OPEN ACCESS

University of BRISTOL

Dudley, M., & Pearson, C. (2017). Environment. In J. Hogg (Ed.), *Using Primary Sources: A Practical Guide for Students* Liverpool University Press.

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research
PDF-document

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research
General rights

ENVIRONMENT

Marianna Dudley and Chris Pearson

The following primary sources discussed in this chapter are available to view within the 'Environment' collection on Biblioboard:

[A] Borrow, G., 1862. *Wild Wales: its people, language and scenery*. London: John Murray.

[B] Ballantyne, R. M., 1880. *The pioneers: a tale of the western wilderness, illustrative of the adventures and discoveries of Sir Alexander MacKenzie*. London: Nisbet

[C] Ballantyne, R. M., 1863. *The wild man of the west: a tale of the Rocky Mountains*. London and New York: Routledge.

[D] Reid, M., 1908. *The desert home; or, the adventures of a lost family in the wilderness*. London and New York: Routledge/E. P. Dutton.

[E] Turner Bennett, E., 1829. *The Tower Menagerie comprising the natural history of the animals contained in that establishment; with anecdotes of their characters and history*. London: Robert Jennings.

[F] Johnston, A., 1942. *Animals of North America*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[G] Johnston, A., 1941. *Animals of the countryside*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Introduction

This chapter explores how primary sources can be used to analyse the environment. Environmental history is a relatively recent area of historical inquiry. Although we can trace its roots back to the work of the Annales historians who worked in France in the 1920s to 1940s, it emerged as a distinct sub–discipline in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s as historians, such as Donald Worster and William Cronon, began to historicise the

relationships between humans and the environment. Environmental history emerged in conjunction with the environmentalist movement, yet its concerns, approaches, and methodologies mean that it offers far more than 'environmentalist' history. Environmental history draws on a wide variety of primary sources, which can include the physical environment itself. In this chapter, we show how the primary source analysis skills of social and cultural historians can be used to research environmental issues, and highlight that environmental historians share many of the same concerns as other historians, including an interest in identity construction and power.

To make our chapter manageable, we focus on the idea of wilderness. This topic has been a major concern of environmental historians, particularly in the USA, and we will consider it within the context of modern British history. In considering the cultural construction of wilderness, we use two main types of sources: travel accounts (George Borrow's *Wild Wales*, 1862, [A]) and children's literature (the novels of Robert Michael Ballantyne and Captain Mayne Reid [B], [C], [D]). We suggest that reading such sources 'against the grain' enables us to gain a better understanding of the representation of nature and the construction of national, gender, and other identities.

Overview

Environmental historians see themselves, in the words of John R. McNeill (2003, p.6), as tackling the 'the history of the mutual relations between humankind and the rest of nature.' This quotation is illuminating because it suggests that humans are part of the environment and that human–environmental relations are reciprocal: humans have shaped the environment and vice versa (think, for example, of the 2011 tsunami's impact on Japanese society). It is also worth reflecting on McNeill's use of the term 'nature', which environmental historians and others sometimes use as a synonym for 'environment'. Both 'nature' and 'environment' are hard terms to define. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, but environment is perhaps the best one to use as it suggests the deep interrelationship and interconnectedness between humans and their surroundings, whereas 'nature' can sometimes become too easily positioned as something separate to humans (Warde, 2016).

Environmental history is a very diverse field with arguably no central unifying theme (Sverker and Warde, 2007). It can be the study of rivers, forests, mountains, and animals, in history. Environmental history is also

about the urban, the human, the chemical, and the intellectual – categories which might not so readily fall under 'natural'. There is very little that lies beyond the interest of environmental historians. Rather, it is the attention they pay to the environment – to 'dirt, water, air, weather, germs, and animals', and to sites, processes and ideas that constitute the world around us – that distinguishes them from other historians (Stroud, 2003, p.78). Despite their specific approach, environmental historians share common concerns with political, social, and cultural historians. From famine in colonial India to the fate of Afro-Americans in post-Katrina New Orleans, human–environment relations are always connected to wider political, economic, and social power relations. Students can turn the field's diversity and links with other histories to their advantage, as this provides especially varied areas of inquiry to which an environmental history analysis could be applied in essays, projects, and dissertations.

In addition to being an almost limitless field of enquiry, the good news for history students is that environmental history need not require any different skills or resources than other types of history. We find dirt, water, air, weather, germs, and animals (and much more besides) in primary sources familiar to political, cultural, and social historians. These might include governmental reports, literary texts, photographs, films, paintings, memoirs, scientific reports, maps, and newspapers. The diversity becomes apparent when we take just one issue of *Environmental History* (2009), the field's leading journal, to see what sources the historians used in their articles: scientific and other specialist journals; key environmentalist texts, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962); US National Park Service documents; memoirs; magazines; governmental documents including letters and reports; maps; newspapers; legal files; oral history; paintings; and food packaging labels. Students can therefore use the primary source analysis skills developed in political, cultural and social history courses to explore the complexity of human–environment relations.

