



PROJECT MUSE®

The Redrock Chronicles: Saving Wild Utah (review)

Lisa DeChano

Southeastern Geographer, Volume 44, Number 1, May 2004, pp.
120-122 (Review)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sgo.2004.0001>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/169738>

The Redrock Chronicles: Saving Wild Utah

T.H. Watkins. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000. 163 pp., bibliography, illustrations, maps. \$28.95 paper (ISBN: 0-8018-6238-8); \$49.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8018-6237-X).

LISA DECHANO

Western Michigan University

The *Redrock Chronicles* provides a glimpse into southern Utah—a unique region that has historically received little attention. T. H. Watkins has a deep emotional bond with this area of Utah, and he communicates his passion and love of this region in the introduction. He also foreshadows what is to come in the remaining parts of the book (physical and cultural characteristics). Moreover, he mentions what he perceives as a major environmental problem: the fact that much of the wilderness of southern Utah is not under federal protection, and this is discussed in the third portion of this book.

“Part I: The Place” describes the geologic and geomorphic setting of southern Utah, the land at the heart of the Colorado Plateau. Watkins provides a vivid description of the geologic history of the region. He discusses the various types of rocks and vegetation that can be found in southern Utah and focuses on some of the more prominent geomorphic features such as the Escalante River’s canyon country and the Dirty Devil River. While Watkins is intimately familiar with lithospheric structure, he occasionally struggles to adequately define geological and geomorphological jargon such as laccolith, crenelated massif, and anticline. His use of jargon (mostly terms from basic physical geography and earth science courses) most likely stems from his self-education on the geology of the area. These terms and land-

forms lay the foundation for appreciating the book’s photographs.

“Part II: People” is a bit longer and describes the various inhabitants of southern Utah, beginning with Native Americans and ending in the 1990s. Watkins begins by focusing on the Anasazi ruins and petroglyphs found throughout southern Utah and on how archeologists have been putting their story together. In addition, he then retells the Anasazi story as recounted by Dan Katchongva, a Hopi elder. The Anasazi story leads up to Watkins’ discussion of Spanish and European contact in Utah. Watkins outlines the Spanish influence in southern Utah by telling the stories of several Spanish explorers and priests. Finally, Watkins examines the Mormons as they moved southward from the vicinity of Salt Lake City. Many Mormon settlers regarded southern Utah as hot, dry, and infertile and were therefore reluctant to move south. Yet some Mormons did eventually set up small villages in canyon country such as Green River, Caineville, and Kanab. These villages contributed to the strong Mormon landscape traditions, such as wide streets and ward houses, in this part of the state.

Economic issues are also highlighted in this section of the book. In the 1950s, large amounts of uranium were discovered near Moab and Muddy Creek, and mining activity brought an economic boom to this area. The resulting increase in population cre-

ated a demand for wood for housing, increasing the importance of timber extraction. The discovery of uranium did for southern Utah what gold did for many small towns in California, and the prosperity lasted only as long as the mineral. Today, uranium mining contributes very little to the region's economy and Watkins bemoans the resulting environmental damage.

"Part III: The Problem" is an examination of the proposed Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The idea of this national monument began around 1930 when U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes asked for a study to establish an Escalante National Monument. This proposal met considerable opposition from Congress and within Utah, but it did not die; it appeared in Congress several more times over the next few decades, but to no avail. Studies were done and hearings were held, but each time opposition raised its head, putting up roadblocks for the national monument's establishment. Finally, the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was established in 1996 by President Clinton using the Antiquities Act of 1906. The story does not end here, however, because land management problems plague the area around the monument. Environmentalists are concerned about people building roads on neighboring lands that may harm the unprotected wilderness areas of southern Utah. In addition, corporations such as Conoco are applying for rights to do exploratory drilling, much to the chagrin of the region's environmentalists. Watkins ends this section by proffering a suggestion to preserve all of Utah's remote areas. He realizes that this is a tall order, but many people in the state have started

asking some of the questions leading to just such a proposal.

In the conclusion of the book, Watkins discusses Utah's future prospects for conservation and preservation. He briefly reviews current economic and demographic changes in the state, particularly in southern Utah, and how these changes could detrimentally impact Utah's wilderness. He also presents the case that the people of Utah fall on both sides of the preservation of wilderness issue and that this split presents its own complications and obstacles for preserving southern Utah's landscape.

Watkins provides photographs at the end of each major section. The photos are illustrative of what the author discusses and provides the reader with a good sense of what southern Utah looks like. The one major drawback of the photos is that they are in black-and-white; these illustrations would have more impact if they were in color, especially in Part I where Watkins pays special attention to color detail when describing the rocks.

This book harkens back to other books that look at a specific geographical area such as *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (Wyckoff 1999). Both Wyckoff and Watkins provide great mental images of what their study site looks like as well as brief, but informative histories of inhabitants and their impacts on the area. This book differs from other specific regional geographies in that it is not meant to be a comprehensive history and recounting of all the people that have lived in southern Utah or of all the changes that have taken place. The book is, however, meant to provide some history of the forces that shaped the landscape of the area (both physical

aspects and cultural influence) and to provide visual cues to entice the reader to find out more about southern Utah and, perhaps, even visit this area. Watkins does this in an informative, yet intriguing way. He leaves the reader with a sense of what has happened in southern Utah and that there is more to be done to save this precious landscape.

The *Redrock Chronicles* provides an excellent look at a unique geographical area by providing descriptions of the physical and cultural geography of southern Utah.

Watkins bridges these two aspects in the final portion of his book with his discussion of the environmental degradation that has taken place and, in his view, will continue to take place if Utah's wilderness does not become protected by federal law.

LITERATURE CITED

Wyckoff, W. 1999. *Creating Colorado: The making of a western American landscape, 1890–1940*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

An Outdoor Guide to Bartram's Travels

Charles D. Spornick, Alan R. Cattier, and Robert J. Greene. The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2003. 405 pp., index, maps, tables, figures, notes, refs. \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8203-2437-X); \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0-8203-2438-8).

JOANN MOSSA

University of Florida

Although it is not currently possible to travel back in time and witness first-hand what landscapes in the southeast were like centuries ago, the writings of 18th century naturalist William Bartram describe what some of the South's special locales were like in the 1770s. A recent look at the same locales by Charles D. Spornick, Robert J. Greene and Alan R. Cattier of Emory University's library and information technology division provide a sense of what remains and what has been transformed in the interim. Their book, *An Outdoor Guide to Guide to Bartram's Travels*, receives considerable inspiration from the Bartram Trail Conference in the 1970s, which attempted to establish a national scenic or historic trail and legally protect and preserve sites of considerable aesthetic, cultural or recreational merit. The conference

identified more than fifty Bartram heritage sites in seven states, and some progress has since been made in establishing historical markers, gardens and memorial parks.

The authors' stated goal is to present the trail's components into a book, and to provide travel advice for visiting different portions of the trail by foot, canoe, bicycle, car or armchair. The end result is not a typical travel guide, nor a conventional academic book, although it is certainly of interest to travelers and academics. It is essentially a field trip guidebook of Bartram's travels between 1773 and 1777, concurrently discussing the initial voyage, natural history, historical geography, native peoples and their legends, and landscape change. The authors successfully meet their stated purpose using descrip-