

Native American Ethnobotany. Daniel E. Moerman. Portland, Oregon: Timber Press. 1998. 927pp. ISBN 0 88192 453 9. US\$ 79.95 (hardback).

This scholarly and weighty tome contains a stupendous quantity of high-quality information about the use of plants by Native American peoples. It is clearly the product of an enormous amount of time and effort, coupled with a profound understanding of the subject, and that effort has not been wasted.

The book covers 44,691 uses of 4029 plant taxa (from 1200 genera) among 291 different societies, covering the whole of the USA (including Hawaii) and Greenland. Although the emphasis is largely on medicinal and food plants, it also covers a much broader spectrum of plant uses. The book is primarily a dictionary of these uses, and as such the organization of the information is fundamental. Happily, Moerman has made a fine job of this, providing easy access via the generic or common names of the plants, the uses to which they are put, and the indigenous groups who use them. Access is also facilitated by the clear layout of the text. The fact that the plants have been ordered alphabetically by genus (rather than by family) further facilitates the book's use by the non-taxonomist, as does the refreshing layman's explanation of the workings of taxonomic nomenclature.

The book begins with an overview of the range of plant uses by Native Americans. This includes some interesting, useful and objective discussions of the assumptions and interpretations made by ethnobotanists when recording, categorizing and analyzing traditional knowledge of this nature. There follows a breakdown of the 186 categories of plant uses cited in the text (a sensible and pragmatic treatment of a difficult but important subject), and a list of the indigenous peoples and their traditional territories.

The main body of the text is the Catalogue of Plants, which takes up about 60% of the book. Each item of information is ordered first by species, then by major use category, then by user group, and finally by minor use category (e.g. *Chlorogalum pomeridianum* (DC.) Kunth/Fiber/Luiseño/Brushes and Brooms/'Bulb fiber made into small brushes used for sweeping up scattered meal after pounding acorns'). Each entry is concise but informative, and is given with the page reference in the original publication for easy referral. In all cases, Moerman has gone back to the primary information source, helping to avoid the 'Chinese whispers' confusions that can so easily arise in literature surveys.

Following the bibliography there are 300 vital pages of indices. The first is by indigenous peoples, listing the genera for each use category, and effectively providing a summarized ethnobotany of each of the 291 tribes treated. The second lists the genera in each use category, the third lists synonymies of species names (essential if the work of taxonomists is to be prevented from obfuscating ethnobotanical information!) and the last is a list of common names and their scientific equivalents. It is a pity that this cannot include the common names in the Native Americans' own languages, but, as Moerman points out, to do so would probably double the size of an already voluminous book.

It would have been nice to know a little more about the context of this information – about the history of ethnobotany among the Native Americans and indeed of the peoples themselves. One is left wondering what is happening to this vast body of information, beyond its incorporation in the book. Does it still exist among the peoples from whom it was collected; is it being lost from the oral tradition? And what is happening or has happened to these peoples?

The information in this book was previously scattered in a jumble around the literature. Suddenly, however, with this publication, Native American intellectual property has become available to us in a way in which it has never been before. Let us hope that this will not be abused by the exploitation of traditional knowledge for personal gain without equitable sharing of the benefits.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book as a fundamental and highly valuable source of fascinating information on the plants and the peoples of North America. It will doubtless become a key reference for anybody with an interest, be it academic or personal, in these fields.

W. MILLIKEN

The Journals of Hipólito Ruiz, Spanish Botanist in Peru and Chile 1777–1788.

Transcribed from the original manuscript by Jaime Jaramillo-Arango, translated by Richard Evans Schultes and María José Nemry von Thenen de Jaramillo-Arango. Foreword by Santiago Castroviejo. Cambridge: Timber Press. 1998. xxx + 357pp., 11 colour photos (of maps). ISBN 0 88192 407 5. £32.50 (hardback).

This book is another contribution to the long and complicated saga of that huge undertaking of the Spanish crown in the late eighteenth century, the exploration, collection and description of the plant and animal riches of their overseas territories in Mexico and South America. The Spanish botanists Ruiz and Pavon, together with the French botanist Dombey, spent eleven years traveling in Peru and Chile, during which they collected thousands of herbarium specimens, described many new species, and their two artists completed over 2000 plant drawings from life. All of which was to be assembled into a monumental illustrated multivolume work, the *Flora Peruviana et Chilensis*. Regrettably, various political, social and economic problems intervened and only three volumes were completed, out of eleven projected.

Ruiz wrote a journal while in the field in Peru, and this was transcribed by A. J. Barreiro and translated into English by Dahlgren (1940); however, on his return to Spain, Ruiz reworked his journals and produced two further, more complete, versions. These were lost for 150 years, finally being discovered by the Colombian surgeon-diplomat Jaime Jaramillo-Arango in the library of the Botany Department of the British Museum (Natural History) shortly after the end of the Second World War. Both these editions of Ruiz's journals were meticulously tran-