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A Far Cry



Synopsis

A solo canoe journey through the Mackenzie Mountains Northwest Territories. The book is in two parts. The first and shorter part gives a brief background history of the author and takes the reader quickly and directly into the bush experience, into isolation. It recounts the building of the first cabin on the Broken Skull River, the first winter alone, and the following spring. It continues with the initiation into canoe travel with a journey down the Broken Skull, South Nahanni and Liard Rivers to Fort Simpson. This chapter includes an account of the Nahanni fire of 1881 and a contrast between wilderness and National Parks. The second part of the book takes the reader along on a two year solo journey down the Mackenzie River and into the Mackenzie Mountains by way of the Keele River. Wintering over in a previously built cabin, the author continues his journey over the spring ice and following break-up, on up the Twitya River, nearly to the Yukon border. Building a small cabin a further winter is spent alone and then in the following spring a descent of the Mountain River is made. At the height of the flood waters the canoe capsizes in sixteen foot waves. All is lost. A ten day walk out with but life-jacket, sheath-knife and twenty matches was made to the San Sault Rapids on the Mackenzie River where the author was picked up by a passing party of Indians from Fort Good Hope. The book concludes with an attempt to place in a wider context the lessons so easily perceived in wilderness, yet so obscured in present society. A Perspective: The Dangerous River by R.M. Patterson formed my introduction to the Mackenzie Mountains when I was eleven years old; A Far Cry in some sense, modernizes the timeless wilderness endeavour. The search is no longer for gold but for original material for photographs and paintings, it is founded in reality, not dream; it possesses purpose. That the purpose ultimately fails is irrelevant for the wilderness provides a more valuable gift than any sought. This is the real parallel between the D.R. and the F.C. and the same sets it apart from the more usual wilderness travelogue limited in both duration and purpose. Aside from this story I have endeavoured to paint with words much of what I saw and also to convey a sense of the perpetual land by recounting the ongoing day to day travel, from one winter through to the following winter. Criticism has been levelled at the length of this story and whilst I accept this as valid, I never-the-less want to respond it was a long journey and find comfort in many historical precedents, whose authors did not have to conform to modern literary accounting and styles.

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