

Planning in Iceland: From the Settlement to Present Times. By Trausti Valsson. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2003. 480 pp. Illustrations, maps, references, index. Cloth \$78.

This extraordinary history of Icelandic settlement policies pays tribute to the important role of urban and regional planning. It is a fine piece of scholarship in which Trausti Valsson describes the history of Icelandic landscape management, with an emphasis on more recent planning processes.

The history of human settlements from ancient times until today is surely a topic familiar to readers of *Environmental History*. What makes the Icelandic case interesting is the rich body of evidence from which the historian can work. The arrival of Norse Vikings was recorded in *The Book of Settlements* (written between 1122 and 1133) and later activity has been carefully written down in various sagas and family chronicles. Today there is not much room for speculation about settlements; especially when the author risks confrontation with Icelandic readers known for their obsession with family heritage. Valsson has done a fine job in maneuvering through the sources. He tells a story of how Vikings first freely chose uninhabited territory that later became the subject of disputes and agreements which mark the origin of planning in Iceland. The subsequent discussion of the Middle Ages, early industrialism, and modernization is rather short in comparison with Valsson's thorough analysis of planning in Iceland after the Second World War. This later period dominates most of the volume, and the choice of focus reflects its importance to changes in the Icelandic environment.

In terms of methodology, Valsson builds his argument on Ian L. McHarg's famous book *Design with Nature* (J. Wiley, 1969). McHarg thought that the natural sciences in general and ecology in particular should play a vital role in understanding the past and suggesting future landscape usages. If ecology played a vital role in planning, McHarg argued, landscape designers would contribute to a closer relationship between the settlers and their environment. In Valsson's book, the central theme is also the importance of unity between humans and nature. He uses his rich historical knowledge to suggest ways in which the lives of people and the environment could be in greater harmony. Valsson is also inspired by the various regional development plans that emerged in Iceland in the 1960s and 1970s, along with subsequent plans for nature conservation and greater environmental sustainability.

Some of the most intriguing pages in the volume suggest how past experience in landscape management can offer ways to improve the planning of oceanic environments. Fishing is a key industry in Iceland, and numerous Icelandic trawlers are hardly known to the neighboring nations for sustainable harvesting of the fish stock. Valsson's suggestions for how one can extend experiences from landscape planning into the management of ocean environment is both timely and convincing.

On the critical side, the book could have paid more attention to the social resistance to planning processes. The voices of those whose settlement and land usage have been controlled by bureaucratic experts also deserve a place

in the history of planning. This is not to say that Valsson has not written a first-rate study. It should find its way into university and college libraries as the standard history and reference tool about planning in Iceland.

Peder Anker received his PhD in the history of science from Harvard University in 1999. He is currently a research fellow at the Center for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo, Norway. He is the author of *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945* (Harvard, 2001).

In Search of the Rain Forest. Edited by Candace Slater. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. x + 318 pp. Index. Cloth \$79.95, paper \$22.

Nature in the Global South: Environmental Projects in South and Southeast Asia. Edited by Paul Greenough and Anna Lowenhaupt. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003. xii + 428 pp. Notes, bibliography, list of contributors, index. Cloth \$89.95, paper \$24.95.

These two edited volumes extend critiques of nature and development raised in past works such as *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (W.W. Norton, 1996) to the discursive terrain of rain forests and South and Southeast Asia.

In Search of the Rain Forest, like *Uncommon Ground*, is a product of a seminar held at the University of California, Irvine, where an interdisciplinary group including political ecologists, anthropologists, a historian, a forester, a literary theorist, and others explored rain forests as cultural places where science, tourism, and conservation practice are tied to changing ideas of nature both among locals and more globally. In the book's introduction, Slater explains the terms "icon" and "spectacle" as organizing principles for this dialogue. The chapters that follow are loosely organized around these concepts; the first part of the book deals with problems of representation and the second more with human projects to create, preserve, or rehabilitate rain forests as spectacles of wilderness.

Slater initiates this study on ideas of the rain forest by comparing media coverage of two devastating fires in a slash pine forest in Florida and the Amazon forest in Brazil. She shows how this common icon of forest life can be interpreted very differently and argues that the resulting southern bioscript to "save the rain forest" legitimizes calls for outside intervention and continuing antagonism against those who live and work in these places. This sets up a recurring theme in the book that points to contradictions, or "bio ironies" as Greenough terms them, in his essay on tiger conservation in Indian forests. One of the most globally poignant ironies in his essay is the connection between the creation of core zones in biosphere reserves and the subsequent rise in lawless activity—poaching, criminal gangs, narcotics trafficking, and illicit logging—in these centers. Alex Greene focuses on a form of cultural bio-irony where a native Chicagoan follows a Mayan healer and then claims to be his only protégé, opening a gift shop, consulting business, and tourist center to spread his medicines. Sawyer's essay on oil drilling addresses the more