Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place

German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860–1930

Edited by
David Blackbourn and James Retallack
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7 The Nature of Home: Landscape Preservation and Local Identities

THOMAS M. LEKAN

In his 1995 essay 'The Trouble with Wilderness,' the American environmental historian William Cronon offers a provocative critique of the wilderness idea in modern environmental thought. 'The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems,' he writes. 'Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation — indeed the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history ... As we gaze into the mirror [that wilderness] holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires.' The possibility of escaping into national or state parks, Cronon asserts, has exacerbated the dichotomy between nature and civilization, allowing us to shirk our responsibility towards the more humble nature in our backyards. Cronon also argues that the aesthetic tropes that buttress our fascination with wilderness — the sublime and the frontier — reify elitist, colonialist, racist, and patriarchal assumptions about our place in the natural order. Wilderness thus denies modern societies a 'middle ground' in which responsible human exploitation and natural processes might attain a balanced and socially just relationship where 'city ... [and] ... wilderness, can somehow be encompassed in the word "home."'

Cronon's essay received a hostile reception among environmentalists when it appeared just over a decade ago, for he appeared to be abandoning a linchpin of environmental philosophy: Henry David Thoreau's dictum 'In Wildness is the Preservation of the World.' Cronon's work has helped to spawn a broader debate among conservationists, land-use planners, and environmental ethicists about whether the
obsession with wilderness diverts attention from more pressing concerns about sustainable development, especially in the developing world. Yet few critics have noted how peculiarly North American the wilderness obsession is and how little resonance the wilderness debate has had within environmental writing on 'developed' civilizations such as Europe's. As Mark Cloc has noted recently, the conspicuous presence of over two millennia of human activity in Europe has focused attention on preserving the 'cultural landscape,' rather than the wilderness. Landscape preservationists in Germany saw this cultural landscape as the aesthetic, cultural, and even biological foundation of Heimat, or homeland, a term signifying an indelible attachment to place amidst the many displacements of modern society: mass migration to industrial cities, transnational commerce, fluid social-class boundaries, and the creation of the German Empire in 1871. Such belief in the power of landscape to shape the German homeland spurred the country's first attempts at environmental reform in the wake of rapid industrialization between 1860 and 1900. New social movements of Naturinschutz (nature conservation) and Heimatschutz (homeland protection) drew attention to the dark side of industrial progress, including the destruction of scenic landmarks and historic architecture, the mechanization of the countryside through stream regulation and tree plantations, and the loss of habitat for wild animal and plant species.

American conservation movements emerged around the same time, spurring intellectually fertile 'Atlantic crossings' about what constituted legitimate uses of the environment. In both countries, educated middle-class dissatisfaction with the environmental and social consequences of rapid industrialization — crowded and polluted cities, the economic and aesthetic impoverishment of the countryside, a feeling of personal and cultural alienation, and political unrest among manual labourers and immigrant groups — led to legislative and educational initiatives to beautify cities, protect the countryside and natural resources, and provide 'healthy' recreational options for low-income citizens. The belief that nature provided a sanctuary that crossed class, confessional, or ethnic differences had a powerful imaginative hold in both the United States and Germany after the 1860s.

German conservationists admired the U.S. government's decision to set aside large tracts of land as national parks, including Yellowstone in northwestern Wyoming (1872) and Yosemite in California (1890). Organizations such as the Nature Park Society argued that Germany and the Austrian lands should follow America's lead by establishing such reserves in Central Europe. The majority of nature conservationists and homeland protectionists, however, prized the unspectacular, human-shaped vernacular landscapes of their regional and local homelands, not remote, sublime wilderness. This humble perspective reflected not only the spatial limitations of Central Europe, but also long-standing institutional and cultural patterns of provincial self-determination and localist environmental perception. While many historians have dismissed German landscape preservation and Heimat movements as hopelessly agrarian-romantic, even proto-fascist, Cronon's interest in an environmental ethic of 'home' casts a new light on these groups' search for a middle ground between human use and ecological vitality. Indeed, the cultural landscape tradition and the Heimat movements that embraced it offered a significant historical alternative to the wilderness ethic and the narratives of environmental degradation and nation-building that underpinned it. The 'middle ground' of Imperial Germany nonetheless remained a shifting and elusive environmental goal, subject to differing interpretations depending on geographic scale, the social status of the preservation organization involved, and an organization's level of tolerance for the signs of industrialism and consumerism in the landscape.

Wilderness in the American Mind

American obsession with the wilderness began in the early nineteenth century among upper-middle-class male intellectuals in cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, who formulated a narrative of national development that stressed America's divine mission and its cultural distinctiveness from the Old World. As Roderick Nash notes in his classic Wilderness and the American Mind, Romantic ideals of the sublime and primitivism conferred new value on landscapes once deemed hostile, even morally repugnant, by the country's Puritan founders. While other nations might have an occasional wild peak or patch of heath, 'there was no equivalent of a wild continent. And if, as some suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe.' American elites seized upon wild nature as one of the few bases on which a favourable comparison could be made between the United States and the more civilized countries of the Old World. By the mid-nineteenth century, a torrent of voices participated in a new debate about 'nature' and its place in American culture,
including transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, landscape painters such as Thomas Cole and Thomas Moran, and natural historians and sportsmen who published their views in *Nature and American Naturalist.* As Cole remarked in 1836, "Though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, it still has features, and glorious ones, unknown in Europe. The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive characteristic of American scenery is its wilderness.""^{13}

In addition to glorifying the aesthetic and scientific advantages of their wilderness condition, American commentators found practical reasons for valuing the natural environment. George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864), for example, sounded the alarm about the danger of clear-cutting forests on river watersheds, particularly in the Adirondacks, that served as the headwaters of the Hudson River and New York City's water supply. Marsh, who had spent many years as a U.S. envoy to Turkey and then Italy, believed that forest clearance had transformed the Mediterranean basin from a fertile garden into an arid wasteland and triggered the decline of the Roman Empire. Unless the State of New York stepped in to save the Adirondack woodlands from lumber and mining interests, Marsh warned, New York City's water supply would be destroyed when the mountains could no longer act as a natural sponge to soak up rain and snow and deliver water downstream to quench the city's thirst. Marsh noted approvingly that European countries had regulated their timber supply by regulating forest clearance and developing scientific forestry. He urged that such measures be introduced in the United States lest American civilization share Rome's fate."^{15}

