Review of Preserving the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains By Elaine Freed

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The title is misleading. This is actually a book about preserving human-made structures and prehistory sites and artifacts in the region. There is no strong argument here against stopping the forces that lay waste to the landscape as the European onslaught continues to nullify the symbiotic relationships that Native American peoples practiced with their mother, the Earth, on this continent.

And yet the argument made in this book (with a strong journalistic text and hundreds of pictures) is a good one. True, it champions the preservation of exploitive architecture along with the older sites. There is a beauty in that, an inherent beauty of human creativity and a historical beauty that offers the hope of learning from our mistakes. It is a beauty akin to observing a great Mayan temple and reflecting on what might have happened to the average Mayan citizen as a result of what that temple represents.

Freed makes a strong case for the need for preservation and points out what has been lost. Any person who has lived in the area over a twenty-year span could probably name at least two or three structures now gone that should have been saved. In my case, the Coalville, Utah, tabernacle and the St. Anthony, Idaho, tabernacle, come to mind. When these were destroyed the spiritual heart was cut out of their respective communities.

This is one of the book's important messages. Another is that we should look at all beautiful structures with a knowing eye and apologize, over and over, for their violations of older, more sacred ground. If we do this, Preserving the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains can be a useful tool, and the Great Spirit may be kinder in its dealings with us.

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