The View From
Listening Point
NEWSLETTER of the Listening Point Foundation, Inc.
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"Why Wilderness?"

Nearly 70 years ago, Sigurd Olson wrote an essay for *American Forests* magazine. Simply titled "Why Wilderness?" the piece examined the value of wilderness experience to the human mind, heart, and culture.

Today, these sorts of themes receive robust debate and discussion in literary, scientific, and activist circles. That was not the case in 1938, however, when this essay appeared.

At this time, Sig was still more than 15 years away from publication of his first book, *The Singing Wilderness*. While this essay is perhaps not a reflection of Sig's best writing, in it are voiced themes and values that resonated through the rest of his career as a writer and activist, and have inspired countless people who followed him.

LPF Photo Archives

By Sigurd Olson

In some men, the need of unbroken country, primitive conditions, and intimate contact with the earth is a deeply rooted cancer gnawing forever at the illusion of contentment with things as they are. For months or years this hidden longing may go unnoticed and then, without warning, flare forth in an all-consuming passion that will not bear denial. Perhaps it is the passing of a flock of wild geese in the spring, perhaps the sound of running water or the smell of thawing earth that brings the transformation. Whatever it is, the need is more than can be borne with fortitude, and for the good of their families and friends, and their own restless souls, they head toward the last frontiers and escape.

I have seen them come to the "jumping-off places" of the North, these men whereof I speak. I have seen the hunger in their eyes, the torturing hunger for action, distance, and solitude, and a chance to live as they will. I know these men and the craving that is theirs; I know also that in the world today there are only two types of experience which can put their minds at peace, the way of wilderness or the way of war.

As a guide in the primitive lake regions of the Hudson's Bay watershed, I have lived with men from every walk of life, have learned to know them more intimately than their closest friends at home, their dreams, their hopes, their aspirations. I have seen them come from the cities down below, worried and sick at heart, and have watched them change under the stimulus of wilderness living into happy, carefree, joyous men to whom the successful taking of a trout or the running of a rapids meant far more than the rise and fall of stocks and bonds. Ask these men what it is they have found, and it would be difficult for them to say. This they do know, that hidden back there in the country beyond the steel and the traffic of towns is something real, something as definite as life itself, that for some reason or other is an answer and a challenge to civilization.

At first, I accepted the change that was wrought in such men with the matter-of-factness of any woodsman, but as the years went by, I began to marvel at the infallibility of the wilderness formula. I came to see that here was a way of life as necessary and as deeply rooted in some men as the love of home and family, a vital cultural aspect of life which brought happiness and lasting content.

The idea of wilderness enjoyment is not new. Since the beginning of time poets have sung of the healing power of solitude and of communion with nature, but for them the wilderness meant the joys of contemplation. Typical of this tone of interpretation is Thoreau with his "tonic of wildness," but to him the wild meant the pastoral meadows of Concord and Walden Pond, and the joy he had, though unmistakably genuine, did not approach the fierce, unquenchable desire of my men of today. For them, the out-of-doors is not enough; nor are the delights of meditation. They need the sense of actual struggle and accomplishment, where the odds are real and where they know

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

Letter from the Chair


courtesy Tim Rudnicki

A seemingly simple question can change lives and our world.

We started our annual autumnal beach hike along the northern shore of Lake Mille Lacs. The early morning cloud cover was breaking up as a cool breeze puffed from the north. A few of the children ran ahead, with some of the adults in tow, while others paused to examine what the lake recently deposited on shore. Ancient bobbers, gnarled driftwood, fish skeletons and clumps of a strange-looking round plant were among the many items that captured our attention and fueled our imaginations.

Among the hikers was my 11-year-old son, John. For as many years, from that first year in his backpack to, by the next year, on the ground and at the height of a toddler, he experienced this last stretch of what we call Mille Lacs' wilderness. Over the years, with our friends, we have all come to know the ever-changing beach as shaped by the windswept lake and the effects of its crashing waves.

On this visit, the water level was the lowest it had been in many decades. This situation left a few large power boats stranded on newly formed sandbars far from shore and exposed the otherwise hidden, spindly legs of the docks yet in the water. Moving toward the last part of undeveloped lakeshore, we discovered and walked on peninsula-shaped sandbars that were at least three meters wide and extending out 10 to 15 meters from the beach. These new, natural creations of the low water level and variety of wave action captivated and alarmed us. Among the adults, we saw this as another local effect of global climate change.

John, too, was formulating some ideas about the changes taking place on the beach. It was his next question, though, that took the wind out of me. We were walking side by side when he paused, looked up at me and asked, "how long will we live?"

