

Forests and Peasant Politics in Modern France

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Abbreviations

ADA	Archives Départementales de l'Ariège, Foix
ADH-G	Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne, Toulouse
ADS	Archives Départementales de la Savoie, Chambéry
AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris
INRA	Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Orléans
REF	<i>Revue des Eaux et Forêts</i>
RFF	<i>Revue forestière française</i>
RGA	<i>Revue de géographie alpine</i>
RGPSO	<i>Revue géographique des Pyrénées et du Sud-Ouest</i>
RTM Ariège	Archives du Service de Restauration des Terrains en Montagne de l'Ariège, Foix
RTM Savoie	Archives du Service de Restauration des Terrains en Montagne de la Savoie, Chambéry

Note on Usage

The adjective *alpine* with a lowercase *a* will refer to characteristics of upland areas of Savoie and Ariège or to upland areas in general; I reserve *Alpine* with an uppercase *A* to designate conditions particular to Savoie or the Alps.

Introduction

In the Pyrenees as in the Alps, the necessities of pastoral life often protest the artificial separations introduced by politics, inspired by a false geography.

—*Paul Vidal de la Blache*

For many people from widely varying societies, the idea of reforestation carries a positive resonance. It signals a return to the forsaken garden, a powerful image of ecological health. This book explores the reforestation of alpine France, one of the first efforts of any modern state to create forest in areas thought to have been deforested within recent memory. French initiatives to replant the mountains stand out in the global context of the nineteenth century, an era during which economic forces induced the clearing of forest on a massive scale in Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East, followed by tropical rain forests in Africa and South America. Western Europeans also continued to rely heavily on the forests of the Baltic region for timber, as they had for centuries, instead of taking stock of their own resources.¹

Was France critically deforested by the middle of the nineteenth century? This question leads to the complicated relations between

ecology and perception that have become a major focus of environmental history. In France, a “forest of dreams and that of reality” coexist in popular memory. Since approximately the first third of the nineteenth century, for example, a fear of deforestation has gripped the collective imagination of French officialdom, but subsequently the forest has made one of its gradual comebacks, increasing its share of the national territory by 27 percent in the twentieth century alone.²

Ecological patterns and the reasons for them are, of course, rarely self-evident; even with the aid of hindsight, variations over time in the sheer extent of forests raise more questions than they answer. In contrast to the dramatic return of forest following demographic collapse due to the Black Death of the fourteenth century, the forest’s fluctuation in modern history has responded to complex human and natural mediations. The absence of forest, for instance, has not always reflected high population densities; in France, the forest has disappeared in places of low human density, such as the west, as well as in more populous regions. But broadly speaking, over the past two centuries the French have relegated their forests to the rocky, sandy, chalky, dry, and clay soils of the country—soils generally acidic and too poor for sustained agriculture.³

These early efforts to reforest significant portions of the French national territory nonetheless appear precocious, indeed enlightened. In France, however, enlightened forest management was defined in terms of the purely material interests of an abstract “public,” and for this reason among others reforestation was far from a neutral project, much less a “proto-Green” endeavor.⁴ It constitutes a major chapter in the broader struggle between peasants and the state for control of the forest during the period from 1860 to 1940. This conflict has been a fundamental dimension of modern environmental history in the Alps and the Pyrenees.

This study weaves the ecological, social, and political threads of the struggles for the forest in the Alps and the Pyrenees, regions deemed in the nineteenth century to be critically deforested. Three overlapping themes provide theoretical springboards for the following six chapters. The first theme treats the differing cultural constructions of the nature of alpine France that framed the debate over reforestation. For foresters influenced by engineering and trained in the techniques of silviculture and forest management, mountains assumed fixed, functional qualities that could be maintained only by the state’s intervention in order to avert natural catastrophe; in their view, mountains were destined to be forested. Agro-pastoral peasants living in the mountains perceived their habitats as interpenetrating spaces that shaped a diverse economy marked by

broadly seasonal activities. Alpine peasants did not idealize the mountains—they often complained of hardships imposed by an exacting environment—and they harbored their own notions of natural catastrophe. Yet radically different consequences flowed from their constructions, which were based on lived reality rather than on textbook techniques.

The second theme treats the conflict between legal and customary norms, or, more narrowly, property and possession. Both sorts of norms created units of nature in the service of territoriality, a delimitation of boundaries to secure access and resources for some people while excluding others. Property and possession, though, did not share the same legal status. Private property, established as an individual right during the Revolution and further enshrined in Napoleon's Civil Code, posed the greatest challenge to the maintenance of possession—a realm of rights to land defined narrowly in the Civil Code but embodying a much broader world of access, use rights, and communal property in the mentalities and practices of peasants. This theme also explores the gradual transformation of forests into “productive” spaces by the agents of a national economy. It remained incomplete owing to unexpected triumphs of possession over property in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵

Third, each side in the struggle for the forest articulated political strategies to promote its own “forest of dreams.” For their part, successive governments sought to defuse and in fact disguise the struggle by according discretionary power to the French Forest Administration, known for most of the nineteenth century as the Administration des Forêts. The major pieces of forest legislation after 1860 couched the rationale for state intervention in the neutral, universalizing concept of public utility, a standard long used with respect to public works and one theoretically detached from politics. Peasants resisted this standard, their means reflecting centuries-old patterns as well as new opportunities. Through “devastation,” illegal pasturing, petitions, meetings, covert destruction, foot-dragging, force and threats of force, litigation, and voting, peasants not only pried the administrative state out of its accustomed channels but also unveiled the inevitably political character of public utility.⁶

The dynamics of contestation have had little place in other accounts of the state's agenda to reforest alpine France. Written by a diverse body of foresters, geographers, sociologists, and historians, many French studies of alpine reforestation have primarily judged the Administration des Forêts by its technical performance. The postwar work of the forester Paul Chabrol retained nineteenth-century conceptions of the anarchic, disorderly nature of the mountains and their inhabitants and sought to demonstrate how foresters had rectified a

long-lost ecological balance. In the early 1960s, Pierre Fourchy's retrospective of the first law on reforestation cast the state's initiatives in a history of growing sensitivity toward alpine ecology. Fourchy qualified a history-of-progress outlook only by noting the "veritable faith" of nineteenth-century foresters: "Their work in the beginning was a sort of mission which excuses certain errors, a certain naiveté."⁷

Beginning in the 1980s, sociologists attached to the Institut national de la recherche agronomique (INRA) brought to light both the technical limitations of reforestation and the changes in social relations that these policies entailed. Foresters as well began to admit the ecological errors of zealous reforestation, above all their predecessors' notorious disregard for the effects of altitude on the growth of trees. The historian Andrée Corvol has offered the most thoroughgoing critique of the state in what is also the most detailed study of forests and society in modern France. Yet Corvol's monolithic view of the state, one that suggests coherent intentions and realpolitik, remains largely uncontested.⁸ No major study has shifted the problem to disputes between rural communities and the state.⁹

Reforestation would not have occurred when it did in the absence of a powerful Administration des Forêts; Chapter 1 treats its evolution over the two centuries before 1860. More broadly, reforestation belongs to the history of the French state's provision of infrastructure and economic subsidies. It is thus related to public engineering and the state's penchant for *dirigisme*, especially that aspect concerned with the spatial distribution of economic activities, referred to in recent decades as *aménagement du territoire*. "Technocracy" comes immediately to mind, yet it is a strange concept to apply to alpine reforestation. Foresters believed that they were restoring the mountains to an anterior state, before the age of technocrats, industry, or even agriculture; the Third Republic's substitution of "restoration" for "reforestation" spoke clearly to this conviction. Assuming that alpine France had once been forested from base to summits required a thorough reenvisioning of the mountains. This conceptual shift provides the analytical framework for Chapter 2.

An image of fully forested mountains required the erasure of alpine peasants. Along with emigration, reforestation meant the reversal of a trend that had been in place, with fits and starts, since the beginning of the agricultural revolution—in western Europe, the gradual formation of a peasantry, at the expense of forest, as a "closed association over the face of the land."¹⁰ From the nearer vantage point of nineteenth-century consciousness, many officials deemed alpine peasants archaic. Napoleon III undertook a vast program of in-

tegrating the majority of peasants into the nation through agricultural modernization, public works, and plebiscites; his republican successors substituted more open electoral politics for plebiscites and rigged elections, continued to support agriculture and finance public works, and facilitated primary education. For practical as much as for ideological reasons, many of these policies bypassed peasants in the uplands. Agricultural modernization, for example, meant shifting production to the plains and away from the thin, erosive soils of the mountains. The plains produced healthier livestock as well; animals there did not grow weak from six months of sequestration in crowded stables, nor tough from months of summer migrations—distinctions of growing importance to urban consumers with more money to spend on food.

For the nineteenth-century urban elite, highlanders themselves were unfit; even recognition of the historically high rates of literacy in the Alps could not dispel images of undersized, prematurely aged, and sometimes cretinous peasants. Most important in the present context, foresters named alpine peasants the primary, if not the only, agents of deforestation. Although it employed some peasants in restoration, the administration did not conceive the greening of the mountains in their interest, and some foresters openly hoped that reforestation would push peasants off the land. Alpine people did emigrate for many reasons and even inaugurated the nineteenth-century depopulation of rural France. Those who remained became ever more archaic in outsiders' eyes.

Foresters treated the mountains, inhabited for millennia, as ideal, "empty" terrains of experimentation. Clearly the imaginative work this required surpassed that of American explorers, migrants, and bureaucrats on the western frontier, who confronted more lightly populated mountains whose native inhabitants they had never assumed to be part of the polity. To be sure, notions of the idealized, de-peopled mountain were more developed among professors of forestry and makers of policy than among foresters on the ground. Wherever imagined landscapes confronted alpine realities, however, conflict marked the relations between foresters and peasants.

Antagonisms were neither absolute nor permanent. The evidence in this book shows that some representatives of the state did not always play by the rules written by other representatives and that peasants often appropriated the state's language and at times sought their own integration with official structures. It is inaccurate to view unrelieved domination as the primary effect of state policy—perhaps especially in remote alpine borderlands where official power was inevitably stretched thin. Instead, the story yields a less dramatic interplay of forces; to borrow James Leaning's formulation, this was a "process of

occasional conformity, occasional resistance, but always negotiation.”¹¹ Such a perspective changes our way of viewing the dynamics of contestation, though not its reality. We gain a far more nuanced understanding of goals, strategies, and outcomes attached to specific struggles.

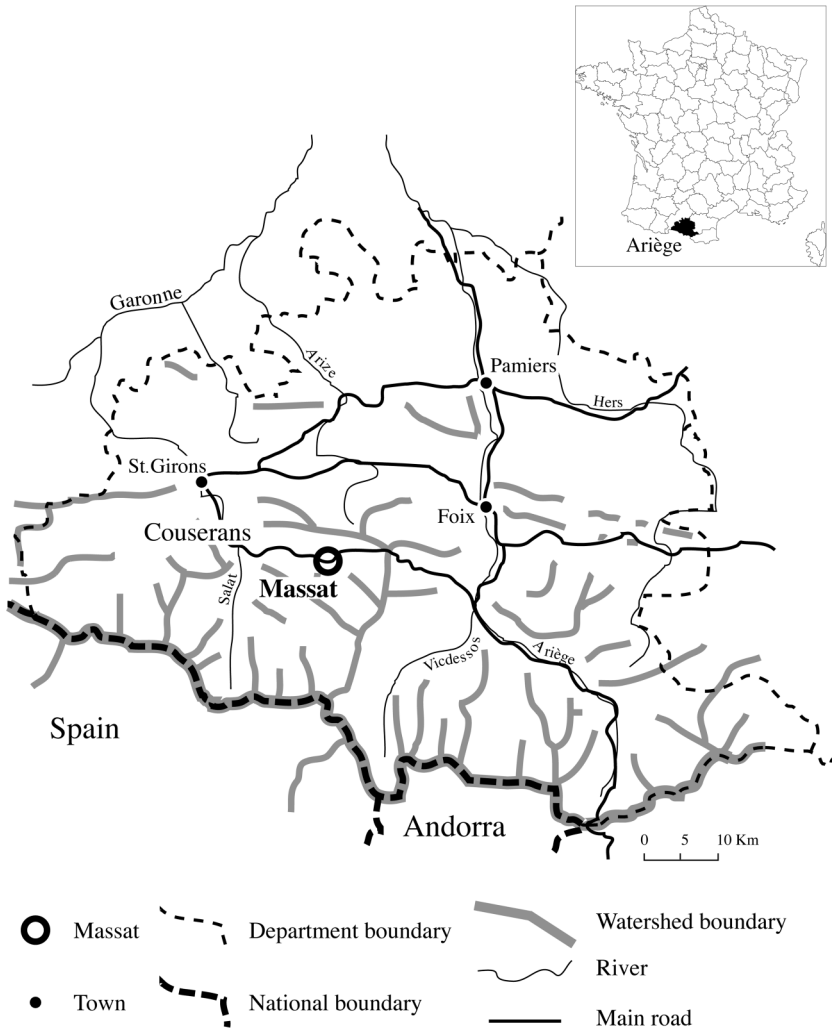
At its core, the conflict was over the values ascribed to the land of alpine France: abstract, interchangeable space for many professional foresters, specific, meaning-laden places for rural communities. This study is about the politics of this long-term conflict over values. The historiography of rural politics in France points, as a whole, to the transformation of political mentalities from “local” to “national” priorities; most studies have, in one way or another, tried to locate the precise timing and mechanisms of this change. As Maurice Agulhon’s essays suggest, the coming of modern politics in the countryside has meant integration with the nation at large, the development of wide conceptual horizons, and the intellectual linking of realities in the village to national currents of thought and action.¹² The achievement of political consciousness has often been an assumed element of modernization, along with certain changes in economy and culture.

