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I confess that Theodore Roosevelt has always been my favorite President. In part, it was his *joie de vivre*; in part his eclectic, passionate intellectual curiosity; and, in part, his sunny optimism in the face of often-formidable challenges.

I recalled these traits when I read a fascinating excerpt in this month's *Vanity Fair* from a forthcoming book on Roosevelt's environmental legacy, [*The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*](#) (Harper Collins 2009). The article and book remind me of another reason I so admire Teddy Roosevelt: he was our first environmental President, and remains the Chief Executive who has most influenced American environmental policy and history.

Consider this: as Brinkley notes in this month's *Vanity Fair* excerpt, during his presidency Roosevelt was responsible for preserving 230 million acres of America's finest wilderness areas for posterity. That's one out of every 10 acres in the U.S. (including Alaska), and nearly half the landmass another of the nation's finest Presidents—Thomas Jefferson—acquired from France in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. T.R. established five new national parks, quadrupled America's forest reserves—including Alaska's Tongass National Forest, and rescued such national treasures as the Grand Canyon, Yosemite Valley and the Florida Keys from commercial exploitation.

It was exactly a century after Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase—in 1903—that Teddy Roosevelt permanently established his environmental legacy and demonstrated to American citizens his commitment to conservation of American wilderness. For it was in April 1903 that Roosevelt embarked upon an extraordinary, 66-day trip across the American West that remains the longest cross-country journey ever taken by a U.S. President. His trek through 25 states took him to the Dakota Badlands, Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon. T.R.'s journey also included Yosemite, where he hiked and camped for four days with Sierra Club founder John Muir, producing one of the most iconic photos of the environmental movement: Roosevelt and Muir standing together, somewhat uncomfortably, on the granite precipice of Glacier Point. (It turns out that the two, who had admired one another from afar, didn't really hit it off while roughing it in the wilds of what would become Yosemite National Park: Muir openly disdained Roosevelt's love of hunting, while the President was disappointed that Muir's love for and expertise regarding Sierra flora far exceeded Muir's interest in fauna.)

Fast-forwarding another century, there's much hope in many quarters that President Barack

Obama's environmental legacy will prove substantial. But as author Douglas Brinkley chronicles, Obama will have to go a long way to even approach the conservation record of Theodore Roosevelt-America's first environmental President.