After some followup discussion, I came to better understand John and what was wrapped in his question. Even at his young age, John understands that all humans need clean air, water, food, and open spaces to play in and explore. He sees the adverse effects human activity is having on the natural environment that supports life.

How does one answer John's question?

Complex moral, social, political, economic, environmental, and scientific issues surround his question. At the same time, each of us has a stake in and, to some degree, can take immediate action to shape the answer to John's question.

John's question prompts me to re-dedicate myself to working on solutions to protect our life-sustaining environment, including the important wilderness component. Please join me in renewing your commitment to preserve the natural and historical integrity of Listening Point and to carry on Sigurd Olson's legacy of wilderness education.

By working together, we can protect our life-sustaining environment and send a tangible and hopeful message to this and future generations. Thank you. ●

—Tim Rudnicki

Inside

Trail Builder: Martin Kellogg

This article, featuring LPF board member Martin Kellogg, first appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of Minnesota Trails*, and is used here with permission.*

How did you get involved in protecting parkland?

Growing up in Minnesota often involved outdoor experiences such as hunting and fishing where city limits were quite visible and an open countryside nearby. It was a place where there could hardly be a thought that wide-open outdoor experiences would ever be in short supply. It was a landscape where "No Trespassing" signs were rare.

That idyllic impression of the outdoors began to fade in the early '60s as population and disposable incomes increased and urban sprawl became familiar in word and deed. It was about that time that I happened to become involved in a committee established by the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce with a charter to study and recommend ways to boost "Tourism and Outdoor Recreation" in Minnesota.

Following a yearlong study, the committee identified many opportunities. Gov. Elmer L. Anderson (1960-1962), who also served on the committee, was behind an idea to designate the St. Croix River as a Wild and Scenic River. This idea really struck home for I had earlier discovered the Snake River tributary to the St. Croix where I had spent many pleasant days canoeing and fishing.

The Snake River was almost a secret, winding through woods and dairy farms on its way to join the St. Croix. Almost instantaneously I began noticing ads in the paper for riverfront lots on the Snake. Before long, I met the seller who described an ingenious discovery of river hideaways at dairy farm prices. The understanding struck me right between the eyes that the great outdoors I loved was forever "For Sale" and in an accelerating mode. Thus began a second career as a volunteer rescuer of the outdoors.

Minnesota Trails

Martin Kellogg

"Each person who can recite a similar awakening to action and resolve will know what I have experienced—a deep satisfaction with our mutual accomplishments and a realization that we need not stand alone, jaws agape, and watch our natural world slip away."

—Martin Kellogg

What motivates you to continue this effort?

Each person who can recite a similar awakening to action and resolve will know what I have experienced—a deep satisfaction with our mutual accomplishments and a realization that we need not stand alone, jaws agape, and watch our natural world slip away.

One of our good friends in this movement often expressed a concern that there were too many conservation-oriented organizations and that we should all band together in a single powerful organization. I argue that we need them all, each with its mission and focus, and each building its band of volunteers ready to reach out on a critical issue in a united effort while not losing sight of its special objectives.

That is why I not only have been an active member of the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota for more than 40 years, but also active or supportive of a number of other organizations committed to protecting our great outdoors.

What do you see on the horizon for parkland protection efforts?

With these many organizations needing support, it is sometimes difficult to give each its just returns in labor or funds. Such a situation is a good time for creative thinking. Perhaps a remainder gift in a will or trust will resolve the dilemma. In some cases idle assets such as a life insurance policy could be directed.

My only regret is that there have not been more days to enjoy the comradeship of the good hearts and minds that frequent the bastions of protection for our natural resources. Yet I am more than rewarded by a vision that someday there will be still another person walking through some parkland wondering as I have wondered, who were the thoughtful people whose foresight kept this beautiful landscape free of development and free for the public to enjoy? ●

Activities, Events & Updates

◆ **The effort to gain recognition for Listening Point** from the National Register of Historic Places continues. In September, consultant Dave Anderson, from Waukon, Iowa, began work on the writing and completion of the National Register of Historic Places application form. Dave spent the day at the writing shack and at Listening Point taking notes and photos to include in the documentation. The process includes submission to the Minnesota State Historical Society, which reviews the application and sends it with recommendations to the National Register office in Washington D.C.

Alanna Johnson

Consultant Dave Anderson, at left, is guided around Listening Point by Chuck Wick

◆ **Milt Stenlund honored:** In June, LPF Vice-Chair Chuck Wick presented a commendation plaque to Milt Stenlund upon Milt's retirement from the Board of Directors.The plaque acknowledged Milt's role as a charter member of the Board, his years of support, his unique contributions as an old friend of Sig and Listening Point, his quiet counsel, and the pleasure of his company. Milt will be sorely missed.