Seven years after the publication of Marsh's book, the United States became the first country in the world to set aside a large tract of land in perpetuity by designating over two million acres in northeastern Wyoming as Yellowstone National Park. Then, in 1885, a combination of sporting and business interests from New York City persuaded the State of New York to set aside 715,000 acres in the Adirondacks 'forever as wild forest lands."^{16} While the creation of Yellowstone protected the 'natural curiosities' in the park from commercial exploitation, the utilitarian motives that drove the Adirondack State Park served as the model for subsequent national conservation efforts. In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt established the U.S. Forest Service under the leadership of Gifford Pinchot to oversee the millions of acres removed from the public domain by the Forest Reserve Act of 1891. Pinchot, who had learned the techniques of 'scientific forestry' in France and Germany, pioneered the Progressive era's conservationist or 'wise-use' perspective on natural resources. He championed the use of federal power to guide natural resource development and applauded the application of technologies such as roads, rail lines, and dams to enhance access to such resources."^{18} Pinchot relied heavily on German-trained foresters who had practised 'sustained yield,' forestry in the woodlands of Prussia and Saxony, including Carl Schenck, who established the United States' first forestry academy, the Biltmore Forest School, on the Vanderbilt estate near Asheville, North Carolina."^{19}

While wilderness values did not provide the original impetus behind the creation of Yellowstone or Adirondack parks, the 1890s provided a new socio-economic and cultural framework in which wilderness came to dominate environmental thinking about national parks. John Muir, an acolyte of Ralph Waldo Emerson, led the charge to establish Yosemite National Park in 1890 solely on the basis of non-anthropocentric, preservationist values. For Muir, wilderness was no refuge; it was humankind's true home: 'Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity."^{20} As a member of the Sierra Club, Muir helped to transform the group from a mountaineering club into a lobbying organization with a national network of supporters dedicated to protecting wilderness."^{21} Muir and the Sierra Club reminded Congress that Yosemite's ancient sequoias were far older and more intricate than the finest works of European art and architecture; these were 'God's First Temples' and should be shielded from all traces of the 'Almighty Dollar.'"^{22}

Muir's success in saving Yosemite reflected a growing concern among the American reading public about the negative effects of urbanization on American democracy and the national character. The 1893 essay by the University of Wisconsin historian Frederick Jackson Turner on the 'closing' of the American frontier proposed that the confrontation of the frontiersmen with a primitive environment had provided the central drama of the American experience. As immigrant pioneers from Europe confronted America's wilderness, they shed their former culture, gaining a hardy individualism that was the basis of American democracy. Such a narrative of national development was especially appealing at this time. During the 1890s, the United States was experiencing intense anxieties about integrating immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and knitting together a country still
divided along regional lines in the aftermath of the Civil War. Without such a wilderness antagonist, Turner suggested, Americans might lose the very essence of their national character.23

Other commentators feared that the frontier’s closing would lead to the same dissoluteness and feminization that plagued European urban civilization. As the 1910 Handbook of the Boy Scouts of America explained, urbanization resulted in ‘degeneracy’ and people who were ‘strained and broken by the grind of the over-busy world;’ young boys would have to lead the nation back into the outdoors, where it might rediscover ‘the simple life of primitive times.’ Theodore Roosevelt echoed such fears of emasculation when he commented that only wilderness could promote the ‘vigorous manliness’ necessary to transform European men ‘in dress, in customs, and in mode of life.’24 If it was true that American democracy and masculine individualism depended on contact with a primitive environment, then wilderness protection guarded the very roots of national character.

Whereas American conservation historians once celebrated Roosevelt and his compatriots as a ‘pantheon of conservationist prophets,’ more recent work, partly in response to Cronon’s challenge to rethink wilderness, has revealed a ‘hidden history’ of conflict and violence associated with dispossession along the frontier and within the boundaries of national parks. Historians of the American West in the 1990s criticized Turner for his environmental determinism and erasure of Latinos, Asians, blacks, and especially indigenous peoples from his Western drama. As Cronon writes, ‘The myth of the wilderness as “virgin,” uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s own creation.’25 In Adirondack park, on the other hand, members of New York’s Forest Commission faced a landscape inhabited by Euro-Americans. These rural folk responded to the state’s encroachment on customary land use, including fishing, hunting, and timber gathering, with local acts of trespass, pilfering, and arson guided by a ‘moral ecology’ unintelligible through the simplifying and rationalizing lens of the state.26 Conservation and preservation appealed to Romantic nature as a font of authenticity and an antidote to an overly civilized urban existence, but simultaneously laid the foundation for a thoroughly modern and managerial approach to the natural environment and its human inhabitants.

Undergirding American conservationists’ desire to create wilderness or forestry preserves with fixed, carefully policed boundaries was a powerful ‘degradation narrative’ about ordinary people and their place in nature.27 Conservationists such as Marsh assumed that nature, when left undisturbed by human beings, retained a state of static harmony. All human impact was therefore deleterious: ‘Man is everywhere a disturbing agent,’ wrote Marsh. ‘Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discord.’28 Marsh assumed that indigenous peoples and the inhabitants of the countryside lacked the education and foresight necessary to be stewards of the natural world. In this view, the state, armed with technical and administrative expertise, was the sole body that could guarantee public environmental goods in a society dominated by short-term private gain.

