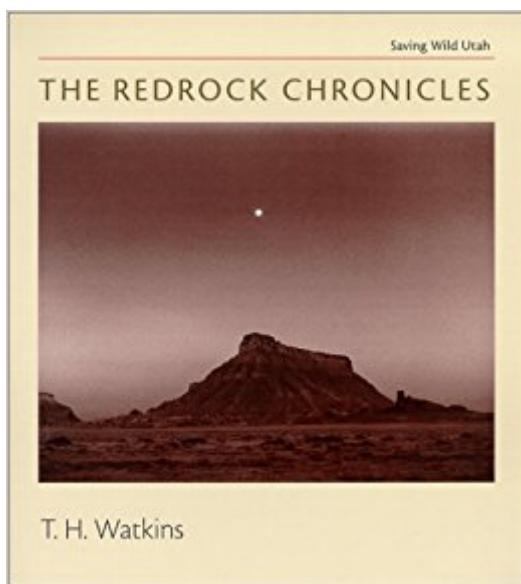


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The Redrock Chronicles: Saving Wild Utah (Center Books On Space, Place, And Time)



Synopsis

As a collection of geological and climatic phenomena, the earth is a scarred, bent, cracked, and agitated wreck of a place. Nowhere is this more evident than in Utah's redrock canyon country, which is among the most spectacular terrain not only in America but in the world. These extraordinary lands lie at the heart of the Colorado Plateau—130,000 square miles of uplifted rock sitting like a huge island in an earthly continental sea, surrounded on all sides by the remnants of once-active volcanoes. Although the Colorado Plateau includes portions of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, in no other part of any other state are its complexity and time-constructed beauty illuminated more brilliantly than in southern Utah. Tourists and outdoor enthusiasts by the millions visit and revisit the area because there is no place else on earth quite like it. In *The Redrock Chronicles*, T. H. Watkins, one of America's best-known and award-winning writers on the environment and history, focuses on southern Utah's unprotected lands in a loving testament to its warps and tangles of rock and sky. Combining history, geography, and photography, the author reports the full story of the region—from its violent geologic beginnings to the coming (and going) of pre-Puebloan peoples whose drawings still adorn rocks and caves there, from the Mormon settlement of the 1840s and 1850s to the great uranium boom of the 1950s, from the beginning of tourism and parkland protection in the 1930s to today's controversial movement to preserve millions of acres of wild Utah land in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Indeed, the account of that revolutionary movement is told here in all its color and complexity for the first time. Writing from his own personal experience and extensive research, an appreciative Watkins takes readers on a tour of the Grand Staircase of plateaus, moving from the utterly wild triangle of Kaiparowits Plateau, with its erosion-sculptured mesas, tablelands, benchlands, and canyons, to a more welcoming kind of verdant wilderness that sits northeast, across the rolling desert scrubland of Harris Wash, in the red-walled canyon of the Escalante River. The author has spent much time hiking and camping here among the isolated buttes and mesas, and he draws a vivid portrait of the area's highlights: Comb Ridge, a 90-mile wall of 600-foot cliffs; Waterpocket Fold, an even more spectacular monocline to the northeast of the Escalante River, stretching a hundred miles; the Henry Mountains; Hump of Bull Mountain; Cataract Canyon; and the San Rafael Swell, an enormous oval some 2,200 square miles which rises just north of Capitol Reef National Park. But *The Redrock Chronicles* is not simply a celebration. Watkins concludes with a spirited call for the preservation of the unprotected wilderness that gives the land its character and color. He offers the legislative device of wilderness designation as the necessary means of saving this plateau country that is not marked by one or two or even three or four scenic marvels but by an enormous kaleidoscope of geological diversity whose impact

on the senses can set the mind to reeling with every turn.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book is simply essential right now in Utah, a state where the debate over the vast but unprotected canyon country is loud and often uninformed. Watkins is the person for the job. The thesis is direct, wise, and profoundly field-based. Yes, we must protect this resource because we love it, because it is achingly beautiful, and because its destruction is ethically unacceptable.

Watkins owns up to his love for this place and I say amen to that! It is always necessary to marshal the economic arguments, the ecological rationales, and such. However, wild country must survive if we are to remember freedom and retain the right to walk in the world with awesome land all around— even if the risk of dying is real. The main purpose here though is to inform as well as give permission to care. What is most original is the combination of geology, geography, law, cultural insights, and clear intention—if we are to save the redrock country we must know all we can about it. (John B. Wright, author of *Rocky Mountain Divide: Selling and Saving the West* and *Montana Ghost Dance: Essays on Land and Life*) The Redrock Chronicles captures—for as long as we're willing to hold small, beautiful books in our hands and hearts—the wondrous mystique and complex politics of southern Utah's wild country. (Ron Steffens *Bloomsbury Review*) The Redrock Chronicles provides an excellent look at a unique geographical area by providing descriptions of the physical and cultural geography of southern Utah. (Lisa DeChano *Southeastern Geographer*)

T. H. Watkins (1936-2000) was the Wallace Stegner Distinguished Professor of Western American Studies at Montana State University and a contributing editor at Audubon magazine. He was the author, coauthor, or editor of twenty-eight books, including *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America* and *Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes, 1874-1952*, which won the Los Angeles Times Book Award for biography in 1991 and was a finalist for the National Book Award. He also wrote more than three hundred articles and book reviews for some fifty journals, magazines, and newspapers, including *American Heritage*, *Wilderness*, *Smithsonian*, *Audubon*, *National Geographic*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. He served as writer, advisor, and commentator for various PBS documentary series, including "The West."

