

By Michael F. Blake

In the fall of 1883, a reedy, bespectacled young man hopped off a train in the middle of the night in the western Dakota Territory. He had arrived in the West to hunt one of the remaining buffalo on the Northern Plains. His name was Theodore Roosevelt.

During the 1880s, Eastern newspapers reported there was vast, unspoiled land in the West, with an endless supply of game, timber and rivers. Many moved west in hopes of finding riches in farming, raising cattle or mining. Like others before him, Roosevelt would soon discover there wasn't an endless supply of resources, and Americans needed to institute careful conservation efforts for future generations.

No one really knows when Roosevelt had his moment of epiphany. It could have been during one of his long rides in the Bad Lands, seeing the land that was once so plentiful bereft of game. Perhaps it was when he saw sections of forests chopped down without any effort toward restoration. One thing is certain, his time in the Bad Lands awakened his realization

FOR ENJOYMENT OF ALL THE PEOPLE

How a buffalo hunt transformed Theodore Roosevelt into the conservation president



Grand Canyon National Park. Johnny D. Boggs

that, like other natural resources on earth, there was not an endless supply of game.

In December 1887, Roosevelt, in typical fashion, jumped into action. He formed the Boone and Crockett Club (named after his two frontier heroes, Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett), with the goal of protecting big game and their environment. George Bird Grinnell, editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine, became a member along with notables such as artist Albert Bierstadt; generals William T. Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan; author Owen Wister; senators Henry Cabot Lodge and Carl Schurz; and many scientists and explorers.

The club supported the protection of the nation's first national park, Yellowstone. Established in 1872, Yellowstone had become the victim of poachers, souvenir hunters and miners. Naturally, Roosevelt came out swinging. He wanted the park enlarged, the military to be allowed to enforce the laws and punish wrongdoers and the herds of buffalo protected from hunters.

The Boone and Crockett Club pushed Congress to pass the Yellow-

The Grand Canyon and TR

By Michael F. Blake

It was love at first sight when Theodore Roosevelt stepped off his train in 1903. He had read about it, seen paintings and photographs, but nothing could prepare him for the breathtaking beauty and vastness that is the Grand Canyon.

Roosevelt called the Grand Canyon "the most impressive piece of scenery I have ever looked at." Words failed to express what he felt deep inside, a common experience for most first-time visitors to this majestic gorge.

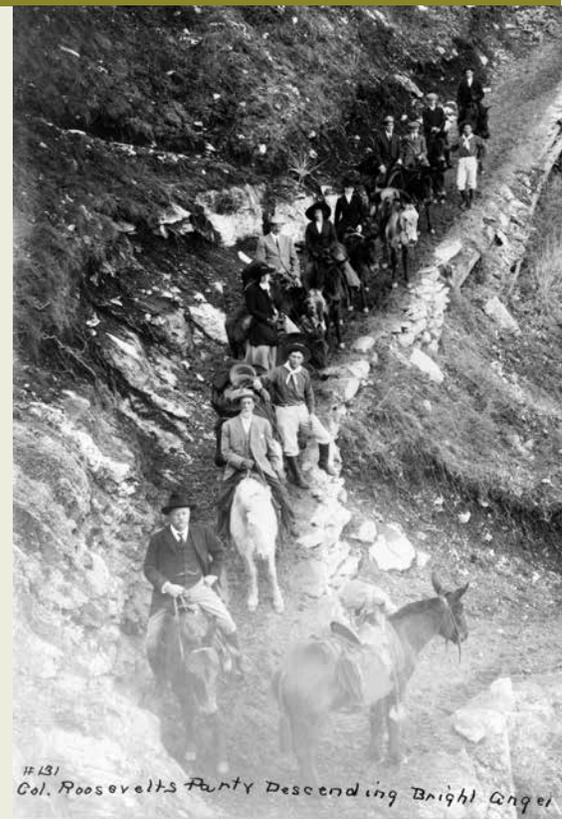
At the time of his visit, the Grand Canyon had no protection from those who would abuse it for financial gain. Companies were mining minerals from the canyon walls. Ignoring their historic importance, rare ancient artifacts were sold for a quick profit. The Santa Fe railroad talked of building a hotel on the edge of the canyon. All of these transgressions violated Roosevelt's belief that we, the people, were the stewards of this land.