Landscape and Homeland in the German Heimat Movement

The landscape preservation movements that emerged in Imperial Germany shared Americans’ belief that nature shaped national character and ameliorated social conflict, but did not use ‘wilderness’ as a touchstone of environmental integrity and aspiration. Because scientific forestry was already entrenched in German resource management by the 1880s, discussions about landscape protection tended to articulate a middle ground between conservationist and preservationist positions. More important, preservationist impulses emerged from a diverse array of local, grass-roots efforts in the 1880s and 1890s to protect local natural monuments for reasons of civic pride, small-town sociability, and tourist promotion. Known collectively as the Heimat movement, these organizations proved to be far more accommodating of local concerns than the top-down efforts of American federal and state governments, setting the tone for Germany’s decentralized and landscape-centred approach to environmental reform in subsequent decades.

Heimat advocates in Imperial Germany looked back on a rich array of Romantic forerunners in their call for lifestyle reforms based on a return to nature. In the early nineteenth century, for example, poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin and Novalis celebrated the untamed forest as a font of sublime sentiment, while nationalists such as the father of German gymnastics Friedrich Jahn, the playwright Heinrich von Kleist, and the painter Caspar David Friedrich imagined the woodlands as the primeval home of the Germanic tribes. Nationalists proposed that these tribes had once rebuffed the advance of Roman civilization, setting a
historical precedent for their contemporaries to throw off the yoke of Napoleon's 'Latin' tyranny. Other intellectuals, such as Ernst Moritz Arndt, imagined the nation's origins as fluvial rather than sylvan. In his 1813 tract Germany's River, Not Germany's Border (Deutschland's Strom, aber nicht Deutschlands Grenze), Arndt countered the French claim that the Rhine was France's 'natural' border by positing the river as the artery of the German national body. For Arndt, the 'Wars of Liberation' against France were the first glimmerings of a popular German national consciousness, the latest chapter in the age-old struggle of the Germanic Volk against its hereditary enemy.

Whereas Turner's frontier myth provided American conservationists with national-political reasons for protecting wilderness, Germany's preservationists looked to regionalist writers such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl to anchor their belief in cultural landscape diversity as the key to Germany's unique national character. Riehl's multi-volume Natural History of the German People (1853–69) insisted that national character emerged organically from the topography and culture of a particular territory, rather than from abstract declarations of individual rights. Riehl's foil was France, where culture emanated from the Parisian center into the provinces, whereas he envisioned Germany as a mosaic of culturally and geographically distinctive homelands that made up the whole without losing the integrity of the parts. Following Riehl, many nineteenth-century preservationists recast the aesthetic enjoyment of meadows, rock formations, and especially forests as a form of patriotic devotion. As Riehl once remarked, 'We must retain the forest not only to keep our stoves from growing cold in winter, but also to keep the pulse of our nation beating warmly and happily. We need it to keep Germany German.'

Despite the politically conservative origins of Heimat discourse, Celia Applegate and others have noted that the concept has been used in such a diverse array of cultural and political contexts that it is impossible to describe it as inherently reactionary. David Blackbourn's essay in this volume demonstrates that the Heimat 'sense of place' could be used to legitimate aggressive expansion into the 'Wild East' based on degradation narratives similar to those that guided American conservation thinking. As Blackbourn makes clear, social-Darwinist understandings of the German 'civilizing' mission among Slavs in Silesia and East Prussia drew upon an array of racist and völkisch discourses whose chauvinistic understandings of homeland later found expression in Nazi attempts at ethnic cleansing in the Wartheland. Yet these colonialist and xenophobic understandings of homeland coexisted with local, regional, and even democratic meanings, especially in the west-central Rhineland and parts of southern Germany. In these areas, Riehl's call to discover Germany's roots in the backwoods of the Fatherland found resonance among Heimat advocates who rediscovered local dialects, vernacular architecture, folklore, and natural monuments to assert the singularity of the local in an era of creeping administrative centralization, political polarization, and urban conflict. Heimat organizations did not challenge Prusso-centric stories of national development emanating from Berlin head on, but offered an alternative, emotionally accessible pathway to national feeling that endowed the nation with the familiarity of the hometown.

The beautification societies, hiking and alpine clubs, and natural history societies that embraced Riehl's ideas about 'land and people' argued that local nature provided common ground for nurturing consensual social relationships in all spheres of life. These societies worked to improve and render nature accessible by picking up trash in nearby meadows and forests, building and maintaining hiking trails to surrounding woodlands, creating promenades through municipal parks, fixing up familiar castle ruins, or raising funds to build a Bismarck or Moltke observation tower. During the 1880s, Germany witnessed a flowering of interest in regional cultures and the natural world; as one observer in the western Eifel region noted, 'National feeling was awakened and strengthened and with it a more conscious Heimat feeling, which let us recognize and treasure the beauty and uniqueness of our German land and especially the central mountains.' For Heimat organizations, nature did not need to be pristine to deserve research and care, for it stood as a material witness to millennia of local culture, folklore, and memory.

An example of Heimat environmental sentiment in the Rhine Province was the Beautification Society for the Siebengebirge, founded in 1869. This club dedicated itself to 'creating and maintaining roads, riding paths, and footpaths, as well as facilities that could contribute to the comfort and convenience of the Siebengebirge's visitors.' The Siebengebirge or 'Seven Mountains' region south of Bonn, which contained the Drachenfels ruins where Siegfried slayed the dragon in the Song of the Nibelungen, formed the gateway to the romantic Middle Rhine Gorge. It was already a popular destination for strollers and hikers when, in 1870, national unification renewed interest in the site because of its association with Germanic myths and sagas. The society
planted trees and shrubs, created thousands of kilometres of walking paths and carriage roads, placed benches and platforms at scenic lookouts, and helped to fund a funicular railway up the side of the mountain that whisked visitors to the Drachenfels summit. In 1886 alone, almost fifty trains or steamers stopped at the foot of the Drachenfels each day, discharging hundreds of German, English, American, and Dutch visitors into the woodlands and medieval ruins of the Seven Mountains.