It is worth noting, though, that environmental historians are also willing to look beyond the literary and visual to the environment itself as a source. Environments are layered with 'strata of memory' (Schama, 1996, p.7) that the historian can explore by being in the environment itself. For instance, a river may be seen as an 'archive of choices' (Armstrong, Evenden and Nelle, 2009, p.19), shaped by dams and mills and weirs, that reveals human relationships to water and land. The material world forms an important resource for those environmental historians who have resisted the

postmodern linguistic 'turn' (which at its most extreme, conceives of everything as a 'text') in history, or at least retain an underlying belief in the reality of material entities and their place in history.

By placing value on places, materials, natural forces, and animal life as sources of history in their own right, environmental historians add to the range of human-produced sources at our disposal. Site visits, maps, bodily experiences and encounters with animals can all legitimately and valuably contribute to an understanding of a subject, but this does not diminish the importance of documentary and visual evidence to the pursuit of environmental history, which rests on rigorous archival scholarship. For this reason, we focus in this chapter on documentary evidence, to demonstrate that – while we encourage students to engage with the material, the spatial, and the animal if they wish – environmental themes can be found in the most traditional of historical texts, and in every archive and library.

Given the diversity of environmental history and the wide variety of primary sources deployed by environmental histories, we have decided to focus this chapter on the theme of wilderness in Britain. Wilderness has repeatedly interested many environmental historians, which is undoubtedly due to its importance to national identity in the USA and the problematic exportation of this idea to other parts of the globe. As a concept, wilderness also allows us to consider how environmental sources can be used to explore many of the issues that we raised above, such as identity and power, and think through ideas such as the cultural construction of nature.

Moreover, wilderness became a matter of much historiographical debate with the publication of William Cronon's seminal essay 'The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature' (1996). Cronon critiqued the American fascination with wilderness as an unhealthy and misguided flight from history and challenged the idea that wilderness represented 'untouched' or 'pristine' nature. In line with postmodernist thinking, Cronon argued that 'wilderness' was largely a 'cultural invention' infused with 'moral values and cultural symbols', as well as national and religious meaning. Furthermore, it was created through the exclusion – some would say genocide – of Native Americans, and could only be maintained through modern state bureaucracies, such as the National Park Service. Cronon challenged the arguments previously advanced by Roderick Nash (2001 [1967]) who, while arguing that the meanings of wilderness were historical and complex, asserted that wilderness was far more than a cultural

construction and deserved protection, treating the 'ecocentric rationale for wilderness' as a sign of 'respect for [the] larger community of life' (p.390).

This North American historiography provides an important reference point for environmental historians, but in this chapter, we want to think through how ideas of wilderness have been constructed in a British context. The notion of wilderness may not be as bound up with British identities as it has become in the USA, but a broader category, landscape, has certainly played a functional and symbolic role in shaping understandings of place, and self, at multiple levels: the local, the regional, and the national (Matless, 2005). Wilderness is by no means absent in these discussions of landscape, and in recent years has resurfaced as a literary category that bridges popular and academic discourses. So-called 'nature writers' probe assumptions about the human place in nature, and vice versa, at a time in history when daily experiences are, more than ever, lived in increasingly urban, technical and virtual environments. Robert MacFarlane (2007), for example, undertakes personal journeys in search of wilderness and argues that what is wild is fundamentally tied to what is human.

Wilderness has also captured (some) environmentalist imaginations in Britain through the formation of a movement for the 'rewilding' of the countryside. Advocates argue that the restoration of past ecosystems, with an emphasis on the reintroduction of megafauna, will reverse environmental destruction, establish new economies (through eco-tourism), and reinvigorate the human–environment relationship. It is important to note that the movement is not without critics or divisions, not least over the environmental periodisation on which it relies. To what period should landscapes be restored to? Pre-industrialisation? Pre-agricultural? Environmental journalist George Monbiot's call (2013) to reintroduce elephants to the British countryside, for example, has not only reached a large audience and generated debate, but also presented Britain as a place where elephants (and wolves, bears, lynx, bison, and other beasts) once lived, constituting an imaginative, if not an actual, rewilding.

