

OTHER

Algonquin Park. A Portrait: The Landscape, Wildlife and Ecology of an Iconic Canadian Treasure

By Jan Rinik, and Martin Rinik. 2014. Formac Publishing Co. Ltd., 5502 Atlantic Street, Halifax, NS, Canada, B3H 1G4. 300 pages, 34.95 CAD, Cloth.

Having spent part of each of the past 50 years or so working and playing in Algonquin, I am naturally interested in books on my favourite place. Coffee table style books on the Park are many, but rather stereotyped, usually full of photos of sunsets and close ups of wolves, moose, bears, and loons. Despite spending 1000's of hours in the Algonquin wilds, I rarely have close encounters with these icons; rather it is mosquitoes, biting flies, green frogs, turtles, leeches, dragonflies, mosses, and trees that I encounter often. Those photos of win-some wolf faces seldom evoke any sense of nostalgia or reminiscence in me. I was therefore pleasantly surprised on opening this book to feel a yearning to get back to the Park, to again smell the piney summer air, the moldy, snapping turtle essence of fall, to see babbling spring freshets, and hear frogs and those warblers

whose songs I must relearn each year. This is a beautiful book, lovingly produced and lavishly illustrated, not with repeated close up photographs of charismatic megafauna, though there are some, but with landscapes, often beautifully painted or drawn. And that is not all. There are many pencil drawings of birds, mammals, insects, fish, plants, and fungi often interspersed with crisp photographs and paintings of these "other" fauna and flora. The ultimate effect of this splendid assemblage of form, colour, and scenery was to create a visceral need to get back out there, and experience that special evocation of the senses that is the Ontario wilderness. Sadly, I first opened the book in winter, over 1000 km from the Park. Happily, with this splendid book, I could now be there. I have spent several hours scattered through the endless snowstorms of the 2014-

15 Maritimes' winter gazing at the paintings and photos of the four seasons of Algonquin.

In the Preface, the Riniks make the interesting point that many visitors to the Park see much less than they expected. Certainly, this is true for the busy summer season when zillions of vacationers race along Highway 60, only screeching to a halt when a hapless moose is spotted. In summer, the highway and campgrounds are filled with people, dogs, radios, cell phones, and the cursed WiFi. As a child, I was similarly disappointed on my first trip to Algonquin in the family sedan, as in mid-July we drove across Highway 60 from west to east and back and saw nary a single bit of identifiable wildlife, not even the wild Indians which I thought might lurk in the bushes. Disappointment is to be expected when we have been conditioned to expect wildlife frolicking at every kilometer. The Riniks say they hope to bring the reader closer to the wildlife. I think they do something far better. They give the reader a sense of the variety of experiences available and of the variety of perceptions attached to each of these experiences. A painted landscape or flower differs from a photograph or line drawing. Every page presents something different in scale, diversity, season, and illustrative style. It is delightful.

The book starts with a brief history of the Park and some facts and figures on its size, numbers of bird, mammal, etc. species. Here and throughout the text

is readily grasped information for the newcomer and light refresher for the hardcore gourmet. Relaxing stuff. The rest of the book is organized into four chapters, one for each season. As in real life, I found the spring and fall most enjoyable, summer a bit heavy on green and charisma, and winter spartan and Canadian, and seriously attractive. The summer does have more coverage of individual species, though my experience is that most of them are less likely to be observed then, because of the human hurly burly. The number of pages devoted to each season is: spring 44, summer 70, fall 40, and winter 20.

This is the perfect coffee table book to me. It is beautifully laid out, the reproductions and production in general are a wealth of colour and visual detail of excellent quality. I particularly appreciated this quality as this is a Canadian publication, and very affordably priced too. Canada can still do it. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has or wishes to indulge in the beauty of Algonquin. If you are stuck in dreary suburbia, a sterile office, or a humbling hospital bed, this book will conjure up the real thing, and lift your spirits, and there will be no black flies, icy winds, long drives on the 400, or bears that will bite your feet. You can be transported to a heavenly place with a glass of wine for a companion.

RON BROOKS

PO Box 175, Weymouth, NS, Canada, B0W 3T0