Many historians of rural France have argued that, given the sources of modern cultural and economic change, politics too flowed historically from an urban bourgeois setting to a rural peasant one. This “diffusion” model has come under attack in more recent writing, however, for the basic reason that it denies rural people autonomy of mind. Peter McPhee has, for example, sought to place “the rural inhabitants of mid-nineteenth-century France at centre stage” by writing from the premise that rural people could take political initiatives and discriminate among political choices.¹³ Moreover, he uncovers four critically weak assumptions underlying the diffusion model: rural people were “stable, unchanging, and immobile”; they lacked any experience with politics prior to 1848, the first year that universal male suffrage was practiced in France; the flow of ideas is unilinear; and the rural context is fundamentally irrelevant. Although these notions have unfortunately framed much of the discussion, McPhee has gone far to prove them untenable.¹⁴

This book takes issue with a related and prevalent assumption that defines modern politics as the jockeying for representation through an electoral process originating outside the village community. Consequently, the absence of electoral politics can signal only archaism. A more useful definition of politics would include the mobilization of opinions, talents, and strategies in the interest of safeguarding local resources and values. This construction points to the role of locale in collective action: aspects of identity that derive from a sense of

place call for profoundly local politics when that identity is threatened. Kent Ryden aptly connects identity with place: “The depth that characterizes a place is human as well as physical and sensory, a thick layer of history, memory, association, and attachment that builds up in a location as a result of our experiences in it.”¹⁵ It is not surprising that, invested in so heavily, places can be so ardently defended, and have been in the past. In any case, it is not clear that the

Map 1. Department of Ariège



Eric Leclerc, professor of Geography, University of Rouen.

the sense evoked above. The defense of place will be explored through case studies of villages in each department. To begin with the larger scale, Ariège and Savoie suggest bases for comparison that illuminate the range of issues that confronted foresters and peasants in modern France.

MOUNTAINS, FORESTS, COMMUNITIES

Ariège and Savoie are often called *départements forestiers*. With a 39 percent rate of forestation in Ariège and nearly 29 percent in Savoie, they currently rank among the most heavily wooded departments in France, a country whose metropolitan territory consists of about 25 percent forest. Precise definitions qualify the picture suggested in these figures: the French National Forest Office defines forests as areas in which trees occupy at least 10 percent of the surface area, or approximately five hundred saplings per hectare; this is a much broader definition than the international norm for dense forests—a 20 percent ligneous cover—attesting to the extent of sparse woodland in France.¹⁶ While the rates of forest cover increased in these two departments during the nineteenth century, foresters never held Ariège or Savoie to be as ravaged as Provence or the southern Alps.¹⁷ The problems of torrential streams in Savoie and galloping rivers in Ariège, exacerbated by apparently dwindling forests, did not measure up to the critical state of the erosive southern Alps or to certain parts of Hautes-Pyrénées that threatened to collapse onto popular spas. Shared climatic characteristics, described below, assure rapid forest growth in both departments, though more so in Ariège. The historian of Savoie André Palluel-Guillard and the historical geographer of Ariège Michel Chevalier have come to the same conclusion with respect to the “deforestation hypothesis”: forests had become profoundly degraded by the nineteenth century but far from denuded.¹⁸ In light of contemporary discussions of deforestation, we could say that degradation had not disrupted the conditions for forest growth.

Nineteenth-century foresters rarely made such distinctions, often interchanging the terms *dégradation* and *deforestation* (*déboisement*, more rarely *déforestation*) when referring to forests throughout alpine France, Ariège and Savoie included. Relegated to secondary importance as less deforested areas, these two departments put the state’s foresters in the position of having to justify more rigorously the sort of ecological intervention that they deemed imperative for the southern Alps. Ecology in Ariège and Savoie complicated the debate over restoration and forced its principles to the fore.

Inseparable from official perceptions of many alpine forests was the “prob-

lem” of pastoralism; that both departments were *pastoraux* as well as *forestiers* explains their inclusion in this book as well as the exclusion of a department from the Massif Central. In that broad region, Third Republic foresters focused their work on the Cévennes, where subsistence had been more purely forest-based than pastoral. Cévenol peasants had, over time, transformed their chestnut forests into less dense orchards and harvested the fruit for human consumption; indeed, the extension of these orchards jeopardized the quality of pasture. This phenomenon reached its height in the early 1800s, but it was not until a full century had passed that soil degradation caused by the thinning of the chestnut forests reached a critical point. Thus, for reasons of both human ecology and chronology, the inclusion of a department such as Lozère would make for a very different, though perhaps no less valid, comparison.¹⁹

If Ariège and Savoie present similar uses of the forest in a pastoral economy, they are also distinct from each other. Ariège had a reputation loathsome to foresters, for its alpine inhabitants had proved themselves willing to act collectively when the state threatened access to “their” forests. This history is the subject of Chapter 1. In official eyes, Ariégeois peasants treated their woods with disrespect; foresters saw chaotic practices everywhere as well as the alarming indifference of shepherds to the destructive presence of livestock in the forests. Although the notoriety of Ariège was to shape foresters’ approaches to restoration, a long history of conflict also shaped their reception in Ariégeois communities.

Savoie, on the other hand, presented foresters with a vast terra incognita owing to its belated annexation to France in 1860. Invaded in September 1792 and soon named the department of Mont-Blanc, the entire duchy of Savoie had participated in the Revolution and remained part of French territory until 1814, when King Victor-Emmanuel I of Piedmont-Sardinia reclaimed it. The French cultural heritage of Savoie argued well for reincorporation, though the annexation constituted a diplomatic swap resulting from French military involvement in the unification of Italy. Nonetheless, Savoie represented a welcome challenge for foresters, who acquired significant jurisdiction over it and who were among the first French officials to open offices in the new territory. From surveying to reforestation, foresters plied their techniques while rediscovering the environment of the northern Alps, little concerned for the opinions or objections of Savoyards.

Paradoxically, geography allowed Savoie a broader opening onto France than it did Ariège; geography reinforced the strategic importance of Savoie and, thanks as well to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century vogue for outdoor

recreation, familiarized French people with it long before tourism became critical to the economy of Ariège. This essential basis of comparison calls for a geographical sketch of each department.

Situated just east of the central point of the Pyrenees, Ariège is a famously cobbled department: dividing geographically into the Lauragais plain in the north and the mountains in the south, it also contains an east-west cultural rift, straddling the historically and culturally distinct regions of Languedoc and Gascony. In social and economic terms, the lowland-upland contrast has been the more enduring. One can imagine the tilt of the department by drawing a line on a topographical map from Lézat-sur-Lèze, the northernmost commune in Ariège, to the Pic d'Estats, almost due south of Lézat on the Spanish border: the line would reveal a rise in elevation of nearly three thousand meters over only seventy kilometers. But such simple geometry obscures the fact that very few communes in Ariège boast elevations of more than one thousand meters; it also glosses over the geographical features of Ariège that set this part of the Pyrenees off from the rest.

The Pyrenees, whose central range boasts passes nearly as high as its summits, constitute France's most formidable border. Within this massive barrier formed of schist and gneiss, sandstone and limestone, and granite blocks, Ariège happens to host a particularly complex portion of the Pyrenean topography. Parallel to the central, or axial, zone is a lower series of parallel formations known as the north-Pyrenean range. Its peaks fall between two thousand and twenty-five hundred meters and form a broad barrier in the middle of the department; the central part, known as the massif de l'Arize, separates the prefecture, Foix, from the subprefecture of Saint-Girons. To the north of Foix lies a wide zone called the pre-Pyrenees (named to correspond to the pre-Alps), where summits are less than one thousand meters. Stretching from the Garonne River to the Aude River, these hills detach the Lauragais plain from the mountains. These parallel ranges create a series of east-west valleys unique to Ariège, differing from the transverse valleys that drain the Pyrenees further to the west. Although these valleys may have facilitated east-west communication on a local scale, only the pre-Pyrenean depression bordering Foix is broad enough to have allowed the construction of a major road and railroad. The multilayered Pyrenees of Ariège compartmentalized the department and tended to isolate its communities from the more populous plains of Languedoc.²⁰

In addition to higher elevations and broader ranges, the Alps differ from the Pyrenees in their greater accessibility, and the Alpine arc has historically been a crossroad for communication in west-central Europe. The department of

Savoie forms the hub of the northern Alps, whose parallel ranges and valleys march from west to east with a clarity absent in the complex alignment of the southern Alps.

Five calcareous blocks form an avant-garde for the high mountains: these so-called pre-Alps consist of the Chablais-Giffre, the Bornes, the Bauges, the Chartreuse, and the Vercors. Though marked by cliffs hundreds of meters high, portal-like transverse valleys pierce each section of the range. The cities of Annecy, Chambéry, and Grenoble lie in three of these portals, or *cluses*. Behind them, a long depression interrupts the progression from pre-Alps to Alps, forming a continuous plain known from north to south as the Sallanches basin, the Val d'Arly, the Combe de Savoie, and the Grésivaudan. Formed of schists and other "black earth," this valley of unequal elevations is unique to the northern Alps and allowed an agrarian culture to take hold during the neolithic period.

The spinal column of the French Alps rises just to the east, extending from Mont Blanc through the Beaufortain and Belledonne ranges and south to the Romanche and upper Durance Rivers. Continuously high elevations and needlelike peaks bear witness to hard crystalline rock. An interalpine zone extends beyond the central range; this is an area of sustained high elevations but also of deep valleys and immense *alpages*, or summer pastures. Within this zone, the long Tarentaise and Maurienne Valleys, curving outward from each other and separated by the Vanoise range, constitute the heart of Savoie. These two sweeping valleys reflect glacial action in the Alps as a whole: massive glaciers formed in the central range, then punctured, deeply carved, and aerated the Alps, rendering them accessible. In this sense, the "high Alps" of Savoie are its valleys as well, long settled, open to the west, and, in the case of the Maurienne, industrialized since the late nineteenth century.²¹

Ariège and Savoie also have similarities: both departments include lowland and highland, and altitude as well as comparable positions within their respective mountain ranges have created corresponding patterns of forest. Subject to both Mediterranean and Atlantic fronts, Ariège receives heavy precipitation, especially the western part of the department known as the Couserans. Similarly, the Alps create a convergence zone between Atlantic, Mediterranean, and continental weather patterns. Overall, however, climate is mild in both departments given average altitudes. In Ariège, warm, dry winds from the southeast ease temperatures in the winter, and the absence of true glaciers allows relatively mild temperatures in the high Pyrenees.²² The pre-Alps and central range of Savoie absorb thorough soakings in the milder months and heavy

snows in winter, but the interalpine zone, by contrast, is relatively sheltered and remains considerably drier throughout the year.

