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Author

Hamilton-Smith, Elery

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Peer reviewed

Review: Natural Environments of Arizona: From Deserts to Mountains

Peter F. Ffolliott and Owen H. David (Eds.)

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Ffolliott, Peter F. & David, Owen H. (Eds.) *Natural Environments of Arizona: From Deserts to Mountains*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 196 pp. ISBN 9780816526970. US\$19.95, paper.

This book comprises a series of essays, each describing the diverse environments of the state from a specific disciplinary perspective. As a whole, the book has two very valuable characteristics. The first is that each chapter locates Arizona in both continental and global contexts and thus provides a basis for comparisons with other regions. The second is that all authors give attention to clarity of description and explanation – a great benefit to readers from other disciplines.

At the same time, the rigorous containment of each chapter within its disciplinary boundaries results in a fragmentation of knowledge and a significant problem in attaining a holistic perspective and understanding. The editors claim that it “. . . clearly shows that nature is more than picturesque landscapes, vegetation and wildlife.” However, they have failed to take the next step and to recognise that an overview of a natural area is far more than the sum of separate disciplinary views.

So, a reader seeking a better understanding of any one of the magnificent environmental spectacles of the state such as the Sonoran Desert or the Grand Canyon would find this a frustrating and unsatisfactory book. I am well aware of the profusion of tourism guides for some of these sites, but most of these provide only a superficial view of the ecological understanding which could provide an in-depth and holistic account of the genesis and development of each site.

In short, it meets the objectives of the editors extremely well – it is eminently accurate and readable. But I would have liked to see it take the further steps that many comparable books do. A series of chapters which present a holistic view of some areas would have made it into a much more valuable book.

Elery Hamilton-Smith <elery@alphalink.com.au>, Professor, Charles Sturt University, Australia, P.O. Box 36, Carlton South, Victoria 3053, Australia. TEL: (613)9489.77850.