Whereas the Beautification Society worked to make an already familiar landscape more accessible to visitors, other local societies promoted natural landmarks to turn images of 'backwardness' into virtue. In the Eifel region, a landscape of extinct volcanic cores and dense woodlands on the Belgian borderlands, the Eifel Association, founded in 1888, sought to unite a diverse array of local beautification societies with the common goal of dispelling the Eifel's reputation as the 'Prussian Sibera.' Already among the poorest regions in Germany, the Eifel experienced a depression in agricultural prices and poor harvests that necessitated a 1.5 million mark infusion of state and private donations in 1883. The Eifel undoubtedly belongs among the regions of Germany that enjoy an extraordinarily bad reputation,' noted an 1889 article in the journal of the Association of German Tourist Clubs. Nearby residents of Trier and Koblenz were more likely to have visited Switzerland or the Tirol than have 'placed even one foot' into the Eifel and were 'stunned' when it was suggested they make a hiking tour through the region.

To lift the Eifel out of its economic and psychological doldrums, the Eifel Association tried to stimulate domestic craft and textile production hampered by foreign competition, modernize agricultural production and forestry techniques, and improve fish hatcheries. But the organization viewed tourism above all as the region's future. Despite the growing Wanderlust of the 1880s, the Eifel had not managed to attract visitors in the same way as the Harz Mountains or the Thuringian Forest. A new market image for the region was offered as a solution. Like Americans who touted the advantages of their wilderness condition, Eifel Association leaders noted the salubrious effects of pure mountain air in 'Germany's lungs' for urbanites in desperate need of relaxation. To heighten the region's appeal to visitors, the Eifel Association marked trails, built protective huts for hikers, maintained a native-plant nursery, and printed brochures touting the region's woodlands, natural springs, and castle ruins. These brochures were distributed throughout Germany's major cities and in foreign countries. The Eifel Association also developed regional affiliates in Berlin, Munich, and even Chicago to maintain economic and emotional ties between the region and burgeoning metropolitan areas at home and abroad.

Rather than rejecting the city and the fruits of urban civilization, therefore, organizations such as the Beautification Society and the Eifel Association pioneered the commercialization of the natural world for urban consumers. The Eifelverein supplied visitors from Bonn and Cologne with exact train schedules, it lobbied railway officials to offer more Sunday trains to the region, and it distributed guidebooks pointing out the most important sites to visit and the proper gear for hiking. In place of Teddy Roosevelt's admonishment to rediscover 'savage virtues,' however, the association encouraged restrained, gentlemanly behaviour towards the Heimat, printing brochures describing the Ten Commandments of proper hiking behaviour, such as disposing of trash in appropriate receptacles, not picking flowers, and avoiding carving on trees. The association's postcards imagined nature as a bucolic, domesticated space, rather than a sublime spectacle. They depicted the Eifel as a land of villages nestled in carefully tended fields and orchards, usually punctuated by church spires or castle ruins, which framed nature as a place of contemplative pleasure and strolling.

The popular image of the Siebengebirge was also that of a harmonious cultural landscape accessible to the region's densely populated industrial districts. The Beautification Society called the Siebengebirge a 'unique garden of God' with fertile soil, abundant fruit orchards, and vineyards clinging precipitously to the sides of mountains. The stories and legends about the region anchored the Siebengebirge in popular memory, much as Heinrich Heine's poem 'Die Lorelei' had popularized the rocky outcropping further downstream. Thousands upon thousands annually make a pilgrimage [here], noted the Beautification Society, 'to get new energy and new spirit for the strains of their daily occupations on fresh hiking excursions.' The society emphasized that nature's beauties were available to all, regardless of class or confession; it required no special education to enjoy a hike along a Siebengebirge path and relax for a picnic in one of its meadows. Describing nature's social-hygienic function, the Beautification Society wrote, 'Especially in our time with its sharp social differences the ideal goods of the nation [such as nature] represent a conciliatory, balancing element.' Far from being a wilderness playground for wealthy hunters and recreation-seekers, nature in Imperial Germany served as an accessible, comforting site of homeland sentiment.
The communal sentiment that guided the *Heimat* movement's discovery of nature also shaped the inclusive character of the organizations themselves. Though participation required a basic knowledge of local history, folklore, and natural history, membership in local *Heimat*, hiking, and beautification societies was not bound by class or confession and remained open to all who could pay the modest annual dues. The clubs offered familiar and comfortable forms of local sociability deliberately shielded from the rancorous debate that characterized politics at the national level. Even though the Eifel Association consolidated a number of existing beautification societies in 1888 and had affiliates in Berlin and Chicago, its lifeblood remained local branches in Düren, Monschau, or Andernach, as well as larger groups in nearby Bonn and Cologne. In a similar vein, the Beautification Society for the Siebengebirge included members from as far away as Berlin, but most came from nearby communities such as Königswinter and Bad Honnef. The club attracted highly educated and well-to-do citizens, including several university professors, lawyers, doctors, and financiers, but also drew members with more modest income and educational backgrounds, such as small-business owners, teachers, foresters, and fixed-income retirees.\footnote{Inclusiveness stopped short of manual workers, who formed their own proletarian hiking groups towards the end of this period, as well as women, who usually joined only in conjunction with their spouses. Membership in the Beautification Society nevertheless provided a venue for a broad cross-section of the province’s middle classes to engage in civic-minded activities designed to improve the province’s environment, a far cry from the reactionaries’ “cultural despair” that scholars once used as a label for middle-class *Heimat* activities.} Inclusiveness stopped short of manual workers, who formed their own proletarian hiking groups towards the end of this period, as well as women, who usually joined only in conjunction with their spouses. Membership in the Beautification Society nevertheless provided a venue for a broad cross-section of the province’s middle classes to engage in civic-minded activities designed to improve the province’s environment, a far cry from the reactionaries’ “cultural despair” that scholars once used as a label for middle-class *Heimat* activities.\footnote{Given the economic and symbolic significance of natural landscapes for the *Heimat* movement, these groups were among the German Empire’s earliest supporters of nature conservation. As activities such as mining, agricultural reclamation, river canalization, waste disposal, and housing construction threatened natural landmarks, local societies often banded together to pressure municipal and provincial officials to designate sites as “natural monuments” or nature parks. When basalt mining ripped open a gash on the side of the Oelberg peak in the Siebengebirge in 1885, the Beautification Society joined forces with local residents to save the region from environmental obliteration.\footnote{These efforts led Prussian officials to approve lotteries in 1898 and 1899 to help purchase land from mine owners. Officials even allowed the society to dispossess proprietors of land that “as a consequence of present or expected use might spoil the beauties of the Siebengebirge.”} Grants from the Rhenish Provinzialverband (Provincial Association), an organ of self-administration in the Rhine Province, as well as the cities of Bonn and Cologne, helped to secure the core parcels for the nature park. After the campaign’s successful completion, the Beautification Society changed its central goal from promoting recreational development to “the lasting protection of the Siebengebirge against destruction and damage.”\footnote{This combination of state support and private initiative reflected a long-standing tradition in the Prussian provinces of encouraging private organizations’ cultural activities through grants and assistance, rather than direct state financing and administration.} Such a private-public partnership offered a significant alternative to the centralized, managerial ethos that led to the creation of the Adirondack State Park, Prussian officials severely curtailed the Beautification Society’s powers of eminent domain. It did not sanction dispossession in cases where “expected uses” did not involve activities that destroyed the area’s aesthetic beauty, such as forestry, or where the Beautification Society could convince owners to restrict their uses voluntarily.\footnote{In practice, the society used its right to eminent domain sparingly (by 1912 it had only dispossessed two owners of parcels totalling less than three hectares) so as not to agitate local businessmen and mine owners who bemoaned declining profits and threatened to file suit against the society. In line with the belief that the cultural landscape was a working environment, the society never sought to root out all economic activities in the region. Mining continued in several parts of the region, viticulture remained a mainstay of the local economy, and the society was among several landowners who practised selective cutting of hardy trees to generate additional income. There was no assumption on the part of the state, in other words, that the Siebengebirge needed to be partitioned off from the surrounding population, or that a local group such as the Beautification Society was incapable of serving as a steward of the landscape.}

