

*The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*

Shepard Krech III

New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. 318 pp. \$39.99 cloth.

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EVERY DAY British Columbians confront issues related to the relationships between Native peoples and the environment, whether they be within the context of hunting and fishing rights, natural resource management issues, land claims, or parks policies. Much of the debate on these issues is conditioned by perceptions of historic relationships between Native peoples and the environment. In coffee shops, newspaper editorials, government offices, Native communities, the courts, and academia indigenous peoples are commonly portrayed as either natural environmentalists who always lived in harmony with nature or as rapacious plunderers who, once devastated by European diseases or given the requisite technology, easily plundered the environment for short-term gain.

Happily, in *The Ecological Indian*, Krech moves towards a deep understanding of the historic relationships between Native peoples and their environments, thus enabling his readers to understand that the question, "Were Indians ecologists and conservationists?" diverts attention away from far more interesting and important historical questions. For this reason, anyone interested in the issues surrounding the relationships between Native peoples and their environments should read *The Ecological Indian*; and any scholars, policy makers, politicians, lawyers, judges,

and Native leaders who must make decisions related to these relationships should put the book on their reading list. As a masterful synthesis and historiography, Krech's book should now be seen as the single most important historical survey of the relationships between Native North Americans and their environments. As a bonus, although the book is broad in its scope, Krech, whose expertise is in the subarctic fur trade, discusses several topics of specific interest to Canadians and British Columbians.

Krech organized his book around analyses of some of the most hotly debated issues in the history of Native relationships with the environment, his aim being to "rekindle debate on the fit between one of the most durable images of the American Indian and American Indian behaviour, and [to] spawn detailed analyses of the myriad relationships between indigenous people and their environments in North America" (28). Having led his readers to believe that the book is centred around the idea of the ecological Indian, Krech quickly warns them that this image, like the many other stereotypes Westerners have invented about Native peoples, is "ultimately dehumanizing" (26). In order to help them understand the complexity of Native-environment interactions, Krech provides a sensitive and sympathetic survey of the historical debates. The book's chapters

provide careful analyses of the secondary literature relating to debates surrounding indigenous contributions to the Pleistocene extinctions, the environmental causes of the disappearance of the Hohokam, the demographic collapse brought about by the arrival of Old World diseases, Native use of fire, and Native participation in the near extermination of the bison, white-tailed deer, and beaver. In the end, readers preoccupied with the idea of the ecological Indian are led to understand that, although indigenous peoples have indeed long had unique, close, and respectful relationships with their environments, these relationships did not conform to nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of conservation or environmentalism. While some experts in the field will find nothing new in this argument, they can rest assured that they will benefit from Krech's careful analysis as well as from his copious and detailed citations. Had the publisher decided to include a bibliography, the book would have been even more effective in

meeting the authors' goals.

It is unfortunate that readers encounter an epilogue rather than a conclusion at the end of this book. The epilogue discusses, superficially, more case studies than Krech attempted to deal with in the entire body of the book. It is difficult to believe that his rapid-fire discussions of recent hotly contested issues, such as the Makah whale hunt, do justice to them. A conclusion that explored the implications of his arguments more fully would reinforce, rather than obscure, the contributions his book has to make. Nevertheless, *The Ecological Indian* should do much to familiarize scholars and the public with the important literature published on the history of Native-environmental relations in the last twenty years, to stimulate further research, and to improve our ability to make important decisions for the future. Given how many of these decisions British Columbians will be called upon to make in the next decades, they, in particular, should welcome this new book.

*At a Crossroads: Archaeology and  
First Peoples in Canada*

George P. Nicholas and Thomas D. Andrews, Editors

Burnaby: Archaeology Press, Simon Fraser University, 1997.  
303 pp. Illus. \$37.00 paper.

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**A**RCHAEOLOGISTS WORLDWIDE working within postcolonial contexts have increasingly come under pressure to adopt an explicitly political position – pressure

they must balance against the pitfalls of feigning scientific neutrality. Conversely, as indigenous peoples have found, archaeology can be both an insidious foe and a powerful ally in the