Monbiot did much of the thinking and writing for his book *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life* in the Cambrian Mountains, Wales. Described as 'really wild' by the Montgomery Wildlife Trust, in Monbiot's opinion their boggy expanses form a wet 'desert', devoid of large animal life and biological variety (2013, pp.210–21). An upland similar to the landscape captured in one of our sources, it is an environment which reminds us that the cultural signifiers of wilderness in the UK are mixed, sometimes

contradictory, and subject to change: wilderness is a subject ripe for historical investigation. Selecting primary sources to examine the meanings of wilderness in modern Britain is our next task.

Selecting and interpreting sources

We will now explore our theme of wilderness by examining a travel account and children's literature, including books by Robert Michael Ballantyne. We want to include these primary sources to show how environmental historians are able, like historians of race, gender, and class, to read 'against the grain' and reveal how power can be exerted on, and through, the environment. How did we find and select those particular sources? How will we interpret them?

The diversity of environmental history primary sources liberates the researcher, but it can also disorientate: where do we start? Occasionally, we may have access to a rich source set that cries out for detailed examination and interpretation. Such a source set – say, for example, the collection of Smoke Abatement League documents held in the University of Liverpool's Special Collections – might define our research project and provide us with a period of study (the mid-twentieth century), a central theme (air pollution in the industrial age), and ideas for further exploration (the role of pollution in discourses of public health, say). But sometimes an environmental history research question demands a broad range of source materials located from multiple archives. Our sources for this chapter are clearly not a collection unified by theme, time, or authorship, and are indicative of the responsive way in which much historical research is undertaken. More often than not, historians are led by research questions to the sources. The topic of study precedes, and guides, the identification of source material.

Our interest here is in wilderness as an idea or discourse that is iterated and upheld through the ways in which people think, speak and write about the environment. A parameter is therefore established: we will be working with documentary records using discursive analysis as our predominant approach. We will pay attention to the ways historical actors have used language and texts to convey ideas about the environment, and more specifically wilderness, and consider how audiences encounter and interact with discourse. We want to explore how discourses of wilderness have emerged in Britain: a second parameter, one of scale, is thereby set. This will take the British Isles as our geographical focus, so our sources will likely be found in British-based archives and libraries (although notable collections

of British materials are held elsewhere). A third, temporal, parameter is set by examining modern representations of wilderness. This is partly because our expertise lies in modern history, so we will work to our strengths, but there are also sound intellectual reasons. For although ideas about wilderness and the wild predate the modern era, it is since the eighteenth century that they have taken hold in the West due to the impact of industrialisation, Romanticism, and the conquest of the American West (among other factors). The modern period suits our purposes.

With some parameters in place, we do as most historians do: we search online catalogues, consult archivists, and read widely, alert to references that may point us towards useful material. Through a mixture of prior knowledge, chance, and targeted research, we chose to focus on a nineteenth-century travel account, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery*, by George Borrow [A], and a selection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British children's books that have wilderness as their central theme: Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Pioneers* (1880) [B] and *The Wild Man of the West* (1863) [C], and Captain Mayne Reid's *The Desert Home* (1908) [D].

Source selection itself involves a certain amount of initial interpretation. Having identified our sources, we can begin to think more carefully about what they offer us. Consideration of their strengths and weaknesses is an obvious, but essential, place to start. Firstly, how representative are they? George Borrow, for instance, is only one commentator of Welsh environments: it would be a mistake to treat his observations as necessarily representative of travel accounts of Wales. As for the children's literature, we have only selected a handful of texts: it would be erroneous to think that they are automatically representative of children's literature. To assess their representativeness we would have to read more primary sources or consult secondary literature. What we discover would have to then inform how much we can claim from our sources. Secondly, we need to bear in mind the texts' intended audiences and their reception. We cannot assume that the readers of Borrow and the children's authors agreed or absorbed the text's intended meaning.

Another issue we need to consider is our own subjectivity as historians working in the early twenty-first century and how we feel about wild environments. What cultural baggage do we carry? Are we situated within the Romantic lineage that valorises wildness, or do we see it as more problematic and, perhaps, a waste of potentially productive land? How

might our own attitudes influence the questions we ask and our interpretation of primary sources? Is there danger that we might reify wilderness (*à la* Nash), or perhaps attack it as a problematic construction to make a wider point about environmental politics (*à la* Cronon)? Neither position is necessarily a problem, but we do need to be aware of positioned subjectivity.

