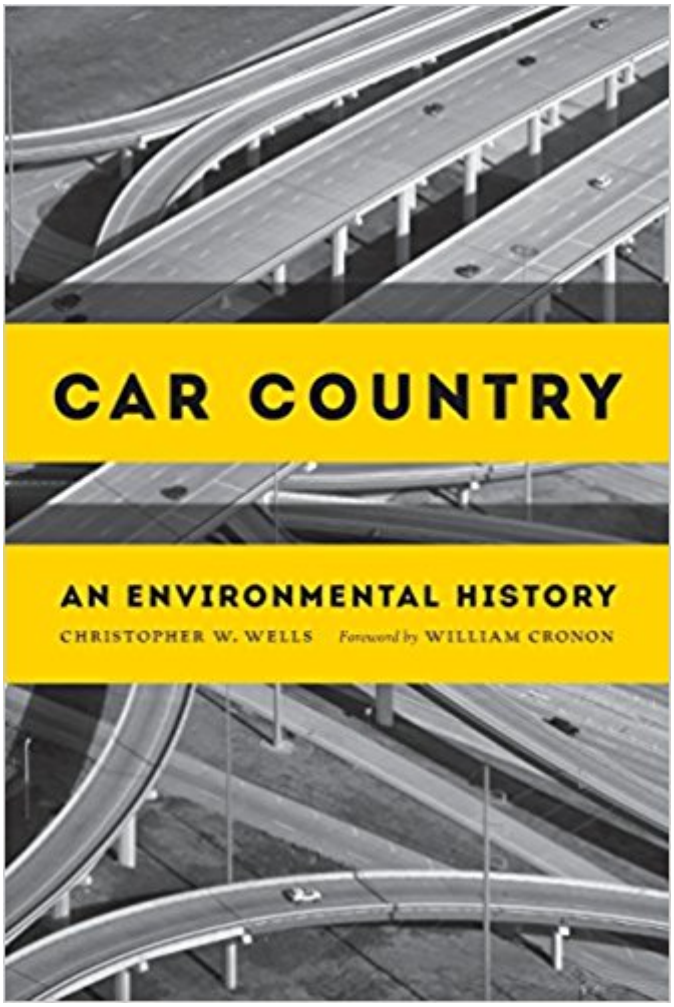
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Car Country: An Environmental History (Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books)



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Synopsis

For most people in the United States, going almost anywhere begins with reaching for the car keys. This is true, Christopher Wells argues, because the United States is Car CountryÃ¢â ¬â ¢a nation dominated by landscapes that are difficult, inconvenient, and often unsafe to navigate by those who are not sitting behind the wheel of a car.The prevalence of car-dependent landscapes seems perfectly natural to us today, but it is, in fact, a relatively new historical development. In Car Country, Wells rejects the idea that the nation's automotive status quo can be explained as a simple byproduct of an ardent love affair with the automobile. Instead, he takes readers on a tour of the evolving American landscape, charting the ways that transportation policies and land-use practices have combined to reshape nearly every element of the built environment around the easy movement of automobiles. Wells untangles the complicated relationships between automobiles and the environment, allowing readers to see the everyday world in a completely new way. The result is a history that is essential for understanding American transportation and land-use issues today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"One of the great strengths of the book is WellsÃ¢â ¬â„¢s meticulous work in revealing how the institutional, economic, and mental arrangements supporting Ã¢â ¬ËœCar CountryÃ¢â ¬â„¢ were set in place during the interwar years. . . . WellsÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book is a remarkable achievement."Ã¢â ¬ ¢Theodore Strathman, Southern California Quarterly"For students and

inhabitants of car country, Wells offers a terrific excavation of the sprawlscape that still drives our days."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Human Ecology"A fresh, well-documented history of roadbuilding policies in the United States between 1900 and 1960."Ã¢â ¬â ¢James M. Rubenstein, Journal of American History"Relatively few academic geographers have focused their research and publishing directly on the automobile and its geographical implications for life in the United States. Yet nothing over the past century has had a greater effect on AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s geography than the publicÃ¢â ¬â„¢s evolving dependence on the motor car, and, as well, the motor truck. . . . Christopher WellsÃ¢â ¬â„¢s opus will excite more geographers to focus on automobility as a fundamental factor underlying the American experience."Ã¢â ¬â ¢John A. Jackle, The AAG Review of Books"In Car Country, Christopher W. Wells offers a compelling history of AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s signature car-dependent landscapes. With lively anecdotes, effective imagery, and dozens of illustrations, the book also presents an accessible narrative that will help students visualize how Americans gradually and profoundly transformed their nation."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Michael R. Fine, American Historical Review"Wells has produced an important and persuasive new chapter in the history of American car culture."Ã¢â ¬â ¢David Blanke, Register of the Kentucky Historical Society"[Car Country] is an excellent and needed addition to the still remarkably small literature that explores the combined histories of Americans, automobiles, and the environment."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Tom McCarthy, The Michigan Historical Review"Wells argues that in order to understand how automobility has become so deeply Ã¢â ¬Ëœlocked inÃ¢â ¬â„¢ to contemporary American society, historians and geographers would do better to focus on the built landscape . . . [Car Country] belongs in the library of anyone interested in transportation, infrastructure, mobility, and land-use in twentieth-century America."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Ben Bradley, Journal of Historical Geography"Wells has produced an important and persuasive new chapter in the history of American car culture."Ã¢â ¬â ¢David Blanke, Register of the Kentucky Historical Society

