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Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites [book review]

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Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites by Debra A. Reid and David D. Vail, is another book in the *Interpreting History* series from the American Association for State and Local History. Vail is a history professor at the University of Nebraska, while Reid is the curator of agriculture and the environment at The Henry Ford Museum. In this work the authors try to amalgamate various approaches to interpreting the environment, striving to bring “more science in the history and more history in the science.” The first three chapters introduce readers to subjects useful to thinking about the environment, summarize differences in the way scientists and humanists think about the natural world, and address environmental literacy and public engagement with environmental topics. The second part of the book explores the ways people manipulate the environment, and includes case studies that highlight examples of history infused with environmental issues. Two additional resources include a bibliographic essay on key environmental topics, and a timeline of environmental ideas, policies, and legislation. Approaching interpretation in an agglomerated, multidisciplinary manner, sometimes makes the content hard to follow. This book is most useful to experienced professionals and students in formal interpretation programs.

Published version:

Reid (The Henry Ford Museum) and Vail (Univ. of Nebraska) have coauthored another volume in the "Interpreting History" series from the American Association for State and Local History. Adopting a hybrid approach to interpreting the environment, they look for “more science in the history and more history in the science.” The first three chapters introduce readers to thinking about the environment, summarizing differences in the ways scientists and humanists approach the natural world, and addressing issues of environmental literacy and public engagement with environmental topics. The second part of the book explores the ways in which people manipulate the environment and includes case studies that highlight examples in which history has become intertwined with environmental issues. Two additional resources included here are a bibliographic essay on the literature of environmental history and interpretation and a time line of environmental ideas, policies, and legislation. Approaching interpretation in an agglomerated, multidisciplinary manner sometimes makes the text difficult to follow. This challenging book will be most useful to experienced professionals and students in formal interpretation training programs.