Seeing Like a Province: Nature Conservation and *Heimat* Protection, 1904–1918

Local efforts to research, advertise, and protect natural areas led to growing pressures on Imperial and Prussian officials to set aside scenic
or scientifically significant natural areas from economic development. After visiting the Siebengebirge region in 1898, the Breslau schoolteacher Wilhelm Wetekamp, a member of the Prussian parliament, called for a 'declaration of untouched areas as state parks similar to the national parks of the United States.' Wetekamp's appeal led the parliament to commission botanist Hugo Conwentz, the head of the West Prussian Provincial Museum in Danzig, to publish a report outlining the measures needed to protect the country's natural landmarks. The result of Conwentz's three-year effort was The Endangerment of Natural Monuments and Recommendations for Their Preservation, published in 1904 and the establishment of the State Office for Natural Monument Preservation (Staatliche Stelle für Naturdenkmalpflege) within the Prussian Ministry of Culture in 1906. The use of the term Naturdenkmalpflege marked this 'care of natural monuments' as the 'youngest child' of Denkmalpflege, or heritage preservation, which already enjoyed state support in Prussia, Bavaria, and Hessen. Naturdenkmalpflege thus recognized the close association between historic preservation and nature conservation in the cultural landscape tradition.

Whereas Americans had once looked to Germany as a model of scientific resource management, Wetekamp took his cue from the U.S. experience in calling for the creation of national parks in Germany. Yet Conwentz recognized that large-scale reserves such as Yellowstone were inappropriate given Germany's economic conditions, size, and population density; this one park alone would have encompassed the entire Kingdom of Saxony. The Nature Park Society, a private organization founded in Stuttgart in 1900, was successful in raising money to secure the first parcels of land for national parks in the Austrian Alps and the Lüneburger Heath, yet promoting such large-scale reserves remained the exception rather than the rule in Imperial Germany. Unlike the National Forest Service or the National Park Service, the Prussian State Office was to serve as an advisory agency for a decentralized array of regional and local efforts to secure individual natural objects or smaller conservation regions. In line withalist traditions in German environmental perception, Conwentz argued that a handful of large-scale reserves could never accomplish the broad-based environmental education necessary to secure the country's natural monuments. 'It is much more appropriate and feasible,' he suggested, 'to preserve in their original state smaller areas with varied characteristics scattered throughout the entire region, preferable in every part of the country ... here an erratic block, a piece of terminal moraine, or a group of cliffs, there a small moor, a heath, or a stretch of woodlands.' Conwentz also indicated that it was neither practical nor desirable to place all responsibility for environmental preservation in state hands. As the public-private partnerships at the Siebengebirge had shown, uniting municipal governments, private organizations, and individual owners in common cause with the state enabled local entities to identify and protect sensitive areas according to community priorities.

Although Conwentz's report condemned the environmental attitudes and irresponsible land use that destroyed cherished natural monuments, it did not wholly endorse the 'degradation narrative' found among American nature conservationists. Rural residents do not appear as culprits in his report, nor did he see contemporary environmental problems as the result of decline from a golden age of environmental harmony. In fact, Conwentz recognized that an exclusive focus on pristine landscapes might lead citizens to ignore the humble nature of their homeland. 'Here and there the concept [of natural monument] will need to be somewhat broadened,' he wrote, 'since completely untouched landscapes, as in other developed countries, hardly exist anymore.' Conwentz's cosmopolitan vision of nature conservation also did not confine itself exclusively to Germany's native species. He encouraged preservationists to protect the burchberry, Cornus suecica, which was a rare specimen in German woodlands but widespread in northern Russia, Finland, and Sweden.