"Car Country is arguably the most carefully researched, clearly written, and consistently engaging study anyone has yet written exploring the far-flung and extraordinarily complicated landscapes created by and for automobiles in the twentieth-century United States. The story is all the more remarkable because most of us who now inhabit this landscape take it so much for granted without having the slightest clue how it came into being."Ã¢â ¬â ¢William Cronon, from the Foreword"Car Country offers a valuable historical perspective that is directly related to many pressing contemporary issues."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Owen D. Gutfreund, author of Twentieth Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape

In 2012, there were ~ 8.6 million lane-miles of roads in the United States. Roads, parking facilities, driveways and sidewalks now imperviously cover > 43,000 sq mi, an area greater than Ohio. To learn more about how this happened, who some of the key players were, and why it may be a less stable result than you might think, you should purchase this book.While attending a lecture by James Longhurst, author of Bike Battles, at our local library, one of the librarians attending recommended that I have a look at Car Country. Am I glad she did. This is a much-needed and appreciated book. It was wonderfully readable and, like all perspective-changing works, required pauses to think about the implications of this remarkable history. The authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s love of the subject and curiosity about where his research on the book led him are both wide-ranging and as delightful as they are informative. Prior to reading Car Country, I had little idea of the extent to which roads constrain our experience of topography and of our social/cultural/natural/political/economic/technologic and environmental world.Dr. Wells is an environmental historian and provides information about our ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“receivedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• mobility environment that helps one better understand the everyday world and provides historical context for it. This is information that should appear in our schools to help our younger citizens understand the world we live in and the forces at play in maintaining a mobility policy equilibrium of sorts. Structures that seem ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“inevitableÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, from the gutting of mass transit in our cities, the decline of business in city centers and walkable, neighborhood-supporting businesses in abutting neighborhoods are the result of largely unplanned, crisis-mode adaptations to rapidly growing motor vehicle ownership/use as the primary mobility mode. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“VisionaryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• urban planners with little sense of downstream effects on liveability took the motor vehicle as the determinative element in nearly all future urban design. Opportunistic motor vehicle-driven suburban ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“designÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• with traffic-flow driven zoning ordinances followed in the post WW2 period. Planners. Developers in collaboration with planners and city councils now take these approaches as written in stone, although they were originally manifestations of cheap fuel-cheap land opportunism with little more planning than how to optimize profits and meet minimum zoning requirements.The cultural, political and economic drivers how we got to Car Country are splendidly described in this wide-ranging work. The history of road funding mechanisms and how fractious and resistant our countrymen were about road development and maintenance in the late 19th and early 20th century is fascinating. The role of the railroads in undermining rural road development is another aspect to road development I had not previously appreciated. I had

previously thought (and lore in the League of American Bicyclists maintains) that 19th century bicyclists were major drivers for Good Roads, prior to the large-scale appearance of motor vehicles on the scene. While bicyclists were a part of the story, more significant forces were in play.The author provides very good secondary and ample primary sources in his bibliography. IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read some of the secondary sources and appreciate that they are by the best in their fields. I will continue to cherry-pick this excellent bibliography for some time.

Car Country is a remarkably thorough book about embracement of cars in the USA starting in the late 1800s. The historical perspective weaves various elements of rural and urban developments that enlighten and reveal how our road system evolved with significant environmental impacts at various times. The description of the Ford factory in Detroit is particularly powerful and contrasts with the light hearted pictures routinely observed of folks with their Model T. It is full of facts and scholarly documentation so would not be a quick read for most folks. However, this is the kind of book I enjoy. I came away with a much better appreciation and knowledge of how we got our car country.

A well-crafted history of perhaps the most influential technology of the 20th Century. Wells' work helps us to see just how profoundly our world has been shaped by the automobile.

Over many years of reading non-fiction, two books stand out in my mind. One was entitled The Age of Reagan and the other was a biography of the Beatles. Most of what I read in non-fiction books is quickly forgotten as I move on to another book. But these two books stuck because the authors embedded the story within a larger context, and thus, I was able to connect new information to what I already knew. The Reagan book simply set the stage for Ronald Reagan by explaining American politics after WWII. While there was little Reagan biography, the reader could see just how he appeared on the scene. We know about Reagan, but we know little of what was happening around him. In the Beatles book the musical landscape in Europe and America was discussed and the emergence of the Beatles fit in perfectly. We expected to see Reagan and the Beatles because we could see the progressions.Christopher Wells has done the same thing in his book Car Country. In teaching my course the Automobile and American Culture I have read numerous books about car makers, car companies, and car culture. I have also read books about the development of our road system, which not page turners by any stretch of the imagination. While I have learned about Henry Ford, James Ward, and Albert Sloan, each book is too narrow in focus to look at the big picture. So,

I quickly forget the details and then the point altogether. Car Country does it differently. Christoper Wells synthesizes cars and culture in a way that is both interesting and thought-provoking. Instead of starting the book with a look at the first car, he begins with people and dirt roads. By explaining the actions of people in the country and the big cities, he sets the stage for how the automobile showed up and why cars like the Ford Model T were big hits. I find myself reading a passage of this book and saying, "No kidding. I did not know that." I never saw the connection between the 1901 Mercedes and the Model T for example.I initially overlooked this book because I thought it would be another assault on our automobile and how they are so bad for the environment, blah, blah, blah. But what Christopher Wells has done is introduce the automobile, nuts and all, to the reader in the context of early 20th century America. It is a fascinating book and will be highlighted and dog-eared for years to come.

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