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Peer reviewed

Review: Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper

By J. Keri Cronin

Reviewed by Fred Mason
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Cronin, J. Keri. *Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2011. 201 pp. ISBN: 9780774819084. CAN \$29.95, paperback. Recycled, acid-free paper.

J. Keri Cronin's book *Manufacturing National Park Nature* explores how photographic images of Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada, particularly tourist photographs, construct notions of "wilderness" and the sorts of encounters with it that visitors to the park expect to have. It is a solid addition to the UBC Press series "Nature | History | Society," aptly fitting the series' intention to consider the interface between nature and society, in work that has temporal depth.

Cronin deploys a concept she terms "National Park Nature" to indicate the ways that the broad understanding of Canada's Rocky Mountain parks depends on cultural constructs of "wilderness," "recreation" and "wildlife," that are mediated through photographic representation (p. 4). She argues that tourist and tourist industry photos of Jasper National Park maintained consistent elements over time, despite the Park's existence for over 100 years and the many surrounding societal changes. Such images have been typically constructed to minimize the visibility of human impact on the physical landscape, which reinforces the Nature-Culture divide, ensuring that the landscape is understood as pristine, untouched wilderness. Usually, photographs are of "natural" landscapes; if people are present, there are usually very few, the sole traveler or their small party, engaging in recreational pursuits or encountering animals in a sublime environment. Such constructions shape cultural expectations of the types of experiences one will have when visiting, which in turn drives promotions, parks management and the development of amenities.

Manufacturing National Park Nature is organized into five chapters, plus a conclusion. The first, "Grounding National Park Nature" introduces the theoretical concepts and the history of the region. Separate chapters deal with constructions of notions of wilderness and the impact of the wilderness industry, how recreational activities in the park have been represented, and how images of animal-human interactions have changed over time. The last substantive chapter, "Fake Nature," draws parallels between the ways that nature is re-constructed in wilderness theme parks and museum dioramas, and the framing of the "real" world of Jasper National Park. This short chapter really stresses the idea that dominant cultural ideologies dictate expectations and understandings, and that culture greatly influences interaction with the natural world.

The book is brief, and lavishly illustrated, as to be expected from a work whose central concern is the visual. It is a slim volume of 150 pages of material, including 40 images (not counting the extensive endnotes), but it makes a real contribution to the literature by analyzing the cultural and physical impacts of tourism in an iconic environment. It seemed that some of the discussion within chapters was a bit repetitive, but the author is really dealing with a topic that is complexly circuitous—tourist images help create expectations of the park, which influence what one does in the landscape once there, which impacts on the park's development and management, in turn driving the possibilities for what tourists can do. The author has deftly woven together a convoluted web of images and ideologies, uniquely focused on one location.

This work will appeal to readers interested in parks, tourism and leisure, in cultural concepts of landscape, and in the management of wilderness areas. The book is historically focused, but Cronin's work deals very much with the present and the cultural trends informing current approaches in tourism and the wilderness industry, as well. While it engages deeply with theoretical issues, *Manufacturing National Park Nature* is highly comprehensible, and appropriate for any intelligent, interested reader.

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