It is not possible to address all these questions here, but a brief discussion of *Wild Wales* [A] will allow us to explore them further. Published in 1862, the text is an example of a literary genre in which educated gentlemen (and, less commonly, gentlewomen, such as Celia Fiennes [Morris, 1995]) set out to travel the British Isles, recording their impressions in a diary or travelogue manner. We are able to work with the original published document, which gives us pause to consider that it has been edited and presented to the public: this is not Borrow's personal diary or handwritten notes. As a literary text, we need to be aware of the conventions of the genre, the stylistic forms used, and the intended readership. Borrow describes his encounters with Welsh people using formal English, writing for his contemporary, educated audience. We can be sceptical about the veracity of such exchanges, but nonetheless they are a useful source for the historian: not as accurate depictions of rural populations, but as evidence for the ways in which Borrow, as an educated, privileged, man, perceived others – in this case, the Welsh rural poor – and himself. We must be careful not to assume that Borrow's account is an accurate reflection of the Welsh environment and its inhabitants, but we need not dismiss it as prejudiced nonsense either. Read critically and analytically, it can tell us much about English elite views of wild nature.

Historical context is key to our analysis. A literary scholar would approach the source somewhat differently, considering the 'textuality' of the source, analysing structure, rhetoric, and style in depth, identifying techniques and literary constructs deployed by the author. The environmental historian may also consider these factors, but is also interested in provenance, textual content, and how the work sits in a broader historical context (Cohen, 2004). As a source for environmental history, and for thinking particularly about wilderness as a construct, Borrow's account is rich in its description of the environment. As the title suggests, the text engages directly what wilderness looks and feels like, to Borrow, at this time. By publishing his account, Borrow upholds a certain notion of wilderness and the Welsh landscape that influences his contemporary audience, and a

string of writers and travellers that followed him. With this in mind, we might consider to what extent Borrow echoes and popularises existing ideas of the Welsh environment, or whether he creates new visions of it.

We also need to reflect on what we want to claim from this source. Are we mainly interested in how Borrow represents the Welsh environment, or do we also want to think about the contemporary reception of his book? If the latter question interests us, we would have to try to find publication figures, book reviews, and so on. Also, are we interested in elite representations of wild Welsh environments, or do we want to consider popular attitudes towards them? In other words, what voices are excluded from Borrow's text? Here, the question of language is important because it is more difficult for non-Welsh language speakers to assess primary sources that might present Welsh environmental perspectives, unless they were available in translation. Does our position as historians primarily raised in England influence our understanding and analysis of Welsh environments?

We have spent some time considering the strengths and weaknesses of *Wild Wales*. Another core part of the interpretation of historical sources is to understand how other scholars have used them. Turning our attention to our second set of sources, children's literature, we can build a familiarity with secondary literature to provide ideas and approaches to guide our own analysis, and highlight issues to be aware of as we explore the sources further.

General studies on children's literature suggest that the texts of this diverse genre are infused with ideology and meaning and are subject to adult control and censorship. They reflect and shape prevailing social attitudes and are enmeshed within wider power systems, linked to the creation of individual, national, and other identities, and form part of a problematic negotiation between author and reader(s) in the creation of meaning, complicated by the fact the texts are created by adults *for* children (Hunt, 2005; Rose, 1984). The books had a clear social and political purpose. At a time when imperialism infused British culture, adventure stories, such as the ones we've selected, provided British boys (the targeted audience) with stories of exploration, conquest, adventure and sacrifice that provided evidence of white superiority and Britain's obligation to colonise supposedly inferior people. They were also designed to placate the potentially disruptive youth of Britain's urbanising society and channel juvenile energies into useful colonial directions. With this knowledge, we are better placed to understand how *The Pioneers* [B], *Wild Man of the West* [C], and *The Desert*

Home [D] used images of the North American wilderness to shape British youth.

As is immediately apparent, interrogating a source quickly generates a host of questions. We do not need to answer all of them, but it is necessary to be aware of them. Given the complex issues involved with the interpretation of primary sources, we spend the next section offering more practical advice.

Practical advice

To begin, it is vital to think about what you're using the sources for: are you working on a research essay on, say, British depictions of wilderness, or on an essay for which your tutor has set the question (maybe: 'Do representations of wilderness tell us more about class and gender identities than the landscape itself?')? Or maybe it's for a shorter primary source commentary. The task at hand will inform how you use the sources. You might need to use the source to back up the central argument in your essay, or you might need to analyse it in great detail for a commentary. Either way, your tutor will want to see your ability to critically analyse the source, which will mean setting it in its historical context and considering its content in depth.

Once you have selected your primary sources and reflected on their strengths and limitations, as discussed in Section 3, you need to think about their provenance. The date should be readily available from the library or archive catalogue or on the source itself. However, knowing more about the author, including their social background and political views, can be harder. The [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography](#) (ODNB), which should be available through your university website, is an excellent resource. We can use it to find out more about Robert Michael Ballantyne, the Scottish author of *The Pioneers* (1880) and *The Wild Man of the West* (1863), such as his personal life, career, and the reception of his work (Rennie, 2004). The ODNB helpfully has entries on the Scottish explorer and fur trader Sir Alexander MacKenzie, upon which Ballantyne based *The Pioneers* (Baigent, 2004), and Captain Mayne Reid, author of *The Desert Home* (1908) (Butts, 2004).

