



The Singing Wilderness

Sigurd F. Olson , Francis L. Jaques (Illustrator)

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Sigurd F. Olson was for more than thirty years a wilderness guide in the Quetico-Superior country, and no one knew with the same intimacy the mysteries of the lakes and forests of that magnificent primitive area. To the many out-of-doorsmen who canoed and portaged with him through this wilderness, he was known honorifically as the Bourgeois--as the voyageurs of old called their trusted leaders through this same region.

The Singing Wilderness Details

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Author : Sigurd F. Olson , Francis L. Jaques (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Singing Wilderness for online ebook

Matt Ihli Ihli says

The Singing Wilderness is a summary of Sigurd Olson's travels throughout the North Woods of Minnesota. In this book, Olson discovers the spirituality that the North Woods has to offer through the sights and sounds of the wilderness. I would definitely recommend this book to anybody who is interested in the Minnesota Wilderness or the spirituality of the wilderness.

Karen says

Lyrical. Olson's beautifully written memories of time--literally seasons--in the wilderness put me right there with him. Even in my little bit of wilderness a few feet from the house I feel that grounding to the earth. His writing tapped that and was itself a wilderness experience.

Maja says

"It was there we saw the first haze of light green over the hills, the budding-out of the aspen. That was another reason for an early trip: to see those slopes in the ephemeral hours before they had begun to darken, while they were still misty and pastel. Grayish-white drifts of the large-toothed aspen and the rose of budding maple made poetry on every shore. One must be on time to see these things, for they do not wait."

This book is a new favourite, to be treasured by anyone that wishes to keep the wilderness wild. He puts into words the feelings and senses experienced when one is lucky enough to escape into the real outdoors.

Krista S. says

Great book, if you love the BWCA, or any wilderness area... He puts words to a lot of feelings wilderness invokes. However, not an 'exiting read' for those not into such things...my husband couldn't get through it.

Heather says

"The woods are ready, and as the zero hour approaches, an even greater silence settles down over the north. There is a moment of suspense when the quiet can be felt, when it presses down on everything. Suddenly the air is white with drifting flakes, and the tension is gone. Down they come, settling on the leaves, into the crevices in bark, on the lichen-covered rocks, disintegrating immediately into more and more wetness. Then almost magically the ground is no longer brown, but speckled with white. Now there is an infinitesimal rustling as the flakes drift into the leaves and duff. Swiftly the whiteness spreads, then the earth is sealed and autumn is gone...The snow means a return to a world of order, peace and simplicity. Those first drifting flakes are a benediction and the day on which they come is different from any other in the year."

Lynette says

An very pleasant read about the passion Olson had for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the plant and animal life he spent his life enjoying and protecting. Lovely and short reflections on his wilderness experience. I read it while we were staying in a lovely cabine 8 miles west of Ely, MN.

Angie says

This book is about the peace you find in the wilderness, whether canoeing, hiking, or just observing from the steps of one's cabin. Sigurd Olson put to words the things I have felt deeply in my heart about the woods of Minnesota and Wisconsin. This book sang to my soul.

Doug Gordon says

A classic literary work on nature. A Sand County Almanac for the Northwoods. Sigurd Olson's writing feeds my adventurer's heart like no other writer's. I find myself returning to it again and again, rereading his stories and essays as devotionals which reconnect me to the heart of wilderness.

Dick says

I actually have an earlier edition. I love these books. If you love the wilds or like the idea of loving the wilds, these collections of thought will captivate you. Especially if you have experienced the Boundary Waters region in Minnesota. Sigurd Olson is the wilderness canoist's godfather.

Craig Werner says

Add a star if you're someone who breaks into a smile when you hear the word "portage" or feel a sense of disappointment when the winter temperature just refuses to go below 10. (If you're not one of those people, I can assure you after living in Wisconsin for 30 years that they actually exist.)

The best parts of The Singing Wilderness, a series of short essays arranged by the cycle of the seasons in the border region between Minnesota and Wisconsin and Canada, are those where Olson simply observes. There are wonderful descriptions of otters, weasel, pine knots, and many waterways. Clearly, he had a profound love of the landscapes he grew up in and continued to revisit.

Not quite four stars for me because there's a bit too much of the American transcendentalist drive to derive "meaning" from nature. Olson's very much aware of his relationship to the tradition that grew up around Emerson's "natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts." He quotes Thoreau frequently and I liked the sense of his affectionate conversation with an elder and fellow trampler of paths. Olson's take on Native Americans

doesn't stand up to contemporary perspectives--more than a touch of romanticism, primitivism and noble savagery. But almost no white of his time avoided those and his attitude is always respectful, so I didn't find it difficult to just skim over those passages when they occurred.

