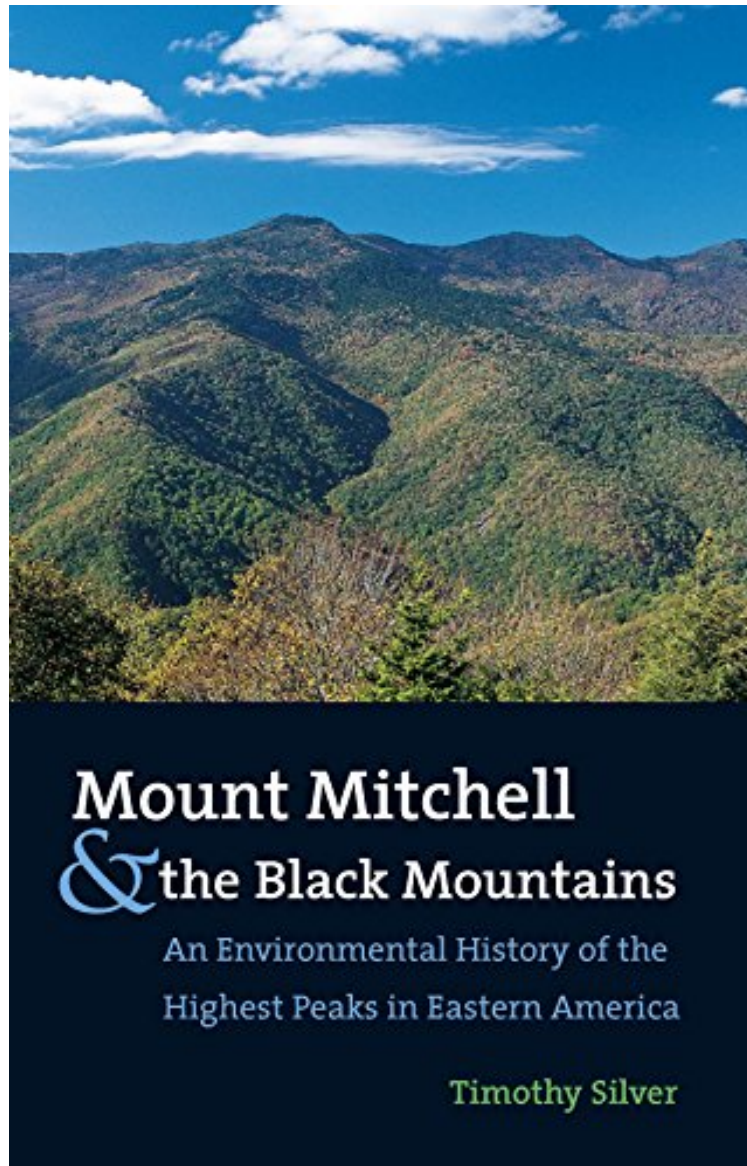


[DOWNLOAD] Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America

Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America

Timothy Silver

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#1007111 in Books The University of North Carolina Press 2003-03-03 2003-03-03Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x .78 x 5.88l, 1.08 #File Name: 0807854239352 pages | File size: 26.Mb