The ODNB also tells us about George Borrow's unusual life and literary career (Fraser, 2004). This information can help us consider why he wrote *Wild Wales* when he did (he had experimented with first-person travel accounts before), why he chose Wales as his focus (it was part of a series of walking tours around Britain, after years of travel on the continent), and how

he chose to represent his encounters with local inhabitants (Borrow's fascination with Romany and Celtic cultures contributed to a phase of scholarship in the late nineteenth century that romanticised, and misrepresented, them with lasting cultural consequences; Hyde, 2004). Using the ODNB entries as our starting points, we now consider *Wild Wales* before examining children's literature.

[A] *Wild Wales*

A strong sense of how the source relates to the period in which it was produced, knowledge of the group or person who produced it, and the people that engaged with it (positively and negatively) is crucial to unlocking its historical meanings. Let's consider Borrow's description of the landscape of 'Plunlummon' (Pumlumon in Welsh, and today referred to as Plynlimon): 'a mountainous wilderness on every side, a waste of russet-coloured hills with here and there a black craggy summit' (Borrow, 1864, p.212). This is both a useful descriptive record of what Borrow saw, and a clue to his socially and culturally influenced way of seeing. Borrow comes to a 'craggy and precipitous place', and is warned by his guide that the path is steep and dangerous, but he insists on venturing down it and is rewarded by locating a river source, that is considered 'beautiful and romantic' (Borrow, 1864, p.215). We can use this evidence to trace the connections between Borrow and the major shift in thinking about, and experiencing the natural world, that the Romantic movement brought about in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantics pursued exhilarating outdoor experiences in order to connect with heightened emotions and thoughts, and were heavily influenced by Edmund Burke's theories on natural beauty and the sublime (1756). For Burke, true beauty was not found in ordered and proportionate objects and scenes, as had been the dominant belief since classical times (think about the symmetrical formal gardens of the early modern period, for example), but in places that conveyed a thrill, a sense of fear and danger, that heightened the emotions to their most perceptive and receptive state: 'whatever is in any sort terrible … is a source of the sublime; that is, the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling' (Burke, Section VII, p.112). These new sensibilities encouraged people to re-evaluate previously feared environments such as mountains. Borrow is actively seeking out such an environment, and pursues the rocky trail precisely because, rather than in spite, of such danger. We could argue that he is embodying the Romantic traveller, over a century

after Burke's original text, demonstrating that Romantic ways of seeing had a lasting legacy on Victorian society.

We can use the source to deduce what constituted 'wilderness' for Borrow at this time. It is an explicitly unpeopled landscape: 'no signs of life or cultivation were to be discovered, and the eye might search in vain for a grove or even a single tree'. This chimes with other perceptions of 'wild places' as empty. We mentioned earlier the accounts of the American West which chose to 'unsee' the native inhabitants living on the land. We know that Borrow is not alone in the landscape (he has a local guide), and later visits a nearby village; so this is not a truly people-less landscape. Yet, Borrow chooses to dwell on that as a quality, perhaps to reinforce his own, and wider society's, expectations of wilderness.

Borrow's prose paints a vivid picture of Plynlimon. However, environmental sources offer more than simple descriptions of environments (useful and interesting as those are). By reading 'against the grain' – that is, looking for what is omitted as well as included, and thinking critically about what Borrow says, particularly with regard to women and the poor as two groups whose historical voices are harder to find in sources than, for example, educated males like Borrow – the source becomes useful in new ways.

Towards the end of the extract, Borrow visits a village. His response to a 'peopled' rural landscape is vastly different to the exuberance of his response to the mountain. The village is 'miserable'. He attributes a human characteristic to the surrounding hills, describing them as 'sullen', and in doing so reveals how much perception of place relies on personal, subjective interpretation. He describes the inhabitants in unfavourable terms. The men wear no hats – a mark of low standing. The women 'leer contemptuously' (Borrow, 1864, p.244) at him, a loaded phrase that presents the women as not only unfriendly, but of questionable morality (to leer has a connotation of 'immodest desire' that was in use at the time of writing [OED]). The language used in a source needs careful consideration. It constitutes a record of decisions and assumptions that can tell us much about the author and the period. We must also be aware that meanings shift over time, and that words may have been used differently in the past. The *Oxford English Dictionary* should be available in your university library. In addition to word meanings, it provides a valuable reference for historic usages and is a recommended research companion.