At the time of his first visit, Roosevelt did not have the power to do anything to

protect the Grand Canyon. Designating national park status could only be done by an act of Congress. However, the signing of the Antiquities Act on June 8, 1906, gave Roosevelt the tools he needed. Twenty-one days later, he used this new law to create the Grand Canyon Game Preserve to protect wild animals within the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve. On January 11, 1908, Roosevelt declared the Grand Canyon a national monument, giving it federal protection.

The Grand Canyon received national park status on January 26, 1919.

Speaking to the people while at the canyon, Roosevelt said this natural wonder was "absolutely unparalleled" to anything in the world. He urged listeners to leave the Grand Canyon as it is. "You cannot improve on it," he said. "The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it. What you can do is to keep it for your children, your children's children, and for all who come after you, as one of the great sights which every American, if he can travel at all, should see."



Theodore Roosevelt and others ride down Bright Angel Trail at Grand Canyon National Park in 1911.

Library of Congress



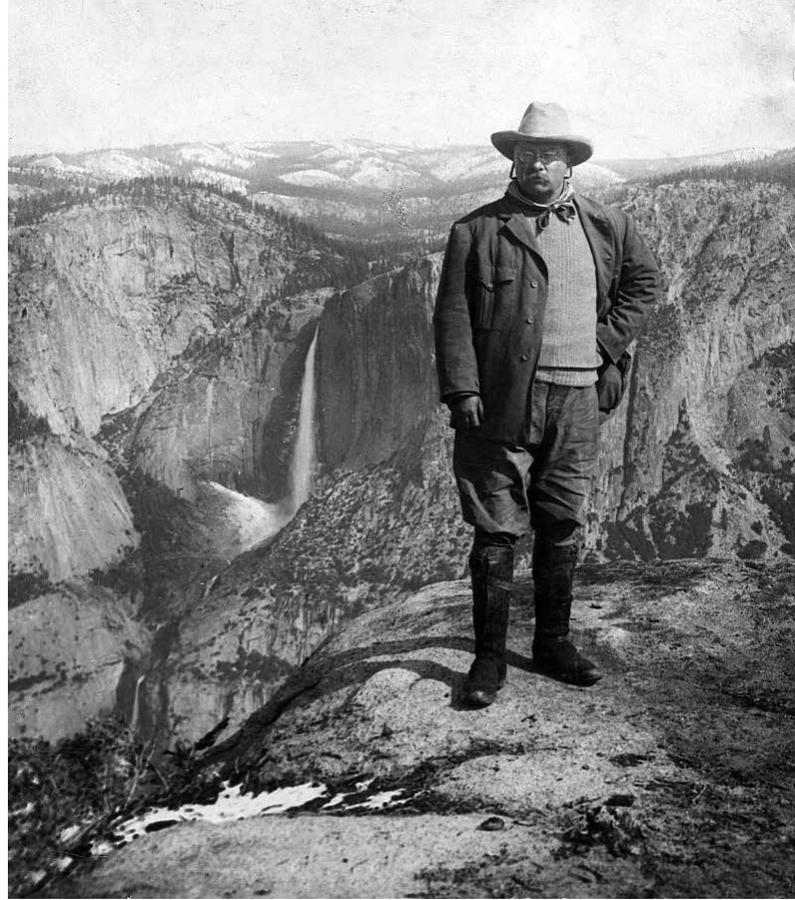
Theodore Roosevelt in deer-skin hunting suit in 1885. Library of Congress

stone Game Protection Act, which became law on May 7, 1894. The bill gave the Army power to arrest and prosecute poachers, as well as protect the park from timber harvesting and mineral extraction. In 1891, the club's lobbying efforts led to the passage of the Forest Reserve Act, which gave the president the ability to set aside public land forests – entirely or in part – as public reservations, despite any commercial value.

This was the beginning of Roosevelt's campaign to protect public lands for the people.

In September 1901, with the assassination of William McKinley, Roosevelt became the 26th president of the United States. He would cast a long shadow across the nation.

