Nature is a deceptively simple and ahistorical term, suggesting intrinsic, unchanging reality. Yet nature has a history too, both in terms of human attitudes and human impacts. Coates outlines the major understandings of nature in the western world since classical times, from nature as higher authority to its more recent meaning of threatened physical space and life forms. Unlike many others, this book places the history of attitudes to nature within the story of human-induced changes in the material environment. And few others take a supranational perspective, or cross the divides between historical eras. A distinctive unifying theme is Coatess interest in how green writers over the last thirty years have interpreted our past dealings with nature, specifically their efforts to diagnose the roots of contemporary ecological problems and their search for ancestors. He concludes with a discussion of the future of nature in the context of developments such as the new ecology, global warming, advances in genetic engineering and research on animal behaviour. Assuming no previous knowledge, Nature provides the reader with an accessible synthesis and introduction to some of environmental historys central features and debates, confirming its status as one of the most enthralling current pursuits within historical studies. This will be essential reading for second-year undergraduates and above in cultural history and environmental history, as well as to the general reader interested in environmental issues.

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