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**Review of *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807- 1840: A Geographical Synthesis* By David J. Wishart**

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*The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis.* By David J. Wishart. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Maps, illustrations, charts, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. 237 pp. \$15.00.

The fur trade of the Trans-Missouri West has long been a fertile field of historical investigation, effectively plowed for almost a century by scholars, both trained and lay. Taking those familiar materials, Wishart has produced a book that brings a new and challenging dimension to that history. Indeed, his synthesis calls for a new interpretation, namely, that the fur men's rapacious exploitation of the fur resources of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains "was destructive to the physical environment and to the native inhabitants alike." The romantic image of the buckskin-clad mountain man at the cutting edge of the nation's westward expansion is replaced by a darker image—a greedy spoiler of the ecosystem wherever he trapped or traded, grossly insensitive to the environment.

To achieve this revisionist interpretation, Wishart, a geographer, has cast his research in an interdisciplinary mold, emphasizing the interplay "between the biological, physical, and cultural environments of the fur trade." Eschewing any attempt "to write a definitive historical narrative," he admirably realizes his primary objective: a geographic synthesis that illuminates the prevailing history of the fur trade.

After an initial chapter that provides the geographical setting, Wishart focuses on what he deems to be two distinctive production systems: (1) the fur trade of the upper Missouri, based on bison robes procured from Indian tribes at trading posts and shipped by water to Saint Louis; and (2) the fur trade of the Rocky Mountains, a trapping system geared to the acquisition of pelts by Euro-American trappers utilizing the rendezvous system and an overland supply system. Both systems lasted well into the 1830s, at which time a new strategy had to be devised.

Wishart chronicles the rape of the environ-

ment during this period by the fur men, trapper and trader alike. Their total disregard for the ecosystem lead to overtrapping and their food requirements to extensive slaughter of indigenous game. Unbridled rivalry, both corporate and individual, among fur entrepreneurs stimulated the hunt for furs and the acquisition of robes. Only with the collapse of the European market in the 1830s did the exploitation begin to diminish in scope and intensity. But by then the damage had been done. The full extent of that damage remains to be assessed, but this book points the way.

Rooted in extensive research, as the splendid bibliography indicates, the book is further enhanced by excellent maps, well-organized tables, and appropriate illustrations.

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