Timothy Silver : Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A refreshing change from mainstream Appalachian histories...By Brandon Kirk
In *Mount Mitchell the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America*, Timothy Silver presents the story of the Black Mountain region of North Carolina from the time of its origins a billion years ago to the present. Mostly, *Mount Mitchell* documents the history of the Black Mountains since the arrival of Europeans and Anglo-Americans in the sixteenth century. Silver's history of this single mountain range is unique in that it blends a few historical approaches (regional studies, community studies) into one tour de force. It is also different from many histories in that it emphasizes equally the role played by people and nature in shaping events in a specific region. Silver is adamant that neither people nor mountain ranges exist in isolation (xv). Additionally, in his view, human behavior within the mountain region was largely dictated by peoples views of the natural world and their own place within it. The Black Mountains, as the highest peaks situated within the oldest mountain range in North America, makes for a worthy topic of study. Silver's choice of the region is also based on more personal reasons: it is the location of his genealogy and some of his earliest childhood memories. Ultimately, he hopes to use environmental history to reveal something new about Appalachian studies; he believes the study of one region reveals truths about a larger world. *Mount Mitchell* is a chronological tale, beginning with the mountains geological beginnings and dating back billions of years. Silver uses the first part of the book to establish the mountains, or rather, nature as a powerful, dynamic, ever-changing force. By doing so, he sets up the natural world (mountains, animals, plants) as something that will meet human settlement on equal footing and work with it equally to create a sort of eco-borderland. For the most part, the sophisticated nature of this topic, while necessary for Silver's theme as well as to establish his authority as an environmental historian, makes for a complicated (or, to borrow his term, a kaleidoscopic) start to an otherwise fascinating and well-written book (27). Still, it seems necessary to include this information: the yin-yang relationship of nature and man requires it. Actually, his discussion of the founding fathers of environmental studies (Clements, Tansley, Odum, Gleason) and their various (and often contrasting) theories regarding formations, climax, ecosystems, patch dynamics, and so forth almost holds interest. The bulk of *Mount Mitchell* is devoted to the period of human habitation, which began approximately 10,000 years ago. Silver's treatment of Native American history in the Black Mountains region, while brief, begins the most interesting portion of *Mount Mitchell*. Within a larger discussion of native culture and their food sources and power structures, Silver finds time to shatter the myth that natives did not alter their environment. Going further, he offers a well-written history of European and Anglo-American penetration into the mountains, whether Spanish gold-seekers, Spanish explorers and missionaries, English and French traders, European botanists, colonial land speculators, or English settlers. The Black Mountains of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, while drawing in various groups with various agendas (gold, leather, plants), were largely unimportant outside of a regional context. This sense of importance emerged a little later with the controversy over Mount Mitchell being declared the highest peak in eastern North America. The booster boom initiated by Professor Mitchell and Senator Clingman, their dramatic falling-out, and the subsequent intervention by Professor Guyot, Zebulon Vance, Big Tom Wilson, and Charles Phillips makes for good reading, as does the arrival of such significant color writers as Porte Crayon. The way in which Professor Mitchell's posthumous legacy was so favorably crafted and the manner in which Clingman was generally condemned is quite remarkable. For the most part, Silver's account of the Black Mountains is strictly case study-oriented regional history arranged chronologically. There are moments of revisionism, but generally these instances are minor and would only be important to a local/regional historian (such as his view on Mitchell's claims regarding the location of Mount Mitchell or on the legacy of Professor Mitchell). His primary contribution to revisionist history comes in his assertion of the importance of interplay between man and nature to create the Black Mountain culture. Other times, he provides summaries of schools of history, thereby offering concise revisionist viewpoints occasionally making it clear how he stands on the issue. A case in point comes in his summary of the differing views of nature among environmental historians (as a changeless Edenic paradise or as a dangerous place in need of civilization). Within this context, one of Silver's themes emerges: that the mountains were not an unchanged paradise prior to man's arrival, that man was simply the latest force to act as agents of change upon them. Confusingly, he also offers the idea that nature itself is a human construction. There are also instances where he weaves revisionist history into his narrative; one case of this comes in his discussion of commercial agriculture in the mountains, which plays on recent scholarship by John Inscoe and others. Another instance comes in his discussion of boosters and tourism in the Black Mountains, one of several instances where the mountains are clearly not isolated or backward (as is often promoted by the proponents of what Shapiro calls the myth of Appalachia). Silver's history of the Black Mountain region is unique in that it asserts how the mountains are as important as the people. Unlike previous writers and historians, he does not relegate the mountains to the role of supporting actor in a distinctly human drama (xv). For Silver, the mountains and people join in one magnificent history, each affecting the other within a complex eco-borderland. Within this realm, he documents the exchanges between various peoples (the trade between Europeans and Anglo-Americans and Native Americans) and animals/plants (deer repopulation, flora, livestock, trees) whether positive and negative, economic and biological, or technological (i.e., farming techniques blended from Celtic, German, and Cherokee habits). The mountains emerge as a major player in Silver's discussion on Mount Mitchell itself, whether in the case of the Mitchell-Clingman