From one zone to the next in both Ariège and Savoie, the forest changes according to variations in relief, altitude, and climate. Deciduous trees dominate in the lowlands and montane zones, mix with conifers up to subalpine levels, and then give way entirely to fir, pine, and larch. Above the forest lie broad alpine pastures—the alpages of the Alps and the *estives* of the Pyrenees, covered with grasses, gentians, asphodels, and other plants in the summer.²³

The somewhat wetter climate of Ariège provides ideal conditions for the growth of deciduous trees, which make up 85 percent of the department's forest cover. Beech is the dominant species, thriving up to 1,700 meters in most places south of the oak-covered pre-Pyrenees. In much of Ariège, however, beech mixes in a patchwork with conifers. Nearly a quarter of the coniferous content in Ariège derives from nineteenth-century reforestation with nonnative species: spruce, Silvester pine, Austrian pine, and larch, to name a few. The roughly sixteen thousand hectares of solid fir stands grow primarily in the upper Ariège and Quérigut Valleys, yielding, at around three thousand meters, to the hardier *pin à crochets* (*Pinus montana*).²⁴

In Savoie, the dense forests of the rainy pre-Alps thin out in stages to become the sparser forests of the drier interalpine zone. Oak dominates in the lower areas, up to six hundred meters on slopes with northern exposures. Ascending from montane levels in the central range, the forest begins with beech and ends, passing through a mixed zone, with stands of fir and spruce. In the interalpine zone these species share the terrain with varieties of pine. At the subalpine level spruce gives way to *Pinus montana* in the external zone and to Cembra pine with larch in the internal zone. Although the forests of Savoie meet the national average for surface area, covering 151,800 hectares, more than a quarter of the department, Savoie and Haute-Savoie, are home to an extraordinary floristic richness that overshadows the mere quantity of forest cover: between the two departments one can find approximately 2,080 species of plants, or half the flora of France.²⁵

Geography, climate, and vegetation in the uplands framed the possibilities for human settlement. Alpine communities worked with the resources and limitations of field, forest, and pasture to forge an agro-sylvo-pastoral economy. This trio of interpenetrating ecosystems ran the gamut from wild to domesticated. The forest, harboring a greater diversity of plants and constituting the primary alpine habitat for animals, was more wild than the field; pastures lay somewhere in between. But alpine communities integrated the three into a

working economy, transforming them into a rural space in conjunction with the forces of relief, climate, soil, and water.²⁶

Central to rural space was the community. Ariège hosted two of the three dominant settlement patterns in France—agglomerated villages and dispersed hamlets, with very few isolated farms. As in other districts of the Mediterranean Pyrenees, clustered villages lay in the uplands, though more markedly in the Ariège River corridor than in the Couserans. Dispersed hamlets characterized the pre-Pyrenees and the middling altitudes, such as the Massat Valley, but also, exceptionally, the high-altitude Salat basin between the western *pays* of Castillonais and the central Vicdessos. Upland villages, corresponding to more ancient settlement, tended to contain large unenclosed commons, whereas hedge-enclosed prairies surrounded the dispersed settlements and reflected individual clearings in the Middle Ages and later. Until the last few decades of the Old Regime, roughly twenty-four enormous “valley communities”—areas grouping anywhere from two to thirty villages, with or without hamlets—dominated most of the uplands and some of central Ariège. The coherence of valley communities derived from use rights to forest and pasture enjoyed by all inhabitants of the valley. The communities became subject to partition after the mid-eighteenth century, owing to immemorial antagonisms between villages and to class hatreds; peasants in outlying hamlets, for example, clamored for separation from the *messieurs* in the central *bourg*. Some valley communities did survive, notably in districts of dispersed habitat.²⁷

Villages and hamlets also characterized human geography in Savoie, in contrast to the high proportion of isolated farms in the Germanic Alps. Most single villages had outlying hamlets; even within geographical unities such as the Maurienne, only a few self-contained villages lie at the uppermost end of the valley. In both Ariège and Savoie, security from avalanches played an important role in determining villages’ sites and shapes; whether drawn out along a single road, grouped around a church or square, or perched on a slope, villages and hamlets grew out of complex natural, cultural, and historical circumstances.²⁸

Surrounding villages and hamlets, fields, forests, and pastures constituted the productive spaces in most of the western European ecological zone, but their unique configuration in the mountains derived fundamentally from the challenges of farming on slopes. Thin, rocky soils given to erosion required heavy fertilization—the first justification of alpine pastoralism. Too poor and subject to impossibly short growing seasons, soils at higher elevations could still support trees, their understory, and the many edible and nonedible plants of open areas. High-elevation agriculture was far from negligible: in Ariège, pro-

ductivity per hectare in alpine cantons outstripped that of lowland cantons, since peasants in the uplands tended to restrict crops to the choicest parcels and cultivate them intensively. Harvests remained modest but, owing primarily to greater use of animal dung, made gains in the nineteenth century: by the early Second Empire, peasants in the alpine cantons of Ariège had doubled wheat production from six hectoliters per hectare in 1812 to twelve hectoliters. An agricultural survey undertaken in Savoie in 1866 reported the surprisingly high figures of sixteen hectoliters of wheat and even higher figures for rye, oats, and barley. These latter grains, all hardier than wheat, were cultivated in both departments through mid-century. Peasants began to be persuaded of the potato's agricultural and caloric merits in the early nineteenth century in Ariège and somewhat later in Savoie, where corn also competed with the traditional grains.²⁹

In the zones lying above cultivated areas, the "right" proportion of forest to pasture, as well as their location with respect to each other, were subjects of geographical debate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many nineteenth-century foresters viewed alpine pastures as deforested areas whose proper destiny was to "return" to a forested state. But peasants did not experience forests and pastures as qualitatively opposed spaces: harboring many resources, alpine forests gave rise to multiple uses and overlapping interests. Because of their floristic diversity, forests articulated the many elements of an agro-sylvo-pastoral economy. An image of perfect equilibrium, however, would be false: though an essential provider of nutrients, shade, and water for livestock, which in turn produced vital fertilizer for fields, the forest also threatened agriculture by encroaching and had to be burnt back.³⁰

Alpine peasants used many forest resources for domestic purposes rather than commercial gain. Sizeable quantities of firewood topped the list, given the rigors of winter and the requirements of cheese-making in the summer. Wood composed the primary building material in upland areas, where climate as well as fire necessitated frequent repairs. The forests supplied medicine chests and additional sources of food, not to mention trees and woody plants that furnished particular woods for tools and domestic implements.

Forests functioned crucially in pastoralism as well, and more so in Ariège than in Savoie. The forester Etienne Dralet described Pyrenean forests dense with livestock in the early nineteenth century; many commentators recognized their role as linchpin in the pastoral economy. In order to limit the duration of winter stabling, shepherds used forests as intermediary pastures, protecting animals from exposure on the high pastures during inclement moments of au-

tumn and spring. Rarely far from high pasture in Ariège, swatches of forest provided respite from heat and summer storms during pasturing season as well. The typically sparse forests allowed enough light to promote the growth of edible grasses.³¹

Until the nineteenth century, Ariégeois and Savoyard peasants enjoyed extensive access to forests, despite contrasting property regimes. In France as a whole, private ownership accounts for two-thirds of all forested areas, whereas only about one-third of the forest is in private hands in Ariège and Savoie. The latter department was a stronghold of communal property; up to 73 percent of forest belonged to communes in the duchy's alpine zone in 1738, according to the Sardinian cadastre; the proportion of communal land under the forest regime in Savoie was 58 percent in 1912.³² Communes, then, determined access to the forests, along with the occasional, and sporadically enforced, regulation emanating from the Sardinian capital of Turin.

A deeper imprint of feudalism in Ariège had resulted in a far greater proportion of seigneurial property, followed by bourgeois acquisition of much of it after the Revolution; not until the late nineteenth century did falling land prices allow peasants to buy parcels of the great domains. The largest single proprietor by far was the state, which in 1876 owned 48 percent of the Ariégeois forest.³³ Yet hardly a forest in Ariège remained untouched by use rights. Though the term can apply to rights in forests under any property regime, use rights touched mostly the seigneurial and state forests of Ariège.

Jurists separate use rights into two categories—"forest" rights and "rural" rights. The former include gathering firewood and wood for construction and repairs, and pasturing animals in the forest, whereas the latter apply exclusively to pasturing rights in nonforested areas, namely, the right to graze on fallow or harvested land, or *vaine pâture*. Peasants regarded their rights as a single and coherent set, and their invocations of "immemorial rights" had concrete meaning: use rights had in many cases existed *de facto* since Carolingian times and become codified beginning in the thirteenth century. These medieval charters, which "granted" rights over large territories to one or more village communities, structured popular memory for centuries and cemented an identity between community and place. Although subject to regulation by the municipality, use rights helped ensure social and biological reproduction while infusing the notion of property with a meaning akin to possession, before the rigid separation of the two terms under the Civil Code.³⁴

In high pasturing season, peasants grazed their livestock mostly on nonforested terrain; this, again, was more the case in Savoie, where peasants had

long preferred to cut and burn forest to extend their grassy areas rather than pasture their animals in the forest.³⁵ Despite the crucial place of forests and the human energy monopolized by alpine agriculture, pastoralism in the Alps and the Pyrenees not only perpetuated agriculture but also provided the chief link to local and regional markets via annual livestock fairs and the production of butter and cheese for sale. Peasants devoted more space to pasturing than to farming, and this spatial preponderance deeply colored images of alpine ways of life for lowland consumption and critique.

In the spectrum of ways to raise domesticated animals, pastoralism differs, first, from sedentary modes, which require intensively irrigated pastures used year-round and proximity to villages. Second, it differs from nomadism—the migrations of entire human groups with their animals over large but well-defined territories—as well as from transhumance—the long-distance migration of large herds along with shepherds between summer and winter pastures, for example, between Provence and the southern Alps. Pastoralism involves migration to and from summer pastures, led by family members or by shepherds, but the migration takes place within a region or even within the space of a single commune. This is especially true of Savoie, where alpine communes, some of the largest in France, tend to incorporate secondary valleys and stretch to the summits.³⁶ Unlike transhumants, animals raised in a properly pastoral system spend the winter in stables. Although transhumance certainly touched economic life in both Ariège and Savoie, it declined rapidly during the nineteenth century and implicated fewer members of village communities than pastoralism itself.

The centrality of pastoralism is revealed in regional dialects. Throughout the French Alps, local usage defined *montagne*, synonymous with *alpe*, as a high-altitude pasture; thus *mountain* was coequal with its primary function.³⁷ The words *pasquiers*, *pla*, *calms*, and *estiba* commonly designated high pastures in the Pyrenees, yet *montagne* was not unknown, as a forest inspector noted of the Massat Valley in the 1840s: “what in the local speech they call ‘mountains’ is as follows: Massat, Ercé, Aulus, etc., possess on the sides of the great ridge and above their forests considerable stretches of uncultivated land which serve to pasture their numerous flocks.” The inspector also remarked that the rigorous climate might make reforestation of these areas very difficult, and the inhabitants’ opposition could undo it.³⁸ Though they might be fiercely defended, the high pastures remained tenuous, impermanent agro-ecological entities. They were, in effect, always works in progress. Peasants in the Pyrenees recreated their high pastures by burning them annually; areas whose dominant vegeta-

tion consists of tough, inedible plants—ferns, heather, broom, and gorse, to name a few—required artificial maintenance. Fire, the most effective method, absorbed the least labor in the task of reviving grasses for livestock’s consumption during the spring and summer.³⁹ Savoyard peasants, for their part, burned the edges of their ever-creeping forest.

Pastoralism existed in hundreds of forms in alpine France, forms differing according to ownership of pastoral lands, management of the flocks, species and varieties of livestock raised, and rhythms of seasonal migration. A diversity of pastoral systems existed in both Ariège and Savoie, but, for the sake of clarity, they can be broken into a few broad contrasts within each department.⁴⁰ In the upper Ariège River corridor, communes organized summer pasturing, whereas associations of livestock owners, usually several per commune, regulated pasturing in the Couserans. Exceptionally, peasants in the area around the large commune of Auzat, located in the upper Vicdessos basin, had created a privatized pastoral system by gradually transmuting use rights into property rights. In the lowlands of Ariège, sedentary modes structured the raising of livestock. Hybrids of all these systems had a place in Ariège, including the unique practices found in the Massat Valley, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Throughout the department, sheep and cows shared the pastures. Sheep dominated in the upper valleys, outnumbering cattle at the end of the eighteenth century by five to one; even in areas of high dairy production, such as the Massat Valley, sheep enjoyed a three-to-one advantage over cows. Differences in breeds of livestock reflected the cultural contrasts between the western and eastern halves of the department, but all major varieties of cattle were small, rustic animals bred for work.⁴¹ Livestock played a significant role in local subsistence, with few Ariègeois cheeses enjoying the wide reputation of a Savoyard *tomme* or *gruyère*.

The green northern Alps earned the epithet *montagnes à vaches*, “cow mountains,” in opposition to the drier *montagnes à moutons*, “sheep mountains,” of the south. Yet the contrast between cattle- and sheep-producing regions lay within Savoie, coinciding in many cases with a difference in pastoral management. Predominating in the pre-alpine Chartreuse, the central Beaufort and Belledonne ranges, and the interalpine Tarentaise Valley was a system known as the *grande montagne*, in which several families grouped their livestock, mostly milk cows, under the management of cooperatives that hired shepherds or individual entrepreneurs; in either case, communes generally owned the pastoral lands. In the interalpine Maurienne, the *petite montagne* separated livestock,

mostly sheep, by family, leaving young family members to care for them. This system, which necessitated a greater human population on the summer pastures than did the more collective *grande montagne*, also played itself out on communally owned pastures. Both systems demanded more or less complex migrations before, during, and after the pasturing season.⁴²

To capture alpine peasants' sense of place and its various boundaries, a loose analogy might be drawn between the imbrication of forest and pasture, more characteristic of Ariège than of Savoie, and the overlapping of property and use. The dominance of use rights in Ariège and the contrasting pastoral systems involving communal property in Savoie exemplify this overlapping and point to the primordial role of possession. Perhaps no one grasped the relations between environment, possession, and property better than a nineteenth-century historian of Ax-les-Thermes (Ariège), H. Castillon, who can be forgiven a bit of exaggeration:

For the highlander, who lives far from all established government, in the liberty of primitive nature, the wood of these forests is, like the grass of the pastures . . . , the property of whoever comes to take it. There is something which speaks to him high in his heart: it is necessity. Nature caused him to be born in a district where work is insufficient to feed him, but where vast, uncultivable terrains offer him providential resources, and he concludes the right to profit from them. The only property he recognizes in these mountains is communal property, and that in itself is founded upon the extent of local needs and limited only by them.⁴³

The seasonal nature of pastoralism reinforced a form of possession dictated by necessity: the geographer Vidal de la Blache wrote of pastoral possession as an activity, an annual ritual of reclaiming the summer pastures.⁴⁴

This *longue-durée* history of peasants' access to forest and pasture set the stage for the reception of French foresters in the peripheral mountain ranges in the first half of the nineteenth century. Collective action to defend rights of access in 1830 and 1848 defined the moments of greatest intensity in the struggle for the forest. Beyond Chapter 1, this book covers the period that followed these high points of popular resistance. Chapter 2 treats the Second Empire's approach to reforestation and its reception in both Ariège and Savoie. Chapters 3 and 4 present case studies drawn from within each department in the context of alpine restoration under Third Republic governments. In both cases, peasants responded to restoration in complex ways. Resistance was both overt and anonymous, collective though seemingly individual. It combined old tactics with new opportunities afforded by electoral politics, emigration, which left re-

maining villagers with more resources, and growing literacy. Chapters 5 and 6 alternate between national and departmental scales as they uncover continuities but also changes since the late nineteenth century in the arenas of legislation, ecology, and associational culture.

