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## Review of *People and the Land through Time: Linking Ecology and History* by Emily W. B. Russell

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**People and the Land through Time: Linking Ecology and History.** Emily W. B. Russell. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. xx+306 pp. Figures, maps, tables, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0-300-06830-1) \$17.00 paper (ISBN 0-300-07730-0).

While some environmental historians have used the insights of the natural sciences in their historical work, Emily Russell, offering a scientist's perspective, challenges ecologists to incorporate historians' methods and insights into their studies. In *People and the Land through Time*, Russell

outlines working principles for the “historical ecologist,” a scholar who traces past human impacts on particular ecosystems. She makes it clear that her emphasis is on ecological systems rather than humans, but argues that ecosystems can’t be fully understood without accounting for how human actions have affected them.

The book provides an introduction to methods and a variety of case studies showing historical ecology at work. Part I, “Questions and Clues,” explains why human history is relevant in ecological studies and introduces the types of historical sources ecologists ought to use. Historians would find the source discussion pretty obvious, but Russell does offer an engrossing analysis of varieties of information and how they might be flawed. Any student or scholar without prior exposure to historical method would find this section useful. Toward the end of Part I, Russell begins connecting documentary and field evidence to show how the two work together to give a more complete picture of an ecosystem. Non-ecologists can learn from this section because Russell describes important scientific methods, such as pollen analysis.

Part II, “The Diversity of Human Impacts on the Natural World,” addresses the principal ways in which humans affect ecosystems. Russell takes on the topics of fire, animal populations, forests, agriculture, and settlement, showing how humans have intentionally and unintentionally “altered ‘natural’ processes.” She uses a wide range of examples across time and space. Readers will notice that the book is nicely illustrated with photographs corresponding to major points in the text. Pollen charts, which may take the uninitiated a little time to get comfortable with, also enhance the text’s clarity.

Part III, devoted to case studies, is a synthesis of existing scholarly work: Russell pulls together examples from a wide range of scholars and treats each fairly briefly. Having offered readers sufficient background in earlier chapters to understand these examples, she doesn’t push for additional depth here. The book might have been enhanced by new research at this point, as well as by a more detailed demonstration of the relationship between human actions and ecological change. But using her examples skillfully to draw broad conclusions, as in her discussion of the impact of humans on lakes, she does offer a little something new.

Russell’s work fits with recent efforts in environmental history to dissolve perceived boundaries between humans and their surroundings. Environmental historians argue that these boundaries are cultural constructions rather than ecological facts, and Russell provides support by using historical ecology to show that we can’t study ecosystems in isolation from

human history. As environmental history and historical ecology move into closer dialogue with each other, we should see a new burst of work combining historical and ecological methods. Students in both fields will broaden their horizons by reading Russell's book. **Emily Greenwald**, *Department of History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.