Conwentz's devolution of environmental stewardship to the communal level achieved some degree of success. The micro-optics of Heimat enthusiasm encouraged residents and visitors to move beyond the distanced, panoramic ways of seeing that were common in nineteenth-century tourist culture. Local environmentalism invited residents to see, feel, touch, and smell the nuanced textures and subtle interdependencies of the vernacular landscape. Hikers in Bad Godesberg, for example, noticed a precipitous decline in the population of local reptiles and amphibians due to the draining of bogs and ponds for agriculture, the straightening of streams for transportation, and the dumping of polluted waste water. Hidden from sight and inhabiting uninviting swamps, bogs, and ponds, these creatures had disappeared in many areas, victims of what the author called a 'war of destruction against original nature.' Birds could escape such destruction by flying to a different habitat, but reptiles and amphibians 'cling to the soil of Heimat to a much greater extent and for them a change in habitat caused by development means in most cases not the signal to migrate, but
rather certain death.⁶⁰ The author suggested that developing an ethical attitude towards frogs, toads, and salamanders required citizens to move beyond their traditional revulsion to these animals' wet or slimy skins. They could then learn the magic and harmony of a 'frog concert' at a local pond, or see that turtles found with wrinkled or destroyed shells indicated that there were deeper disturbances in the balance of nature affecting all species, including human beings.⁶¹

The conviction that environmental ethics required the engagement of all the senses led some preservationists to advocate forms of preservation that moved beyond the nature-reserve model altogether. To counteract the 'disfigurement' of Germany's landscape, for example, the music professor Ernst Rudorff founded the German Association for Heimat Protection (Deutscher Bund Heimatschutz, or DBH) in 1904, an organization whose holistic vision of landscape protection included protecting natural and historic monuments, saving the indigenous animal and plant world, promoting regionally distinct architectural styles, and researching folk art, mores, festivals, and costumes.⁶² With a membership that often included university professors, architects, landscape architects, and high-ranking civil servants, homeland-protection organizations were far more elitist than their predecessors in the local Heimat movement. The fledgling group's most important nature-protection campaign was the unsuccessful 1904 bid to save the Laufenburg Rapids on the Upper Rhine from a hydroelectric dam. According to one DBH pamphlet, the dam promised to destroy 'one of the most beautiful landscape scenes in Germany, or indeed the world.'⁶³ The association argued that the benefits of hydroelectric power and the lure of jobs at the electric plant did not outweigh the losses to the area's tourist industry. Such pragmatic advice was ignored when a regional advisory board approved the dam project in short order and let the rapids be obliterated. The homeland-protection movement had succeeded, however, in putting environmental protection on the national agenda, at least among cultural elites, and moving beyond Conwentz's conciliatory approach to state and industrial interests.

Homeland protectionists' pressure also helped to bring about legislation that guarded the vernacular landscape, even though the Imperial state remained steadfastly unwilling to infringe upon the rights of property owners. Rudorff was instrumental in the passage of a 1902 Prussian Law Against the Disfigurement of Outstanding Landscapes; soon thereafter, the newly founded DBH tried to expand the law to include areas that were not 'exceptionally scenic.' Though the 1907 revised law fell short of their expectations, homeland protectionists serving on local advisory boards were able to use it to exert behind-the-scenes influence on both building and historic preservation projects.⁶⁴ Despite their limitations, the disfigurement laws went far beyond contemporary American or British efforts to protect the countryside, paving the way for comprehensive landscape planning, or Landschaftspflege, to emerge as a key area of preservation concern in the interwar period.

Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who became DBH chairman in 1904, set the tone for the landscape planning ethos in his influential Works of Culture series (1901–17).⁶⁵ To a far greater extent than Rudorff, Schultze-Naumburg believed that planners and landscape designers could naturalize industrial technologies in the cultural landscape. Using side-by-side photographs of 'good' and 'bad' design, Schultze-Naumburg set out with missionary zeal to re-form the entire 'culture of the visual': houses, monuments, bridges, streets, forests, machines, even military installations should be merged organically into the surrounding built and natural environments.⁶⁶ Schultze-Naumburg also disparaged modern farmers' tendency to eliminate hedgerows in the interests of larger fields, because their removal destroyed the habitat of birds. Anticipating modern ecological arguments about feedback mechanisms in nature, he noted that once these natural insect eaters were exterminated, farmers had to rely on artificial insecticides, to which insects gradually developed resistance, prompting even greater chemical intervention.⁶⁷

Like Conwentz, Schultze-Naumburg soon realized that homeland protection could best accomplish its goals by devolving responsibilities and activities onto regional affiliates and local clubs, each pursuing its own program of heritage preservation. In the Rhineland, the Rheinish Association for Monument Preservation and Heimat Protection, founded in 1906, helped provincial leaders to protect the area's classical antiquities, such as the amphitheatre ruins in Xanten and the thermal baths at Trier.⁶⁸ Rheinish Association members and travellers viewed these ruins as proof that the eighty-year-old Rhine Province had had 'civilization' 1000 years before the rest of Germany, with the river serving as the dividing line between civilized Germans and the 'Lithuanians' to the east.⁶⁹ Following Schultze-Naumburg's lead, the Rheinish Association embraced a forward-looking approach to environmental management that sought to blend modern structures into their cultural and natural surroundings. In an article on bridge design, for example,
one Rhenish homeland protectionist claimed it was no longer possible to argue that 'there can be no railway connection between Remscheid and Solingen because the romantic Wuppertal may be disfigured by a large bridge.' The proper question was to ask how the bridge might be constructed as inoffensively as possible by drawing on nearby organic materials and mimicking the forms and textures of the surrounding environment.

The German attempt to articulate a 'middle ground' that cautiously embraced industrial modernity was difficult to realize in the American case because of the tensions that emerged between conservationists and preservationists. While Muir and Pinchot parted ways in 1897 over the issue of sheep grazing on forest reserves, their debate over damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley in northern California permanently split the ranks of American conservationism. In 1908, Secretary of Interior James R. Garfield approved San Francisco's petition to dam Hetch Hetchy valley in order to create a drinking-water reservoir and provide hydroelectricity for the city. Hetch Hetchy's borders lay entirely within Yosemite National Park; the petition thus tested the government's resolve to set aside certain wilderness areas in perpetuity. Pinchot, whose utilitarianism led him to advocate solutions that 'served the greatest benefit to the greatest number,' favoured the reservoir, and convinced President Roosevelt to support the city's petition. John Muir and the Sierra Club opposed this infringement of laws protecting the national parks and launched an ultimately unsuccessful public-relations campaign to save Hetch Hetchy. The debate that ensued drove a wedge between conservationists and preservationists, particularly at the national level, which persists in varying degrees to the present.21

