

their ecological value, but because they represent and record the very passage of time.

Individual ancient trees can be of great cultural and symbolic significance, revered for their connection with particular historical events, links with religious sites and their continuity through time in a local context. Collections of ancient trees in woodlands and forests may be valued for their strong sense of place. But the cultural and spiritual importance of forests has been widely overlooked during recent centuries of global forest exploitation. In the colonial era of settlement, the quest for land, building materials and profit has led to the clearance of vast areas of ancient trees without regard for the ecological consequences or the needs and beliefs of local people.

Old-growth forests are clearly of immense ecological importance for the habitats they provide and the biodiversity they support. In her relatively slender tome, Joan Maloof, a biologist and Director of the Old Growth Forest Network, sets out the importance of old trees for biodiversity. She points out that many species unique to old-growth sites disappear after timber management and that rare and threatened species are more likely to be found in old-growth forests. The chapters in her book *Nature's Temples* outline the support provided by these forests for different species groups and also document the value of old-growth forests for water and carbon, and for their sheer beauty. There are some odd gaps in her coverage, however. For example, the chapter on amphibians refers only to salamanders and frogs, without reference to other amphibian groups. The geographical scope is also somewhat limited: Maloof's book focuses mainly on the USA, with few references to ancient trees and forests in other parts of the world. The author points out that in the western USA, only 5% of forests remain unlogged and in the eastern part of the country, less than 1% of the land is covered by original, unlogged forest. She makes a strong case for leaving old-growth forests alone 'for the species we share the planet with and for our human spirits' (p. 147).

Farmer's fascinating—and much chunkier—book, on the other hand, provides a broad global and historical perspective. He highlights the interlinkages between people and trees throughout time and explains how the scientific value of dating trees can help understand the history of the Earth. 'As a worldwide phenomenon, the modern cult of arboreal monuments could conceivably serve as a cross-cultural foundation for geotemporal thinking' (p. 133).

And what of the oldest trees? Farmer notes there are c. 25 plants species that can, without human assistance, produce individuals that live for over a thousand years, and

that these are mainly conifers of primeval lineage. He also draws our attention to the fact that the oldest individuals are not always the biggest. As noted in both books, a Great Basin bristlecone pine *Pinus longaeva* is acknowledged as the oldest recorded living tree. The story of ageing bristlecone pines as described by Farmer is as gripping as any novel. It was no small achievement for Edmund Schulman—who fought poverty and ill health to develop an academic career—to discover, in the late 1950s, living trees aged over 4,000 years old.

Bristlecone pines have not been major targets for their timber. The species is categorized as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List and is now protected within the Great Basin National Park thanks to the endeavours of Schulman and his successors. Other ancient trees such as the majestic *Fitzroya cupressoides* of Chile and Argentina or the Kauri *Agathis australis* of New Zealand have been depleted by logging and are under continuing threat of extinction. These two books highlight why we should record and care about all the world's ancient tree growth. As Farmer notes, 'the demise of olden trees represents an ecological loss, a cultural impoverishment and a social problem' (p. 305). The solutions are for us to remain engaged, network, do more where necessary and also learn to leave ancient forests alone without interference. Only if we do all this will the treasured and unique ancient trees and forests of this world be able to continue to play their crucial role in the intricate web of life.

SARA OLDFIELD (ORCID), [sara@saraoldfield.net](https://sara@saraoldfield.net)  
IUCN Species Survival Commission Tree Specialist Group

**Dawn at Mineral King Valley: The Sierra Club, The Disney Company, and the Rise of Environmental Law** by Daniel P. Selmi (2022) 347 pp., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA. ISBN 978-0-226-81619-7 (hbk), USD 30.00.

This book is called *Dawn at Mineral King Valley*, but it is not really a book about a valley. Instead, it is a book about the many men who used this particular valley—located in the southern part of Sequoia National Park, in California, USA—as a backdrop to further their own agendas. This throng of men contributed to the development, argumentation and aftermath of one of the most prominent cases in environmental law: the U.S. Supreme Court case *Sierra Club v. Morton*. This case, decided in 1972—at the dawn of modern environmental law—has become a classic in large part because it features a story-book conflict of development vs conservation. This conflict played out between those

seeking to develop the remote subalpine Mineral King Valley—including the Walt Disney Company and the U.S. Forest Service, who approved Disney's plan—and preservationists in the Sierra Club, one of the first large-scale environmental preservation organizations (which had been founded by naturalist John Muir in the late 1800s). Although the Sierra Club technically lost the case, the decision in *Sierra Club v. Morton* is often credited with establishing a basis for standing in environmental cases—an issue of particular modern urgency as courts play an increasing role addressing climate and environmental injustices.