controversy or the death (and thus immortality) of Mitchell himself. The effect can be reversed: Silver argues, for instance, that Mitchell's death transformed the Black Mountains from a mere natural and geologic curiosity to a martyr's mausoleum, a place for pilgrimage and reflection, and a source of state pride (119). Mount Mitchell is, as its title boldly proclaims, environmental history. Interestingly, Silver fashions his tale by blending two lesser types of history: in one sense, it is a community study of people and their relationship to their surroundings; in another sense, it is local or regional history. Because of Silver's inclusion of his own journal entries, one might also include a third category to the book: travel writing. His writing style, which is clear and pleasing, unites these three flavors of writing into something very satisfactory and useful for both scholars and laymen. While he admits early that his work is unconventional in organization and narrative style, it actually works quite well; his use of maps and black-and-white photographs are an added bonus to the appeal of its layout (xvii). Many Appalachian enthusiasts, familiar with the standard histories of the region, will find Silver's work to be a refreshing change from mainstream histories. The topic, as well as his theme and overall approach, is rare in Appalachian historiography. The notes section of Mount Mitchell is particularly fresh in that it offers a plethora of oft-overlooked Appalachian-related sources. If there is a weakness to the layout of and readability of Mount Mitchell, it might come in Silver's use of journal entries (four per chapter). While personal and clearly important to him, they generally seem misplaced in the story line. He himself admits early in Mount Mitchell that his organization and narrative style is unconventional (xvii). Conceptually, however, Silver is very convincing in his portrayal of life in this region of Appalachia.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Five Stars
By Nathan Gruver
This was a great read for the history of Mt Mitchell a very well written book.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Enjoyed This Book!!!
By Terry S.
Good book to read with some good details on the title subject, would recommend this book, priced right for the material in this book.

Each year, thousands of tourists visit Mount Mitchell, the most prominent feature of North Carolina's Black Mountain range and the highest peak in the eastern United States. From Native Americans and early explorers to land speculators and conservationists, people have long been drawn to this rugged region. Timothy Silver explores the long and complicated history of the Black Mountains, drawing on both the historical record and his experience as a backpacker and fly fisherman. He chronicles the geological and environmental forces that created this intriguing landscape, then traces its history of environmental change and human intervention from the days of Indian-European contact to today. Among the many tales Silver recounts is that of Elisha Mitchell, the renowned geologist and University of North Carolina professor for whom Mount Mitchell is named, who fell to his death there in 1857. But nature's stories--of forest fires, chestnut blight, competition among plants and animals, insect invasions, and, most recently, airborne toxins and acid rain--are also part of Silver's narrative, making it the first history of the Appalachians in which the natural world gets equal time with human history. It is only by understanding the dynamic between these two forces, Silver says, that we can begin to protect the Black Mountains for future generations.

"Timothy Silver has written a magnificent history of the Black Mountains, one that fascinates and instructs. He conveys a vivid sense of the natural and human history of these still-wonderful mountains. Even more impressive is the way he relates the two in analyzing the problems and possibilities of life in the Black Mountains in coming decades." This book is both a major contribution to our regional literature and a model of what an "environmental history" can and should be. (Christopher Camuto, author of "A Fly Fisherman's Blue Ridge") It delights me that Timothy Silver covers the early history involving Dr. Elisha Mitchell and others, as well as the recent scientific research by Dr. Robert Bruck dealing with air pollution that damages forests, streams, and human health. The book is thorough and well done. (Hugh Morton) Silver portrays the majestic environmental history of Mount Mitchell as set within the deep history of the Appalachian Mountains and the varied, often unanticipated ways that nature and humanity have jointly shaped the region. (Carolyn Merchant, author of "The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution") Like the natural world that is his subject, Timothy Silver's new environmental history of Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains is complex and compelling. . . . Gracefully written and well-organized. . . . Silver's work is one of only a handful of studies that consider the natural world as an active agent in the Appalachian history and, as such, is an important contribution to the field.--H-Appalachia