This is not, then, a simple tale of winners and losers in a conflict over nature. Over time, depopulation permitted forests to cover more of alpine France, rendering state-sponsored restoration less urgent. But in its heyday the politics of restoration was refracted through a prism of antithetical values, perceptions, and cultures. Remarkably, a few of the state's representatives "on the ground," namely foresters, allowed their own politics to become influenced by the particularities of locales. If, however, I have placed more emphasis on the actions and responses of peasants, it is because of a captivating artfulness in their defense of places.

Chapter One Forests, the State, and Alpine Communes: Authority and Conflict, 1669–1860

Our oaks no longer proffer oracles, and we no longer ask of them the sacred mistletoe; we must replace this cult by care; and whatever advantage one may previously have found in the respect that one had for forests, one can expect even more success from vigilance and economy.

—*M. Le Roy*

FROM POLICING TO PROPERTY

From the late eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth, the status of forests in France changed dramatically. Nowhere was the change more apparent than in alpine regions; no longer shunning the barely accessible backwaters with their threatening inhabitants, foresters began to think they could take the alpine forests in hand by formulating technical problems and setting out to solve them. Developments in law, administration, and scientific forestry all contributed to this impetus. The experience of revolution strengthened foresters' resolve and reaffirmed their assumptions about alpine populations. Conversely, peasants' experiences of revolution made them wary of state models. In tracing the background of foresters'

schemes of alpine transformation, this chapter will discuss Ariège more than Savoie, the latter having been reincorporated into France only in 1860. It will focus most of all on the state: in the pursuit of *longue-durée* history, it is hard to find a more appropriate state structure than the Eaux et Forêts. A reasonable starting point is Louis XIV's Forest Ordinance of 1669, a harbinger of later change.

The ordinance itself had many precedents—eighteen recorded edicts pertaining to forests since 1215. Philippe-Auguste instituted the special jurisdiction of Eaux et Forêts in 1219; by 1346, a general staff of *maîtres et enquêteurs* assumed the authority that local bailiffs had enjoyed over royal forests. In the early sixteenth century Francis I issued many regulations pertaining to the conservation of royal, ecclesiastical, and even private forests; in 1537, for example, he prohibited sales of high forest without prior approval of a *parlement*. By Louis XIV's reign, four and a half centuries of sporadic attempts to decree the uses of the forest had left a voluminous, unwieldy record that stood in need of rationalization. In a standard account, the 1669 ordinance achieved this immense juridical task; it also linked jurisdiction with administration, thereby serving as a key model for the Forest Code of 1827.¹

Michel Devèze has called the edict, prepared under Colbert in the course of eight years, “essentially a police ordinance,” and this is correct insofar as “police” is understood broadly as a claim to jurisdiction, which in the case of forests refers to the control of specific territories.² The ordinance presented panoramic claims: forests belonging to the monarchy, the church, communities, parishes, and individuals fell under its purview, as did navigable rivers and the practices of hunting and fishing anywhere in the realm. Both the civil and the criminal aspects of jurisdiction lay in the hands of the *maîtrises*, whose officers carried both judicial and administrative authority. The fourth part of the ordinance, relating to “police and conservation of forests, waters, and rivers,” best reveals the document's judicial scope: among other things, it prohibited the sale of royal forests and banished wood-dependent industries such as tanning and shoe- and charcoal-making from all forests. Other parts of the ordinance were prescriptive, detailing the appropriate ways to conduct surveys, cuts, and auctions of wood. Some of the better-known clauses established the number of mature seed-bearing trees (*baliveaux*) that would be left to stand after a cut, a number that differed according to property regime; others sanctioned the traditional method of exploiting deciduous forests known as *tire-et-aire*—the division of a forest into a certain number of areas, cut annually and consecutively, a method based on the time needed for a forest's regeneration.³

Inevitably, questions concerning who could do what in the forests and what could be taken out of them implicated the status of use rights. In the two major categories of forest rights, pasturing and wood-gathering, the ordinance again made sweeping claims. It confirmed the principle of refusing new use rights in the royal forests (established in the thirteenth century) and suppressed existing rights to firewood in return for indemnities—given only if possession of such rights could be proved to have existed since at least 1560. Regarding forests belonging to communities and parishes, the ordinance allowed partition between a seigneur and a community if the latter possessed the forest by virtue of the seigneur's gratuitous concession; this mechanism, called *tiercement* (also *triage*; one-third to the seigneur, two-thirds to the community) foreshadowed *cantonnement*, the widely practiced nineteenth-century method of clearly demarcating property bereft of use rights. Finally, Colbert's redactors took the bold step of forbidding the pasturing of sheep and goats in all forests, and pasturing of cattle and pigs was to be tightly regulated.⁴

The Ordinance of 1669 far overstepped the limits of the possible. In defining a global jurisdiction over French forests, it had neglected the monarchy's escalating needs for revenue as well as the entrenchment of local custom. For example, the plan to reimburse holders of newly banned use rights foundered on the treasury's financial straits at the end of Louis XIV's reign; throughout the eighteenth century the monarchy even continued to sell its forests in order to raise money, despite the emphatic prohibition of royal alienations in Colbert's ordinance. Special commissioners, hired to verify titles to use rights, effectively secured the rights of those who managed to get their names on the proper lists. Most famously, the forester Louis de Froidour, who carried the grand title of *Commissaire Général Réformateur* for the grande maîtrise of Toulouse, did not enforce the ordinance in the Pyrenees following his observation that severe penury necessitated use rights in the mountains. Until 1684, Froidour issued reforms that maintained the use rights of Pyrenean communities; confirmed by the Conseil d'Etat, the derogations applied to both seigneurial and royal forests.⁵

Froidour had also noted the blurred distinctions between use rights and property in the Pyrenees: inhabitants seemed to enjoy rights to the forest "as masters," an observation based as much on the confusion inherent in written titles as on the practices of the people themselves.⁶ Beyond its failure to establish the state's jurisdiction in the mountains, the Ordinance of 1669 did not effectively substitute a single concept of jurisdiction for these overlapping meanings. After more than a century of intense pressures on the forests paralleled by growing scientific interest in them, Revolutionary legislators again confronted

the problem of communities' jurisdiction and its merely theoretical basis in property. But first came reform at the top.

By the end of 1790, the Constituent Assembly (1789–91) had terminated the criminal jurisdiction of the Eaux et Forêts, abolishing the maîtrises and assigning the prosecution of forest crimes to normal district courts. The assembly toyed with the idea of local control over all forests but in the context of vast new acquisitions of forested lands: the nationalization of ecclesiastical forests in 1790 added close to 800,000 hectares to the state's domain. In 1793 the National Convention (1792–95) confiscated an additional 640,000 hectares of forest from émigrés. Two crucial laws of 1790 had already restricted the alienation of state forests. Although somewhat loosened under the Directory (1795–99), and decried throughout the Revolution by would-be purchasers, the laws placed state forests in a separate category from other nationalized property, effectively preventing their privatization. As early as 1791, the assembly dropped the notion of local management by formally integrating forests confiscated from the church into the newly defined realm of the state's *régime forestier*. The Conservation Générale des Forêts also came into being; though short-lived, it served as the model for the forest service of the nineteenth century. Far from constituting a break with the Colbertian system, the reforms of the Revolution created an enlarged state domain under even firmer jurisdiction.⁷

Still, the state did not own all public forests, for communes had gained recognition of their property rights. They had won significant protections for collective rights in the Rural Code of 1791 and recognition of property by the law of 28 August–14 September 1792. This measure gave legal favor to communes rather than seigneurs in questions of ownership of common lands, adopting as national principle the legal tradition of southern France—*nul seigneur sans titre*, no lord without title. The victory for communes came in the wake of intense debates over the origins of communal property: one theory posited the feudal origins of use rights, allegedly granted by the nobility in the interests of keeping land productive and retaining labor; another put forth the idea of “native property,” a communal patrimony that had preceded and been degraded by use rights. What is most clear from these debates is that national legislators were moving toward rigid distinctions between use rights and property rights, a distinction alien to the people of alpine France.⁸

In the process of revolution, however, communes appropriated vast tracts of land, in particular state forests, rationalizing these acquisitions through the existence of use rights. Though the movement paralleled the many individual appropriations that were part of the great revolutionary property shuffle, the state

began to retaliate under Bonaparte in Year Nine, winning back forested lands in countless legal operations. In Ariège and Haute-Garonne alone, the state stripped communes of 50,862 hectares of forest, cementing a frustration in many districts that would be recalled in the nineteenth century. Communal forests, that is, those recognized by the state, did largely remain intact, for they had been exempt from the decree of 10 June 1793 that allowed partition of the commons at the request of one-third of a commune's inhabitants. In any case, partitioning the commons, rarely hailed with enthusiasm outside the Paris basin and the eastern plains, was especially ill-viewed in alpine areas dependent on extensive grazing lands.⁹

The Revolution changed the status of forests in another important way besides legal reforms of property codes. Leaving thick traces in popular and official memory, the Revolution bequeathed an image of "devastation" to the nineteenth century: peasants had ravaged the forests as they had châteaux, for state control of forests had long symbolized Old Regime authority in general. The highly evocative term *devastation* appeared in many official reports from the period as a code word for several different activities. The most common forest crime of the Revolution was stealing wood, referred to as "pillage," an act hardly unknown in rural France but rendered thoroughly banal by the events of 1789 and after. Second, peasants took to pasturing their sheep in the younger stands of forest officially off limits to them. But most worrisome to authorities was the extension of *défrichement*, clearing the forest for agricultural purposes, much of which took place on fragile mountain slopes. These clearings often followed the usurpation of property, and they had been effectively decriminalized by a reform of September 1791 that legalized the clearing of privately owned woods.¹⁰

Devastation was limited largely to the Midi and to the years 1789–90, the winters of 1794 and 1795, and the end of the Directory—times of acute political tension and subsistence pressures.¹¹ But many contemporaries did not know of or did not heed these specificities in time and place, and *devastation* became coequal with *Revolution* in the administrative analysis of rural, especially alpine, France. What is more, the legacy of "devastation" had far-reaching consequences for nineteenth-century forestry. In the conservative Administration des Forêts of the mid-nineteenth century, reforestation found its historical justification in deforestation, whose origins foresters attributed time and again to the Revolution, occasionally including the last few decades of the Old Regime. It is one thing to evoke the great clearings of the late Middle Ages, which Marc Bloch established as the high years of forest clearance in France, or

to emphasize the accelerating degradation of forests during the whole eighteenth century, constantly at the mercy of an expanding royal navy, flagrant sales of royal forests, growing cities built of wood, and famines and other population pressures. But this *longue-durée* history of the forest has become conventional only in the twentieth century; many foresters and politicians in the nineteenth took a markedly short-term view, one fraught with consequences for forests and peasants alike.¹²

The Revolution was thus two-sided in its effects on the forest. A dark legacy of destruction with impunity paralleled an enlightened legacy of privileging property and enacting reform. In that respect, the Revolution accomplished what the Ordinance of 1669 had stood for in theory—jurisdictional clarity. Now state, communal, and private property would structure the uses of the forest¹³ Yet in spite of its Old Regime taint, in spite of the abolition of the *maîtrises* and the practical work of “pillagers,” the 1669 document was never abrogated. It remained the basis of forest law and the point of departure for its reform. The postrevolutionary imperative lay in correcting and filling gaps in Louis XIV’s edict from the new, seemingly secure basis of property.

GERMAN SILVICULTURE

The gaps were actually more akin to a vacuum of authority; private property did not, in itself, compensate for the power invested in the *Eaux et Forêts* before the Revolution. Instead, the state’s foresters began to elaborate a new system of referents for authority based on technical knowledge. Silviculture and *aménagement* had acquired sufficient prestige during the Revolution to provide those referents. *Aménagement* is quite close in meaning to “forest management,” an aspect of forestry concerned with organizing a forest for a specific purpose, taking into consideration economic and financial factors. The defined purpose of a forest—firewood, lumber, or soil protection—helps determine the location, extent, and periodization of cuts. In American forestry, the two broad types of forest management are even-aged and uneven-aged, the creation, as the terms suggest, of large stands of homogeneously or heterogeneously aged trees.¹⁴ The French term *aménagement* (which can be used in contexts other than forestry) strongly evokes the arrangement and transformation of space. Its etymology dictates the sense of exploiting for the needs of the *ménage*, or human household, and the term strongly suggests the importance of order, as well.¹⁵

Silviculture, on the other hand, means the “art and science of growing trees,”

and as such is a field of applied biology akin to agriculture and horticulture.¹⁶ Whereas *aménagement* is a medieval term, figuring in the 1669 Ordinance in its present meaning, silviculture emerged as a science in the eighteenth century. In practice, of course, these two aspects of forestry have much to do with each other—foresters speak of adapting silvicultural systems to the needs of forest management—even though one aspect is more concerned with growing trees, the other with cutting them. Moreover, it is not clear that the two terms designated entirely separate concepts in eighteenth-century France, especially as the novelty of silviculture began to infuse old notions of *aménagement*.

