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The Survival Of The Bark Canoe



JOHN
McPHEE

The
Survival
of the
Bark Canoe



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Synopsis

In Greenville, New Hampshire, a small town in the southern part of the state, Henri Vaillancourt makes birch-bark canoes in the same manner and with the same tools that the Indians used. The *Survival of the Bark Canoe* is the story of this ancient craft and of a 150-mile trip through the Maine woods in those graceful survivors of a prehistoric technology. It is a book squarely in the tradition of one written by the first tourist in these woods, Henry David Thoreau, whose *The Maine Woods* recounts similar journeys in similar vessel. As McPhee describes the expedition he made with Vaillancourt, he also traces the evolution of the bark canoe, from its beginnings through the development of the huge canoes used by the fur traders of the Canadian North Woods, where the bark canoe played the key role in opening up the wilderness. He discusses as well the differing types of bark canoes, whose construction varied from tribe to tribe, according to custom and available materials. In a style as pure and as effortless as the waters of Maine and the glide of a canoe, John McPhee has written one of his most fascinating books, one in which his talents as a journalist are on brilliant display.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In an age of mass-produced and disposable objects, traditional crafts are becoming extinct, and appreciation for craftsmanship has become a hobby for the wealthy dilettante. But here and there, a few stalwart individuals carry on the old traditions. Henri Vaillancourt of Greenville, New Hampshire is in large part responsible for the continuing survival of the birch bark canoe. McPhee tells the story not only of Vaillancourt and his work, but of the canoe's role in American history. Many McPhee fans

consider this lovely and lucid book one of his finest works.

“In his own beautifully crafted work, McPhee treats both man and boat with all the respect and admiration their precarious presence commands. Every white water and wilderness buff should rise to it like a trout, but as all followers of Mr. McPhee’s work would expect, its appeal and value cannot be so narrowly limited; it’s a lively chronicle, rich in character study and observations.”
—The Wall Street Journal

This is the second of many of McPhee’s books that I have read. He is a very good writer. His detailed information about the subject of his books is amazing. But the way he interlaces information about the people and places he has met & been in gathering that information is absorbing. He has the ability to draw you into the scenes and carry you along on the journey. While his book about Florida oranges was the first of his books that I have read, and I liked it best, this one is written in that same way. I wish I could afford one of these canoes. I would recommend this book for all high school students and any adult looking to learn about the canoe or just looking for a good book to read.

The books use writing technical for story telling that is very appealing for continuous engagement. And new words become clear from the context. I would rate ‘What the Robin knows’, Bird Sense and The Survival of the Bark Canoe at the top of my list for facts brilliantly delivered. Adventure and Fantasy books well written can be great diversions. All the writers I have listed in those categories are very pleasing! Thank you for the opportunity for making some statement! Cliff

Excellent book. For anyone who loves wilderness, native history, and beautiful descriptive writing, this is a great read!

Great Job by a Great Writer.

John McPhee is at his best, as he explores the history of the bark canoe in America, and tells of a canoe trip gone wrong. The character development and the story line are both excellent. They provide endless opportunities for humor, as the characters struggle to keep their canoes afloat, and their emotions in check, while mother nature and human nature conspire against them.

Vintage McPhee, and pretty much what you would expect when he get his oar (ok--paddle) in the water.

Interesting story of modern replication of Malecite designed canoes built by someone from NH in the 1970's.

Worth reading for any fan of canoes, history, paddling and the Maine woods. McPhee paints a great portrait of a man obsessed with the birch bark canoe and those who have to suffer his quirks during a trip through the Penobscot and Allagash waterways.

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