Alanna Johnson

Milt Stenlund, at right, with his wife Althea accept a plaque from Chuck Wick.

◆ **The North American Association for Environmental Education** (NAAEE) Conference took place Oct. 10-14, 2006, in St. Paul, Minn. LPF Advisory Board members David Backes and Clayton Russell were featured presenters at the conference. LPF hosted an information table during the "Share Fair" portion of the conference—an opportunity for non-profit organizations to meet with conference attendees and share information.

◆ **The new Minneapolis Central Public Library** features a "Sigurd Olson Chair," thanks to the efforts of Martin & Esther Kellogg, Chuck Dayton, Becky Rom & Reid Carron, Steve Piragis, Byron Starns, and Jim Lenfestey. The chair, featuring Sig's name and a plaque, is located in the library auditorium.

◆ **Members of the Parks & Recreation Club** from Vermillion Community College, led by instructor Bill Tefft, spent a day at the Point relocating the path to the actual Point on the lake. The crew moved stones, cleared brush, and added gravel, making the path safer and not as steep—and easier for visitors to navigate.

◆ **LPF enjoyed another good year at Ely's 2006 Blueberry Arts Festival.** The LPF booth attracted many visitors, including new volunteers, and many stories were shared. It was a verysuccessful three-day event for the Foundation.

Alanna Johnson

Blueberry Arts Festival visitors stop by the Listening Point Foundation booth to share stories and learn more.

◆ **This past summer and fall the Point hosted** an exceptional number of interested and supportive visitors. Some of the larger groups included: Isaak Walton League of Minnesota (30 people); The Trust for Public Land (30); International Wolf Center Alpha Group (20); the staff of the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College in Ashland, Wis. (12); an Elder Hostel group from Vermilion Community College (12); and the Vermillion Wilderness Management Class (12). Many other smaller visitor groups and indivudials also enjoyed a visit to the Point this season.

Once again, Vermilion Community College joined LPF in coordinating a summer internship program that helped guide visitor tours at the Point. This past summer's intern, Micca Leider, writes:

"*This past summer Vermilion Community College once again held tours for Sigurd Olson's Listening Point. We had a grand total of 59 people coming from all across the United States attend this summer's tours.*

In addition to visiting the point, we also added a visit to Sig's home and his writing shack. Many people thought this was an excellent idea since it gave them even more insight into Sig's life and writings. We were fortunate enough to have beautiful weather during each of the tours which enhanced the brilliance of the natural beach, the Point itself and Sig's rustic cabin. The Listening Point Foundation is continuing these tours for next summer, so plan ahead and come learn about the legacy of Sigurd F. Olson."

Coming Up...

◆ **January 2007:** Booya LPF fundraiser dinner, sponsored by "Friends of Sigurd Olson." For more information please contact Al Knutson at 612-789-0904.

◆ **Date to be announced:** Annual SFO Birthday Anniversary luncheon to be held in St. Paul, Minn.

Activities, Events & Updates

◆ **Endowment fund established:** A Listening Point Foundation endowment fund was established in the fall of 2005. Now, a year later, we would like to officially announce the name of this gift: **The George and Donna Arbaugh Endowment Fund**.

Establishment of this endowment will help to ensure the preservation of Listening Point and the furthering of Sigurd Olson's wilderness education ethic for generations to come.

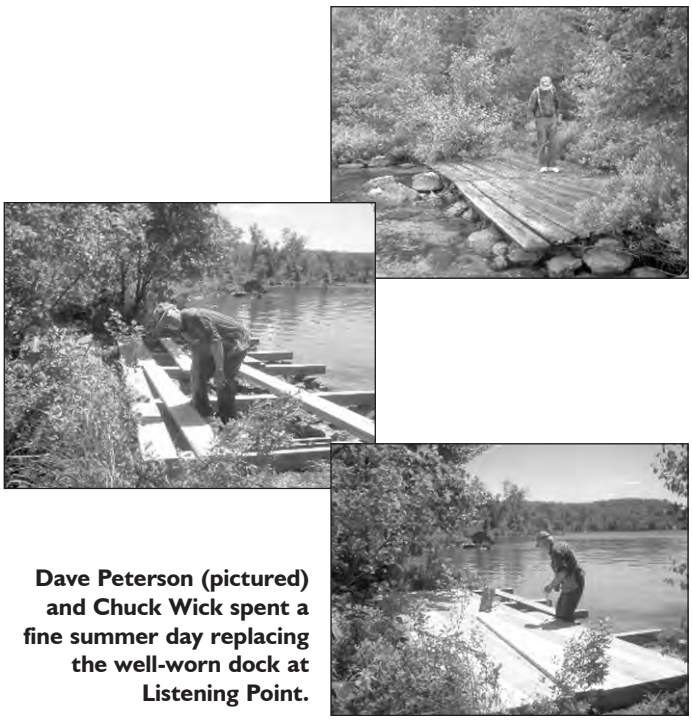
Donna Arbaugh puts it best, in her own words:

"My husband George and I grew up and attended college in the Midwest, moving to the Pacific Northwest in 1959. By that time we had built a modest cabin on a lovely lake near Ely, Minnesota.

"Because George was a college professor and I, too, had summer vacations, we lived three months a year at our lake cabin. Sigurd Olson's writings were an important part of our lives, leading us to an appreciation of the Sigurd Olson Institute at Northland College and becoming members of the Heritage Society in 2004.

"After my first visit to Listening Point in September of 2004, it became very evident to me that the Listening Point Foundation should also be supported in a significant way. The Foundation's mission to keep Sigurd Olson's legacy alive and to support wilderness education on all levels is a critical importance."

◆ **Listening Point dock rebuilt:** No visit to Listening Point is complete without a stroll out onto the dock tucked away at the foot of the little cove below the cabin. Dave Peterson and Chuck Wick replaced this well-worn dock this past summer. Dave and Chuck used cedar boards and six-by-six support structures to copy the dock's original design, to ensure that a safe view from the dock remains part of the Listening Point tradition.



Dave Peterson (pictured) and Chuck Wick spent a fine summer day replacing the well-worn dock at Listening Point.

Dock pictures by Chuck Wick

Listening Point Foundation Contribution Form

Name: _____

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City, State, ZIP: _____

❑ My donation will secure a gift contribution for:

Name: _____

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❑ My contribution is in *(select one)* honor/memory of:

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Contribution Amount

❑ $25 ❑ $250

❑ $50 ❑ $500

❑ $100 ❑ (other) _____

Please send your check payable to Listening Point Foundation to:

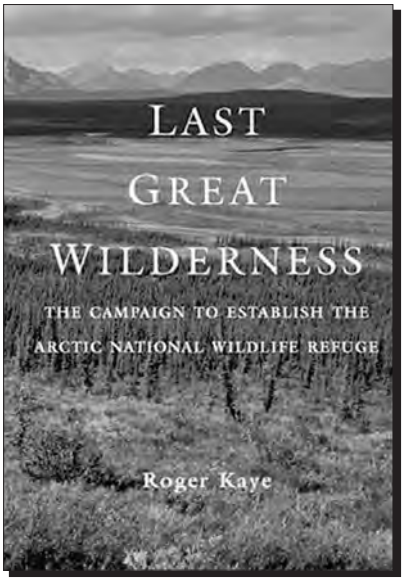
Listening Point Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 180
Ely, MN 55731

Book Review

Last Great Wilderness: *The Campaign to Establish the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*

Roger Kaye
University of Alaska Press, 2006

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, with its 8 million acres of designated wilderness and its 1.5 million-acre unprotected coastal plain, symbolizes for many people the values, character, and ideals of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Yet many of us know all too little about the struggle to first establish the refuge in the 1950s and 1960, and how that struggle still influences the Wilderness System today. That will now change with the publication of Roger Kaye's terrific new book, Last Great Wilderness, the first in-depth examination of that epic struggle.



Roger Kaye documents the important roles that George Collins and Lowell Sumner of the National Park Service, and Olaus Murie and his wife Mardy played, as well as the work of Wilderness Act author Harold Zahniser, Sigurd F. Olson, Stewart Brandborg, Conservation Foundation President Fairfield Osborn, and even Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. They struggled throughout the 1950s to protect a vast corner of Arctic Alaska against those, like Alaska U.S. Senator Bob Bartlett, who blocked their legislation in order to fulfill their own American dreams of developing the frontier. Even current Alaska U.S. Senator Ted Stevens played an important role in the 1950s effort, but one that may surprise modern wilderness advocates.

Blocked in Congress, conservationists convinced Interior Secretary Fred Seaton in the outgoing Eisenhower Administration to create the Arctic Range in December of 1960 by secretarial order. The Range was, of course, later expanded and renamed the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980, the monumental conservation law that had been in part inspired by "the beliefs and values, the ideas and idealism and the hopes and concerns for the future" that propelled the original campaign.

