



The Tanoak Tree: An Environmental History of a Pacific Coast Hardwood

By Frederica Bowcutt

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Tanoak (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*) is a resilient and common hardwood tree native to California and southwestern Oregon. People's radically different perceptions of it have ranged from treasured food plant to cash crop to trash tree. Having studied the patterns of tanoak use and abuse for nearly twenty years, botanist Frederica Bowcutt uncovers a complex history of cultural, sociopolitical, and economic factors affecting the tree's fate.

Still valued by indigenous communities for its nutritious acorn nut, the tree has also been a source of raw resources for a variety of industries since white settlement of western North America. Despite ongoing protests, tanoaks are now commonly killed with herbicides in industrial forests in favor of more commercially valuable coast redwood and Douglas-fir. As one nontoxic alternative, many foresters and communities promote locally controlled, third-party certified sustainable hardwood production using tanoak, which doesn't depend on clearcutting and herbicide use.

Today tanoaks are experiencing massive die-offs due to sudden oak death, an introduced disease. Bowcutt examines the complex set of factors that set the stage for the tree's current ecological crisis. The end of the book focuses on hopeful changes including reintroduction of low-intensity burning to reduce conifer competition for tanoaks, emerging disease resistance in some trees, and new partnerships among tanoak defenders, including botanists, foresters, Native Americans, and plant pathologists.

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The Tanoak Tree: An Environmental History of a Pacific Coast Hardwood By *Frederica Bowcutt* **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Review

Bowcutt's account of the invaluable but imperiled tanoak is comprehensive and well organized.... [S]he provides a wealth of detail, citing hundreds of sources that enable engaged readers to further explore the tree's remarkable story.... Anyone who reads Bowcutt's deeply affecting book will be prompted to add a new call to action: 'Save the Tanoaks.'--Jerry Rohde "Humboldt Historian" (01/01/2016)

We may hope that one day a future edition of this nicely written, heavily referenced little book will conclude with a tale of successful restoration.--Wendy L. Applequist "Economic Botany" (01/01/2016)

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--Jerry Rohde "Humboldt Historian" (01/01/2016)

A fascinating treatment of a tree that remains central to the region's Native American cultures but has little value to the timber industry. . . . This is a model of how histories can deploy visuals as central storytelling tools. . . . This is a fine addition to the literatures of historical ecology and forest history.

--Erik Loomis "Environmental History" (01/01/2016)

The book is an honorable treatment of Indigenous Peoples and accurately portrays their health struggles due to the loss of their ancestral diet, as well as their resilience in recreating their food systems. People with an interest in Native culture and lifeways, history, biodiversity, the environment or just fascinating reading will enjoy this book.

--Terri Hansen "Indian Country Today" (01/01/2015)

This book will be helpful for someone wanting a general overview of tanoak-conifer forest of southwestern Oregon and northern California. It could serve as a basis for, or as part of, a seminar or class on broadening the scope of forest management to include Native American cultural values in contemporary western U.S. forests.

--John Tappeiner "Northwest Science" (01/01/2016)

Especially good. . . . Through the lens of the tanoak Bowcutt vividly brings home how carelessly and how rapidly our own species has exploited and manipulated nature, and how devastating our impacts have been. . . . [The tanoak], as is so thoroughly documented in the book, should stimulate reflection on the ethics of how we use our power to change the natural world.

--Peter Crane "H-Environment" (01/01/2016)

Review

"The book is a multifaceted and fascinating treatment of a tree whose history and cultural and ecological importance are certainly underappreciated. There are unexpected twists and turns in this tree's history that make this account important, complex, and compelling."?Douglas Sackman, author of *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*

"This book spells out the gravity of human-facilitated spread of pathogens and the limitations in the existing efforts to keep sudden oak death from spreading. The potential loss of this tree, one of California's most common hardwood species, is a presage of the loss of biodiversity all over the world."?M. Kat Anderson, author of *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Resources*

"This important book puts into historical context tanoak's current sudden oak death crisis."?Susan Frankel, plant pathologist, Pacific Southwest Research Station, U.S. Forest Service

About the Author

Frederica Bowcutt teaches botany in interdisciplinary programs at The Evergreen State College. She specializes in floristics, field plant ecology, and plant-centric environmental history.

Users Review

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