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**Review of *Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's
Historic Mining Districts* by Richard V. Francaviglia**

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Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts. Richard V. Francaviglia. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997. 297 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0-87745-609-7).

In his introduction to *Hard Places*, Richard Francaviglia admits that "mining landscapes may not be especially pretty to look at." Beauty is in the beholder's eye, and many people would probably agree with the statement; others of us see in these hard places doorways to the past and a better understanding of the present. He goes on to say, "Across the country, mining has left its legacy on the landscape. Mining, in fact, creates its own distinctive topography that may last for thousands of years" (xvii).

Within those statements is the heart of this pioneering study, an analysis of America's mining landscapes. Landscape is defined broadly, as the author explains in his Introduction, a part of the book that must be carefully read. *Hard Places* successfully addresses three issues: identification of sites; interpretation of processes or forces that shaped the landscape of a mining area; and perception, "what do mining landscapes mean to us as Americans?"

Francaviglia, a historical geographer and architectural historian, has written a book that challenges its readers and continually opens new doors of investigation. For example, he writes on page 109, "The mining landscapes of America are rich, but under explored, places to look for traces of ethnic cultures." The following discussion elaborates on that theme, focusing especially on cemeteries, which tell fascinating stories if interpreted correctly. Nevertheless, before he is finished with the chapter he looks at the role of women in mining districts, architecture, the stratification of society, and—among other topics—transportation and the impact of reclamation. Francaviglia tells his readers how to read the landscape and find the interconnections.

The author is no armchair historian. He visited all of America's major mining districts in a lifelong pursuit of this fascinating topic. Mining history is well served by his work, but the fresh avenues he explores could be profitably worked in agricultural regions and other nonmining areas. There

is much in this book that will guide scholars of the Great Plains. Francaviglia does not limit himself to the popular gold and silver mining of the nineteenth century; *Hard Places* comes into the twentieth century with coal, lead, and copper mining, for example.

This is a well-written, exciting study that will challenge its readers to travel different historical paths. It is an interdisciplinary study of mining communities across the United States sure to be worthwhile reading for historians (professionals and “buffs”), archaeologists, preservationists, geographers, actually anyone who wants to understand better where we came from and why. **Duane A. Smith**, *Department of History and Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College*.