

Review: Tracking the Great Bear: How Environmentalists Recreated British Columbia's Coastal Rainforest

By Justin Page

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

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Page, Justin. *Tracking the Great Bear: How Environmentalists Recreated British Columbia's Coastal Rainforest*. Vancouver: UBC / University of British Columbia Press, 2014, 145 p.

In his first scholarly book, Canadian scholar Justin Page retells in sociological terms a success story made in Canada: the restoration of the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR), a vast 1.8 hectare territory located in coastal British Columbia (BC), a long-term project that culminated in 2006. This extraordinary environmental adventure of over ten years was quite complex to achieve because it implied the restoration and a “rebalancing” of various elements and stakeholders in a place originally inhabited by First Nations. When this whole project began, the aim was to give back a vast region that was massively exploited by the lumber industry (p. 64). This unbelievable conversion from a partly exploited zone into a valued, protected ecosystem was due to a wide mobilization of various networks, citizenship involvement and pressure on authorities and industries, and a general awareness of many Canadians who realised that rainforests were not only located in Amazonia or South American countries, but in Canada as well. The common point between Canada and Brazil was that both rainforests were equally and savagely exploited. Justin Page’s book explains how all stakeholders slowly accepted this transformation “for the better”, and how it took place, step by step. One has to admit that back then (and still today) the Canadian rainforest was not really well known by Canadians, so there was no strong sense of belonging.

Unlike Ian and Karen McAllister’s *The Great Bear Rainforest* (1997), *Tracking the Great Bear* is not a “coffee table book” and contains no photographs. It acknowledges how the tireless efforts and various strategies by environmental groups and ordinary citizens finally achieved success. Divergent voices could object that this is the triumph of deep ecology over jobs and prosperity, but Page’s demonstration is quite convincing and reconfirms the value of this wide territory of ancient trees and countless rare animal species that could have otherwise been eradicated or lost forever. He lucidly comments on possible counterarguments on this matter: “Our identities, goals, and objectives become defined in relation to whom and what we are connected, so there might be a strong tendency to draw rigid boundaries to protect cherished values” (p. 124). And as for any social movement, we understand as well the importance of connecting networks and pressure groups, organizations and committees (e.g. Conservation International and Ecotrust) one with another for a stronger and more persuasive action into the same direction. My only (minor) quibble about this otherwise enthusiastic book would be the lack of the exact page numbers in some quotes that nevertheless provide author’s

name and text's reference (see the long paragraph quoted from Bruno Latour, p. 64). Social scientists (in domains such as sociology of science and technology) and advocates in social movements will appreciate this positive story that is never anecdotal.

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