Silviculture was to a large extent a German import. In both France and the German states, jurists had written tracts and treatises on forests since the sixteenth century; the Germans broke first from the juristic mode, gradually developing a vision of the forest defined by algebra and geometry and aimed at refining technique.¹⁷ A century after Colbert's ordinance—which had said little about technique and entirely neglected questions relating to the growth of conifers—Frederic II created the first German forest academy, in Berlin. Arguably, practical silviculture already existed in France; earlier in the eighteenth century, the naturalists Réaumur and Buffon had published studies on the growth of forests in terms of volume, concepts translated into actual calculations of cubic meters of wood after the Revolution. But because of the schism between practice in the *Eaux et Forêts* and theoretical science, French ideas found their first audience in the German states.¹⁸

During the Revolution and First Empire in France, Prussian scientists wrote what are still considered the classic works of German forestry while founding schools of silviculture throughout the German states. By the early nineteenth century, the reigning principles of the German school comprised progressive conversion of low to high forest, planting conifers, and management based on calculations of surface area or of volume. These tenets pointed toward a single ideal: the creation of uniform forests, consisting of single species and identically aged trees.¹⁹ Each of these concepts had been tested on the ground in France in one way or another, but in an atmosphere of empiricism, not through their scientific elaboration followed by dissemination to professionally trained foresters.

The Revolution allowed the reintroduction of this ensemble of principles to France, now in sophisticated, scientized form. With the invasion of the left bank of the Rhine in 1792 and its full occupation by the end of 1794, a generation of French foresters became exposed to German silviculture. Not only did the left bank, its territory 25 percent forest, become a showcase for Prussian

methods, but a number of acclaimed German foresters also chose to serve the French state. Foresters such as H. von Cotta, Adam Dressler, Friedrich Ostler, and Albert von Schultz taught the trade to those who would attain powerful positions in the French administration; they also advocated the founding of a school of forestry in France. The Alsatians Bernard Lorentz and his son-in-law Adolphe Parade, both of whom became leaders of the nineteenth-century Administration des Forêts, and Jacques-Joseph Baudrillart, founder of the *Annales forestières*, sought to institutionalize the new silviculture and adapt it to the natural and political conditions of France.²⁰

Hardly the reality in eighteenth-century Prussia, the homogeneous forest was even less of a reality in France. But the long-term impact of German methods and the powerful ideal of the rationalized, homogenous forest can hardly be overestimated, as James Scott has recently illustrated. Viewing, growing, and harvesting forests according to mathematical logic reinforced the state's old fiscal approach to forests by better assuring constant yields of timber. Thus forestry provides a keen example of how state-building and the "logic of commercial exploitation" developed together. Once science had honed techniques of measuring and assessing forests, then the scientized forest (single-species, even-aged) could be created, a space that would lend itself perfectly to the use of those very techniques—and to commodities, revenue, and surveillance. In parts of Germany this sort of forest, with its "radical simplicity" and consequent vulnerabilities to insects, diseases, and storm-felling, was created, and it was no place for peasants.²¹

Though the French fully adopted silviculture only under the Restoration, standard German methods remained among the common systems of French forest management into the twentieth century. One method, the calculation of allowable cuts based on surface area, shared a history with (or was derived from) the traditional French practice of *tire-et-aire*, but by the nineteenth century the prestige of German science was improving its reputation. By contrast, the vernacular practice of *jardinage* never received the imprimatur of German silviculture. Although another German method, calculating cuts on the basis of volume, gained a following among French foresters, the latter continued to couch debates over management in terms of a choice between the two older approaches. A brief foray into the French debate over *tire-et-aire* versus *jardinage* provides a further clue to the threat posed to customary uses of the forest.

Several accounts designate *tire-et-aire* as perhaps the oldest and simplest way of managing a forest.²² To obtain the measure of an allowable yearly cut, the surface area of a forest is simply divided by the length of its revolution, or num-

ber of years needed to grow the species of tree (presumed to be only one) to a desired height and girth; a one-hundred-hectare forest allowed to grow for twenty-five years yields the “possibility” of four hectares per year. This portion is the *aire*, or area; the term *tire* refers to the practice of cutting adjacent parcels from one year to the next. Cutting, in this system, generally meant clear-cutting the *aire*, though some seed-bearing trees might be left to help regenerate the parcel. Thus, *tire-et-aire* lies in the category of even-aged management. Approved in royal edicts since the sixteenth century, this rational and geometric method of dividing up the forest remained the basis of official *aménagement* in the nineteenth.²³ By then, it had also received the sanction of German silviculture.

Jardinage, on the other hand, was a method that sprang from below. Long associated with forests subject to use rights and with coniferous forests in general, *jardinage*—“gardening”—meant culling a prescribed number of individual, fully mature trees throughout an entire forest. After a *jardinage*, a forest would look much the same as before, with nearly mature trees left to shade and protect younger ones. Peasants in both the Alps and the Pyrenees who pastured livestock in the forests relied on *jardinage* as a protective measure against their animals’ teeth: if the whole area had to regenerate, animals would chew the saplings. We could call this uneven-aged management, or, as many contemporaries viewed it through the nineteenth century, a dangerous and disorderly approach. Authorities had a difficult time identifying illegal cutting in a forest subject to *jardinage*; at the very least, the method threatened jurisdictional boundaries. The “gardened” forest also created aesthetic disorder, to the point where some observers confused it with “devastation.”²⁴

Jardinage has a paradoxical history: though execrated in edict after edict, it became domesticated. Foresters had long observed that *tire-et-aire* could be disastrous when applied to the coniferous forests of the mountains, given the erosion and degradation that resulted from the presence of sizeable bare areas. Huffel believed that *jardinage* had been practiced and officially approved in the Vosges as early as the fifteenth century. Froidour himself prescribed *jardinage* for the pine forests of the Pyrenees, and its sanctioned use spread to the Massif Central, namely the Cévennes, in the eighteenth century.²⁵ Royal foresters might adapt *jardinage* to their purposes, but it remained largely identified as a peasant practice until the early twentieth century. Etienne Dralet, Froidour’s distant successor as chief forester for the Pyrenean region during the First Empire, inveighed against the peasants’ use of “this disastrous *jardinage*.” Peasants cut trees wastefully, slashing and discarding the lateral branches of young oaks

until they reached the most vigorous one, taking out whole young pines to make a single *sabot*: referring to years of the Revolution during which Pyrenean communes had usurped state forests, Dralet wrote, “two pines were necessary to supply a man with shoes, six for the year, 2,000 for a village of a hundred families.” For Dralet, quelling the “disorders” in the Pyrenees meant using all means from reason to armed force in order to wean peasants from their profligate uses of the forest; disorderly themselves, peasants invariably left devastated forests in their wake.²⁶

In any case, German silviculture did not favor *jardinage*. Bernard Lorentz, the first director of the *Ecole Nationale des Eaux et Forêts* (see below), introduced a scientific variant of *tire-et-aire* from Germany called natural regeneration.²⁷ The adoption of a glorified *tire-et-aire* as silviculture sat well with the many foresters who, unfamiliar with alpine forests, had always looked askance at *jardinage*. As the prestige of German silviculture in France began to grow in the early nineteenth century, it became defined in opposition to peasants’ uses of the forest. The Alsatian Philippe Hermann, future forest conservator of Colmar, had already explained the purpose of silviculture in 1790, which was to exploit woods not “according to the interests of users [*usufruitiers*], but [according to] the possibility of reproduction from one revolution to the other.”²⁸

Silviculture, though enhanced by the general prestige of science as well as territorial conquests during the Revolution, could not come into its own without a corps of organized and trained practitioners. Napoleon Bonaparte created the *Administration des Forêts* in January 1801, the first of three steps toward national forestry achieved in the early nineteenth century, followed by a school of forestry and a new forest code. The revamped administration included structural elements from both the Old Regime corps and the *Conservation Générale des Forêts* of 1791, but only a symbolic shade of the *Eaux et Forêts*’ legal jurisdiction remained: the right of foresters to stand next to the public prosecutor in correctional courts. But the reason for a new administration had much to do with jurisdiction in that the state had to establish its authority over the former ecclesiastical and seignorial forests—almost a million hectares. Bonaparte also needed a corps of foresters to extract revenue from these lands; he linked the financing of several major institutions, including the Senate, to revenue from the state’s forests, keeping his forest administration under the Ministry of Finance, where it remained until 1877. Above all, he needed a forest administration because he needed a navy, another Old Regime inheritance. A good sailing ship still required roughly six thousand oaks in the early

nineteenth century, and the impact of revolutionary “devastation” had not been lost on the First Consul.²⁹

At the top of the pyramidal hierarchy stood five general administrators, who oversaw a maximum of thirty conservators. The successors, in loose terms, of the Old Regime *grands maîtres*, the conservators were distributed in provincial posts where they managed from two to eight departments. Their major duty entailed negotiating between prefectorial and judicial authorities, and they had the last word on the size of annual cuts and lumber sales. Finally, each conservator also donned the hat of forest inspector in the districts that served as headquarters for his region. Most technical functions devolved upon two hundred inspectors assisted by three hundred subinspectors; many members of these ranks retained positions held under the Old Regime and the Revolution. Finally, approximately five hundred general guards took on the chief policing roles, while an enormous corps of eight thousand *gardes particuliers* saw to daily surveillance in the forests of the state.³⁰

The Administration des Forêts instituted a system of promotion based on experience; it also retained a percentage of income for retirement pensions before the Ministry of Finance enacted a retirement system for all of its personnel. Despite the incipient meritocracy and social protection, the salary structure favored top administrators, who earned hefty salaries of ten thousand francs; this sum represented fifty times what the poorest-paid guards in the state forests made, a yearly income less than that of most urban workers.³¹ Hierarchy was reinforced in another way: until the end of the nineteenth century, the Administration des Forêts cultivated multiple links with the army and based its uniforms, discipline, and mandatory *esprit de corps* on military traditions. During the Consulate and the Empire, the administration recruited its upper echelons largely from the ranks of Old Regime officers; after 1803 it drew many of its subaltern personnel from the ranks of wounded soldiers, whose re-employment became mandatory in 1811.³² The evolving uniform of the state’s foresters served the double purpose of providing visible distinctions among ranks and setting the forester of whatever status apart from the people he would encounter while on duty. Because all elements of the uniform had to be purchased by the employee, details in dress changed according to rank: the tight-fitting green suit and all its accoutrements were reserved for the elite. Yet even the incomplete uniform that guards could afford—a bandoleer slung across the torso, a cap, and good shoes (they were given muskets in the 1840s)—provided ample distinguishing signs.³³ At a glance, a forest guard would never be confused with a peasant (figure 1).



Figure 1. Officer of the Administration des Forêts in full uniform, 1885. Negative by Kuss. ADS.

The military recruitment of much of the corps collided with increasing technical demands on foresters. Influential agents in the upper ranks, many of whom received their training in the German states, bemoaned the fact that most of their inferiors did not possess the slightest knowledge of forestry. A new administrative structure had not magically produced qualified foresters, but the founding of France's first national forestry school in 1824 relieved many fears of structural incompetence. One of the youngest of the *grandes écoles*, yet the first established in a provincial city, the Ecole Nationale des Eaux et Forêts was located in Nancy, it has been argued, because of the city's proximity to German-speaking Europe and to the varied forests of eastern France. With the initial cost of tuition, room, and board fixed at twelve hundred francs per year for the two-year program, the school recruited its students from aristocratic and bourgeois backgrounds, by means of a national exam, for much of the century. Similar to those of the *grandes écoles* that preceded it, the school's founding charter defined its mandate as training the personnel of a national administration. The first three directors at Nancy, Alsations imbued with the German science, resolved that silviculture would be the basis of this training. By 1837, Lorentz and his son-in-law Adolphe Parade, who directed Nancy from 1838 to 1864, had produced the first French textbook of forestry, *Cours élémentaire de culture des bois*.

Founded to teach silviculture, not policing, the "Ecole de Nancy" nevertheless reinforced the military ethos of the Forêts. Hardly fortuitous was the dispensation from military service that students at Nancy received in 1826. Required to board at the school beginning in 1839, students also wore uniforms and submitted to rituals of discipline and obedience. After the Franco-Prussian War, students not only received some military instruction at Nancy, but they also had to spend a year in an infantry regiment or battalion of riflemen after their two years of study. Less formally but just as crucially, students received instruction in an ethic: like their counterparts at military schools tutored in patriotism, the Nancéens were taught to "love the forest with passion," and the forest, after all, was a large part of the *patrie*.³⁴

Both militarization and the very existence of Nancy bore heavily on the lowly forest guards, for these phenomena intensified rifts in the internal hierarchy. A graduate of Nancy could land a job as *garde général* or, at best, subinspector. Thousands of *gardes particuliers* continued to emanate largely from military ranks, even after the founding of three schools for forest guards in 1863. The unspoken similarity between the upper and lower echelons of foresters—military backgrounds in the latter, much quasi-military training among the former—did not prevent savage condescension on the part of the forestry elite.

