

certainement pas la même magnitude sur l'échelle de Richter, mais il suscitera très certainement quelques secousses dans le vieux comme dans le nouveau continent.

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BRADLEY, Ben. *British Columbia by the Road: Car Culture and the Making of a Modern Landscape*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017. Pp. 309.

The notion that the automobile transformed North American society over the course of the twentieth century comes as no surprise to denizens of lecture halls and readers of textbooks. The advent of the internal combustion engine and the roadways that allowed drivers to commute, vacation, date, and trade in the comfort of their own vehicles transformed work, leisure, courtship, commerce, and countless other activities. Sometimes such travels opened up exciting new opportunities—a remote campsite far from home, for example. On other occasions, they resulted in frustration—perhaps bumper-to-bumper traffic on a Friday afternoon that delayed the start of the weekend. What united these disparate experiences, Ben Bradley argues, was “automobility”—“the system of objects, spaces, images, habits and practices that surrounded private automobiles and public roads” (p. 232). In *British Columbia by the Road*, Bradley delves deep into the historical record to explore what this phenomenon meant for the landscape of the BC interior. Boasting equal parts environmental and commemoration history, Bradley’s study offers fresh perspectives on tourism promotion, park development, political culture, and public history. Befitting a study focusing on driving’s visual culture, the book has superb maps and photographs—including tangible evidence that today’s forest-fire-prevention signs pale in comparison to the threatening discourses of the early 1950s!

Keen to qualify and correct perceptions that have championed automobile travel as liberating and unfettered (particularly in comparison to rail travel), Bradley’s study demonstrates that “the practice of driving and the experience of landscapes by the road were more firmly constrained than commonly recognized.” After all, by travelling the same routes and visiting the same authorized and publicized stopping points, auto travellers “were all seeing the same landscapes, even if their readings of such shared experiences might be various” (p. 11).

The book’s organization cleverly parallels the author’s aim to balance *structure* with the *agency* of his subjects, for he provides the reader with a fair amount of autonomy while effectively reinforcing his key conclusions. He offers two ways forward, Route A (four chapters examining nature) and Route B (four exploring historical commemoration) and encourages readers to determine the order of their trip. A tight conclusion brings together common themes.

Route A explores the very different histories of Manning and Hamber provincial parks, both established in 1941. While Manning remains a popular

camping destination, Hamber became a prime example of a “failed” park (p. 66). In documenting and comparing their fates, Bradley offers a window onto a wide range of competing interests, including forestry, tourism, and wildlife-management lobbies, provincial and federal governments, and auto travellers. In doing so, he vividly illustrates the extent to which decisions about highway development shaped the parks’ destinies. From our present vantage point, Manning’s preservation and development might seem natural enough, but the two case studies on offer underscore the contested and contingent nature of the decisions to set aside provincial land for recreational purposes.

Route B explores the kinds of history lessons that auto travellers came across as they toured the province’s interior. Here the author nicely balances an analysis of the aims and initiatives of local entrepreneurs and history buffs with fresh insights into the machinations of state actors. With case studies focusing on the 1958 BC Centennial Celebrations, roadside plaques, Barkerville, and Fort Steele, Bradley documents the selectivity involved in preserving and celebrating the province’s past. He also skilfully connects local decisions and conflicts to broader province- and continent-wide trends—and the role that the automobile played in exposing both British Columbians and the province’s visitors to highly edited understandings of the past.

An effective and self-aware conclusion neatly outlines the book’s potential impact while highlighting themes demanding further study. Roads, Bradley notes, served as “a kind of cultural infrastructure” that shaped the views and experiences of the people who used them (p. 234)—hence local and state actors’ desires to have their say on the route of a highway, the entrance to a park, or the wording of a plaque. In tracing both the development and the impact of this infrastructure, Bradley reminds us that while automobiles affected most places in North America over the course of the twentieth century, various regions experienced automobility in quite different ways—a major caveat for scholars in danger of overlooking regional (and national) cultures and constructs in the rush to embrace an otherwise productive transnational approach. On First Nations’ responses to automobility in the BC interior and its influence on land use and historical understanding, Bradley offers suggestive hints while encouraging further research. For scholars seeking to understand the Social Credit party’s hold on the province throughout the century’s third quarter, he rightly suggests that the conflicts and patterns he has uncovered go a long way towards identifying and explaining key elements of the party’s political culture that championed economic development of the interior.

Overall, *British Columbia by the Road* provides a much-needed and sustained analysis of key developments in the province’s interior and is clearly a “must read” for BC historians. For those less engaged and less familiar with the province’s history, it offers valuable and nuanced insights into the political, environmental, and economic history of North America—particularly the regional impact of automobility. Moreover, Bradley’s study will caution them against accepting even a deeply discounted offer to travel British Columbia’s Big Bend Highway.

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