



## The Lonely Land

*Sigurd F. Olson*

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## **The Lonely Land** Sigurd F. Olson

"There are few places left on the North American continent where men can still see the country as it was before Europeans came and know some of the challenges and freedoms of those who saw it first, but in the Canadian Northwest it can still be done". With these words Sigurd Olson begins *The Lonely Land*, the breathtaking account of a five-hundred-mile Canadian canoe journey. Olson and five companions retraced the waterways used by the Voyageurs, the Hudson Bay traders, and a succession of adventurers who used the mighty Churchill River as a major waterway from Hudson Bay to the Mackenzie.

Now available for the first time in paperback, *The Lonely Land* tells two stories: that of Olson's expedition and that of the Voyageurs who came before them. The text is illuminated by historical quotes, maps, and research about life on the Churchill during the fur-trading years. But each chapter is driven by the beauty and challenges that faced Olson's group.

*The Lonely Land* is a tribute to the unspoiled beauty of the deep wilderness and the rugged individuals past and present who take up a canoe paddle to explore it.

## **The Lonely Land Details**

Date : Published August 13th 1997 by Univ Of Minnesota Press (first published March 12th 1961)

ISBN : 9780816629978

Author : Sigurd F. Olson

Format : Paperback 288 pages

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## From Reader Review The Lonely Land for online ebook

### Anthony Meaney says

A straightforward retelling of Olson's trip down (up?) the Churchill River in Northern Saskatchewan, Canada.

With a team of friends (most of whom are either senior government officials or captains of industry) they set out to retrace the routes of such nation builders as McKenzie, Frobisher and Simpson... and they did. Successfully and without any real incident.

So in a sense this is a very well written canoe "trip report" that canoeing enthusiasts (both armchair and otherwise) will adore. Those looking for his brilliant nature writing should check out some of his other books.

What's interesting is that this trip coincided somewhat with the ill fated Art Moffat trip which resulted in his death and the subsequent book "Death on the Barrens" by George Grinell.

The tragedy of Moffat's death certainly imbued a greater sense of gravitas and pathos to Grinell's book but beyond that Grinell really laid his soul bare in gut wrenching fashion making it a much more compelling read.

The lesson in all that? Well prepared and planned trips that don't end in disaster make for excellent outings but not exciting reading.

I always tell myself when going into the wilderness - don't have an adventure. An adventure is what makes a good book. But when it is happening to you it is not an adventure - it's an ordeal.

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### Scott Brown says

Despite enjoying all the books I have read so far, I was looking for one that was less based around disaster and survival, but more about thriving in the wild. I certainly got this in The Lonely Land. It got rave reviews on Good Reads so I gave it a go. It did not disappoint.

The Lonely Land follows Sigurd Olson, a renowned woodsman of his time (book was written in 1961) and 5 of his friends (who all have equally impressive Outdoorsy CV's) along on their 500 mile paddle down the Churchill River in Northern Saskatchewan. They follow the waterways of Voyageurs, old Hudson Bay Traders and adventurers alike.

It very much tells two stories, one of Olson and his friends and the others of those traders that paddled along the same stretch over the last 200 years. Each chapter opened up with a quote from the diary of one of these trader or adventurer, each one relating to the same part of the river which said chapter was going to cover.

For me, there was a real child like sense of adventure. It was somewhat like reading an adult version of Enid Blyton's Famous 5 or Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransom. Despite torrential rain and gale force winds Olson captured the romance of long adventures with the troubles of navigating the rapids, 'encounters'

with "Indians" and the sneaky rum tipples in camp. All of this romance shone through because although this group were very much experts, the focus of the book was purely on the excitement of adventure; going down rapids, cooking in camp and being with your friends. This stands out even more so when you the men that feature in this book are all in their 60's! Boys will be Boys.

This brought back great memories of my trip on the Bowron lakes in 2016 and I could relate to their adventure albeit far longer than any of mine. I highly recommend The Lonely Land to anyone who has ever been on a canoe trip or is planning one just to whet their appetite for what may lay ahead

We are giving this a resounding 5 Trees

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### **Martin Gibbs says**

We took countless canoe trips to southern Ontario when I was younger--for weeks at a time we never saw another soul. My dad had left me this book when he passed, and I finally read it, almost in one setting.

Our trips, waterfalls and all, paled in comparison to the mighty adventure that Olson describes. With is "Voyageurs", he covered an amazing amount of ground. What makes it more amazing is that many of the early traders and explorers took the same route UPSTREAM, poling, and paddling like mad.