Along with the countless guards of communally owned forests, who were not assimilated into Eaux et Forêts ranks until 1919 and depended for their meager salaries on municipal councils, the *gardes particuliers* of the state's forests became true outsiders: demeaned by their superiors for their ignorance of forestry, they were commonly hated throughout the countryside for resembling *gendarmes* and incarnating the state's jurisdiction over forests. Like peasants themselves, forest guards had to supplement their livelihoods with the forest's fruits. Authorized by the administration to keep two cows, gather a certain amount of wood, and cut grasses, they often competed for limited resources. Yet it was not this as much as their previous training in the arts of repression that assured their execration in rural France.³⁵

THE FOREST CODE OF 1827

Within three years of the founding of Nancy, however, even the least paid forest guard could derive some status from enforcing the organic set of laws known as the *Code forestier* of 1827—the first significant revision of Colbert's ordinance. The new Forest Code became the linchpin in the reformed system of state forestry: it resolved the remaining jurisdictional confusion of the previous thirty-eight years and dealt with forest management in ways that reflected the growing influence of the Nancy school. Still, by rationalizing the criminal aspects of forest law, it echoed the Ordinance of 1669 and set the stage for a new era of contestation between the state and users of the forest.

Many of the code's 225 articles found precedents in the older document, yet M. de Martignac, Minister of State for Charles X and spokesperson for the code, accented its liberal, lenient, and fair qualities. Martignac deliberately placed the code in the line of legal reforms since the Revolution, proclaiming that "[t]he word 'arbitrary,' in effect, has been forever crossed out by our kings from French legislation."³⁶ For the corporal punishment, multiple rationales for incarceration, and heavy fines of the previous era, the new code substituted a system of far lower fines for most crimes committed in and against the forests. Leniency certainly described the code's prescriptions for private forests, too, in keeping with the protection given private property in Napoleon's Civil Code and with the political clout of the large owners of property who supported the regime of Charles X. Private owners could manage their forests as they wished, notwithstanding the single noteworthy restriction that forbade clear-cutting, for the subsequent twenty years; even this restriction excepted young forests, small forests, private gardens, and parks.

The spirit of liberalism did not extend to the articles pertaining to communal forests. In the context of communal property, the code achieved a striking union of the concepts of jurisdiction and management: as article 90 stated, “[There] shall be submitted to the forest regime . . . the low and high forests belonging to communes and public establishments, which will be recognized as liable to management or exploitation on a regular basis.”³⁷ The phrase “liable to management” (*susceptible d’aménagement*) received varying interpretations in the nineteenth century, yet what is clear is the linking of a jurisdictional category—the forest regime—with management. To manage was also to control, after all, as would become more evident once the implications of silviculture began to play themselves out during the century. By extension, article 90 cast communal authorities as bad managers of their forests. One of the code’s promoters clarified this assumption as follows: “The state is taking over control of communal woods only in order to assure their perpetuation via regular management. . . . [It is] impossible for *communalistes* to administer their woods by themselves and to assure proper surveillance.”³⁸ The Forest Code thus defined communes as legal minors with respect to their forests, suggested that public interest was something other than communal interest, and partially undid the gains made during the Revolution toward the recognition of communal property.

In the communal forests “liable to management,” the state established jurisdiction by giving foresters the right to mark trees and officiate at sales of wood. The state’s heaviest imprint on communal forests bore upon pasturing: no longer would sheep or goats be tolerated in these forests, a measure that also harkened back to 1669. The center had in effect designated *pâturage* as a space, by definition outside the forest, erasing its vernacular meaning as the practice of pasturing animals in a variety of environments. By the law of 1827, only the Minister of Agriculture could allow exceptions to the rule. But the larger difference between the two codes lay in what followed: Pyrenean communities, for example, did not receive special derogations from the code of 1827 as they had from the Ordinance of 1669.³⁹

The articles pertaining to communal forests unveil the elements of order and control that lay behind principles of management. In the early nineteenth century, however, the state first had to create jurisdiction over its own forests by clearly delimiting state property. In order to resolve the problem of superimposed uses by creating a neat fabric of juxtaposed properties, legislators had recourse to cantonnement, the legal means of converting use rights into property rights, a measure legislated in 1790 theoretically to protect communal property.

The Forest Code also allowed private and communal owners of forest to initiate the procedure, illustrating that cantonnement was more than an expedient measure allowing the state to control its own forests.⁴⁰

For cantonnement involved not only property lines: to reorganize a forest through cantonnement meant, in fact, to rewrite its value in the language of capitalism. As worked out in the years after 1827, the first step in any cantonnement involved calculating the “users’ capital” (*capital usager*), that is, the capitalized value of the use rights. Titles to use rights, by contrast, had never attached a monetary value to them; such a designation would have departed from the tenet of perpetual rights freely granted. If a commune, for example, possessed use rights to a given forest, the commune’s annual needs for firewood and lumber, figured in cubic meters, would be multiplied by the respective market value of each kind of wood; this figure, in turn, would typically be multiplied by twenty to obtain the capitalized value of the use rights. Similarly, the capitalized value of the forest itself—now characterized by the “immobile capital” of its land and the “mobile capital” of its trees—required calculation in order to see how the value of the rights would map onto the value of the land. If the former figure outweighed the latter, an adjudicator’s conclusion would be that use rights were weighing too heavily on the forest, outdistancing its “possibility.” In most cases of cantonnement, however, the use rights translated into roughly two-thirds of the value of the forest, and communes consequently obtained titles of property to two-thirds of the area in question. Though often left with a mere third of its former domain, the Administration des Forêts deemed these arrangements advantageous, for the state’s forests could then be managed scientifically, and the state could increase revenue by no longer having to pay guards’ salaries, while collecting taxes, on the other two-thirds.

The articles on cantonnement thus completed a paradox in which the Forest Code helped create more communal property while undercutting its importance by submitting it to the forest regime. Offered fewer use rights and more property of dubious integrity, communes often engaged in long legal disputes over cantonnement. The municipal council of Ax-les-Thermes (Ariège), for example, delayed its cantonnement for twenty-seven years by repeatedly refusing the administration’s proposals, addressing letters to the Minister of Finance that warned of local rebellion, texturing complaints with historical references to immemorial use rights, and otherwise winning last-minute concessions. Although litigation was not a novelty for alpine communes, the case of Ax reveals the adoption of new vocabularies by literate members of the com-

muné in order to beat the state at its own game. Contests over cantonnement helped create a new element in the evolving repertoire of popular protest: a foot-dragging use of bureaucracy woven into an older repertoire of violent direct action.⁴¹

Finally, the Forest Code of 1827 lay well within the framework of Colbert's ordinance by virtue of its title 10, which pertained to the "policing and conservation of woods and forests." The articles in this section defined explicitly the forest crimes that had not been defined implicitly in other sections of the code. They set forth in meticulous terms the plants that could not be extracted without permission, the sorts of tools permitted in the forest, where one and one's livestock could appear in the forest (only on obvious roads and paths), and the distances to be respected for the building of houses and industries near forests. Alongside each prohibition appeared the corresponding fine.⁴²

Titles 11 and 12, pertaining to judicial action and penalties, gave teeth to the category "forest crime." These sections of the code restored some of the judicial power of the former *Eaux et Forêts*. Foresters could once again initiate legal proceedings against suspects, who might be pursued simultaneously by the administration and by a state prosecutor. Bearing witness to acts or evidence of criminal activity, forest guards also had authority to draft reports while under oath, which stood as official evidence if written and submitted according to formal prescription. If correctly done, the reports of forest guards established guilt until proof of innocence, regardless of the potential penalty for the crime in question. Forest guards also received authority to seize animals caught pasturing illegally as well as to confiscate illegally cut wood. Fines increased geometrically for each decimeter of a tree's circumference, and a range of fines per type of livestock comprised the penalties for clandestine pasturing. In the original code, the guilty could not be sentenced to prison for a forest crime *per se*, but by a law of 1859 a term of between three months and two years was meted to those found guilty of falsifying the tools foresters used to mark trees—the signs of their jurisdiction.⁴³

For decades to come, local and regional authorities as well as peasants denounced the Forest Code for its severity and for its neglect of the vital differences between forests of the plains and those of the mountains. Officials in the Restoration (1815–1830) and July Monarchy (1830–1848) governments never disproved a common contention that the code had been drafted hastily and—like the 1669 ordinance—in consideration of the forests of the Paris basin, the quintessential plain.⁴⁴ Twenty-three years after passage of the code, a justice of the peace from Ax-les-Thermes framed his complaints in terms of order and

chaos. The chaos of the mountains deeply contradicted the rational lineaments of the Forest Code:

It is easy to understand, in effect, that woods of the plain . . . could be submitted to the forest regime. But how is one to understand that alpine woods, situated in a different climate, subjected to rigorous inclemency, to enormous masses of snow; that these woods, I say, which vary with each step like the soil; which are interspersed with empty lands [*vacans*], grasses, bizarrely wooded rocks, precipices, ravines, communal and private pastures, passages for livestock . . . encumbered by the miserable local population with a multitude of imperious needs attached to their agricultural industry, or better said their existence; [how is it that these woods] could be subjected to the theories of the forestry school, which has never understood these needs and which has never calculated the difference between the difficulties of managing woods in the mountain and those on the plain?⁴⁵

Two revolutions, no less tumultuous in the Pyrenees than in Paris, had transpired since 1827, but the local official turned arguments for order upside down by upholding the chaotic “nature” of mountains and their inhabitants.

CONTESTING THE CODE

In a broader context, the code exacerbated social and economic realities that had already begun to erode peasants’ access to the forests. The population of alpine France grew rapidly in the early nineteenth century; in most districts of the Pyrenees, falling mortality rates had launched a demographic transition in the eighteenth century. Ariège had experienced a doubling of population between 1741 and 1846, and the department set a record along with Hautes-Pyrénées of a 10 percent rate of natural increase in the decade 1821–30, significantly above the national average of 7 percent. The later and more gradual demographic transition in the Alps caused mortality and fertility to decline only after 1850. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, population growth in the Maurienne (Savoie) kept pace with that throughout Ariège: both populations grew by 27 percent between 1801 and 1846–48.⁴⁶

Population growth heightened needs for wood and other forest products while compelling peasants to clear more forest for the planting of rye and potatoes on mountain slopes. More people also acquired more cows, sheep, goats, and pigs, squeezing pastoral resources; numbers of livestock increased even more rapidly than the human population of the mountains in the first half of the nineteenth century, owing to heightened demand for meat from the cities.⁴⁷ Greater densities of livestock and consequent overgrazing struck keenly at eco-

logical balance in Savoie. The quantity and quality of forest declined. Extended cultivation carved into the lower limits of forest but even more into the lower, irrigated pastures; to compensate, peasants extended the alpine pastures by cutting into the forest from above.⁴⁸

An additional element complicated matters in Ariège, for agriculture and stock-raising had begun to compete with a local industry that stood to wreak the most havoc on the forests. The development of catalan forges in the late eighteenth century had created state-of-the-art metallurgy, a more decentralized and more efficient technology than large blast furnaces.⁴⁹ A hydraulic system, the catalan forge permitted the transformation of iron ore directly into malleable ingot iron, thus avoiding the stage of pig iron. Ariège was rich in the two primary materials needed for iron production—iron ore and trees, the latter transformed into wood and then charcoal to power the forges. Catalan-forge metallurgy took off in the first half of the nineteenth century, reaching its peak in Ariège in 1853. It took an acute toll on the forest: in 1840 alone, the department's fifty-seven forges consumed 240,000 steres, or cubic meters, of wood. Although this figure represented greater efficiency since the beginning of the century, many foresters and departmental authorities continued to castigate the forge owners for their greed, predicting irreparable degradation and permanent emigration from alpine communes.⁵⁰

Changes in the regime of private property also curtailed peasants' access to forests. Wealthy bourgeois purchased a number of large, formerly seigneurial forests early in the century, and the new owners sought to restrict use rights on their lands, many of which they then sold or leased to ironworks. Large owners of livestock engaged in similar pursuits, encouraging the less wealthy to exercise use rights on lands owned by the state and communes, and not on their own. Coupled with these growing restrictions on private lands was a collapse in the early nineteenth century of the old consensus surrounding the commons: appropriations and usurpations from both high and low in rural society became the norm throughout the Pyrenees. If many of the alpine communes most dependent on pastoralism were able to prevent loss of the commons, consensus did not necessarily return: poorer peasants clamored for partition of common lands while the state and bourgeoisie pushed for their sale. Municipal councils passed ever-more-stringent regulations on use of the commons in an effort to preempt usurpations, yet many mayors were themselves large landowners content to let their poorer constituents wage war over communal property. All of these tendencies tore at the coherence of the always precarious pastoral world. The Forest Code exacerbated tensions by further squeezing access to

pastures and forests, favoring private property, extinguishing use rights, expelling sheep and goats from the forests, and restricting the few privileges that remained.⁵¹

