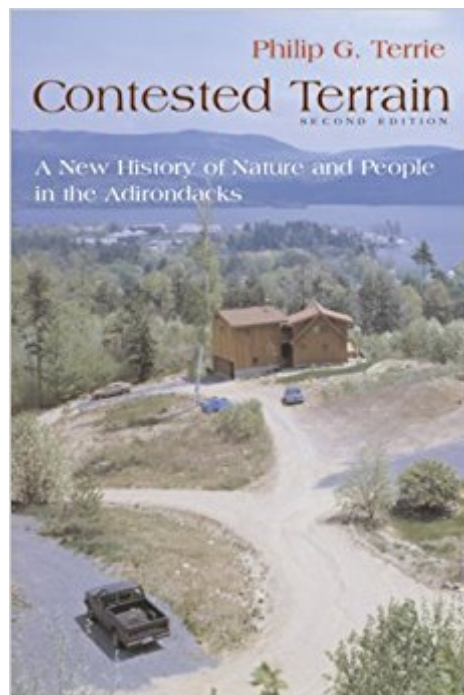




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Contested Terrain: A New History Of Nature And People In The Adirondacks



Synopsis

Contested Terrain explores the competing understandings of how best to manage this spectacular natural resource. Terrie introduces the key players and events that have shaped the region and its use, from early settlers and loggers to preservationists, year-round residents, and developers. This new edition includes a comprehensive account of the Pataki years, an era of stunning conservation triumphs combined with unprecedented pressures on the region's ecological integrity.

Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Syracuse University Press; 2nd edition (June 27, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0815609043

ISBN-13: 978-0815609049

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #597,482 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #128 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Mountains](#) #300 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Geography](#) #1702 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography](#)

Customer Reviews

A masterpiece of historical research, a benchmark publication in regional American environmental history. -- Midwest Book Review The finest general Adirondack history yet written, the book to which all subsequent accounts will have to refer. -- New York Review of Books

Philip G. Terrie is professor emeritus of American culture studies, English, and environmental studies at Bowling Green University. He is author of *Forever Wild*, also published by Syracuse University Press.

A fine, informing, and accessible work. In contrast with a negative review, Terrie actually goes out of his way to connect Adirondack history with "contested terrain" in other contexts. Among other points he makes--the key difference between land conflicts in the A's and elsewhere is that it did not involve genocide of indigenous people (although de Champlain was no mensch). But that is not the

focus. It is rather a nuanced drama involving a range of players--not only locals and tourists, but a range of narratives about "nature" and "conservation" that are both shared and divergent within and between these and other groups. The work on the large private preserves--which do not clearly belong in either of the usual categories--is particularly informing. I have been spending time in the Adirondacks since my parents conceived me (in Biblical sense) on Halfway Island in Lower Saranac Lake. It's good to go back informed by Phil Terrie's book.

This wasn't the most exciting history book I've ever read but it was an informative and concise history of the region. The region known as the Adirondacks is a huge tract of wilderness in northern New York that, as Terrie describes it, is "an unintended mix of private land, villages, and state-owned wilderness." In the opinion of this lifelong frequenter of "The Dacks," it is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Terrie thoroughly explains the conflicting intentions for the region that have plagued it since it was first explored and settled in the 18th century. The conflict was between those who recognized it's unique natural beauty and wanted to preserve it as such, and those who saw it as just another land to be exploited for it's natural resources. More recently, the struggle continues as everyday residents of the region battle the bureaucratic Adirondack Park Agency for the right to grow economically, something which has been consistently denied to them, due to the stringent restrictions on any kind of development. Originally published in 1997, it is a bit dated, but for any fellow Adirondack lovers, I would say it's definitely worth checking out.

Terrie provides a brief overview of the history of the Adirondacks although he has little new to add. His major theme is the conflict that exists between those who have to make a living in the area and those who value the area for its wilderness. In other words between those who consider themselves "natives" and tourists who use the wilderness as a getaway. The problem I have with the book is its self serving purpose of presenting this conflict as if it was unique. In fact it's an age old conflict and part of the history of not only New York but all other states. Our country was built by eradicating whole populations of "natives" and establishing new terrains. Conflict was here when our first settlers chopped down acres of virgin timber in order to grow crops. Conflict was here when those farmlands were stripped by suburban sprawl or when quaint seaside towns were taken over by tourists and wealthy owners of second homes. And this conflict still exists in cities where gentrification has forced out the "natives" or destroyed their way of life. It would be wonderful if the writer had a solution but it seems that all he wants to achieve is redefining the problem and casting it as unique. There's nothing unique about the conflict in the Adirondacks.

This book provides a good history of Adirondack State Park, an area three times as large as Yellowstone. Unlike Yellowstone, only about half of ASP consists of publicly-held land; the rest is private lands within the park's "blue line." Disagreements over how to keep the public land wild, and what developments are appropriate on private lands within the park boundaries, dominate this narrative. Terrie is fair-minded, explaining the views of each side in their own words. He is a resident of the area, and would like to see more local influence in regional planning, within the context of an overall conservationist agenda. Since the region's political rhetoric pitches outsiders' strict environmentalism against locals' economic concerns, Terrie's narrative emphasizes the more complex battle lines, with insiders and outsiders on each side of every debate. His account would be valuable for readers with a personal connection to the region. For the rest of us, it is best read in the context of debates over local control versus national control of national parks, national forests, and other preserved areas. A new concluding chapter brings the book up to date, instead of changing the original text in light of later developments. This creates a rough transition and some overlaps between the original final chapter and the new final chapter, but otherwise serves the story well. It's not a perfect book but it's as good an overview of the Adirondacks as I've seen.

This is truly fine work. The relatively new genre of environmental history has produced the usual amount of academic turgidity, but many of these young historians clearly love the land that they write about, and have the skills to make discussions of the history of human interaction with natural systems into literature. If you enjoy Terrie, you should also pick up Bullough's Pond by Diana Muir.

I have always loved the Adirondacks, but after reading this astonishingly well-written book I have a new appreciation for this remarkable region. If you're a fellow Adirondacks-lover I HIGHLY recommend this book. Also, if you have time to read only one history of the Adirondacks, then this is the one to read.

The book introduces concepts and ideas that you will have thought of before, but never had actually examined in real images and arguments. Has some great historical facts and stories. Tells New Yorkers about what has happened in their state.

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