towns. In remote areas, it is "natural" features that become imbued with importance and meaning—places that have parallel economic, ritual, and ideological roles. We hear how the Blackfeet tribe developed their use of the mountains as a new hunting ground as well as a place of "resistance" vis-à-vis Europeans during the late 19th century. The latter part of this paper focuses on the archaeological study of a hunter's camp, successfully articulating the links between this and other important paths and places in the landscape.

Laura L. Scheiber starts her paper with a description of an 8000-year-old animal trapping net from northwest Wyoming; this exceptional find typifies the rare and fragile nature of the archaeological record in these landscapes, but also the very specific forms of environmental knowledge and technologies developed there. The central part of this chapter comprises interconnected accounts of contemporary perceptions of the Rocky Mountains with archaeological accounts. The assessment of natural resources is followed by a discussion of cultural and sacred characteristics of different physical or topographic elements: mountains as wilderness, and then as refuge, are key themes.

David Hurst Thomas's chapter presents the results of fieldwork from the Great Basin (Alta Toquima, Central Nevada). One of the most interesting discoveries here is an entire village-type settlement comprising 31 structures above 3000 m. Thomas explains the use of a predictive framework for the discovery of new sites, one that incorporates an understanding of mountain topography and microenvironmental characteristics. This model has clearly helped discover and assess many new sites. The rich description of sites and landscape features provides the reader with a clear understanding of the hunting strategies employed during the Middle Holocene. This is followed by a description of the Gatecliff shelter, used as a camp over several millennia. The final section considers a range of interpretive issues, with a focus on social organization among the peoples who hunted in these areas.

Alex K. Ruuska's research in the Mormon Mountains of southern Nevada considers the social investment and long-term commitments of the Southern Paiute and their mountains. Ruuska considers a range of data and themes, combining archaeology and interview data with a view to investigating oral tradition and the importance of petroglyphs and pictographs. A range of stories, songs, and rock art is assessed in an elegant account of the wide range of values assigned to mountains—from hunting to the exploitation of salt and the possible role of certain rituals associated with life force.

Richard W. Stoffle et al focus on the meaning and perceptions of volcanoes via the case study of the Black Mountain, Nevada. Because of the potentially active and destructive role of volcanoes, they have greater cultural significance than other types of mountains in many societies. This study employs ethnographic and landscape information in a demonstration of how pathways to the volcano were imbued with meaning; places on the route, including springs, functioned as "ceremonial staging places." Stoffle et al go on to demonstrate how the full range of features associated with volcanoes, including cones, tubes, and caves as well as volcanic bombs and minerals, is imbued with cultural meaning and often associated with local stories.

Christopher I. Roos considers how Western Apaches give meaning to mountain landscapes in eastern Arizona. He shows how cultural aspects of landscape are structured through the activities undertaken by the Western Apache—essentially, the notional divide between economic lifeways and cognitive or metaphorical assignations is an artificial one. The specific activity assessed here is the use of fire. Roos carefully explains how we might differentiate natural fire events from purposeful anthropogenic use of fire to enhance the growth of certain wild plants. This discussion then develops a historical analysis, demonstrating how this practice developed in eastern Arizona during the late 16th century, when the Apache started to exploit these mountainous areas.

Stacie M. King and Danny A. Zborover consider the interactions between landscape, subsistence strategies, and identities in the Sierra Sur of Oaxaca, Mexico. They provide a useful assessment of the relationships of the mountain

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peoples with the surrounding populations, and how these relations developed with the arrival of the Spanish. A convincing argument regarding the development of a distinct mountain identity is founded on a range of archaeological and historical sources.

Kacy L. Hollenback presents research on "butte-top" (hilltop) settlements on the northern plains of North Dakota. More specifically, the paper assesses the reasons for the Hidatsa tribe's decision to leave their fortified settlements on the terraces of the Missouri River and establish new butte-top settlements. Hollenback's lucid account explains how this group suffered enormous stresses due to smallpox; this, combined with other processes, led them to establish new butte-top settlements. These became imbued with a wide range of cultural meaning associated with their economic role, and also their function as topographic markers and secure places.

Koerner and Sullivan's contribution discusses the site of Tuckaleechee Cove in the southern Appalachian region. As with other regions presented in this volume, we see how prehistoric (archaic period onwards) groups regularly exploited these higher altitudes. The authors provide a useful characterization of the natural features (geology, climate, and biota) across these mountains, as well as a discussion of the role of the mountain range as a boundary for Europeans when dividing up the territory. We hear how a set of complex intersecting socioeconomic processes led to the exploitation of high-altitude areas by a number of different groups. At certain points in time, the mountains may well have served as points of interaction for different regional groups. During other periods, these mountainous areas may have been dividing zones, separating neighboring groups. These zones, like other high-altitude areas, were attractive because of the variety of natural resources, both biological and mineral.

Zedeño and Scheiber's concluding chapter provides a lucid summary of the themes addressed in the preceding chapters. They successfully demonstrate how North American peoples have interacted with mountains for many centuries. The term "engineered landscapes" goes beyond instrumental economic exploitation of these landscapes, and is concerned with the complex interaction of economic, social, ideological, and ritual processes that vary across time and space. For readers of this review, the important message is that people have engaged directly with these North American mountains for many centuries, and the notion of *pristine* mountain environments is misplaced. This book not only provides an introduction to a wide range of mountain archaeology from the United States, but also constitutes an intellectually refreshing set of papers that combine archaeological, ethnographic, and historical evidence within a vibrant and rigorous framework. For these reasons, this volume should be of interest to a wide readership, not only to those whose work focuses on high-altitude landscapes, but also to landscape archaeologists and others who share an interest in the archaeology of living societies. Most of the papers include useful maps and illustrations that will greatly facilitate comprehension for those who know little about mountain archaeology in this part of the world.

AUTHOR

Kevin Walsh
kevin.walsh@york.ac.uk
Department of Archaeology, University of York, York YO1 7EP, United Kingdom

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