Here, a social historian might pay more attention to Borrow's record of his interactions with the local inhabitants, perhaps noting his description of dress and personal habits (smoking), the communality of the village (men and women congregating together) and the muddy materiality of Welsh rural life. Using our theme of wilderness, and our interests as environmental historians, we can extract some other readings from the text that illuminate our understanding of wilderness and the Welsh environment further.

Gender history has been an important influence on environmental history and can lead to productive, and important, revelations about sources and wider environmental attitudes and changes. We can see that women play a tangential role in Borrow's narrative, itself telling evidence of the value the author (and his anticipated audience) placed on women's views and experiences, particularly those of the rural poor, but a feminist interpretation can go much further. For example, read the passage in which Borrow locates the three river sources. This is evidently important to him: 'it is not only necessary for me to see the sources of the rivers but to drink of them, in order that in after times I may be able to harangue about them with a tone of confidence and authority' (Borrow, 1864, p.213-14). Borrow's dominant concern is to 'take possession' of the rivers by drinking their waters. Using a feminist approach, we can make a connection between Borrow's desire for bodily possession of the environment, and notions of masculinity and nature, to consider why Borrow felt the need to 'possess' nature in order to experience it. It is not the subject of a source that should determine a feminist approach, but the questions you want to ask of it.

Borrow's descriptions of the Welsh upland landscape can also be contrasted with later accounts to consider the extent of landscape change and changing environmental values. In his article on twenty-first-century wind farm development in rural Wales, Michael Woods uses Borrow's description of Plynlimon to show that the area has changed superficially over 140 years (Woods, 2003). Many of the environmental qualities that Borrow describes are still in evidence today. The 'empty' and potentially hostile environment, recognisable from *Wild Wales*, continues to draw modern-day tourists. However, the ways in which we understand the environment (and the role of humans within it) has changed substantially, not least reflected by the area now being 'managed' for its wildlife and landscape significance, and productivity (Forestry Commission tree plantations are a significant addition to the view), and in a broader sense, by

the Welsh through devolution. Having focused extensively on *Wild Wales*, we turn now to children's literature.

Children's literature

Having gained some understanding of Ballantyne and Reid, their aims and the context in which they were writing, we are in a position to think about them in relationship to wilderness. In doing so, we can make the point that we are attempting to do something different with the texts. Scholars have analysed their portrayal of empire, hunting, violence, and Christianity (e.g. MacKenzie, 1989). Instead, we will deploy them to discuss how representations of the North American wilderness were mobilised to entertain and educate British boys. In doing so, we can draw connections with the scholarly work on children's literature that stresses the importance of landscape within children's books, which can help naturalize and form particular identities. *The Pioneers* [B], *Wild Man of the West* [C], and *The Desert Home* [D] were clearly targeted at a young British audience: Reid addresses his readers as 'my young friend'. The gender of the authors and the majority of characters in the book means that we can locate them within the 'Boy's Own' genre. Consulting relevant secondary literature confirms Ballantyne as a propagator of colonialist adventure fiction for boys, and he was clearly influential, both in terms of his productivity (he wrote over 100 books) and the popularity of his work (Hannabuss, 1989, p.54). The 'Ballantyne's Miscellany' illustration on the title page of *The Pioneers* gives us a flavour of the 'Boy's Own' genre: exotic, wild animals, exploration, danger (the ship wreck), encounter and combat with 'native' people (the weapons), Britain and its empire (the flag), and Christianity (the *Holy Bible*).

In *The Pioneers*, *Wild Man of the West*, and *The Desert Home*, wilderness becomes a testing space in which the white and male characters can prove and improve themselves mentally, physically, and spirituality. This is a common theme in children's literature. Journeying through quasi-real/quasi-fictional landscapes allows characters to develop and helps readers to create their own identities and world view (Hunt, 1987; Watkins, 1995). Furthermore, Pauline Farley argues that the frequent portrayal of the 'Wild West' in children's literature had a 'very serious purpose, which was to instruct child readers in an ideological fantasy about the superiority of white English culture' (2008). The white characters in *The Pioneers* move through wilderness spaces, bringing civilisation in their wake, such as when they cut a road through a mountainous forest (p.101). Although they are