Last Great Wilderness shows how the struggle to establish the Range influenced other national wilderness battles going on at the same time, including the effort to block dams in Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado, and especially the eight-year struggle to pass the 1964 Wilderness Act. Some of the same players, like Howard Zahniser, worked on all three efforts. The Arctic campaign infused the wilderness movement with a great sense of idealism and symbolism, both of which enriched the national wilderness movement after establishment of the Range in 1960 and benefited the campaign to pass the Wilderness Act. Part of that idealism and symbolism lay in the realization by Range proponents that northeastern Alaska offered an unparalleled opportunity to protect an entire ecosystem undamaged by development, a nine-million-acre wilderness landscape on a scale unheard-of in the Lower 48. That expansive ecosystem view imbued the wilderness movement with a far broader vision and richer symbolism than had earlier been the case.

The importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the national wilderness movement is as strong if not stronger today than in 1960.

Roger Kaye is well-suited to tell this story. A resident of Fairbanks, Roger has worked for over 20 years as a wilderness specialist and pilot for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He has extensively researched and written about the Arctic Refuge and wilderness in general for years. Roger carefully combed through the records, examined the press and correspondence, and conducted many important interviews to bring this tale to life.

Last Great Wilderness tells an important story for today as well. The values symbolized by the Arctic Range—cultural, spiritual, ecological, and evolutionary—are as meaningful for us today as they were a half-century ago. The importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the national wilderness movement is as strong if not stronger today than in 1960. And the rich context that Last Great Wilderness provides will inspire all of us to continue our current struggle to protect the coastal plain from oil development, and to pass on this last great wilderness intact to future generations. ●

—Reviewed by LPF Advisory Board member Kevin Proescholdt

Stories of Sig

❖ Dave Schneider writes:

I first met Sig Olson through his book Listening Point, and then I knew I would want to meet this special man sometime, somehow, somewhere. I read several more of his books (Singing Wilderness, Runes of the North) and also discovered more of his writings in magazines and newspaper articles.

Then it happened. He was asked to lead a Canoe Wilderness Workshop sponsored by the Minnesota Council of Churches, the statewide interdenominational organization of numerous churches. At that time I was a young pastor, heavily involved in our United Methodist camping program, especially the canoe camps. I jumped at the chance to participate in this three-day workshop to be held in mid-October at the Fenske Lake Campground on the Echo Trail, north of Ely. In those early 1960s there was not as much interest in canoe camping, and so only 8-10 enthusiastic learners attended. "The" Sig Olson was to be our teacher!

One of the participants had just purchased a new canoe—a fiberglass model (quite innovative at the time)—so the day began with Sig being asked to "check it out." To see the skill, the ease, the mastery of the paddle that was so natural in Sig's hands was a sight to behold. We were in awe! I can still see him standing on the shore later, giving a quiet critique of the canoe, quite favorable as I recall. One statement stood out for me because I was just learning the technical terms of canoes and canoeing, so when Sig said "It has good tumblehome," I nodded my head, as though I knew exactly what he was talking about!

Earlier in the day, one of the men had arrived early and had caught a fish or two. He was preparing the fish for our supper when Sig asked, "Do you want me to fix my special fish chowder?" Of course, the response was a resounding "Yes, please do; that would be great!" So we stood around asking questions of this "pro" fish chowder creator, and watching the casual skill of Sig Olson, the camp cook. What a meal we enjoyed that evening, accompanied by campfire stories and all manner of questions asked of Sig. It was a cold, frosty evening, but it was filled with the warmth of a campfire surrounded by eager learners listening to their mentor and new-found friend and compatriot in the love of that Canoe Country.

We were a bit taken aback when we invited Sig to share one of the tents set up for our group, only to have him say, "No, but thank you anyhow. I really do prefer to sleep under that tree over there. I'll be fine." Again, that look of awe as he laid out his pad, sleeping bag, and on top of it all, he drew a canvas cover. I'm sure he was fast asleep before any of us were settled in our tents. There was frost on our tents, and on Sig's canvas that next morning, but Sig greeted us with a smiling face. He had slept well under his tree that night.

