

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Imperialism has been inseparable from the history of global environmental change. Our aim is to illustrate diverse environmental themes in the history of the British Empire. In the first half of the book we concentrate on the material factors that shaped the relationship between imperial expansion and the extra-European natural world. We explore the way in which British consumers and manufacturers sucked in resources that were gathered, hunted, fished, mined, and farmed in a great profusion of extractive and agrarian systems. Our discussion is based on case studies of environmental and social change, driven by imperial forces, whose legacy is still apparent today. We are particularly concerned to compare the impact of different commodity frontiers on colonized people.

We argue, however, that British settler and colonial states sought to regulate the use of natural resources as well as commodify them. India needed to protect forests for its railways; Australia required pastures for its sheep. We examine the rise of conservation, which aimed to guarantee efficient use of soil, vegetation, and water, or to preserve resources by exclusion. The linked themes of exploitation and conservation provide an essential tension in our narrative. We also explore attempts by scientists to come to terms with complex diseases and their prevention. Our final chapters, which link directly with those at the start of the book, focus on political reassertions by colonized peoples in respect of their environments. In the process of decolonization, and in a post-imperial age, they found a new voice, reformulating ideas about nature and landscape, and challenging views about who had the right to regulate nature.

Environment and Empire is a synthesis, exploring commodity frontiers, environmental change, diseases, conservationist ideas, urban environments, visual images of nature, and political ecology over the long term. Most single-volume histories of empire tend to downplay environmental issues; these are also subdued in the five main volumes of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*. This contribution to the companion series is designed to supplement and expand on the core texts and to implant neglected debates closer to the heart of the historiography of empire.

Unlike other volumes in this series, *Environment and Empire* is not an edited collection with chapters by specialists in particular fields. Inevitably we are straying into geographic zones and topics that lie outside our principle research expertise. We are specialists, respectively, on Southern and Eastern Africa and our understanding of these regions, together with India, has helped to shape our perspectives. Our home ground has provided useful reference points, around which we have built a sequence of linked examples, and India offers itself as a linchpin of empire, demographically preponderant, with a rich historiography. Nevertheless, we have scrambled to learn about other places, to place them centre stage in key chapters, and give them due weight in comparative analysis. Some parts of the empire receive limited coverage and readers for the publishers were perturbed about omissions. We have explained these in the introduction, and trust that our choices will not dissatisfy too many readers. Chapters range from the seventeenth century to the present, but the core of the book addresses the period from 1850 to 1950, when the British Empire was at its geographical and political apex. *Environment and Empire* is written as an introductory text in an accessible style and we hope that it will be useful for students of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies as well as for general readers. The chapters are thematic but cross-referenced. Each aims to include both a strong narrative and historiographical discussion. Rather than attempt encyclopaedic coverage, we use graphic examples, pegged to specific places or interesting individuals. In this way we hope to provide hooks for comparison and discussion. Names of places and peoples have sometimes changed in the post-colonial world and we have tried to use the most recent terminology; the difficult problem of naming peoples is addressed in the introduction.

The book was written between 2002 and 2005 when Lotte Hughes worked as a Research Officer with William Beinart at St Antony's College, and the African Studies Centre, University of Oxford. We discussed each chapter together in some detail before one or the other wrote a draft. We made extensive comments on each other's work, and hammered out the final version in front of a screen together. We have decided not to identify original authorship of each chapter as the final result is often an amalgam. It is probably true to say that Beinart has been more preoccupied and fascinated by the environmental and cultural issues raised in our reading, and Hughes more by the social and political. But we do not conceive environmental history as a tightly bounded field and have tried to straddle all of these

approaches. We have some differences in interpretation and emphasis and hope that the discussion is all the stronger for this internal debate.

While the text relies largely on secondary material, we have tried to provide colour and detail from contemporary reports and sources. In addition to our frequent visits to South Africa and Kenya, trips to India, Malaysia, Canada, and Botswana have fed into the book, and enriched our sense of different experiences of empire. Specialists on any of the themes and countries we cover will no doubt be frustrated with the level of generality, but we hope that they are at least stimulated, once they have weathered their annoyance, to think about other places and comparative processes, just as we have been.

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