Forest crimes escalated in such circumstances. Though it acted with more rigor after 1840, the government of the July Monarchy made enforcing the Forest Code a priority from its inception.⁵² The number of criminal convictions in the alpine *arrondissement* of Saint-Girons (Ariège) increased steadily throughout the 1830s, from 415 in 1827 to 2,340 in 1844. Arrests increased notably for the most minor forest crimes, such as gathering firewood from the forest floor or pasturing a single cow in areas off limits. The fines dictated by the code, putatively light and rational, were onerous for peasants in the Pyrenees: at a time when pasturing fines alone represented up to half the value of each animal, many cases of insolvency resulted in jail sentences of between two weeks and two months. Peasants resented the excessive powers placed in the hands of forest guards, authorized to seize livestock and send delinquents to court for the least infraction. A prosecutor in Toulouse believed in 1830 that peasants had begun to attribute their misery to the Forest Code.⁵³

Philippe Vigier analyzes forest crimes, as banal in the Alps as in the Pyrenees, as “the logical extension of the essential role played by wood and its different uses in the existence of traditional rural communities.”⁵⁴ In other words, taking wood, pasturing in the forest, and clearing for agriculture were traditional activities that the state had criminalized. Jean-François Soulet, discussing the Pyrenees, nuances this view by distinguishing a “delinquency of misery,” which fluctuated with the subsistence crises of the early nineteenth century, from a “quasi-institutional delinquency” widely practiced for commercial purposes and often linked to communes heavily involved in smuggling. These forest crimes included the fraudulent cutting of wood for speculative sale to forge owners—a practice by no means condoned by all members of the village community.⁵⁵

But the dizzying increase in forest crimes after 1827 clearly stemmed from the double vice of the Forest Code, which restricted access to the forest while providing for efficient repression of forest crimes. By defining forest crimes as individually punishable acts, the law blinded authorities to the possibilities of collective action. Indeed, the state could hardly have been less prepared for one of the most celebrated of all nineteenth-century revolts—the “War of the Demoiselles,” which took place throughout Ariège from 1829 until 1832. This “war” consisted of a series of autonomous, guerrilla-like actions in which small bands of men armed with various implements or guns repossessed the forests

by threatening, chasing, and sometimes attacking forest guards and charcoal makers, thus targeting at once the state and the bourgeois owners of forest and forge. The men adopted an abridged, or caricatured, disguise: pulling out their white shirts and tying them at the waist, darkening their faces, and donning a kerchief or perhaps an animal skin for the head, to some extent (especially if barely glimpsed through the forest and at night) they passed themselves off as women—hence the name “Demoiselles.”

Though condemned by the department’s bourgeoisie, the War of the Demoiselles unified heterogeneous Ariège in a geographical sense: beginning at the western tip of Ariège in the forests of Saint-Lary, the revolt spread eastward, especially into the Massat Valley and the Haute-Ariège, eventually involving the whole department. The revolt also changed character in 1830, coinciding with the overthrow of the Restoration monarchy in Paris. Before July, the Demoiselles had extended their attacks from the persons of guards and charcoal makers to the properties of local notables, reviving scenarios from the Great Revolution that included appropriating legal documents pertaining to immemorial rights as well as sacking and burning châteaux. Hearing the news from Paris, the Demoiselles began to use the rhetoric of liberty to underscore their attacks on property and claims to the forest; during approximately the last half of 1830, the insurgents abandoned their disguise, fully adopting the “transparent” language of revolution. Yet by the spring of 1831, they once again dressed as demoiselles.

This deft handling of old and new vocabularies has given rise to a number of interpretations that seek to place the War of the Demoiselles in the vast context of European popular revolt. Among recent authors, Soulet depicts the war as singular but not original; the pursuit and expulsion of forest guards, the later episodes of *jacquerie*, the use of disguise and carnivalesque folklore, and the elements of organized revolt formed part of the larger repertoire of Pyrenean contestation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁶ For John Meriman, the War of the Demoiselles verges on the anachronistic; although he allows the revolt a political character, defining its politics as a “local issue—the forests, and who had rights to them,” he concludes that it represented the last gasp of a losing battle: “[The Demoiselles] were a colorful but tragic vestige of an old world.”⁵⁷

Most recently, Peter Sahlins has recovered the symbolic dimension of the revolt in order to explain not only its particular timing and the use of disguise but also, and more broadly, how popular culture infused politics in 1830. The Demoiselles, Sahlins argues, self-consciously used traditions such as the festive

calendar and the feminine symbolism of the forest, dramatizing their grievances as well as their ideals. Moreover, the years 1829–32 saw a remarkable exchange of threads of political culture between Ariège and the distant center of Paris; Ariègeois peasants used the “Parisian” rhetoric of liberty after July 1830, while the peasant practice of *charivari* came back to Paris and other urban centers in both journalism and action. These instances contributed to a long history of such exchanges. Through this illustration, Sahlins builds bridges between Old Regime and nineteenth-century France, dispelling the argument for “anachronism” or even “vestige.” His central claim for a self-conscious use of repertoire casts doubt on the major assumptions concerning peasants in modernization theory.⁵⁸

All histories of the Demoiselles, however, show a reluctance to draw connections to subsequent struggles. Sahlins suggests that popular opposition to the Forêts endured through different means, namely, individual delinquency and legal action. But during the next major episode of the struggle, the Revolution of 1848, peasants combined these tactics with the older tradition of “devastating” the forest and the novelty of electoral politics. Gone were lightly disguised guerrillas and the politics of *charivari*. The Second Republic provided the mold for future conflicts over the forest.

The forest troubles of 1848 were the most dramatic elements in the great peasant conflagration that mobilized significant portions of the southwest, the southeast, and the center of France. Scenes of extraordinary violence resulted from the massive misery of the small peasantry, hit by one of the worst subsistence crises of the century: potato and grain harvests failed from 1845 to 1847, causing the last famine in France’s history. Small proprietors and sharecroppers also targeted the inroads made by capitalist agriculture, destroying modern implements such as ploughs and threshing machines. If, as for Albert Soboul, peasant sedition in 1848 reflected “the permanence of old reflexes,” it occurred in a unique conjuncture of crop failure, deepening capitalism, and population pressure that was most critical in the Pyrenees.⁵⁹

In that region, the crisis centered around reduced access to an increasingly depleted forest. The traditional safety net with its store of acorns, beechnuts, berries, and edible plants, the forest had less to give by 1845: as early as 1830, the effect of tariffs on foreign iron had begun to tell upon the forests of Ariège, as forge owners allowed their wholesale consumption in a spate of iron production. Fifteen years later, fifty-seven forges pounded in Ariège, and the price of charcoal had risen so high it “frightened the sellers themselves.”⁶⁰ Simultaneously, the Forêts began to overturn the peasants’ victory of 1830. The Demoi-

selles had won limited pasturing rights and a general amnesty by September 1830; officials had even extended these privileges beyond the confines of Ariège. But the pasturing rights had been granted on a temporary basis and had to be renewed each year; the royal favor had done nothing to diminish the uncertainty into which the code had thrown Pyrenean peasants. In September 1846 the Forêts suddenly reduced the grazing privileges granted in the Cerdagne and the Capcir (Pyrénées-Orientales), an act that reverberated in nearby Ariège.⁶¹

From the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, the Pyrenees ignited once Parisians had overturned the July Monarchy. By February 28, whole villages in the Quérigut, the isolated eastern extremity of Ariège, had begun to pursue forest guards and local “capitalists”—the principal usurers of the canton. Repressed by line troops in the first week of March, the revolt then metamorphosed into massive delinquency in the forests. Simultaneously, peasants in the Barousse Valley (Hautes-Pyrénées) launched a revolt against forest guards and tax collectors, pillaging houses, holding notables for ransom, appropriating legal documents, and pillaging the château of Luscan. Of seven hundred to eight hundred participants, only sixteen—manual workers, peasants, and artisans—were inculpated. Other regions in Basses-Pyrénées and Hautes-Pyrénées remained in a state of “permanent insurrection” from March to August.⁶²

Beyond these organized revolts, the most common collective action in Ariège harkened back more to 1789 than to 1830: peasants repossessed their usurped commons and forests with violence, pillaging and burning large sections of communally as well as privately owned forest. Fires began in the spring of 1848, concentrating in forests of the upper Ariège and upper Couserans basins. The heaviest destruction occurred in a forest belonging to a notable, M. Bergasse-Laziroule of Saurat, a village on the road between Tarascon and Massat; between February and May peasants cut or mutilated more than 12,000 trees. By October, the conservator of forests in Toulouse placed the estimate of illegally cut trees in the department at 70,574, not including the forests of Quérigut, Ax, and Mérens, and lamented that it would be fifteen or twenty years before the forests of Ariège would begin to recover. The administration would eventually estimate the damage done to them at more than 2 million francs.⁶³

The frequency of pillage and fire, as opposed to the direct confrontations of the Demoiselles, suggested to authorities that individual delinquency had taken on staggering proportions, while collective action had been abandoned. The general prosecutor in Toulouse was still thinking in terms of “forest crimes” in May when he complained that malefactors would have to be prosecuted indi-

vidually since they had not been seen in any gatherings. Outsiders were often unable to tease out the collective element in “devastation,” so blurred had the traces of collusion become. Yet clues were hardly lacking. After the destruction in Saurat, brigades of gendarmes and a detachment of troops descended on the region, arresting two locals; inhabitants rioted, demanding the prisoners’ liberty and shooting and throwing stones at the troops, wounding three gendarmes and several soldiers.⁶⁴ Though unable to locate the exact nature of the troubles on the sliding scale between individual and collective action, the national government opted for swift repression—undertaken several months before the June Days in Paris. From February 1848 until December 1849, roughly nine thousand soldiers were dispatched to the Pyrenees uniquely to repress the *troubles forestiers*; even more troops tried to quell revolts over tax collection and city tolls in the region. Flames in the Pyrenean forests demanded a full 18 percent of the entire repressive force dispatched throughout France during the Second Republic.⁶⁵

That regime is of course most remembered for the political apprenticeship allowed by universal male suffrage practiced under a republican constitution. The voting record of the Ariègeois must be judged in light of the legal repression that preceded the elections of 1848 and 1849. Toward the end of March 1848, the ministers of interior and finance in the provisional government instructed prefects to annul all derogations to the laws in force, to pursue crimes vigorously, and to support the Administration des Forêts. Radical demands from the Capcir and Cerdagne called for the abolition of the Forêts; the government responded in the spring by reinstating the forest guards who had recently been revoked or expelled. Early abandonment by the Republic, which many assumed would bring clemency and reform of the forest regime, became a lasting fact. An antirepublican movement would appear to be the obvious consequence, but the electoral picture was more complicated. The mountainous arrondissement of Foix returned the smallest percentage of votes cast in the central Pyrenees for Louis-Napoleon in the presidential election of December 1848; while the neighboring departments of Hautes-Pyrénées and Haute-Garonne favored the right in the legislative elections of 1849, Ariège returned 49.8 percent of its votes to republican candidates. Sixty-five percent of voters in the canton of Castillon, hotbed of the Demoiselles, voted for the left in 1849. Some historians interpret this voting as an act of faith consistent with peasants’ memories of revolution: they voted republican because the republic had once meant freedom in the forests. By 1851, however, disappointment with the regime bore fruit.⁶⁶

In the plebiscite following the coup of 2 December 1851, both Ariège and Pyrénées-Orientales voted heavily in Louis-Napoleon's favor, as did France as a whole; all voting results of the 1851 plebiscite must be held at arm's length, however, given the atmosphere of repression in which it was conducted. The two departments show a partial contrast in their participation in the revolt against the coup: whereas Pyrénées-Orientales furnished perhaps ten thousand insurgents, Ariège was virtually unmoved, hosting a single unarmed demonstration in the lowland town of Pamiers. A deeper similarity emerges from the fact that the alpine regions of both departments remained quiet. Relatively remote and geared to subsistence, these regions contrast with areas of the Midi that did stage armed insurrections: in Ted Margadant's well-known analysis, an economy increasingly based on cash-cropping and crafts and thus vulnerable to market fluctuations, tight village-town interdependencies, and secret societies with a broad social basis created the conditions for republican mobilization in the face of counterrevolution.⁶⁷ Louis-Napoleon's amnesty of 15 January 1852, for all who owed fines or were serving sentences for forest crimes, can be viewed as a reward for alpine quiescence.

