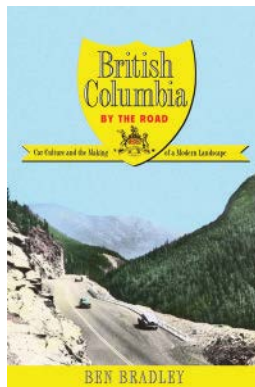


REVIEW: *BRITISH COLUMBIA BY*  
*THE ROAD*

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Maude Flamand-Hubert





Flamand-Hubert, Maude. Ben Bradley, *British Columbia by the Road: Car Culture and the Making of a Modern Landscape*. NiCHE Reviews. 18 December 2017.



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### **Network in Canadian History and Environment Reviews**

Editors: Jennifer Bonnell and Ben Bradley

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Ben Bradley, *British Columbia by the Road: Car Culture and the Making of a Modern Landscape*. Vancouver, UBC Press, 2017, 309 pp. ISBN 978-0774834186

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Ben Bradley's book *British Columbia by the Road: Car Culture and the Making of a Modern Landscape* is a significant contribution to the history of North American automobility. Specifically, it provides readers with a better understanding of the automobile as a vehicle for encountering the world, and explains how this way of travelling structured North Americans' relationships with landscapes during the twentieth century. Bradley explains how the development of routes and highways for tourism created regional distinctions and structured the interior region of British Columbia.

As Bradley shows, the automobile is not only a means of transport, but also serves to create a community of practices for viewing, experiencing, and living within landscapes. The automobile, he argues, came to represent values of freedom, individualism, private property and consumption. These values emerged simultaneously with the possibilities created by the involvement of a Fordist state in building roads. Bradley focuses on the collective movement created by the construction of roads and how this orientation of the public toward automobile travel created "a massive community in movement" which he names the "motoring public" (p. 6). By using the automobile to visit the countryside, people assumed a common identity that contributed to the construction of modernity. This "motoring public" became an active and observant citizenry, a "motorized citizenry." It was not limited to tourists, but

extended to the broader society that took part in the shift to the automobile.

The automobile was a mediator that simultaneously created landscapes and put people in direct contact with those landscapes. In the first half of the twentieth century, the car became a new way of getting closer to nature. It provided travelers with a more sensuous experience of the landscape than the train, for example. As well, the automobile could be a “time machine,” allowing the public to visit historical places and features along the road. These two ways in which the automobile shaped the tourist experience divide and organise the book into its two sections: “Route A: A Drive through Nature;” and “Route B: Paths to the Past.” By mid-century, automobility became a new and modern way of experiencing space and time, and, by extension, nature and history.

Route A explores how the state, mainly through the work of park managers, organised routes in such a way as to offer travelers an experience of nature untouched by modernity. Parks and routes were considered as complementary assets for the Fordist state. Following this idea, routes had to be “scenic as well as efficient”(p. 20). Bradley uses the example of the creation of the two largest parks in the B.C. Interior, Manning and Hamber parks – one that succeeded and one that failed – to demonstrate how managers produced an aesthetic experience of nature visible from the road, and how they manipulated features of the landscape, such as trees and animal habitats, in order to satisfy the expectations of the motoring public. Roads and parks developed in tandem, Bradley shows. In the planning and selection of corridors for highways, managers also covered up commercial, industrial, and extractive activities. In these

ways, economic development and the protection of nature emerge in Bradley's analysis as two opposite but complementary parts of the modern project of opening the British Columbia Interior.

One element that differentiates "Route B" from "Route A" is that historical sites were not initially created through state action. This section of the book reveals that roadside historical attractions began with initiatives by entrepreneurs, such as hotel or gas station owners, who used roadside displays of rustic wagons, old canoes, and waterwheels from the gold rush and fur trade eras to attract and retain motorists. For passing motorists, these displays did not provoke critical reflections on the history of the BC Interior, but instead strengthened perceptions of the interconnections between history and nature and the relative simplicity of a pre-modern time. By the second part of the twentieth century, the British Columbia Parks Service incorporated similar commemorative relics into their "Stop of Interest Program." As Bradley shows, these histories by the road were more than tourist attractions: they "[shaped] the views of citizens" as much as they "[steered] the consumption pattern of tourists"(p. 109).

At the end of the process, nature and historical attractions alternated and worked together to create a "rolling narrative" and to produce an identity for the region. This process of identity creation was significant for a region that, compared to the coast, had been neglected and marginalised in the great national and imperial historical narrative of the province. This "rolling narrative," however, ultimately revealed the exclusion of the Indigenous peoples from the modern landscapes of British Columbia.

By examining the regional culture of automobility, the development of highways, parks and historical sites, Bradley shows a concrete application of the Fordist State. He demonstrates to the reader the economic and political importance of automobility and roads planning. Beyond the landscape dimension, Bradley reveals the history of the opening of the Interior country of British Columbia, and how the construction of roads dedicated to automobile tourism created distinctions within the region, putting some places at the forefront and marginalising others by placing them off the main route. Bradley's reflections on the role of automobility contribute to the broader historiography on the development of the BC Interior and the mechanisms of natural resource exploitation. He convincingly shows how building routes and highways encompassed a larger project of economic development, encouraging commercial activities and resource extraction. In this sense, automobility can be understood as a system.

This book is well illustrated with fifty-six photographs and maps. Bradley draws upon a wide range of source materials to support and illustrate his arguments, including newspapers, personal postcards and memoirs, and archival collections from museums and provincial parks, transportation and forestry departments. The result is a highly readable book that can be read not only for its academic merits, but also as a travel book! *British Columbia by the Road* will be of interest particularly to researchers working on automobility, landscape, tourism, parks, and cultural heritage, together with those studying resource exploitation and land use planning.

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