

Aboriginal Plant Use in Canada's Northwest Boreal Forest. Robin J. Marles, Christina Clavelle, Leslie Monteleone, Natalie Tays, and Donna Burns. UBC Press, Vancouver. 2000. \$29.95 (paperback), \$75.00 (clothbound). Pp. 368. ISBN 0-7748-0738-5 (paperback), 0-7748-0737-7 (clothbound).

Aboriginal Plant Use in Canada's Northwest Boreal Forest describes over 200 of the traditional plants and plant products (foods, medicines, and materials for handicrafts or technologies) of the Cree, Dene, and Métis peoples living in the northwest boreal forest regions of central to Northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The book is a compilation of original ethnobotanical fieldwork and supplemental information derived from the literature (on ethnobotany, nutritive and medicinal plant value, and ecological impact and economic potential of commercial plant development).

It attempts more than simply a list of useful plants by including an extensive introductory section detailing research methods, and ecological and cultural backgrounds. Sources of related literature on boreal plant uses are also included. In addition to documenting plant uses, the objectives of the fieldwork included training Aboriginal students to conduct culturally-appropriate research within their own communities, identifying plants with the potential for sustainable harvesting and economic development, and preparing Aboriginal peoples for a role in the development process. The authors indicate their concern for maintaining Aboriginal rights to intellectual properties, and briefly outline how they attempted to respect these and other related issues (e.g., including only information that elders wished to have shared, and maintaining confidentiality by using a code to identify contributors).

The majority of the book is a listing of boreal plants and their traditional uses, organized into sections as follows: Fungi, Lichens, Nonvascular Plants (i.e., Mosses), Vascular Spore-Producing Plants (i.e., Horsetails, Clubmosses, Ferns), Gymnosperms, and Angiosperms. Plants are organized alphabetically within each section by scientific name, but English and local Aboriginal names are also included. For each plant, a 1-2 page description of the plant (including photograph), its habitat, and uses for food, medicine, technology and ritual is provided. Properties of each plant (based on the literature) that may be relevant to documented and/or potential uses are listed, and a brief assessment of the potential for economic development is provided. The appendices contain a list of contributors (coded by number, gender and cultural affiliation) and a list of voucher specimens. A glossary, list of references cited, and index are also included.

Overall, the book is informative, well-written, highly readable, and serves a broad range of academic, government, commercial, and local interests. The plant use information will be a handy resource for anyone interested in culturally-important plants of the Canadian northwest boreal forest, while the additional research methodologies, cultural information, ecological background and development potential provide a context that will enable the reader to appreciate some of the wider aspects related to documenting Aboriginal plant knowledge and use.

Kelly Bannister
Department of Botany
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B. C. V6T 1Z4