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"Out of the Woods and into the Lab: Exploring the Strange Marriage of American Woodcraft and Soviet Ecology in Czech Environmentalism"

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Jehlicka, Petr, and Joe Smith. "Out of the Woods and into the Lab: Exploring the Strange Marriage of American Woodcraft and Soviet Ecology in Czech Environmentalism." *Environment and History* 13, no. 2 (May, 2007): 187–210. doi:10.3197/096734007780473546 . It is widely assumed that modern environmentalist thinking was imported into post-communist states such as the Czech Republic post 1989. This paper shows these countries had environmental traditions of their own. From its inception in the late 1950s Czech environmentalism was concerned with nature conservation and youth education. At the core of its pedagogy was a concern to educate about and in nature, following the woodcraft and scouting tradition. But formal educational experiences were also significant. Environmental problems were framed as exclusively scientific issues by communist higher education systems. Thus, Czech environmentalism was a blend of the officially sanctioned rational and scientific perception of environmental issues and a more independent romanticising undercurrent. Jehlicka and Smith show how Czech post-war environmental politics blended Soviet ecology with covert references to the mythology of American West, the virtues of pristine nature and of individual freedom. This heritage allowed Czech environmentalism to adapt to both communist and capitalist systems. However, it also meant it was not equipped to deliver a strategic or systematic critique of either. The authors' research helps to explain the surprisingly muted role of environmentalism in post-communist politics, and confirms the importance of nuanced and culturally specific analyses of the history of environmental politics. All rights reserved. © 2007 The White Horse Press

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