

Book Reviews:

APPRECIATING AMERICA'S LANDSCAPE

Reading the Landscape of America (revised). May Theilgaard Watts. 1975. Mac-Millan Publishing Company, New York. 346 pages. \$12.95.

Here is a book that should be required reading for all urban dwellers who venture forth into the countryside. Our appalling collective ignorance of the topography, geology, history, biology and ecology of our native landscape is one of our less well kept national secrets. But then a nation of people who spread out to conquer the wilderness—and have done so—spent, and still spends, its time studying the land through the eyes of realtors, not natural scientists.

Fortunately we are changing. The wilderness, but for a few fragments, is all but gone. The plow, the axe, the bulldozer and all the shiny new technologies have wrought great changes in America the Beautiful and brought us to a mature society. With maturity comes, or should come, an appreciation and greater respect for the world of nature. This book is a long stride forward toward that cultural good.

Most people (with the possible exception of the Arcata Lumber Company and Ronald Reagan—"If you've seen one Redwood you've seen 'em all") can't help but be awed by California's crowning forest jewels, Yosemite, the Grand Tetons and Lake Superior's splendor, but do they see the geological and climatic changes which have wrought these natural wonders? Few do, but May Watts shows them how to see beyond immediate impressions not only of nature's great scenic attractions but of our everyday surroundings in all parts of the country.

The book is particularly incisive in its historical flashbacks—geological transformations eons ago to more recent intrusions by human activity. We see the Mississippi through Chief Black Hawk's eyes and how it has been changed in 150 years. The progress of ecological transition as one hikes from the Great Plains to the timberline in the Rockies through Watts' eyes is a full course in ecological transition. The desert is interpreted for humidity-conditioned Easterners and the Northwoods for us all. Every major biotic system is given attention.

Reading the Landscape is written for everyone who can read. It is not technical but it is technically accurate, seasoned well with much of human interest. The clash between man's rectangular land subdivision (real estate) and nature's ecosystems is described in a rhetorical style worthy of an Aldo Leopold. Yet this is not another gloom and doom book, realistic as it is in describing the forces of nature and man at work.

While not exactly a Duncan Hines "Adventures in Good Landscape," this book would serve the traveller into new regions exceptionally well. Give it to a friend who plans such a trip and you'll enrich his or her experience many fold!

Charles H. Stoddard
The Wilderness Society
Minong, Wisconsin 54859