

Encyclopedia of Appalachia. Edited by Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006. Pp. xxvii, 1832. \$79.95.)

On-line promotional materials for the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* promise that this massive volume “will serve as a one-stop reference for students, teachers, scholars, and the general public as they seek information about Appalachia's land, people, economics, cultures, and institutions” (<http://cass.etsu.edu/encyclo>). Readers with these expectations will not be disappointed. This super-sized, affordably priced tome, ten years in the making, boasts two-thousand-plus entries on more than 1,750 pages of dense, double-column text. Greater than nine hundred authors contributed to the effort that in addition to highly crafted, well-edited writing contains cross references, bibliographies, and a comprehensive, sixty-page index, not always a feature of encyclopedias.

The intellectual apparatus of the volume is complex, sophisticated, and effective. Thirty topical subsections, some exceeding one hundred pages, are grouped into five synthetic sections—Landscape, People, Work and the Economy, Cultural Traditions, and Institutions. Individual entries range from expected—and unexpected—biographical, geographical, historical, and institutional topics to highly original treatments of diverse subjects such as air quality, stone masonry, fruit cobblers, or folklore and the supernatural. Creative categorization produces a compendium of scholarship on social, economic, political, environmental, intellectual, and cultural themes. At the same time that entries do not shirk controversy, they indulge no partisan polemics; they are neither defensive nor promotional. Perusing the volume can therefore be richly rewarding and replete with many surprising discoveries. The *Encyclopedia* also merits serious study and will be useful far in the future for reference, research, policy making, and reform to mention only a few of its possible applications.

But can a volume so far reaching, so complex, so balanced, and so intelligent be all things to all people—a reasonable expectation for a comprehensive reference work. On this question, readers of the *Journal of Backcountry Studies* may want to pause. What, they might want further to ask, does the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* contribute to scholarship on the backcountry. Scrutiny of the *Encyclopedia* will remind readers of how separate have been the lives of scholars on the backcountry and on Appalachia. None of those mentioned in Robert M. Calhoun's opening piece in vol. 1, no. 1 of this journal appear as contributors to the *Encyclopedia*. And over the past several decades examples of scholars prominent in either field attending each other's conferences or publishing in associated journals are quite rare. There are good reasons for these distinctions that go beyond neglect or incompatibility much less antipathy.

The region covered by the *Encyclopedia* fails to well serve the backcountry. At the outset of the project, its editors adopted a definition of Appalachia provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Created by Congress in 1965 with the Appalachian Regional Development Act, the commission now serves 410 counties in thirteen states. Because economic need defines inclusion, politics has heavily influenced the commission's map of Appalachia and hence the coverage of the *Encyclopedia*. Thus the core area of the mountain South has been stretched therein from southern New York to the hill country of northeast Mississippi. As the editors observe “a number of Virginia mountain counties that were Appalachian by any standard except political were left out” (p. xxi). Notably out is all of Virginia's portion of the Shenandoah Valley. In fact, the Great Valley of the Appalachians from central Pennsylvania to upcountry Georgia—so critical to the physical and cultural geography of the eighteenth-century

backcountry—is erratically represented with major sections in Virginia and Pennsylvania omitted while included are West Virginia and western Maryland portions. Winston-Salem, the home of the Moravian town of Salem, and surrounding Forsyth County are Appalachian, but comparable Virginia counties to the immediate north are deemed outside the region as are the eastward counties in North Carolina that figured so importantly in the Regulator controversies of the 1760s. Similar conditions pertain for South Carolina and Georgia where important backcountry settlements at Ninety Six and Augusta remain beyond the *Encyclopedia's* range. Thus major portions of the southern backcountry are not covered by the volume at the same time it embraces regions that are arguably neither backcountry nor Appalachian. None of this is unexpected considering the politicization of Appalachia, a subject fulsomely covered in the *Encyclopedia*.

That major scholars of the backcountry remain unrepresented among the *Encyclopedia's* contributors is similarly unsurprising. Although Appalachian studies and backcountry scholarship are rooted in the same cultural and academic movements of the 1960s, these fields have taken quite separate trajectories since then. Certainly the Great Society programs of that decade gave the study of Appalachia a decided boost as did the related establishment of Appalachian studies centers at many universities in the region. Academic interest in the mountain South, however, developed at the turn of the nineteenth century and throughout the early twentieth century partly in confirmation of Appalachian stereotypes and sometimes in the service of nefarious efforts to exploit the region for economic or political gain on account of them. The debunking of these myths has been a motive force driving much Appalachian scholarship ever since. In this effort the new *Encyclopedia* performs much heavy lifting.