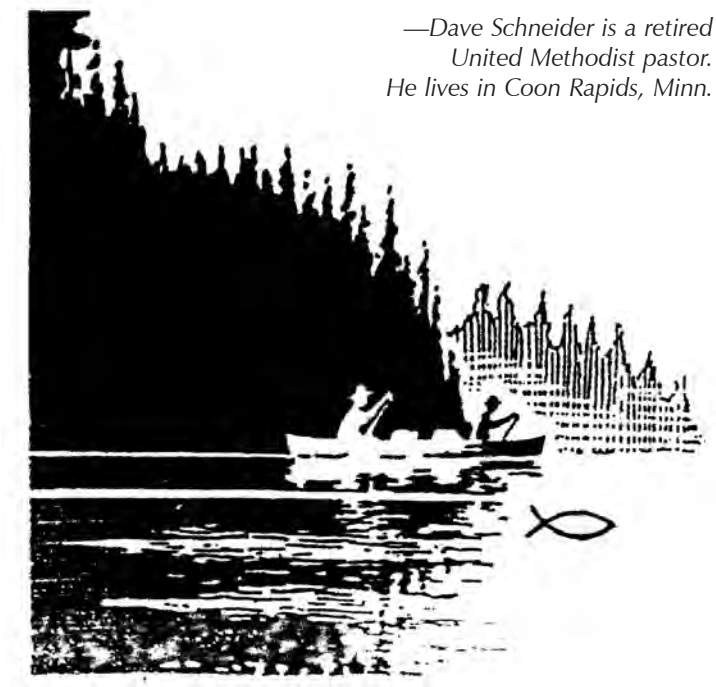
That next day, we sat on the rocky shoreline; he stood with his well-worn hat cocked just right on his head, his white hair showing on the sides. We talked of early days of the area, the ancient rocks, the people who were there long before we came, the stories the lichen and moss and trees can tell us, the need or the love and care for this area.

Toward the end of the day, the teaching and stories ended. The group dispersed, but my brother Jim and I remained, asking Sig more questions. So the three of us talked. Sig gave more details of the growth of lichens—I can see him leaning over to gently touch a lichen, telling us that "this one has been here over 100 years." We were humble students, listening to the noted "professor," the "expert" and now our newfound "hero"!

I saw Sig several other times during lectures he was giving. I've read more about him, especially in The Collected Works of Sigurd F. Olson, the early writings: 1921-1934. Just last September I led a study at a seniors' five-day retreat with Listening Point as our study book, and including a day spent at Listening Point.

Yet, of course, those three days spent alongside the man himself will be forever a part of my canoe wilderness memories. He is still a mentor. His life must be a legacy not to be forgotten. His cherished wilderness must be cherished forever! ●

—Dave Schneider is a retired United Methodist pastor. He lives in Coon Rapids, Minn.



The Listening Point Foundation wants you to help keep Sig's memory and legacy alive by keeping an eye and ear open for instances where you read about or hear mention of Sigurd F. Olson, whether that be in books, newspaper or magazine articles, radio or television programming, anecdotes from friends or coworkers, or from any other source. Please clip or write down these instances and send them to The Listening Point Foundation, where we'll keep a collection and publish them in this newsletter. Send any news of Sigurd F. Olson by letter or email to: Listening Point Foundation, P.O. Box 180, Ely, MN 55731; Phone: 218/365-7890; FAX: 218/365-7072; E-mail: listeningpoint@cpinternet.com.

"Why Wilderness?" (continued from page 1)

that they are no longer playing make-believe. These men need more than picnics, purling streams, or fields of daffodils to stifle their discontent, more than mere solitude and contemplation to give them peace.

Burroughs, another lover of the out-of-doors, spoke often of the wilderness, but he knew it not at all. When he regretted having to leave Old Slabsides on the Hudson for the wilds of Alaska and the West, we knew there was little of the primitive urge in his nature. The birds, the common phenomena of the passing seasons, and work in his vineyard satisfied abundantly his need of reality and physical contact with the earth. For him the wild had little charm. As we explore our literature for men who have felt deeply about wilderness, we find them few indeed, perhaps because in the past there was wilderness enough and men had not learned to wean themselves so completely away from its influence. Invariably men wrote of the dominating effect of wilderness as a mighty unconquered force, and everywhere we find evidence of the part it played in molding the lives of those it touched. Fear was the keynote of the past, fear of the brooding monster of the unknown, and little of the joy of adventure and freedom is ever in evidence. Were it not for a few such daring souls as Joseph Conrad and Jack London, we would know little of the feeling some men have for the far places of the earth.

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With the rapid elimination of the frontiers, due to increased facility of transportation and huge development programs, the opportunity to see and know real wilderness has become increasingly difficult. As it approaches the status of rarity for the first time in history, we see it not as something to be feared and subdued, not as an encumbrance to the advance of civilization, but instead as a distinctly cultural asset which contributes to spiritual satisfaction. The greater part of the old wilderness is gone, but during the centuries in which we fought our way through it, we unconsciously absorbed its influence. Now, as conquering invaders, we feel the need of the very elements which a short time ago we fought to eradicate. The wild has left its mark upon us and now that we have succeeded in surrounding ourselves with a complexity of new and often unnatural habits of daily living, we long for the old stimulus which only the unknown could give.

