

Transient Landscapes: Insights on a Changing Planet

By Ellen E. Wohl. 2015. University Press of Colorado, 5589 Arapahoe Avenue, Suite 206C, Boulder, CO, USA, 80303. 248 pages, 34.95 USD, Cloth.

Transient Landscapes is a travelogue for the naturalist. A collection of short essays, each reflecting the genius loci of a place visited over the course of the author's career as a geologist. Ellen Wohl also shares much of her own emotional interpretation of what she sees. At times the essays are poignant commentaries on ecological degradation. In other examples, the writing reflects the amazement experienced by the ecologically-minded of the biological resiliency of nature. Each contribution has an educational component describing geomorphological change processes which is well-written and interesting. Nevertheless, the essays are not just about the forces that shape our landscapes; some focus almost wholly on the animals and plants within these settings and their adaptations for successful survival.

The essays are grouped into four sections based on the author's own identification of the prevailing cause for change in that landscape: tectonic edge, interior landscape, seasonal weather and human-induced sources. At times an essay seems to fit less well under one of these particular headers, but since each piece is stand-alone the overall flow of reading is not affected. How-

ever, each essay is unified through its reflection on the meaning of transience in the subject location. Transience encompasses short moments to the great stretches of geological time. The author reminds us that we are in a changing landscape no matter what we as individuals can perceive. Wohl does question if perhaps we must come to terms with this transience for our own emotional survival as naturalists in the face of large-scale landscape change. Nevertheless, she counters this philosophical argument repeatedly in her writing when she shares the pain of losing a piece of nature known to her. Those who can be emotionally attached to a place or the life within it will always be affected by its loss.

Several essays take place in the Arctic, often derided for being a composite of barren, empty places by those not able to see beyond into their resilient complexity. Wohl shares stories from her travels here to explain how we can create new emotional linkages with unfamiliar places. She strives to show the value of these places which are most at risk by shifting climate patterns.

Each essay contains a reason for Wohl's being at that place alongside her personal observations while there. This provides a human element in what could otherwise be solely poetic descriptions. Most pieces involve some sort of progression through the landscape, whether it is Wohl heading along a trajectory or through the tracing of change over geological time. Lastly, each essay shares a piece of geomorphology explained in plain terms. This educational aspect of the book is one of its strongest selling points since the reader can learn how landscapes are formed while still enjoying an accessible story.

The sites visited range across the globe but are predominantly based in North America. A map after the introduction shows the sites in relation to the tectonic plates but does not identify the locations explicitly. Some essays are illustrated by black and white photos

which help to envision the location, but ultimately the print quality is poor so the landscapes are not done justice. There is loss of depth due to poor contrast. The print font size is also small which makes for challenging reading. Each essay is accompanied by a hand-drawn icon to indicate the predominant change force in that landscape. These are not always clear and there is no legend indicating what each one represents; the reader must refer to a paragraph in the introduction and their own interpretations.

Wohl's book is enjoyable to read for those who appreciate landscapes but are also interested in how they work. Each essay is a short voyage without the need to suffer mosquitoes, damp weather or any discomfort.

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