This book makes one appreciate the vast wilderness that still exists on our continent, and the power of the human spirit. Olson writes crisply and cleanly, and paints a vivid picture of their trials... it is a terrific book.

I see another reviewer mapped out the route online, and I'm now off to Google Earth!

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### **Chris Knopff says**

I thought this is an exciting memoir of a very challenging canoe trip following the old voyageur routes. Well written as usual for Olson.

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### **Ronald Wise says**

This account of a 500-mile trip by six men in three canoes on the Churchill River across Saskatchewan would be interesting in itself for the historical and geological information presented. With the help of online satellite photos and maps it became an exciting study of the Canadian Shield and led me to a greater appreciation of the vast areas covered by the explorers and fur traders of Canada's past.

Beginning with author Sigurd F. Olson's description of the Canadian Shield, I could see on Wikimapia (at a scale of about 20 miles/inch) the solid rock of the Shield with the glacial gouges from north to south, and a depression running across this at its southern edge. The gouges and depression are filled with water and from above it looks like an almost continuous convoluted body of water extending eastward to Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay.

Olson's detailed description of their journey east from Île-à-la-Crosse, however, provided a much different experience. I soon realized that this water was a series of lakes, each defined by its elevation, and that between many of them there was only a short stretch of river, but more importantly a drop in elevation in the form of a falls or rapids. The importance of work done by the original explorers and fur traders was frequently employed in deciding whether to run or portage around these descents by our travelers. By zooming in on Wikimapia I was often able to see the whitewater being described, though the experience of danger and excitement came exclusively from the book.

Olson's words and these online resources brought back fond memories of my boyhood hydrological experiments with puddles and streams, and trying to visualize them from the perspective of an ant. This book provided me a greatly enhanced understanding of geology and the importance of past North American exploration and cartography, and greatly extended northward my familiarity with Canada.

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### **Tom Baker says**

For me, this Sigurd book was the best of them all, it had a bit of an edge, a story, and a little character development that is lacking in his other books. I still hold him in the highest esteem for saving the BWCA and other wilderness areas.

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### **Rick says**

I like Olson's writing. I wish he knew the creator as well as he does his creation. great book to take on that backpacking or canoe tripping weekend.

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### **Doug Gordon says**

Another great book by Sigurd Olson. This one follows a long trip he and several companions made along the Churchill River in northern Saskatchewan. Olson's narrative is excellent as always as he reviews numerous events along the way and continues to relay his wilderness philosophy through the retelling of the adventure.

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### **Carroll says**

Non-fiction. The great outdoors.

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### **Christopher says**

If you have decided you would like to read a book by the famous environmentalist and wilderness advocate Sigurd Olson, this is not the right book to start your exploration of his philosophical thought. However, if you want a mediocre travel memoir that loosely follows the route of the voyageurs from the fur trade era, then maybe you'll like it.

Sigurd Olson has been a big influence on my own personal quest for an environmental philosophy. The Singing Wilderness, Open Horizons, and Of Time and Place have made the most impact on me thus far in my reading of Olson's works. The Lonely Land, however, left me wanting more of the philosophical, thoughtful insight into preserving wild lands and intact ecosystems. His over-glorification of the fur trade era and of the voyageurs made me wince a little. Similarly, Olson's depictions of the First Nations individuals he and his crew encountered along the way were a little too much for my taste--too much "us vs. them".

Do yourself a favor and start with The Singing Wilderness and leave this one near the end of your "to read" list.

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### **Andrew says**

People fly all over the globe for adventures. Mr. Olsen and his five buddies had an incredible adventure in one of the most remote parts of North America, a place few people even remember exist. I would love to recreate this trip to see how things have changed, I'm guessing they haven't changed too much...

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### **Jose says**

Is an excellent book written with a simple prose to understand the author narrative , is a book that once you started you don't want to put it down . I'm sorry I have not enough time myself to read it in one sitting down .

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### **Mark Geisthardt says**

In this book Sigurd Olson tells the story of a 500 mile canoe trip, from Ile A La Crosse to Cumberland House, in northwest Canada. As he tells the story he also fills in the history of this place and this route and the points along the way. For someone who loves canoeing this is a must read.

I'm in the process of revisiting Sigurd's books and very much enjoying every word!

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### **Pamk says**

I just loved the sense of the wildness and peacefulness of the country that these 4 modern day voyageurs traveled and the reflections of the author as this land sat on the brink of development. This book was written in the '60's and sadly I'm sure much of the wilderness that they passed through is now gone as it's an area that was full of oil.

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