

Book of the Week

***Leave It As It Is* by David Gessner**

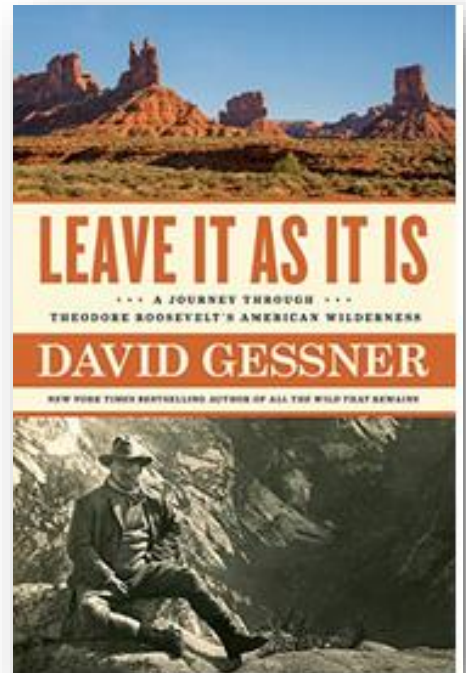
Book Review by Lynn Reinschmiedt

You may be thinking yet another Teddy Roosevelt (TR) book. David Gessner's *Leave It As It Is* is not a biography of Theodore Roosevelt if that is what one is looking for. You will get some of the key aspects and a sketch of his life, but the overall thrust of the book is an overview of Roosevelt's conservation legacy in the age of climate change and enlightened, or at least, recognized awareness Native American culture. *Leave It As It Is* is Gessner's eleventh book of nonfiction all of which offer a blend of nature of the love of nature and environmentalism and often sometimes an aspect of the memoir. He is currently a professor and chair of the Creative Writing Department at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

For in-depth and excellent biographies, one is referred to Edmund Morris' three volume series: *The of Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*; *Theodore Rex*; and *Colonel Roosevelt*; and H.W. Brands; *TR: The Last Romantic*. Also, for an excellent overview of TR's crusade on behalf of America's national parks and the preservation of the nation's public lands one should read Douglas Brinkley's *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*.

The title of this book comes from a speech TR gave at the Grand Canyon in 1903 in which he exhorts his fellow citizens to "Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it." This in many ways sums up TR legacy on preserving public lands.

The idea for the road trip that forms the central theme *Leave It As It Is* traces the legacy of TR's preservationist's history that took root on October 27, 2017, the 159th birthday of TR. Also, on that day Ryan Zinke, President Trump's Secretary of the Interior's announced the drastic reduction of the Grand Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments, established less than a year earlier by the Obama administration, to one-tenth their original size. He also proposed to weaken and possibly overturn the 1906 Antiquities Act, a key tool TR used to save millions of acres of American land.



From there the book turns into a mixture of retracing TR's conservation legacy as told by means of a road trip Gessner embarks on with his nephew as they travel from the east coast across the badlands of Dakota, to Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Grand Canyon to the Bears Ears. Throughout, Gessner wrestles with TR's hunting legacy and his conservationist efforts. The book overall is a call to renew national efforts to protect and expand efforts to preserve the limited lands with threats from climate change and the expanding awareness of the native American cultural aspects of much of these public lands. The book has its critics who argue that the book's political agenda detracts from its effectiveness. But, that is in essence Gessner's purpose of the book. It is a clarion call to a renewed argument for protecting the American wilderness in the face of climate change and numerous challenges.

Overall, I enjoyed the book in that it provides a concise overview of TR's role in the movement to protect the heritage of our public lands at a time when we are facing new challenges and threats of these lands and happy to add to my collection of presidential books.

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