Why wilderness? No two men would have the same explanation. Something definite does happen to most men, however, when they hit the out trails of our last frontiers, and though they react in various ways, there is a certain uniformity noticeable to one who has often seen them make the break with civilization. Whatever it is, they are changed almost overnight from the prosaic conformists they may have been, who dress, think, and act like all the rest, to adventurers ready to die with their boots on, explorers pushing into the blue, once more members of a pioneering band.

It is surprising how quickly a man sheds the habiliments of civilization and how soon he feels at home in the wilds. Before many days have passed, he feels that the life he has been living was merely an interruption in a long wilderness existence and that now again he is back at the real business of living. And when we think of the comparatively short time that we have been living and working as we do now, when we recall that many of us are hardly a generation removed from the soil, and that a scant few thousand years ago our ancestors roamed and hunted the fastnesses of Europe, it is not strange that the smell of woodsmoke and the lure of the primitive is with us yet. Racial memory is a tenacious thing, and for some it is always easy to slip back into the deep grooves of the past. What we feel most deeply are those things which as a race we have been doing the longest, and the hunger men feel for the wilds and a roving life is natural evidence of the need of repeating a plan of existence that for untold centuries was common practice. It is still in our blood and many more centuries must pass before we loose much of its hold.

Civilized living in the great towns, with all their devices for comfort and convenience, is far too sudden a violation of slowly changing racial habit, and we find that what gave men pleasure in the past—simple, primitive tasks and the ordinary phenomena of life in the open—today give the same satisfaction. Men have found at last that there is a penalty for too much comfort and ease, a penalty of lassitude and inertia and the frustrated feeling that goes with unreality. Certainly the adjustment for many has been difficult, and it is those who must every so often break their bonds and hie themselves away.

All do not feel the need, and there are many perfectly content with life as they find it. They will always be the picnickers and the strollers, and for them are highways, gravelled trails, and country clubs. For them scenic vistas of the wild from the shelter of broad and cool verandas. The others, those who cannot rest, are of a different breed. For them is sweat and toil, hunger and thirst, and the fierce satisfaction that comes only with hardship.

While wilderness means escape from the perplexing problems of everyday life and freedom from the tyranny of wires, bells, schedules and pressing responsibility, nevertheless, it may be at first a decided shock and days and even weeks may pass before men are finally aware that the tension is gone. When the

realization does come, they experience a peace of mind and relaxation which a short time before would have seemed impossible. With this dramatic change of atmosphere comes an equally dramatic change in individual reactions as they feel that the need of front and reserve is gone.

I have seen staid educators, dignified surgeons, congressmen, and admirals tie up their heads in gaudy bandannas, go shirtless to bring on the tan of the northern sun, and wear bowie knives in their belts. I have seen them glory in the muck of portages, fight the crashing combers on stormy lakes with the abandon of boys on their first adventure. I have heard them laugh as they hadn't laughed for years and bellow old songs in the teeth of a gale. With their newfound freedom and release, many things become important that were half forgotten—sunsets, the coloring of clouds and leaves, reflections in the water. I can honestly say that I have heard more laughter in a week out there than in any month in town. Men laugh and sing as naturally as breathing once the strain is gone.

LPF Photo Archives

With escape comes perspective. Far from the towns and all they denote, engrossed in their return to the old habits of wilderness living, men begin to wonder if the speed and pressure they have left are not a little senseless. Here, where matters of food, shelter, rest, and new horizons are all important, they begin to question the worthwhileness of their old objectives. Now they have long days with nothing to clutter their minds but the simple problems of wilderness living, and at last they have time to think. Then comes the transformation, and, of a sudden, they are back to earth. Things move slowly, majestically in the wilds, and the coming of the full moon in itself becomes of major importance. Countless natural phenomena begin to show themselves, things long forgotten and needing only the rejuvenating experience of actual contact to bring them back. With this, some of the old primitive philosophy works itself into their thinking, and in their new calm they forget to worry. Their own affairs seem trivial. Perspective? I sometimes think that men go to the wilds for that alone. Finding it means equilibrium, the long-time point of view so often lost in towns.