By contrast, German homeland protectionists embraced a compromise position that sanctioned certain economic activities and technologies as compatible with sustaining the integrity of the cultural landscape. It enabled Germans to envision, if not always realize, an honourable place for humankind in nature that included using the natural world for utilitarian ends. Even though the DBH did not seek to exclude ordinary people from natural landscapes, however, the organization's growing hostility to consumerism and commercial culture left increasingly less room for local initiative. Unlike the more populist Heimat movements of the 1880s and 1890s, homeland protectionists in the decade before the First World War clearly saw themselves as part of a 'domesticizing mission' designed to mould people's perceptions according to their own aesthetic priorities.22 Rudorff satirized the decision of the Beautification Society for the Siebengebirge to build the Drachenfels railway up the side of the mountain as 'bar-hopping in altered form' and demanded instead that visitors be mindful of the 'genuine, living piety for Nature.'73 Homeland protection journals devoted enormous energy to policing the boundaries of good taste by preventing the spread of billboards in the countryside, rooting out kitsch in home gardens and local monuments, and discouraging the 'disease' of Bismarck towers.

The patronizing tone of such efforts limited the appeal of homeland protection for Germans of more modest backgrounds, which only fuelled members' misgivings about 'mass society' and the democratic aspirations of late Imperial Germany. During the war, homeland protection groups allied closely with the state to bolster sagging morale on the home front, abandoning their roots in the locality in favour of Prusso-German and ethnocentric appeals to homeland as the foundation of 'Germanic' character. Scepticism about ordinary people's behaviour in nature turned into outright hostility during the culture wars of the late Weimar Republic, a time when Schultzze-Naumburg concluded that Germans' lack of environmental conviction stemmed from pernicious 'foreign' influences and racial degeneracy. In 1930 he joined the National Socialist party, convinced that only the Hitler movement recognized the biological origins of the country's national crisis.74

The xenophobic Heimat sensibility that grew out of the war experience and contributed to the 'Conservative Revolution' of the 1920s still remained merely an undercurrent of anxiety during the 1890s and early 1900s. During the period of the German Empire, it never successfully displaced preservationists' localist understandings of homeland rooted in cultural, historical, geographical, and natural-historical understandings of Heimat and nation. The majority of Wilhelmine preservationists remained traditional conservatives who embraced the power of aesthetic training to create better Germans. In the last volume of the Works of Culture, published in 1916, Schultzze-Naumburg noted optimistically that environmental destruction had slowed since 1900 and that public edification efforts had achieved noticeable results. 'One may not say, that it is merely fate and that it cannot be otherwise,' noted Schultzze-Naumburg, 'we humans are the ones who have caused the transformation of the earth's surface. It depends on our will to shape it in a different way.'75 Before the First World War, Schultzze-Naumburg, like many of his compatriots, remained a 'child of the nineteenth century' who believed in the potential of environmental reform to create better citi-
zens, stimulate lasting attachments to local homelands, and anchor national patriotism.

Conclusion

A comparison of the American wilderness and German cultural-landscape approaches to environmental protection underscores the cultural vitality and institutional significance of the local in Imperial Germany. This comparison reveals that environmentalists in both the United States and Germany around 1900 drew upon a common framework of Romantic discourse that posited nature as the wellspring of national identity. Cultural anxieties about modernity, rather than ecological concern in a present-day sense, spurred preservationists in both societies to designate particularly scenic or historically significant landscapes as national landmarks. In these areas, aesthetic contemplation or, increasingly, vigorous hiking, camping, or climbing would connect visitors to the roots of their national character and ameliorate the social conflicts, political polarization, and public health concerns that accompanied urbanization and industrialization. These concerns emerged especially in educated middle-class circles, whose humanistic and natural-scientific training enabled them to identify the most scenic and scientifically valuable landmarks. While bourgeois groups applauded the back-to-nature ethos of their time, many maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the democratization of nature in their societies and remained sceptical that ordinary citizens could be competent stewards of the natural environment. German homeland protection societies emphasized proper aesthetic training as the solution to the dilemmas of mass nature appreciation; in the United States, politicians and conservationists advocated the creation of reserves separate from population centres and managed by the state. Social class thus provides a critical lens for understanding shared cultural and environmental anxieties about nature and popular politics.

Despite these similarities in the social origins and cultural attitudes of landscape preservationists on both sides of the Atlantic, there remained significant differences between how American and German preservationists ‘saw’ the landscape and its inhabitants. On the American side, progressive foresters and wilderness advocates turned to European models of forest control, linked to Prussia’s golden age of enlightened absolutism, to justify and implement a new system of forest reserves and national parks designed to curtail human use. Professional expertise, rather than indigenous knowledge or local priorities, guided the development of these reserves. As a result, the United States government created some of the world’s most scenic and biologically significant nature parks, but earned the lasting enmity of indigenous peoples and rural folk for whom enlightened conservation meant dispossession and violence. In Germany, by contrast, nature conservationists and homeland protectionists found nature more readily in their backyards. *Heimat* organizations proposed that each landscape, be it national, regional, or local, reflected centuries of interaction between an area’s human inhabitants and their natural environment, ideally producing a ‘middle ground’ in which human agriculture and industry emerged organically from the existing local contours of the homeland. The inclusive spirit of *Heimat* organizations and their local optics of landscape protection emphasized nature as an accessible, public good whose care should emanate from partnerships that included municipal officials, private organizations, local landowners, and interested citizens, not just the national state.

The German preservationists who sought to protect their homeland’s natural heritage admired the American national park model, but recognized that Germany had neither the space nor the vast territory in the public domain to create such reserves in their densely populated country. The limitations of space and territory, however, may have produced beneficial results when viewed from our contemporary environmental perspective. America’s network of national parks and forest reserves, often distant from major population centres, created an artificial divide between ‘humans’ and ‘nature’ that impeded efforts to develop sustainable forms of economic development. Too often, notes William Cronon, this dichotomy depicted all human use as abuse, setting too high a standard for what counted as pristine and encouraging individuals to escape the immediate environmental ramifications of their actions in distant preserves of sublime natural beauty.

