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*The Desert Reader* ed. by Peter Wild (review)

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speak for themselves. If his book isn't successful "ecotourism," "ecocriticism," "ecoprose," I don't know what is.

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*The Desert Reader*. Edited by Peter Wild. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991. 236 pages, \$17.95.)

Peter Wild in his introduction to *The Desert Reader* claims his purpose is twofold: ". . . to introduce the reader to some of the best writing about the arid lands of the United States and to give an overview of how the thinking about deserts has changed over the years." He successfully accomplishes his task by chronologically arranging nineteen chapters, choosing eighteen authors (John Wesley Powell was used twice). Following the Papago and Pima Indian lore are authors Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, Pattie, Greeley, Gilpin, Dutton, Van Dyke, Austin, Lawrence, Dobie, Leopold, Krutch, Stegner, Abbey, Zwinger, and Banham. Preceding each selection is Wild's commentary drawing insights from prior selections, placing authors in their time, reconstructing biographical relevancies, and weaving the variations of the common themes of myth and reality. Wild's historical perspective and commentary make this a book the reader initially may consume for pleasure but ultimately find soul searching.

What shall we do with the desert? The excerpts reflect the routes of myth makers, beaver trappers, explorers, geopoliticians, bureaucrats, professors, art critics, naturalists, philosophic scientists, scientific philosophers, National Park Service and Forest Service rangers, and novelists. The authors describe their adventures, examine their theories, capture the panorama, enjoy the desert for the sake of the desert, and finally discover themselves in desert solitude. Wallace Stegner presents the "wilderness idea" where the idea itself is the resource. Not the gold. Not the uranium. Not the unrealized potential of future development.

As Wild claims, this book is not about conservation. It's a book about human perception of the desert. It's the history of desert thought, a medley of mirages and refreshing oases. Peter Reyner Banham, a British-born University of California art history professor, pens the following sentence which concludes Wild's book: "It's almost as if no one should be admitted to the desert until he has completed a literary training course in the formation of right attitudes to the wilderness." *The Desert Reader* may not purport to know the right attitudes, but it does have the right authors and selections which allow readers to make their own decisions.

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