Ernest Holt, one-time guard to the late Colonel Fawcett on his first Amazon expedition, told me that in the depths of the jungle he experienced a spiritual uplift and sense of oneness with life that he could find nowhere else. I believe that here is a sensation born of perspective that most men know in any wilderness. Whenever it comes, men are conscious of a unity with the primal forces of creation and all life that swiftly annihilates the feelings of futility, frustration, and unreality. When men realize that they are on their own, that if they are to be sheltered and fed and, what is more, return to civilization, they must depend entirely on their own ingenuity, everything they do assumes tremendous importance. Back home, mistakes can be made and easily excused or remedied, but here mistakes might cause discomfort or catastrophe. Knowing this makes all the difference in the world in a man's attitude toward the commonplace activities of daily life. Simple duties like the preparation of food, the taking of a fish, or the caching of supplies becomes fraught with import. Life soon develops a new and fascinating angle, and days which to the uninitiated may seem humdrum or commonplace are filled with the adventure of living for its own sake. There is no make-believe here, but reality in the strictest sense of the word.

Men who have shared campfires together, who have known the pinch of hunger and what it means to cut a final cigarette in half 200 miles from town, enjoy a comradeship that others never know. Only at war or on wilderness expeditions can this type of association be found, and I believe that it is this that men miss as much in civilized living as contact with the wild itself. I know a busy surgeon who once left his hospital operating room and traveled without thought of compensation a thousand miles through the bitter cold of midwinter to save the life of his guide, stricken with pneumonia. Nothing could have made him consider deserting his practice to take such a long, hazardous trip but a call from a comrade in need. I stood at the bedside of that woodsman as he babbled incoherently of rapids and lakes and wilderness camps they had known together, and I knew then that here was a bond between men that could be forged only in the wilds, something deep and fine, something based on loyalty to open skies and distance and a way of life men need.

I do not advocate that the men of whom I speak allow the wilderness idea to claim all of their energy or enthusiasm. I do believe, however, that if for a short time each year it were possible for them to get away, not necessarily to the great wilderness of the Arctic or the Canadian lakes, but to some wild part of the country which has not yet been entirely caught up in some scheme of exploitation or development, that they would return to their friends and families strengthened and rejuvenated.

Why wilderness?

Ask the men who have known it and who have made it part of their lives. They might not be able to explain, but your very question will kindle a light in eyes that have reflected the campfires of a continent, eyes that have known the glory of dawns and sunsets and nights under the stars. Wilderness to them is real, and this they do know: When the pressure becomes more than they can stand, somewhere back of beyond, where roads and steel and towns are still forgotten, they will find release. ●

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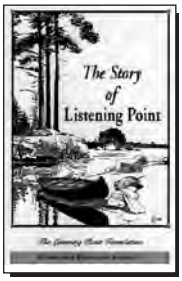
Share the spirit of Listening Point with friends and family, or bring it home with one of these gift items that celebrate Sigurd Olson and Listening Point.



The Story of Listening Point

This 28-page booklet, written by Sig's son Robert, tells the inside story of how Listening Point came to be and why, what it meant to Sigurd Olson, and what it continues to mean to wilderness lovers and loyalists. Features dozens of historical photos and images.

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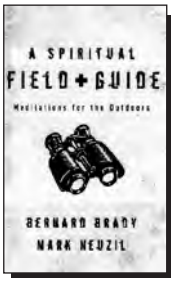

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This 192-page softcover book contains passages from a wide variety of writers, activists and others (including Sigurd F. Olson) who have thought long and deeply about the meaning and value of nature and wilderness. A perfect trip companion.

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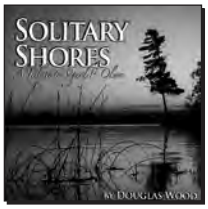

Solitary Shores CD

First recorded in 1983, *Solitary Shores* was Douglas Wood's musical tribute to Sigurd Olson. All of the songs have a strong North Country flavor, and there is even a segment of Sig reading from one of his own essays. This is an album for lovers of the Northwoods and fans of Sig Olson.

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Brandenburg Cards

Listening Point at winter's end, captured by photographer Jim Brandenburg and featuring a quote from Sigurd Olson. Set of 10 full-color note cards with envelopes.

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The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson Video

This intimate film captures the life and spirit of Sigurd Olson late in his life. VHS format, 30 minutes long.

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A digitally remastered version of the classic film "The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson" includes more than two hours of conversations with Sig as he speaks about the craft of writing and life in the wilderness. You'll also hear Sig's wife Elizabeth and their son Sig Jr. speak candidly about Sigurd, his profession, and life in the north woods. The audio clips are set to a slideshow of Olson family photographs.

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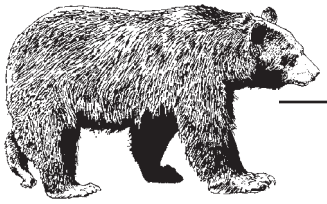

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