aided by 'Indians' (who we would now call Native Americans or American Indians), they maintain a distance and superiority over them. In The *Wild Man of the West*, an 'Indian' character named Hawkswing kills a buffalo and brings it back to camp to be butchered. Unlike his European companions, Hawkswing is unable to resist eating some raw meat: the 'bloody appearance of Hawkswing's mouth proved that he had been anticipating the feast with a few tit-bits raw. The others were more patient' (Ballantyne, 1863, p.120). The lack of self-control underscores Hawkswing's savagery, making him part of nature. The savage and animal nature of the 'Indians' is also highlighted in *The Pioneers* when one of the main characters, Lawrence, describes a group of 'Indians' as 'critters' who 'have never seen white folk before'. The narrator then notes that 'to most people it might have seemed ridiculous to have heard that bronzed *voyageur* calling himself and his brown-faced, smoke dried, weather-worn companions, by the title of white people; but Lawrence referred to the natural colour of the race to which he belonged' (Ballantyne, 1880, p.110). The white characters are thereby seen to maintain the essential and superior qualities of their race in the wilderness, even if they take on the appearance of 'savages'. Their Christian morality also holds fast. Lawrence's father refuses to abandon an old 'Indian' woman whose community has been wiped out by smallpox as 'I would feel like a murderer if I was to leave one o' God's creeturs to perish in the wilderness' (Ballantyne, 1880, p.29). Such quotations allow us to think about the construction of wilderness as white and male space, a notion that Afro-American activists, environmental historians and others have increasingly challenged (DeLuca and Demo, 2001). The sources therefore enable us to address the wilderness-as-social-construction debate, as well as historicising whiteness.

Ballantyne's and Reid's books can be taken in many analytical directions. Depending on the task at hand and your interests, they can be used to explore the many facets of wilderness historiography. These include wilderness as a scary place – Reid tells his readers that he will not show them the 'wildest' aspects of wilderness 'lest they might terrify you' (Reid, 1908, p.17) – which could be used to discuss the relationship between wilderness and the Romantic notion of the sublime, as discussed above. Ballantyne's portrayal of wilderness as a healthy space – 'we assert positively that wandering through the wild woods is a healthy as well as a pleasant sort of thing. The free air of the mountains and prairies is renovating, the perfumes of the forests are salubrious' (Ballantyne, 1863, p.107) – allows us to address

the connections made between wilderness and health (Thompson, 1976). In addition, the frequent appearance of Native Americans in the texts would enable an exploration of the portrayal of Native Americans in wilderness histories and the tensions between constructions of wilderness as empty space and its history as a peopled environment created and maintained by Native American land management practices before their removal from the land (Spence, 1999). Alternatively, we might want to explore the transnational construction of wilderness and think about the role of Scottish (Ballantyne) and Irish (Reid) writers in the glorification of wilderness, thereby adding to the better known story of John Muir who was born in Scotland and went on to fight for the establishment of Yosemite National Park and create the Sierra Club (Tyrrell, 2012).

Part of the excitement in working with primary sources is being able to use them in different ways. So far, we have thought about the books in terms of wilderness, but we could also use their portrayals of wild animals, such as the 'monster of the bear species' that Lawrence encounters in *The Pioneers* [B] and 'with an unflinching eye' takes 'aim at the monster's heart' and shoots it (Ballantyne, 1880, p.26). Lawrence's hunting prowess elicits pride in his father and can be read as a confirmation of his manliness. We can also insert such texts into a wider British history of fascination with, and repulsion at, wild creatures from North America, from the description of the Grizzly Bear in *The Tower Menagerie* [E] (Turner Bennett, 1829, p.123) as the 'most formidable and the most dreaded' of all 'quadrupeds' in North America to 'savage and very cunning' wolves in Arnrid Johnston's *Animals of North America* (1942) [F]. Are these portrayals of bears and wolves intended to contrast the wilds of America with the domesticated calm of Britain (Johnston [1941] describes British badgers as 'clean', 'model parents', and 'lovely pets' [G])? What role do these competing representations of wild animals play in the formation of national identity? What are the similarities and differences between descriptions of animals in juvenile adventure fiction and natural history texts and how do they contribute to wider construction of wilderness, including Borrow's *Wild Wales*? Making these links allows us to bring together different kinds of sources and consider how animals are mobilised symbolically to construct 'wilderness' and cultural identities.

Conclusion

Travel accounts and children's literature are useful sources with which to explore the social construction of wilderness. Bearing in mind their limitations as sources, we have used them to investigate wilderness beyond the USA, showing how it had cultural purchase on this side of the Atlantic and how it served as a way of formulating identities in ways that were gendered and racialised. Interrogating these sources also generated new questions, which we suggest is one of the most exciting aspects of working with primary sources. Furthermore, we have sought to show how the methodologies of cultural and social historians can be used to pursue environmental history, and demonstrate how the field's openness and relative new-ness provides plenty of scope for students to produce exciting work of their own.

Bibliography

Armstrong, C., Evenden, M. and Nelle H. V., 2009. *The river returns: an environmental history of the bow*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Baigent, E., 2004. Mackenzie, Sir Alexander (1763/4–1820). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press [online], January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17570 [Accessed 5 August 2015].