A wonderfully informative and enjoyable journey through time and across the space of an extraordinary Appalachian landscape. . . . His knowledge and love of the region shine through every page. . . . Profusely illustrated with photographs and informative maps, this volume will delight and inform readers seeking a sense of place.--Appalachian Journal

The environmental history of the Appalachian Mountain region is a field that recently has seen the publication of several very good books, of which Timothy Silver's Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains is one. . . . A very worthwhile book.--H-Environment

Timothy Silver has written a magnificent history of the Black Mountains, one that fascinates and instructs. He conveys a vivid sense of the natural and human history of these still-wonderful mountains. Even more impressive is the way he relates the two in analyzing the problems and possibilities of life in the Black Mountains in coming decades. This book is both a major contribution to our regional literature and a model of what an 'environmental history' can and should be.--Christopher Camuto, author of A Fly Fisherman's Blue Ridge

Although the

history is complicated, the author has managed something quite remarkable. He has captured more than the historical facts of Mt. Mitchell and the Black Mountains; he has captured the spirit and the feeling of the place.--Georgia Historical QuarterlySilver's work is not just an environmental history, but an anthropological treatise of great sensitivity. Through this book, readers can fully appreciate the lack of linear explanation for the changes in the natural environment that nurtures all of us.--Blue Ridge Country[A] passionate . . . [and] accessible work that will satisfy both the professional historian and the inquisitive citizen.--American Historical On every clear day I can see Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountain range from Grandfather Mountain. It delights me that Timothy Silver covers the early history involving Dr. Elisha Mitchell and others, as well as the recent scientific research by Dr. Robert Bruck dealing with air pollution that damages forests, streams, and human health. The book is thorough and well done.--Hugh MortonIn this beautifully crafted, compelling book, Timothy Silver portrays the majestic environmental history of Mount Mitchell as set within the deep history of the Appalachian Mountains and the varied, often unanticipated ways that nature and humanity have jointly shaped the region. It will be of interest to anyone who cares about the environment and the ethics of the human care of nature.--Carolyn Merchant, University of California, Berkeley Silver acts as both nature guide and interpreter of history in his book. . . . As a naturalist he is skilled, thoughtful, and engaging. . . . This is matched by equal competency as a historian, including the ability to labor productively in multiple fields.--Journal of American HistoryAn excellent case-study in environmental history. The emphasis on the role of human decisions in the composition and workings of contemporary ecosystems coupled with the recognition that 'nature' is also an active player makes the book worthwhile reading for geographers as well as ecologists, for students and educators as well as the general public.--Historical GeographyAn absorbing and readable book that will appeal to general readers and scholars alike.--Appalachian Heritage[An] instructive story of both ecological change and the impact of human activity on the natural environment. . . . [Silver's] interweaving of his personal journal of visits to the mountains adds a surprisingly spiritual dimension to the scholarly narrative. This book is politically, culturally, philosophically, biologically, and--for its author and its readers--personally engaging.--Mountain Research and DevelopmentThis absorbing, beautifully crafted book tells a powerful story about one of western North Carolina's most popular tourist destinations: Mount Mitchell and the surrounding Black Mountains. . . . No one is better qualified than Tim Silver to interpret the complex transformations of this landscape.--North Carolina Historical This is a fine book and a good read. . . . Tim Silver has given us a benchmark of environmental history for a fascinating part of North America.--Environmental HistoryHis loving portrait of the Black Mountains will persuade most readers of man's responsibility to watch over them. It is an unmistakable call for action.--Charlotte ObserverAbout the AuthorTimothy Silver is professor of history at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. His previous publications include *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800*.