Interest in the backcountry can similarly be traced to the early twentieth century and Frederick Jackson Turner's fascination with the Old West as America's first frontier experience. In this configuration, the backcountry—not a term employed as such by Turner, his attractors, or detractors such as Charles H. Ambler, Thomas P. Abernethy, or Freeman H. Hart—was a study in early America. The core story of the colonial backcountry has ever since concerned the westward spread of Anglo American culture and its consequent encounter with the varied worlds of Native Americans and New Worlds of European empires. By contrast Appalachian studies picks up momentum only in the following century with a grand narrative of regional descent from self-sufficiency to dependency culminating in the twentieth-century reaction to environmental exploitation and cultural marginalization.

The formative experience for backcountry studies, by contrast, was Carl Bridenbaugh's 1952 publication of *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South*. Bridenbaugh not only surprised himself with how distinctive and different he found the ethnically and economically diverse peoples of the colonial interior, but he unwittingly fixed the backcountry clearly in the sights of the New Social History as it emerged a decade or more later as a major academic movement. Deeply influenced by the social causes of the 1960s and the conviction that ordinary people impel historical change and empowered by the computer as a tool for research into their lives, a new generation of graduate students set out to transform historical scholarship with innovative community studies beginning in a broad arc of interest with New England towns and then sweeping southward to the colonial Chesapeake—another of Bridenbaugh's regions. Not until the 1980s did these studies themselves break into the backcountry. By this time Appalachian studies was already a mature field of study with the established institutions and professional apparatus needed to sustain it. Struggling, on the one hand, with a nineteenth-century myth of Appalachian peoples frozen in a preindustrial, Anglo Saxon past and,

fashioning, on the other, a dynamic backcountry of cultural encounter and change, Appalachian studies and backcountry scholarship respectively found few opportunities to engage one another.

Is, nonetheless, the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* an important addition to the research shelf of any student of the backcountry? Decidedly so. Take, for example, the section "Settlement and Migration" edited by Sheila R. Phipps, of Appalachian State University. Forming the core of this section are thirteen entries all headed "Early White Settlement of . . ." discrete regions ranging throughout the entire Appalachian area. Here in capsule form is a settlement history of much of the North American interior. Regional parity for Native Americans is further achieved with general submissions on "Northern Native Americans" and "Southern Native Americans" as well as numerous, specific entries on individual tribal groups in the section, "Race, Ethnicity and Identity." African Americans receive comparable attention as do other minorities such as Finns, French, Germans, Greeks, Gypsies, Irish, Italians, Melungeons, Jews, Poles, Scots, Scots-Irish, Swiss, Syrians, and Welsh. That the English get no greater notice than a modest, single entry in this section underscores the theme of diversity running throughout the *Encyclopedia's* treatment of Appalachian culture. Long serving as a defining concept in backcountry studies as well, this theme formulates a common ground for both fields.

Other shared, but differently interpreted, assumptions accentuate the utility of the *Encyclopedia*. Both backcountry scholarship and Appalachian studies presume the original condition of self-sufficiency for the white settlement population. Whereas the story of Appalachia leads from agricultural independence to industrial dependency, a comparable trajectory in the backcountry plots the transition to capitalism. "Capitalism," in turn, receives only one index reference in the *Encyclopedia* and then to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, a scholar rarely credited in backcountry scholarship. This convolution, however, is the exception that proves the rule of what backcountry scholars can learn by interrogating a distinct but closely related field of study.

Where the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* might prove most useful for readers of this journal lies in pushing outward the temporal and conceptual boundaries of the field in the direction of what happened after the backcountry. The study of the backcountry can be diminished by the extent to which it fails to ask the "So what?" question. What difference does the backcountry make in the larger story of American history? What were the outcomes of those social, economic, political, intellectual, and cultural processes that defined the region? These are the questions that Robert Calhoon has been raising in his study of political moderation extending into the twentieth century as partially a consequence of coping with cultural diversity in the eighteenth-century backcountry. That the boundaries adopted by the Appalachian Regional Commission are a product of both Congressional and cultural politics might here be instructive because despite this distended regional definition, the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* focuses consistently and unapologetically on the smaller, more coherent core of the mountain South in the large majority of its entries. This tension between a region pragmatically defined and its internally acknowledged cultural identity could similarly project perspectives on the backcountry into many, varied reflections on the field as a front country not only for later political philosophies but also for a very wide range of academic endeavors.