Ballantyne, R. M., 1863. *The wild man of the west: a tale of the Rocky Mountains.* London and New York: Routledge.

Ballantyne, R. M., 1880. *The pioneers: a tale of the western wilderness, illustrative of the adventures and discoveries of Sir Alexander MacKenzie*. London: Nisbet.

Borrow, G., 1862. *Wild Wales: its people, language and scenery*. London: John Murray.

Burke, E., 1756. *A philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful; with an introductory discourse concerning taste*. 1st ed., available at Project Gutenburg,

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#A_PHILOSOPHICAL_INQUIRY [Accessed 19 August 2015].

Butts, D., 2004. Reid, (Thomas) Mayne (1818–1883). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press [online], January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23335 [Accessed 5 August 2015].

Carson, R., 1962. *Silent spring*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Cohen, M. P., 2004. Blues in the green: ecocriticism under critique. *Environmental History*, 9(1), pp.9–36.

Cronon, W., 1996. The trouble with wilderness or, getting back to the wrong nature. *Environmental History*, 1(1), pp.7–28.

DeLuca, K. and Demo, A., 2001. Imagining nature and erasing class and race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir and the construction of wilderness. *Environmental History*, 6(4), pp.541–60.

Farley, P., 2008. The "Wild West" in twentieth-century English children's annuals: home on the range? *Limina*, 14, pp.27–37.

Fraser, A., 2004. Borrow, George Henry (1803–1881). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press [online], January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2918?docPos=1 [Accessed 11 August 2015].

Hannabuss, S., 1989. Ballantyne's message of Empire. In: J. Richards, ed., 1989, *Imperialism and juvenile literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp.53–72.

Hunt, P., 1987. Landscapes and journeys, metaphors and maps: the distinctive feature of English fantasy. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 12(1), pp.11–14.

Hunt, P. ed., 2005. *Understanding children's literature*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Hyde, G., 2004. Travelling across cultures: George Borrow's *Wild Wales. The Cambridge Quarterly*, 33(4), pp.331–43.

Johnston, A., 1941. *Animals of the countryside*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Johnston, A., 1942. *Animals of North America*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

MacFarlane, R., 2007. *The wild places*. London: Granta.

Matless, D., 2005. *Landscape and Englishness*. London: Reaktion.

McNeill, J. R., 2003. Observations on the nature and culture of environmental history. *History and Theory*, 42(4), pp.5–43.

MacKenzie, J. M., 1989. Hunting and the natural world in juvenile literature. In: J. Richards, ed., 1989. *Imperialism and juvenile literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp.144–72.

Monbiot, G., 2013. *Feral: rewilding the land, sea and human life.* London: Allen Lane.

Morris, C., ed., 1995. *The illustrated diaries of Celia Fiennes, 1685–c.1712*. Far Thrupp: Alan Sutton.

Nash, R., 2001 [1967]. *Wilderness and the American mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Oxford English Dictionary Online, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/106945?rskey=3VLI8P&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid [Accessed 11 September 2015].

Reid, M., 1908. *The desert home; or, the adventures of a lost family in the wilderness*. London and New York: Routledge/E. P. Dutton.

Rennie, N., 2004. Ballantyne, Robert Michael (1825–1894). *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press [online], January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1232 [Accessed 5 August 2015].

Rose, J., 1984. *The case of Peter Pan or the impossibility of children's fiction*. London: Macmillan.

Schama, S. 1996. *Landscape and memory*. London: Fontana.

Spence, M. D., 1999. *Dispossessing the wilderness: Indian removal and the making of National Parks*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stroud, E. 2003. Does nature always matter? Following dirt through history. *History and Theory*, 42(4), pp.75–81.

Sverker, S. and Warde, P., 2007. The problem of the problem of environmental history: a rereading of the field. *Environmental History*, 12(1), pp.107–30.

Thompson, K., 1976. Wilderness and health in the nineteenth century. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2, pp.145–61.

Turner Bennett, E., 1829. *The Tower Menagerie comprising the natural history of the animals contained in that establishment; with anecdotes of their characters and history*. London: Robert Jennings.

Tyrrell, I., 2012. America's National Parks: the transnational creation of national space in the progressive era. *Journal of American Studies*, 46(1), pp.1–21.

Warde, P., 2016. The environment. In: P. Coates, D. Moon and P. Warde, eds. *Local places, global processes.* Oxford: Windgather Press.

Watkins, T., 1995. Reconstructing the homeland: loss and hope in the English landscape. In: Maria Nikolajeva, ed. *Aspects and issues in the history of children's literature*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. pp.165–72.

Woods, Michael, 2003. Conflicting visions of the rural: windfarm development in mid Wales. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 43(3), pp.271–88.