

Book Reviews

ESSENCE OF WILDERNESS

Reflections from the North Country. Sigurd F. Olson. 1976. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York. 172 pages. \$8.95.

Sigurd Olson's eighth and most recent book is an eloquent revelation of his innermost emotions and philosophies regarding wilderness and, more important, life itself. Many of the passages in this book are on a level with writings of Aldo Leopold, Bertrand Russell, and Henry David Thoreau, all of whom the author thanks in his acknowledgments for their inspiration. I'm sure the readers of this book will, in turn, thank Mr. Olson for his inspiration.

"The Bourgeois," the name reserved by the French voyageurs for their leaders and given to Mr. Olson by his canoeing comrades, has been a wilderness guide, college professor and dean, and president of the Wilderness Society and National Parks Association. His many years of wilderness travel in the Quetico-Superior area of Minnesota and Canada have provided a bank of memorable experiences which he draws upon freely in this book.

Reflections from the North Country consists of 28 essays grouped into three major sections: "Primal Heritage," "Search for Meaning," and "The Imponderables." The essays are written so that they are related, but not dependent on one another. This enables the reader to digest even a single essay at any time without sacrifice in continuity. Discussions of topics as diverse as "Evolution of Mind," "Simplicity," and "Immortality" will be of interest even to those persons who have never paddled a canoe nor snowshoed through a silent forest. For the habitual outdoorsman, though, tales of wilderness adventure will prompt the waterproofing of favorite hiking boots and the varnishing of canoe paddles. An optimistic epilogue concerning man's future in the "era ahead" ends the book.

In the essay "The dream of Hudson Bay," Mr. Olson observes that "... a man is never so much himself as when he is actually part of a dream, never so lost as when it disappears and there is nothing to look forward to." Such statements of belief are scattered throughout the text and are indeed thought-provoking. However, as much as this book is stimulating, it is also relaxing and easily readable. The author's expert descriptions of personal experiences in the wilds and the 11 excellent black-and-white illustrations by Leslie Kouba give the reader the sense of action and involvement.

It is often said that timelessness is the supreme attribute which is the difference between a good book and a classic. If this is indeed so, this book will become a classic in the truest sense of the word.

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