Ariège, then, provides a fit example for Margadant's warning that "ideology needs to be distinguished from collective action." But if republicanism was not to die for by 1851, electoral politics had left a mark, in the context of violence. Frustrated by patterns of voting that differed from canton to canton, Soulet dismisses the Pyrenean forest revolts as "primary," that is, nonpolitical. Such a statement overlooks the early marriage between elections and violence; Yves-Marie Bercé's concept of political violence, which he frames as the common ground between revolt and revolution, does more justice to the events of 1848 in the Pyrenees. By 1849 some members of the Ariègeois elite had begun to realize that the road to peasants' ballots led straight through the forest.⁶⁸

One would-be politician sought a constituency precisely by championing traditional forest rights. Latour de St.-Ybars, an Ariègeois poet, set forth his opinions in a pamphlet, "De la Question forestière dans l'Ariège," which also announced his candidacy for the legislative elections of May 1849. He pointedly turned the tables on the Administration des Forêts by arguing that it was the Forest Code itself and foresters' "vicious systems of management" that were destroying the beech and fir forests of Ariège. Asserting that the greatest prosperity of the forest had coincided with liberal use rights, St.-Ybars set 1848 against 1793, a calm year for the forests: "In '93 . . . there was no emotion in our mountains, no havoc in the forests, not a tree cut by these same men who today would like to destroy the woods, so exasperated are they with what they have

suffered.” Discussing jardinage, forest crimes, and rural poverty, he concluded that the forests had lost their public purpose and served only the administration and its personnel; why else would they be the only ones defending the Forest Code? His platform demanded immediate amnesty for all those convicted of forest crimes and the institution of communal management over all forests. Nothing less would conform to the spirit of 1848: “When all French people [*sic*] have the faculty of naming their representatives and the president of the republic, it is supremely absurd to deny a certain number of citizens the right to manage the commons.”⁶⁹

The pamphlet elicited not only derogatory comments from the regional conservator of forests but also a detailed riposte from a local forester who was not an electoral rival. Attacking St.-Ybars for his ideas concerning silviculture, the anonymous forester spoke from the basis of professionalism, a position conquered over the previous half century by the Forêts. This, too, was politics: who could best represent Ariège by speaking most credibly about its forests and its people? The forester accused St.-Ybars of being an outsider, a man of the plain not versed in the ways of mountain people. But his own estimation of the Ariégeois rested on assumptions current among French foresters since the Revolution: these people had let their culture degenerate. Alluding to “the time when the patriarchal customs of the rural inhabitants were far from having degenerated like today,” the forester implicitly ranked the degraded peasants with their degraded forests, in words reminiscent of Dralet’s. He cast doubt on his own subsequent statement of sympathy with the peasants, proclaiming their common bond of Frenchness. Above all, the anonymous retort took issue with St.-Ybars’ account of deforestation. The forester countered St.-Ybars’ historicizing of 1793 with a narrative describing the decline of the forests due to abuse by peasants just as much as forge owners: “This sad state of affairs dominates in all alpine communes. The inhabitants’ lack of foresight has converted rich forests full of resources for pasturing and heating, into heaths, arid rocks, or sterile grasses dotted with a few remnants of ruined woods. Is that, M. Latour, the result of the vices of exploitation by the Administration des Forêts?”⁷⁰ Among foresters, this narrative retained its currency, and it was only bolstered by the devastations of 1848.

ENTER SAVOIE

This context of administrative reform, repression, revolt, and voting structured official and popular memory by the time the Second Empire took on the project of transforming the landscape of alpine France. Although this memory did

color perceptions in and of Savoie, its analysis applies most fully to Ariège. For in the context of alpine restoration, the history of Savoie differed greatly in that it once again became a French department in the very year that foresters began to remodel the mountains.

On 22 and 23 April 1860, under the gaze of the occupying French army, men in Savoie voted overwhelmingly in favor of annexation to France as the two new departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie.⁷¹ Napoleon III had not been eager to allow the plebiscite, but Camillo Cavour, once again premier of Piedmont-Sardinia, had insisted on it in the Treaty of Turin signed on 24 March; the plebiscite allowed Cavour to justify the cession to King Victor-Emmanuel II. The latter was reluctant to part with the Sardinian dynasty's duchy of origin, and since the Restoration of 1814 Savoyards had shown themselves rather loyal subjects in the Sardinian realm.

Napoleon III soon touted the plebiscite as a triumph of nationalism, but as late as March 1860 he attributed the importance of absorbing Savoie only to the duchy's strategic position. Facing the growing strength of a northern Italy finally free of the Austrians, France had to secure the western slopes of the Alps, especially since the Piedmontese controlled the passes.⁷² Little nationalist sentiment greeted the Treaty of Turin, and the Savoyards had hardly chosen the timing of their entry into France; the plebiscite was the ultimate result of war and diplomacy far beyond the control of Savoyards. Instead of popular sovereignty, the plebiscite represented only the reversal of 1814, or, in Paul Guichonnet's words, a "Bonapartist sort of ratification of a territorial cession, constituting a swap in a closed diplomatic game between Paris and Turin."⁷³

Beyond the official propaganda, French bureaucrats had to assess the "Frenchness" of Savoie for themselves as they began to impose new laws and regulations on the people of the annexed territory. The record was ambiguous, for despite the French linguistic and cultural heritage of Savoie, few Savoyards had openly contested Sardinian hegemony during the forty-six years of the Restoration. Several historians suggest strong support of the absolute monarchy (1814–48) on the part of the reactionary nobility and clergy in Savoie, who held a secure monopoly of local power. Without question a repressive regime incarnated by the Piedmontese *carabinieri*, the Sardinian monarchy nevertheless treated Savoie with relative clemency in the form of light taxes and economic protection from French products. Savoie had gained the especial favor of King Charles-Felix in 1821 following military seditions in Piedmont; the local ruling class had kept the area "loyal" in the eyes of the monarch, in spite of the 163 Savoyards implicated in the affair.⁷⁴

The Revolution of 1848 had left an ambiguous record as well. Those who invoked nationalism in Savoie came in several stripes: some demonstrated in favor of Italian unity, others raised the flag of the short-lived cisalpine republic of the Jacobins, and still others argued for annexation to Second Republic France.⁷⁵ The Fundamental Statute granted by Charles-Albert, similar to Louis-Philippe's Charter, found enthusiastic reception among Savoyard liberals, but the terror occasioned by the *Voraces* ("voracious") and the ensuing massacre dealt a blow to republican sympathies. More than fifteen hundred Savoyard workers in Lyon, expelled by the provisional government in Paris and joined by members of a Lyonnais revolutionary association, marched on Chambéry in early April. Most of the Sardinian troops had left Savoie, and the Piedmontese governor retreated along with most of his staff to the Maurienne upon the arrival of the Voraces. After three days, ten thousand peasants responded to the alarm sounded largely by the clergy and routed the Voraces from Chambéry, killing an unknown number of them. Chambéry's "April Days" squelched further revolution in Savoie.⁷⁶

The constitutional monarchy of 1848 allowed Savoie a substantial electoral privilege: the property qualification for voting was half what it was in the other Sardinian states.⁷⁷ With, in addition, the highest rate of electoral participation, Savoie seemed well incorporated in the new constitutional arrangement in northern Italy. Nevertheless, the seventy-nine Savoyard deputies in Turin formed an opposition hostile to the liberal transformation of Piedmont; during the 1850s the conservative Savoyards shifted their allegiance away from Cavour, enemy of the Pope and no great friend of Savoie. The greatest obstacle to assuring Savoie's allegiance was of course the *Risorgimento*, a movement that made little room for a non-Italian culture on the other side of the Alps but that was rapidly Italianizing Piedmont; in the 1850s, Tuscan replaced the Piedmontese dialect, and French fell out of favor at the court of Turin. Finally, economic depression endured in Savoie through the mid-1850s, and France seemed to promise greater prosperity. Here, too, Cavour alienated the Savoyard bourgeoisie by promoting an industrial corridor along the axis linking Turin with Genoa, leaving Savoie far to the side.⁷⁸

On balance, then, the regime in Piedmont-Sardinia repelled some Savoyards at least as much as France attracted them. Although the Second Empire was an acceptable regime to the largely conservative network of local power, the strongest political emotion to be found in Savoie in 1860 grew in response to a movement in the northern pays of Faucigny, Chablais, and Genevois (today part of Haute-Savoie) to attach the northern Savoie to Switzerland. Petitioners

gathered more than twelve thousand signatures in favor of the drive organized by the Savoyard colony in Geneva; the northern communes were more anxious to maintain their commercial relations with this city than to become part of France. Thus, the *parti français* in the rest of Savoie was galvanized primarily by the threat of a splintered homeland.⁷⁹

If the Frenchness of Savoie remained problematic, Savoyards were, for their part, relatively well acquainted with France. In 1860 nearly eighty thousand Savoyards lived seasonally or permanently in Paris, working as porters, dockers, *garçons de boutique*, chimney sweeps, and servants. In most mountain villages, accounts of life in the French capital could be heard during the spring and summer when migrants came back to work on their farms. Savoyards had a reputation for ranging widely, and nearly every part of France, save other remote alpine areas, had some contact with them in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Yet the converse was far less true: not until the years following the annexation did French officials fully grasp the facts of Savoyard life. Napoleon III acquired a territory where birth and death rates were markedly higher than in France as a whole; where conscripts were shorter on average than their French counterparts; and where poor nutrition, especially iodine deficiencies, led to widespread goiter and cretinism. The Sardinian regime had done little to develop the regional economy, and protectionism had effectively isolated it. Agriculture had expanded in one sense only—upward. Cultivated fields reached altitudes of twenty-five hundred meters and beyond in the inner ranges, competing with both pastures and forests. Given the short growing seasons and poor soils, alpine agriculture could not support a galloping increase in population; seasonal and permanent emigration remained a part of life in Savoie even after the annexation.⁸⁰

Several historians have commented on the hostile reception of French officials in Savoie, who “arrived there as for a tour of duty in the colonies.”⁸¹ But in the early years the theme of the *bon peuple savoyard* was used to effect by French administrators who descended on Savoie. In a circular to Savoyard mayors explaining the importance of the recent laws on reforestation and reclamation (see Chapter 2), Prefect Hippolyte Dieu expressed confidence that the government would not have to resort to coercive means of enforcement: “I take pleasure in believing that municipal administrations in Savoie are too enlightened and convinced of the benefits of these measures not to share the views of the government with enthusiasm.”⁸² The forestry corps had, however, to walk a fine line between praising the locals and acknowledging the sorry state of

their forests; the departmental conseil général reported bluntly at the end of 1860, “The communal forests of Savoie are almost entirely exhausted by a negligence which was driving them to certain ruin.”⁸³

The rhetorical answer lay in blaming the inefficacy of the Sardinian regime, not the Savoyards. By several accounts, the Sardinian government did largely neglect the forests of Savoie. Despite a code of regulations, authorities tolerated overpasturing in the forests, abusive cutting, and unchecked sales of timber. Forest guards received meager salaries and little support from the powers in Turin, who rarely knew the exact boundaries of forests putatively under their care. Many indebted communes had alienated considerable sections of their forests to creditors who had financed much construction during the later years of the Sardinian regime.⁸⁴

Rising demand for wood had intensified neglect. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, industry (namely, the Pesey-Mâcot mines at Conflans), public works, and the urban centers of Lyon and Geneva had contributed to thinning the forests of the northern Alps. Like many Pyrenean forests, those in Savoie had been impoverished if not destroyed, causing many to fear a general shortage of wood by the early nineteenth century.⁸⁵ French foresters in 1860 asserted that the damage could be traced to improper management and that they had come to heal the degradation that the Sardinian regime had caused. Their reluctance to examine the forest practices of the inhabitants themselves stands in contrast to the decades of blame heaped upon the Ariégeois for both the nonenforcement of the Forest Ordinance of 1669 and the difficult application of the Forest Code of 1827. Politics in the Savoie of 1860 had a rather different cast: integration of the department into the nation demanded that the new regime demonstrate the industry, foresight, civic-mindedness, and other exemplary French qualities of the Savoyards, who had already proven their “loyalty” in the plebiscite.

Such political imperatives might have led to a hands-off approach in the annexed territory, yet they clashed with an image of Savoie that particularly enticed foresters: for many French officials, Savoie posed as a place without history and thus a laboratory for relatively free experimentation. Ultimately, assimilation brought intervention in many forms. French military service, application of the Falloux law on primary and secondary education, and the imposition of the Forest Code all made their mark in Savoie but hardly received universal welcome there.⁸⁶ The latter was perhaps the most difficult to introduce, given the large number of communally owned forests. Assimilation *à la française* also meant surveillance through a police-state apparatus. Even as the

Second Empire won over large segments of the rural population of France, officials believed they had reasons to be wary of all people in the uplands. Government reports from Ariège and Savoie bear witness to vigilance, not complacency.

Theories of recent deforestation eventually implicated the northern Alps as much as the southern Alps and the Pyrenees. Most important, the foundations of the state's authority over the forests—the administration, the code, and the school of forestry—had survived the convulsions of 1830 and 1848. Powerful structures remained in place from which foresters launched the most ambitious policy of the second half of the nineteenth century: alpine restoration.

One final current of change made reforestation possible by 1860: a conceptual shift that began to write peasants out of the picture. In the eyes of foresters, mountains, forests, and plains became abstract entities, analyzed in a closed circle that erased the complexities of real human habitats. Institutions such as the Administration des Forêts and the Forest Code had in many ways been defined with reference to threats from the people closest to the forests. As Chapter 2 will show, however, the first law on reforestation carried none of the implicit recognition of peasants as actors, albeit delinquent actors, in spite of the accompanying rhetoric of “public utility.” Offered up as a technical issue whose object of concern was land, not people, reforestation contained misapprehensions that were to backfire. Alpine communes responded with a rich and varied arsenal of tactics to combat the refiguration of the mountain.