Happyreader says

Perfect reading while watching the mist roll out on Nina Moose Lake in the Boundary Waters. Essays reflective of so many moods, just like the BWCA experience, where the lakes can quickly transform from high waves whipped by driving winds to gorgeous still glass reflecting the sunset. Tried reading this while still in the city but only in the wilderness did I slow down enough to enjoy these meditative essays on favorite canoeing routes, fishing spots, wilderness landscapes, and wildlife encounters with just enough hint of the danger posed by easy modern access to this unique and untamed Northwoods water world. Sigurd Olson was influential in the protection of the Boundary Waters, ensuring that my own experience of the BWCA was not so radically different from his own 60 years ago.

Kate says

As a writer, Sigurd Olson is a lyrical evangelist for wild places. In particular, he writes about one of my favorite wild places, the Boundary Waters/Quetico in northern Minnesota and Canada. I have traveled there many times, and Olson perfectly captures the sense of awe this place inspires in me and many others. His essays both describe the experience of traveling in the wilderness, and relate lessons Olson gleaned over the years of studying the landscape and its many diverse inhabitants, from ducks and geese, to squirrels and fish. I just completed the book on my last trip to the Boundary Waters, and the book was a perfect complement to my actual experience of camping on Insula Lake.

My only criticism is that he paints a sometimes overly romantic picture of the wilderness. He rarely describes the struggles to get along in an environment that is not always conducive to human comfort. Just entering the wilderness presents many physical challenges, from paddling through rough waters, storms, or rain, to hauling gear across lengthy mud-covered portages. Mosquitoes, black flies, water parasites, sudden storms or freezing rain/snow, plus the possibility of an encounter with a bear are realities of the wilderness, too. A savvy camper can prepare for these eventualities, but the unwary should be advised that the wilderness is not all rainbows and sunshine. And the uninitiated should know that these challenges do not actually detract from the experience; rather, through adversity, we experience a deeper connection to ourselves and an appreciation for our strengths. By living simply, we learn what truly matters, and we learn what things we can let go of and leave behind.

Tom Baker says

Sigurd as naturalist extraordinaire. Loved the Boundary Waters and Quetico as I do. We owe him our eternal thanks.

Sean says

Great book--"The Singing Wilderness" consists of a series of essays by the outdoorsman and naturalist, Sigurd Olson. The essays are ordered by season, from canoeing in the summer to snowshoeing in the Winter. Olson spent a lot of time during his life in the Quetico-Superior wilderness area in Northern Minnesota. He does a great job of describing the land and its magic. A must for anyone who feels the same way about the wilderness areas in Northern Minnesota and Canada.

Diane says

Love, love, love the whole series--so this was another great read.

Kassie says

Didn't finish, but what I read I liked, but it was just sort of all the same. Would be great if intermingled with other work about the outdoors.

Sev-o says

A classic nature piece. A collection of essays written by Olson from the mid-1930's to the late 1950's. Most written with the goal of influencing public opinion on the protection of wilderness areas. Arranged by season the essays brought (and bring) the wilderness of what is now the BWCA and Quetico Provincial Park to many whom never have experienced it. Through amazingly descriptive writing and with detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna as well as the areas geology Olson takes you on his adventures through this remarkable area.

After reading this book I purchased my first canoe and took my son on a canoe trip to the area. I just couldn't help myself.

Denise says

Have you been to Minnesota or the North country? Have you experienced solitude and the peace that comes from just "being" in the wilderness? The author goes through each season describing the details of the wilderness in a musical manner. This book is very calming!

Tony says

"The Singing Wilderness" is notable both for Sigurd F. Olson's writing and for Francis Lee Jaques'

illustrations. Published in 1956, the author's essays describe the wild country of northern Minnesota and nearby Canada. A glance at some of the titles of Olson's chapters, which are organized primarily by season, can give you a sense of the range that he covers: "The Winds of March," "Smell of the Morning," "The Way of a Canoe," "Forest Pool," "The Red Squirrel," "Pine Knots," "Smoky Gold," "Coming of the Snow," "Wilderness Music," and "Skyline Trail," among others. I think that the author is especially good at describing remote country. For example, in his chapter entitled "Silence," he writes of one cold winter night "...on a lake deep in the wilds. The stars were close that night, so close they almost blazed, and the Milky Way was a brilliant luminous splash across the heavens. An owl hooted somberly in the timber of the dark shores, a sound that accentuated the quiet on the open lake..." (p. 131). Francis Lee Jaques' illustrations add their own vividness to Olson's writings: Jaques' black-and-white drawings of birds, lakes, trees, animals, and other subjects are finely detailed and fun to look at. The combination of words and illustrations makes "The Singing Wilderness" an enjoyable book about the natural world.

Isaac Jensen says

In this collection of short essays about various adventures in the canoe country of northern Minnesota and Ontario, Olson provides a lyrical evocation of the value of wilderness. An impassioned cry for simplicity, solitude and a renewed connection to the natural world, this book is as relevant today as it was 60 years ago when it was first published.
