

# **CANOEING IN THE WILDERNESS**

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Canoeing in the wilderness by Henry D. Thoreau

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By HENRY D. THOREAU

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HOREAU was born at Concord, Massachusetts, July 12, 1817, and at the time he made this wilderness canoe trip he was forty years old. The record of the journey is the latter half of his *The Maine Woods*, which is perhaps the finest idyl of the forest ever written. It is particularly charming in its blending of meditative and poetic fancies with the minute description of the voyager's experiences.

The chief attraction that inspired Thoreau to make the trip was the primitiveness of the region. Here was a vast tract of almost virgin woodland, peopled only with a few loggers and pioneer farmers, Indians, and wild animals. No one could have been better fitted than Thoreau to enjoy such a region and to transmit his enjoyment of it to others. For though he was a person of culture and refinement,

with a college education, and had for an intimate friend so rare a man as Ralph Waldo Emerson, he was half wild in many of his tastes and impatient of the restraints and artificiality of the ordinary social life of the towns and cities.

He liked especially the companionship of men who were in close contact with nature, and in this book we find him deeply interested in his Indian guide and lingering fondly over the man's characteristics and casual remarks. The Indian retained many of his aboriginal instincts and ways, though his tribe was in most respects civilized. His home was in an Indian village on an island in the Penobscot River at Oldtown, a few miles above Bangor.

Thoreau was one of the world's greatest nature writers, and as the years pass, his fame steadily increases. He was a careful and accurate observer, more at home in the fields and woods than in village and town, and with a gift of piquant originality in recording his impressions. The play of



his imagination is keen and nimble, yet his fancy is so well balanced by his native common sense that it does not run away with him. There is never any doubt about his genuineness, or that what he states is free from bias and romantic exaggeration.

It is to be noted that he was no hunter. His inquisitiveness into the ways of the wild creatures carried with it no desire to shoot them, and to his mind the killing of game for mere sport was akin to butchery. The kindly and sympathetic spirit constantly manifest in his pages is very attractive, and the fellowship one gains with him through his written words is both delightful and wholesome. He stimulates not only a love for nature, but a love for simple ways of living, and for all that is sincere and unaffected in human life, wherever found.

In the present volume various details and digressions that are not of interest to most readers have been omitted, but except for such elimination Thoreau's text has been

retained throughout. It is believed that nothing essential has been sacrificed, and that the narrative in this form will be found lively, informing, and thoroughly enjoyable.

CLIFTON JOHNSON.

HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS.

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