The methodology used to construct tree structured rules is the focus of this monograph. Unlike many other statistical procedures, which moved from pencil and paper to calculators, this text's use of trees was unthinkable before computers. Both the practical and theoretical sides have been developed in the authors' study of tree methods. Classification and Regression Trees reflects these two sides, covering the use of trees as a data analysis method, and in a more mathematical framework, proving some of their fundamental properties.

In 1984, Brieman, Olshen, Friedman, and Stone published this book and produced a software product called CART that made tree classification popular. These algorithms were very useful in medical applications, and the book illustrated some simple success stories, particularly those from Richard Olshen's experience working in the Medical School at UC San Diego.

Olshen and Gordon did some of the work on the asymptotic theory of recursive partitioning that made the methodology credible to the statistical research community. The methods began to be applied to pattern recognition problems and also to the development of expert systems. Today, data miners use these tools.

These ideas go back a lot further than these authors. However, previous attempts at recursive partitioning algorithms tended to grow trees with too many terminal nodes. These authors introduced two important ideas. One was to grow the trees overly long and then prune them back. The second was to continually use cross-validation to evaluate the trees.

This book is still very valuable 24 years after it was first published. It is also readable by general audiences for the most part. It now stands as a classic text on the subject of classification and regression trees. There are also
books that followed in its footsteps and other places where tree structure comes into play.

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