When he assumed the presidency that September, more



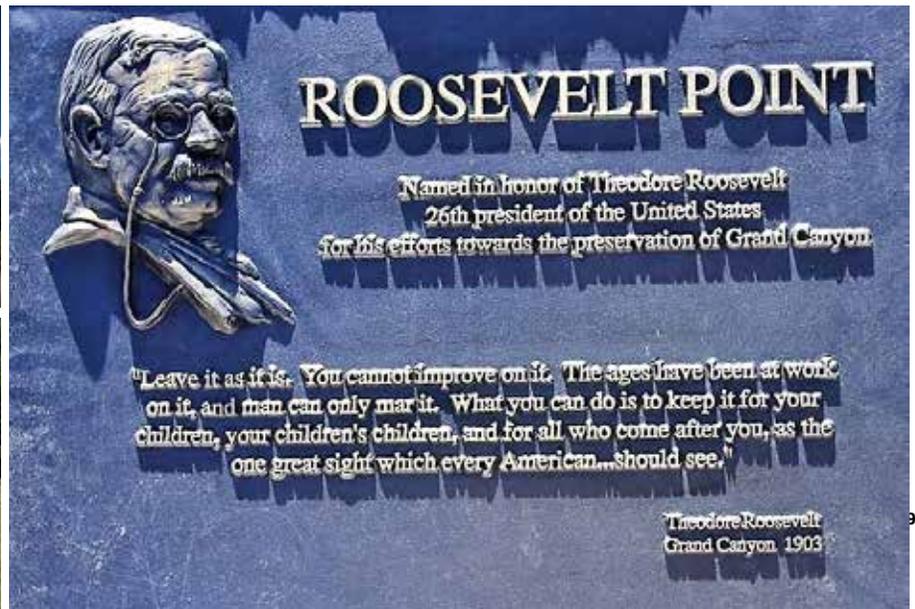
Theodore Roosevelt at Glacier Point at Yosemite National Park in California in 1903. Library of Congress

than half of the virgin forests in the country were gone. Ten times more trees were being cut down than were planted. Roosevelt put a stop to that, saving what he could, and his future decrees would infuriate the pro-business side of the Republican Party (and its financial contributors), but he did not care.

Carving out sections of the country which would forever be safe from developers, protecting wildlife and allowing generations of families to appreciate this country's natural wonders were important to him. Roosevelt once said, "There's nothing lower than somebody that wants to develop this land for their own personal gain without concern about how the land will be for the next generation."

While Roosevelt would save thousands of acres of land,

Clockwise from top left, Theodore Roosevelt Arch at the northern entrance to Yellowstone; Roosevelt Point, on the north side of the Grand Canyon; and North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park (Roosevelt is the only U.S. president to have a national park named after him). Michael F. Blake Collection



he also built huge dams (such as the Roosevelt Dam in Arizona) for water reclamation. He believed that proper water projects could turn a parched area into fertile land for growing crops, thus making the country self-sustaining. Roosevelt saw nothing wrong in creating an area for a dam that would provide irrigation for thousands of acres of crops, where farmers could thrive, growing fields of wheat, corn, fruits and vegetables. It was one of the ideals he believed was best about America, that a man could plant crops in a field and see his efforts pay off with a healthy harvest, be independent, be self-reliant. However, the location where any dam was to be situated was also important. He would not allow a dam in, or near, an area that would spoil natural beauty.

Just as he wanted farmers and cattlemen to thrive, he wanted to protect the land from developers interested only in immediate profit and not the future. To allow a railroad to go through Yellowstone National Park was unthinkable to Roosevelt, just as it was to cut the trees down in the area for profit, or hunt animals simply for their hides.

Developers didn't care about the potential damage their projects might bring decades later. It wasn't their land. They didn't live there. To the lumbermen, trees were simply a means to an end. Cut them down and collect the money. They cared little about the environment or the animals that used forests to survive. Where was the immediate, practical profit in protecting trees for birds, squirrels, or a doe and its fawn?

This mentality was echoed by mining companies that wanted to dig in what they called the "big ditch" in northern Arizona territory. The minerals in the rocks of the Grand Canyon were all that mattered. Majestic beauty? It was a wide hole in the ground, minerals would make them money. Who cared about looking at the beauty of a canyon? The ground above what became Wind Cave National Park could be useful for lumber, farming, or building a town. What was a cave worth? What could it possibly provide for this country? Who cared about the cliff dwellings of some long-forgotten tribe? What did a petrified forest matter, except to sell the remains as a souvenir?

Roosevelt saw the beauty in the Grand Canyon on his 1903 visit and made it a national monument in 1908. (It became a national park seven weeks after his death in 1919.) He recognized the unique qualities of Wind Cave in South Dakota and Mesa Verde in Colorado, protecting them for the future by making them national parks.

No one expected a woman's wardrobe accessory to lead to creating the first federal bird reserve. In the late 1890s, it became fashionable to adorn women's hats with large plumes. The larger and more colorful the plume, the better. Women loved the fashion, and milliners loved the profits. By the end of the 1890s, upwards of 5 million birds from 50 species had been killed for the millinery trade. Members of the American Ornithologists Union attempted to buy Pelican Island, off the east coast of Florida, to prevent the slaughter of hundreds of birds, especially egrets, for their feathers.