Living in Utah, the battle over wilderness is a continual part of my life. And being an environmentalist, it is an important part of my life. There are 9.1 million acres up for wilderness designation in this state, but because of opposition from mining, timber, grazing, and off highway vehicle users, the process is slow- going. T.H. Watkins does an admirable job of making the reader feel the spirit of the west and the heart of the battle... which should make one realize the importance of wilderness designation, especially for these last few million acres. *The Redrock Chronicles* is not a political commentary, nor is it easily dismissed propaganda from the environmentalist faction. It is simply a writer's statement about the utter importance of wild places.

Having recently moved back to the mid-west after living in the west for four years, I am amazed at the lack of awareness or information on what many describe as the War in the West. Before you protest that War may be to strong, consider: Employees of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Forest Service, and other federal employees in certain areas of the west carry sidearm's and long rifles; government vehicles have been firebombed; anonymous threats directed at government workers are routine; and county commissioners have authorized bulldozing or roads into National Parks and Monuments. Add to this volatile situation the recent decision of the Forest Service to charge a fee to anyone desiring to walk into a national forest and proposals to limit, or eliminate, logging and drilling in large sections of government land in the west and you have the makings of a real, well...war. Oh, did I mention the decision to increase the amount ranchers must pay to graze their cattle on public land? Needless to say, that has been a real popular decision among western ranchers that consider their right to use public lands as sacred. Speaking of sacred,

the environmentalist movement had made itself real popular as well by proposing that millions of acres of land in the west be placed in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Such a designation would effectively remove it from any use by the public other than those associated with hiking. No way in or out except by foot, period. Then there is the proposal, gaining credibility and supporters, to decommission Glen Canyon Dam and drain Lake Powell. Some folks in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Phoenix have some concerns about this endeavor. While this battle is being waged geographically in the west, it is over public lands that belong to all citizens, including those of us that live a long day's drive to be even close to the action. In looking at the available literature on the myriad of issues in this war I find, as usual, a lot of publications that are long on rhetoric and short on real information or facts. I treasure the book that make's it argument in an honest, heartfelt, straight-forward manner. I may not agree with the opinion or argument of the author but I can respect their honesty and sincerity. Such books are few and far between. Edward Abbey did it with *Desert Solitaire*. Wallace Stegner did it with *Coda: Wilderness Letter in The Sound of Mountain Water*. The late T.H. Watkins has done it with *The Redrock Chronicles*. If you want a concise, upfront, spirited argument for the preservation of an area that many consider ground zero in the environmental war in the west, this is one of the best. Watkins, an award-winning writer, historian, and scholar has written an eloquent testament to the redrock country of southern Utah that is destined to become a classic. In just 163 pages, Watkins provides the reader with the history, geology, politics and sense of place in both the written word and with stunning photographs, that capture the mystery and complexity of a land under siege. This is one of those rare books that will capture your heart and spirit regardless of your political leanings in this war. It does so because Watkins has managed to write a love story so unique and touching that it could only come from what he calls the "home of his heart." Southern Utah's wild country is not for the timid, spandex-attired tourist on a carefully planned, scripted vacation. This 130,000 square miles of the Colorado Plateau was chosen by Brigham Young as just the kind of wild, desolate, forbidding place to send his followers in order that they might practice their particular brand of religion in peace and solitude. It is an area where a young wanderer from California could find spiritual comfort and disappear without a trace (Everett Ruess.) It is such a desolate place that during the 1950's the Atomic Energy Commission considered it expendable should fallout from atomic testing in Nevada drift northward, which it did. Why then, all the fuss over such desolate, forbidding land? Because it's there and because it weighs so heavy on the heart to see it destroyed, even on the altar of so-called economic development. Because, as Watkins stated shortly before he died, "I am helplessly addicted to this place, this wondrous geographic puzzle of canyons turning in on themselves, of upthrust plateaus

and big blisterlike mountains, of multicolored rocks all layered and bent and broken, of curling rivers dammed by beavers and shaded by grandfather cottonwoods, of horizon-wide sweeps of sunlit emptiness and gracile unknown places where darkness hides and will not tell its name." After reading this gem of a book there will be many readers that will wonder about what was lost with the building of Glen Canyon Dam. One thing is for sure; those that advocate its decommissioning will likely garner some additional supporters. Love stories are like that.

This brief eloquent book is a treasure. The history of the battle for Utah wilderness is a story that needs to be read by everyone who visits the redrock deserts and National Parks of Utah, and by everyone who lives in the region. Our astounding wild landscapes are not there by accident, but because there are people who love and defend them. The photos show places that would be protected if America's Redrock Wilderness Act were passed into law. These are the places that could be lost forever if public lands were privatized (as wise-use and sagebrush rebel groups would like) or managed for industrial tourism, resource extraction and grazing (as the BLM seems inclined to do). I hope that in the future this book becomes a triumphant chronicle of the vision and persistance that saved Utah's public lands wilderness instead of a sad chronicle of what was lost.

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