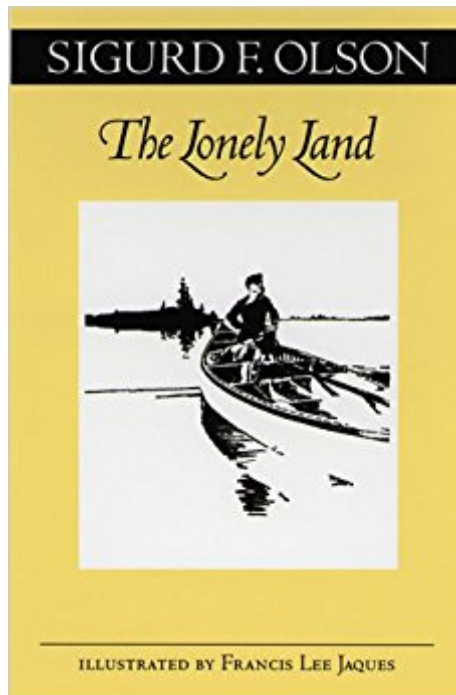




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The Lonely Land (Fesler-Lampert Minnesota Heritage)



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was looking on information on old canoe routes of the voyageurs and I came upon this book. It tells the experiences of Olson, a famous naturalist of the 50's and 60's, and 5 of his friends, as they paddle three wood and canvas canoes down 500 miles of the Churchhill River in Saskatchewan in 1960. Olson describes the setting and experience so completely, including diary entries of famous fur trappers who traveled the same route, that I have thought of nothing else but going to see the country he describes, the Canadian Shield of Northern Saskatchewan. It is a different place now than it was 40 years ago, less lonely I imagine, but still something I must do. I would recommend this book to anyone who longs to experience this land, North America, before it became overpopulated.

I read this book while in Antarctica, and I spent several storm days lost in Olson's vivid tale of an epic journey through the vast Canadian wilderness. His insight into the socio-historical condition of the indigenous peoples and French-Canadian missionaries and traders is unique. Also, I found the illustrations by Frances Lee Jacques to be immaculate line drawings worthy of admiration in their own right. "The Lonely Land" fueled the wanderlust and naturalist in me as much as any Ed Abbey or John Muir book.

This is a book I can pick up and read anytime I need to feel the fresh clean air of the Canadian Northwoods. Olson & 5 other experienced and accomplished comrades follow the route of the early Voyageurs down 500 miles of the wild Churchill river. A bonding of men, rich in history, enough adventure to stir the imagination of any outdoorsman or armchair adventurer. I have read this book many times, it has become a comfortable old friend.

I first obtained this book in my youth through the old Outdoor Life Book Club (which also introduced me to other classics such as John J. Rowlands' Cache Lake Country). I'm not sure I read *The Lonely Land* all the way through at that first encounter, but I recently rediscovered it when cleaning out a family home. I picked it up out of nostalgia, but I soon found that I couldn't put it down. Apart from the inherent interest of its subject matter -- the majestic wilderness of central Canada's Churchill River drainage -- I was quickly taken by the immediacy of Olson's account. The wind, the waves, the thunder of approaching rapids all spill off the page in vivid detail, as do the detailed descriptions of each night's camp and its routines. As compelling is the exuberance of Olson and his five companions as they explore pristine lakes, shoot the Churchill's wild water, and find refuge time and again on the solid, reassuring outcrops of the Canadian Shield. Finally, at each stage of the journey, Olson quotes from the journals of those who came before him, the "bourgeois" who led the brigades of voyageurs into the heart of the Lonely Land in search of furs. Men like Alexander MacKenzie, George Simpson, and David Thompson, who worked for the Hudson's bay Company or its competitors: the record of their observations informs Olson's account with vivid descriptions of the land as well as a sense both of how much and how little had changed over the one hundred and fifty years since they had last paddled, poled, and lined their way up the same great river system. I know that Olson has many well-regarded books to his credit, but a new reader could do worse than enter this world of woods and water by way of *The Lonely Land*.

This is probably one of the best Sigurd Olson books I have read. He wrote about so many details of the land and sights of nature along a river voyage in Canada. From the camp sites to the tough rapids, I felt like I was taking the canoe trip with him, and I didn't want the adventure to end.

This book is an account of Olson's canoe journey down long stretches of the Churchill and Sturgeon Weir rivers in Saskatchewan. Olson was a leading popularizer of the notion of wilderness, associated with the North Country of Minnesota and Canada. The story of someone else's canoe

journey risks being mind-numbingly boring: "we paddled, portaged falls, and then paddled some more." Olson's story isn't any different than that basic narrative, but he manages to make the journey more lyrical. Observations about the empty land they traverse, the comraderie of the company of six, reminiscences of the voyageurs of old, and occasional encounters with other people leaven the basic narrative. It's a great read, and I literally didn't put it down (I was stuck on a transatlantic flight, but even so). Heartily recommended.

After I read this book I had a burning desire to visit the Canadian Shield and paddle a wood and canvas canoe on the Churchill River. I only wish I could have done it in 1960, when this book was written. It is a much different place today. This is an excellent book about a canoe trip of 500 miles by six friends. I only hope I will be as lucky to do such a trip someday.

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