Unsuccessful in purchasing the island, they went to Roosevelt, a self-taught ornithologist, for help. Turning to his cabinet members, Roosevelt asked if there was *any* law that would prevent him from claiming Pelican Island as a federal bird reserve. When informed there was no law to stop him, he announced, "I so declare it!"

In that moment, Roosevelt took a major step as president to protect the land and the animals for the people of the United States. He made good use of the 1906 Antiquities Act, where the president was granted power to create a national monument from federal lands that would protect significant natural, cultural or scientific features. Too impatient for Congress to reach a decision on creating a national park, this law allowed Roosevelt to initiate action, leaving others to debate his efforts.

Along with William Hornaday, Roosevelt began a program at the Bronx Zoo in 1905 to breed buffalo in captivity, with the goal of returning the shaggy beasts to the Great Plains and the northern Rocky Mountain regions. Horna-



Wind Canyon National Park, left, and Devils Tower National Monument.

Roosevelt's legacy

During his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt set aside 51 federal bird sanctuaries, 18 national monuments, eight national parks and created or expanded 150 national forests.

National monuments include Devils Tower (Wyoming), Jewel Cave (South Dakota), Grand Canyon (Arizona), Petrified Forest (Arizona), Natural Bridges (Utah), Gila Cliff Dwellings (New Mexico) and Mount Olympus (Washington). Congress changed Grand Canyon to a national park in 1919. Petrified Forest became a national park in 1962. Mount Olympus was redesignated Olympic National Park in 1938.

National parks include Mesa Verde (Colorado), Crater Lake (Oregon) and Wind Cave (South Dakota).

Federal bird reserves include Pelican Island and Key West (Florida), Rio Grande (New Mexico), Huron Islands (Michigan) and Willow Creek (Montana).

National forests include Coconino (Arizona), San Juan (Colorado), Ozark (Arkansas), Shasta (California), Rainier (Washington), Black Hills (South Dakota) and Wasatch (Utah).



Mother and calf at the National Bison Range in Montana, created when Theodore Roosevelt signed legislation in 1908. Johnny D. Boggs

day established the American Bison Society in 1905 to save the buffalo from extinction, and Roosevelt was its honorary president.

Roosevelt's administration set aside 60,800 acres in the Wichita Mountains area of Oklahoma to protect all wildlife from hunters. On October 18, 1907, 15 buffalo from the Bronx Zoo traveled in padded compartment train cars to Cache, Oklahoma, where they were offloaded from the train onto wagons bound for the Wichita Mountains reserve. The animals had been extinct from this area of the Great Plains for nearly 30 years. Among those watching, was Comanche leader Quanah Parker, who had always dreamed the buffalo would return to his native land.

In 1908, Roosevelt signed legislation to create the National Bison Range in western Montana. For the first time in American history, Congress purchased more than 18,000 acres for the sole purpose of providing a refuge for wildlife. The original herd was donated by the ABS, with additional buffalo coming from legendary Texas rancher Charlie Goodnight. The comeback of the American buffalo had begun.

In his book *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter* (1905), Roosevelt noted that there was nothing as beautiful as Yosemite, the giant sequoia groves, the Grand Canyon, the Tetons or the Canyon of the Yellowstone. "Our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with their majestic beauty all unmarred."

He equally recognized that development was as important as conservation, but to waste or rob those very resources was unthinkable. In his 1907 message to Congress, he warned that "To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed."

By the time Roosevelt's presidency ended in March 1909, he had set aside 230 million acres, equivalent to half the size of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. A hundred years after his death, the land he preserved continues to provide enjoyment for all the people. But Roosevelt reminded all of us that we must be vigilant in our care of these treasures, "We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that the nation is worthy of its good fortune."



Theodore Roosevelt poses with officials during his first visit to the Grand Canyon. In 1908 he made it a national monument. It became a national park in 1919, seven weeks after his death. Michael F. Blake Collection



Upon his arrival at the Grand Canyon, Theodore Roosevelt and his group went for a 15-mile horseback ride to view the canyon. Michael F. Blake Collection



Theodore Roosevelt, John Burroughs and guide Billy Hoffer (seated) during a two-week visit to Yellowstone. Michael F. Blake Collection