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"Re-writing the History of Australian Tropical Rainforests: 'Alien Invasives' or 'Ancient Indigenes'?"

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Sanderson, Rachel. “Re-writing the History of Australian Tropical Rainforests: ‘Alien Invasives’ or ‘Ancient Indigenes’?” *Environment and History* 14, no. 2, “Australia Revisited” special issue (May, 2008): 165–85. doi:10.3197/096734008X303719 . In 1860 in the *Flora Tasmaniae*, J. D. Hooker characterised the vegetation of north-eastern Australia as ‘Polynesian and Malayan.’ Hooker was arguing against the notion that Australian flora and fauna were so different from that found elsewhere that their origin was only explicable by an act of separate creation. Botanist and geologists following Hooker also highlighted the similarities between Australian tropical rainforests and those of South-east Asia; however a number suggested that despite appearances, the Australian rainforests were not recent arrivals, but were comprised of ancient and distinctive species. From the 1980s, ecologists Len Webb and Geoff Tracey utilised evidence provided by palaeoecological studies and the new theory of continental drift to argue that these rainforests were an ancient and truly Australian environment—a relict of the Gondwanan vegetation that preceded the sclerophyllous vegetation more commonly regarded as uniquely ‘Australian.’ They represented their findings as overturning previous notions of rainforest as ‘alien and invasive.’ Their reclaiming of the rainforest as a symbol of nationhood, while involving a re-writing of previous scientific views, played a significant role in the subsequent arguments over the rainforests’ conservation. All rights reserved. © 2008 The White Horse Press

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Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/3325
Print date: 09 November 2026 15:44:31