To say this book talks about 'many men' is no exaggeration: over the 270 pages of the book's narrative, the author introduces (by my count) 170 men. This dizzyingly large cast is only recognizable because of the author's gift for quick and memorable characterization, as when summarizing a geologist as '[m]ethodical to the point of drawing a diagram indicating where to stow all his outdoor equipment in his Volkswagen van' (p. 23), quoting from an administrator's self-congratulatory diary (p. 84), or describing a politician as 'a witty man with a penchant for wearing multicolored tam-o'-shanters' (p. 252). Indeed, the author's ability to vividly humanize his subjects—including lawyers, bureaucrats, judges, organizations and corporations—adds important explanatory depth. Why, for instance, did the Sierra Club, which had initially supported development of a ski resort in Mineral King Valley, turn against the project? The book describes a fiery meeting of the board of directors, in which one member 'raised hell' (p. 27), convincing most of the other directors, including photographer Ansel Adams, to prioritize the 'environmentally correct' (p. 27) position of preserving a wilderness-like area over the pragmatism of maintaining a consistent position. On the other side of the conflict, why was Disney so committed to building a ski resort in this particular remote valley, even after significant public and legal opposition had developed? Here the book emphasizes the ways in which, after the death of Walt Disney partway through the project, the development of Mineral King Valley became an emotional tribute to Walt by his brother Roy Disney and other Disney executives (pp. 71, 241). This depth pays off in the climactic ninth and tenth chapters of the book, when the author reaches the oral argument before the Supreme Court, and the reader has reached the stage of rooting for everyone.

The author does an impressive job of humanizing the perspectives of men on each side of this faceted case. Yet *Sierra Club v. Morton* is concerned with questions of

voice, of standing, and of whose interests should be recognized—so it seems particularly worth reflecting on whose voices are represented in this book. At least two types of voice are largely missing from the book's account, and thus worth listening for especially.

The first of these notable absences are the voices of women. In the author's account of the history of *Sierra Club v. Morton*, women play little to no role: of the nine women mentioned in the book, most (such as movie stars Elizabeth Taylor and Cyd Charisse, mentioned in passing) receive no characterization at all. Many of the rest are merely given the descriptor of being the wife or mother of a described character (e.g. p. 99). Perhaps worse, the author falls into the unfortunate trap of describing partnerships between men and women as belonging to the man. This is most notable in the portrayal of Disney's key competitors in securing the bid for developing the Mineral King resort:

actress Janet Leigh, one of the most well-known celebrities of the day (and still famous for her shower scene in Hitchcock's thriller *Psycho*) and a California native with democratic political connections who got her entrée to Hollywood at a ski resort, and her fourth husband, stockbroker and developer Bob Brandt. Although it is clear that Leigh and Brandt were partners at least insofar as they co-presented the proposal to both the general public and agency decision-makers, the book does little to humanize Leigh, and indeed portrays the bid as Brandt's project (e.g. the caption of Figure 6: 'Robert Brandt and Janet Leigh presenting Brandt's proposal for Mineral King to Sequoia National Forest Supervisor Lawrence Whitfield'). It is true that women's voices in environmental history have been muted by social realities, but that is a reason to listen harder for those voices, and Leigh's representation in particular presented a missed opportunity to do so.

Finally, it is worth returning to the reflection that—despite being called *Dawn at Mineral King Valley*—the valley in this book is instrumental. The valley is merely presented as the backdrop against which detailed and emotional human narratives play out, not a protagonist itself. Using the valley this way seems true to the history of how the human conflicts in *Sierra Club v. Morton* unfolded. Yet, as Justice William O. Douglas explained in his famous dissent in the case, this human-focused approach is not inevitable: it is possible to imagine a world where standing attaches to inanimate objects themselves—to trees, rivers, valleys—rather than (only) to humans. 'The voice of the inanimate object . . . should not be stilled', warned Douglas. Fifty years later, however, the voice of the valley remains elusive.

ARDEN ROWELL (✉, [karowell@illinois.edu](mailto:karowell@illinois.edu))  
University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, USA