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## Review of *The Cast Iron Forest: A Natural and Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers* by Richard V. Francaviglia

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**The Cast Iron Forest: A Natural and Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers.** Richard V. Francaviglia. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. ix + 237 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Drawing on the term “cast iron forest” used by Washington Irving in the 1830s to describe a central Oklahoma component of the larger Cross Timbers region, Richard Francaviglia fashions a thoughtful, thorough, and updated account of this bio-region. Nurtured by American expansion westward, the Cross Timbers was a formidable barrier to transportation and of immediate interest to anyone traveling east-west through the region. From early Euro-American encounters to recent times many of the explorers, surveyors, adventurers, and scientists who encountered and observed the Cross Timbers recorded their experiences. Francaviglia does a superb job bundling the diverse types of accounts into a well-organized compendium of the region that is always mindful of the interface between society and environment and of the impacts of human activity on the Cross Timbers. The author discusses the region’s natural and cultural history at a level readily accessible to a general audience, while at the same time providing sufficient depth to be of value to the researcher and scientist or as an introductory field guide to the region.

The text is well illustrated with an intriguing array of old and new graphics such as maps, drawings, and photos. Data are provided where

available to assist readers in constructing a mental map of the Cross Timbers. The region's landscape is diverse from place to place, however, and not as easy to generalize as some of the accounts might suggest. The Cross Timbers near Fort Worth were, and still are, substantially different from those east of Oklahoma City. Although a brief book cannot possibly address the local and regional diversity of the Cross Timbers, the author has worked well within this limitation. The bibliography provides a strong interdisciplinary list of references useful to those who wish to investigate the Cross Timbers in greater detail.

Francaviglia weaves the controlling edaphic and environmental factors that initially determined the natural Cross Timbers landscape with the temporally dynamic complex layers of social interaction that have resulted in the contemporary cultural-ecological landscapes of the Cross Timbers. Until the next wave of research commences on this unique region, this text will remain one of the best overall references on the region. **Brock Brown**, *Department of Geography, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos.*