

Sabbatical Report: Environmental History of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, and Other Activities

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I originally applied for, and was awarded, sabbatical leave for Fall 2015, but was asked by SSU administration to delay for a year, due to too many people in my department applying for leave at the same time—hence I took my sabbatical leave in Fall 2016. This report summarizes my academic accomplishments stemming from this leave from campus.

My primary objective of my sabbatical leave was to begin a new multi-year research project, documenting the history of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL) in Colorado. Located on the site of a former 1880s-era silver mining town, called Gothic, RMBL has transitioned over time through eras of mining, scientific research and experimentation, and more recently increasing recreation pressure and management as legally designated wilderness. This work will also chart the history of ecological science itself, through early days in the 1920s of doing mostly natural history and description, to more recent eras of greater experimentation and studying ecology are larger spatial and temporal scales. It should also reveal more about how competing interests in the last few decades—federal management of wilderness, and explosion of outdoor recreation use, and a growing emphasis on working landscapes in the region—have interacted or conflicted with the scientific mission of the Lab.

In August/September 2016 I made my first research visit to RMBL, getting set up for working in their archives and speaking with Executive Director Ian Billick. My focus while at the Lab's archives is skimming documents (old correspondence, meeting minutes, annual newsletters, etc.) and scanning those that seem like they will be useful for future work. Gothic is located at 9500' elevation and is under snow for roughly eight months a year, so scanning documents in the summer to be analyzed back at SSU during the academic year is the most efficient use of my time in the field.

The research gathered and analyzed from this first field visit contributed to an essay I wrote during my sabbatical, to be published in a “festschrift” volume celebrating the work and influence of Dr. Carolyn Merchant, one of my mentors from graduate school at UC Berkeley. The essay, titled “Landscape, Science, and Social Reproduction: The Long-Reaching Influence of Carolyn Merchant's Insight,” reflects on my academic research at both Point Reyes National Seashore and RMBL, bridging these two major research projects. It will be published by Routledge in an edited volume titled *After the Death of Nature: Carolyn Merchant and the Future of Human-Nature Relations*, forthcoming in 2018.

In addition to my RMBL research, a portion of my sabbatical leave was spent preparing for the December 2016 publication of my book, *The Paradox of Preservation: Wilderness and Working Landscapes at Point Reyes National Seashore*, by the UC Press. I developed a webpage for the book, and did a number of talks at bookstores around the Bay Area, as well as several radio and newspaper interviews. Articles about the book and my research were published in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and the Point Reyes Light.

During my leave, I also completed another essay, titled “Losing Wildness for the Sake of Wilderness: The Removal of Drakes Bay Oyster Company,” which was published in March 2017 in an edited volume, *Wildness: Relations of People and Place*, by the University of Chicago Press. I worked with my colleagues Margaret Purser, Michelle Jolly, and Melinda Milligan to write an article about our co-teaching experiences at SSU, titled “‘But Where Are the People?’ Grappling with Teaching New Approaches to Our Relationship with Place and the Past,” to be published in *Making the Past Less Foreign: Using Evidence Based on the Human Aspects of Heritage Conservation to Change Practice* by Routledge in 2018. In addition, I wrote a book review of Stephen Haycox’s new book, *Battleground Alaska: Fighting Federal Power in America’s Last Wilderness* (University of Kansas Press), which was published by the *Journal of American History* in June 2017.

Finally, despite being formally on leave in Fall 2016, I also assisted other members of the ENSP and Geography Departments in our proposal to merge to form a single department, called Geography, Environment, and Planning (GEP). I helped to write parts of the proposal, and attended several School Curriculum Committee and EPC meetings as the proposal moved through faculty governance.