REVIEWS

The Great Basin: A Natural Prehistory, Revised and Expanded Edition

Reviewed by David Byers

Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology Department,
Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322

Donald Grayson's (2011) *The Great Basin: A Natural Prehistory* provides a "revised and expanded" edition of his earlier book *The Desert's Past: A Natural Prehistory of the Great Basin*. This is a fantastic book. Whether you are an archaeologist, paleoecologist, or just fancy a little geomorphology, you will find something of interest within this 418-page volume. Those with just a passing interest in Great Basin prehistory will appreciate the engaging narrative, while academics and specialists in a variety of fields will appreciate the comprehensive list of references found in the footnotes at each chapter's conclusion, as well as the 53-page reference section at the end of the book. In fact, this book is so elegantly written, jargon free, and comprehensive, that it has the potential to appeal to anyone who shares a curiosity about the West's interior basins.

The Great Basin includes portions of Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Oregon, and California. Given its areal extent, in combination with a highly variable landscape ranging from 13,000-ft. plus mountains to the lowest elevations in North America, it is not surprising that the region has attracted scientific research from a diverse suite of disciplines. From the early research of Ernst Antevs and Julian Steward to a multitude of more recent studies, Great Basin research has been fundamental to the broader understanding of both the cultural and natural prehistories of North America. Grayson leaves no stone unturned as he moves the reader through the late Pleistocene and Holocene landscape. He does so with a narrative that is rich in detail, amassing data from multiple, diverse disciplines that range from history and archaeology to ichthyology and paleoclimatology. Yet while comprehensive in scope and information intensive, the volume is still an engaging read.

Much like the previous edition, *The Great Basin* is divided into six sections, each containing several chapters. The text has seen some minor modification from the previous edition, largely through the addition of new information and the occasional deletion of items no longer relevant, combined with some minor reorganization. These sections begin with *Part One: The Great Basins*. Here we participate in a discussion of how the Great Basin has been defined by various disciplines, ranging from hydrology to ethnography. *Part Two: Some Ice Age Background* contains two chapters, the first detailing what we do and do not know about the peopling of the Americas, and a second detailing current discussions on late Pleistocene extinctions and the role people may have played in them. These chapters have been updated from the previous edition with new information on sites, such as Paisley Caves, that have come to the forefront in recent years, and a more nuanced discussion of late Pleistocene extinctions that is—unfortunately—already becoming outdated. *Part Three: The Late Ice Age Great Basin* includes chapters discussing the physical environment, as well as the floral and faunal communities, to be found during this time. *Part Four: The Last 10,000 Years* provides an exhaustive overview of Holocene paleoecology and delivers a solid first stop for archaeologists looking for paleoenvironmental data to help them understand archaeological phenomena. Of interest to me was a review of the recent discussion on Holocene large-mammal population histories, a subject a number of us will likely discuss for years to come. *Part Five: Great Basin Archaeology* likewise consists of a single chapter, but what a chapter it is. Here we find a comprehensive overview of many current discussions in the field, ranging from the relationships between fluted and stemmed points during the area's earliest occupations to middle Holocene population trends and the late Holocene Numic spread.

The Great Basin not only identifies what we do know, which is quite a bit, but also what we don't know.

With regard to the latter topic, Grayson highlights several problems worthy of further study, and I find it exciting to know that we still have much to learn. These problems range from the well-known, such as the peopling of the Americas and the fate of the megafauna, to much less widely known issues, such as the origins of pupfish in Devil's Hole and the "Walker Lake-Carson Sink conundrum." Highlighting remaining questions relevant to the prehistoric Great Basin only serves to focus attention on where future research might proceed to fill in gaps in our present understanding of the region's prehistory.

The general rule for book reviews is compliment, content, and critique. I found the first two easy, but finding fault with *The Great Basin* is difficult at best. I might engage in some minor nitpicking over Grayson's critiques of a few of the reviewed archaeological studies, but these are better addressed in other venues. One place the author can make improvements is in the presentation. As mentioned above, Grayson has produced an extremely well written, easily read, and engaging book, especially for those of us working in the Great Basin. Because the book is so cleanly written, it has the potential to appeal to audiences well beyond those found in dusty anthropology and natural science departments. To this end, my suggestion here would be to make improvements in the maps and illustrations. While the prose really draws the reader into the narrative, the graphics are generally bland and uninteresting, and when discussing flora and fauna, leave way too much to the imagination. Color photos would be nice, bearing in mind the added cost. Gains could also be made by adding pictures of the many plants and animals discussed in the text. Such additions would be great for the lay reader unfamiliar with marmots, mice, and Great Basin fishes.

Overall, though, this is a relatively minor critique, especially given the total informational value of the book. I must say that I can not recommend this volume strongly enough. *The Great Basin* is one of those rare publications that spans the space between academic tome and coffee table album. Only one question remains: if I have an earlier edition, do I need this one? If you have the first edition and are familiar with all Great Basin research since its publication, then perhaps not. However, if you want an up-to-date, one-stop source for all things pertaining to the Great Basin, then this book is a must.

Telling Stories in the Face of Danger: Language Renewal in Native American Communities

Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.)
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012,
288 pp., 3 illustrations, 2 maps, $24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Jared Dahl Aldern
Sponsored Associate Faculty, Prescott College &
Visiting Scholar, Bill Lane Center for the American West,
Stanford University

For linguists, it may make little difference, generally, as to what particular language forms the object of their research. Whether focused on Azerbaijani, Algonquin, or Afrikaans, linguists' basic tasks are to rigorously describe and explain such matters as morphology, phonology, semantics, and syntax, with an eye toward the generalizability of their findings, toward a better understanding of language as a fundamental category in the human sciences. Those linguists who study endangered, indigenous languages often encounter complications in these basic tasks, however, and they find themselves quantifying fragmentation and losses—of words, of meanings, of whole sets of narratives—and documenting shifts from rich linguistic variety toward the dominance of ever-narrower, socially and politically powerful languages and expressive modes. One of Paul V. Kroskrity's stated purposes for assembling the articles in *Telling Stories in the Face of Danger* is to take to task scholars who tally linguistic losses but who neither qualitatively describe the consequences