German preservationist leaders, such as Hugo Conwentz and Paul Schultze-Naumburg, recognized the problems of this ‘wilderness hangup’. They noted that a network of isolated, large-scale reserves that failed to address the working landscape could not meet the pressing challenges of development or anchor *Heimat* sentiment across German society. They helped to shape a trajectory of preservation that placed the quotidian landscapes of home, not distant, sublime spaces, at the centre of environmental perception and care. In the long run, this localist strategy boosted the country’s total number of protected areas,
helped to diffuse their recreational and conservation benefits throughout the country, and increased the overall percentage of the country’s land devoted to nature reserves, nature parks, natural monuments, and landscape protection zones. According to the World Resources Institute, by 2003 Germany had 7,607 protected areas, the equivalent of 31.7 per cent of its total land area; in the United States, the comparable figures were 3,448 and 15.8 per cent, respectively.77

Even Aldo Leopold, one of America’s leading philosophers of wilderness, recognized that a sustainable land ethic required a serious look at European patterns of land use. By the 1930s Leopold had rejected German game and forest management techniques, which seemed increasingly fascist in their rigid control of nature, in favour of wilderness preservation. But he always saw wilderness as one plank in a larger strategy of regional planning that did not yet exist in the United States outside select East Coast cities. ‘Western Europe,’ he wrote in 1949, ‘has resistant biota. Its inner processes are tough, elastic, resistant to strain. No matter how violent the alterations, the pyramid, so far, has developed some new modus vivendi which preserves its habitability for man, and for most of the other natives.78 Institutional, cultural, and environmental factors in Imperial Germany helped landscape preservation organizations to build this pyramid of resistance. They articulated a less dichotomous view of nature and culture than the wilderness ethic, a middle ground that provided a more effective language (if not always concrete reforms) for actively shaping the industrial landscapes of modernity, rather than merely compensating for their worst excesses.

NOTES


2 Ibid., 89.

3 For a critique and assessment of Cronon’s work, see the forum in Environmental History 1, no. 1 (1996) and the essays in J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, eds., The Great New Wilderness Debate (Athens, Ga., 1998).


5 The literature on regionalism and Heimat in German culture is extensive and cannot be cited here in its entirety. Useful works that detail its political history and cultural significance include Celia Applegate, A Nation of Provincial: The German Idea of Heimat (Berkeley, 1990) and Alon Confino, The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory (Chapel Hill, 1997).


9 On Heimat as an expression of anti-modern, anti-democratic, or chauvinistic cultural pessimism, see Klaus Bergmann, Agrarromantik und Großstädtefreundschaft (Meisenheim am Glan, 1970); Geert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, Die Liebe zur Landschaft, vol. 1, Natur in Bewegung (Munich, 1996); Roll-Peter Sieferle, Fortschrittseinde? Opposition gegen Technik und Industrie von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart (Munich, 1984); and Ina-Marie Greverus, Auf der Suche nach Heimat (Munch, 1979). Jennifer Jenkins’s chapter in this volume offers similar observations about the modernity of Wilhelmine cultural politics in her analysis of Heimat artists’ attempt to bridge modernist experimentation and regionalism in the visual arts. Other contributors, such as Caitlin Murdock and Tara Zahra, explore the tensions that emerged in the ‘middle ground’ between emerging ethnic constructions.


11 Ibid., 69.


14 George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature: or, Physical Geography as Modified by


17 For a good overview of these local, state, and federal conservation efforts in forest conservation, see Richard P. Harmond and Thomas J. Curran, eds., Environmentalism and the Government (Malabar, Fla., 2005), chaps. 1–2.

18 Ibid., 23–4; Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 133–6.


20 John Muir, Our National Parks (Boston, 1901), 1. Cited in Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 94.


24 These quotes are cited in Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 148–50.

25 Cronon, 'Trouble with Wilderness,' 79. See also Mark Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (Oxford, 1999).


27 On the ingredients of this degradation narrative, see Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature, 14–15.


31 Riehl, Natural History of the German People, 49.

32 Applegate, Nation of Provincials, 4.


34 Applegate, Nation of Provincials, 61–3; Confino, Nation as a Local Metaphor, 113. Several scholars have argued that the seemingly innocent panoramic vistas offered by Molkke and Bismarck towers symbolized urban leisure class domination over the countryside. See, for example, Joachim Kleinmanns, Schau ins Land: Aussichtstürme (Marburg, 1999).


37 Verschönerungs-Verein für das Siebengebirge und Obercasseln (Bonn, 1895); Winfried Biesing, Drachenfelscher Chronik. Geschichte eines Berges, seiner Burg und seiner Burgruinen (Cologne, 1980).

38 Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge, Zur Rettung des Siebengebirge (Bonn, 1886), 5–6.


43 On the commercialization of nature in the *Heimat* movement, see Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, 63–72.


47 Verschönerungsverein für das Siebengebirge, Geschäftsbericht für das Jahr 1902 and Verzeichnis der Mitglieder 1905, in ALVR 3733.


50 Abschrift vom Ministerium des Innern, 27 Feb. 1899, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BAK), vol. 245, nr. 185, fol. 225; see also ALVR 3733, fol. 57.

51 ‘Satzungen des Verschönerungsvereins für das Siebengebirge,’ 13 Apr. 1899, ALVR 3733.


55 On Denkmalspflege efforts, see Charlotte Tacke, *Denkmal im sozialen Raum. Nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1995); and Rudy Koshar, *Germany’s Transient Past: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1998).


57 Conwentz, *Gefährdung der Naturdenkmäler*, 82.

58 Ibid., 6.

59 Ibid., 8.


61 Braetz, ‘Schutz den heimischen Kriechtieren und Blumen!’ 24.


64 Ibid., 81, 87–91, 167–70.


PART FOUR

Language Borders