

INTO THE GREAT SOLITUDE, by Robert Perkins, is a color/sound film journal of a solo canoe expedition to the Arctic Ocean. It is available on video (57 minutes, VHS or Beta) for US\$49.95 plus US\$3.00 shipping from The New Film Company, Inc., 7 Mystic Street, Suite 20, Arlington, MA 02174, USA; tel. (617) 641-2580. The following is extracted from promotional material supplied by the distributor:

"In his unique and intimate film journal, Robert Perkins brings alive the barren Arctic tundra. Trading a high-paying job in New York for a solo adventure in this uninhabited wilderness, he travels alone for 72 days in his canoe down the 700-mile-long Back River, one of Northwest Canada's toughest and most remote waterways.

"Filming his own journey with an artist's eye and a deep sensitivity toward the environment, he draws us into the open, elemental beauty of the land: its power, its fragility, its mystery. We follow him during the long hours of Arctic twilight, in encounters with wild animals, in battles with strong winds and dangerous rapids.

"His isolation also takes him on an inner journey in which he faces change and death and searches for new perspectives on his relationship with his father.

"With honesty, humor, and insight, *Into the Great Solitude* reveals the poetry within the adventure and affirms the resilience of the human spirit."

It is indeed a remarkable, thought-provoking document by a perceptive and sensitive man exploring his world and himself. (TH)

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A WILDERNESS PADDLER?

Orrie Wigle

As a newer member ('87), I am writing this to say 'thanks' to all the individuals who spent the time and energy to make the WCA open to a novice wilderness canoeist. I joined to take the basic whitewater course, my wife took the flatwater one. Both courses provided an introduction to safety, equipment, and paddling skills. The most important thing was meeting people, both new paddlers and more experienced members. I found a partner, someone willing to risk whitewater canoeing with me.

The course only gave the basics which had to be improved by several whitewater weekends. Here was the opportunity to improve my paddling skills, learn to read rapids, and meet more WCA members. They provided additional instruction with rescue boats and helpful comments ("Lean the !!*%*!! canoe downstream! . . ."). The fireside discussions covered a wide range of topics and provided information on different rivers, equipment, food preparation, and much more. Day and weekend trips let me explore local rivers and meet more members. The Fall Meeting and the January Symposium expanded my knowledge of wilderness tripping.

Our first extended trip (one week) was in 1989. There is not enough room to list everything we learned. This trip was very important in preparing us for longer trips. This year, I plan to be part of a group going on a two or three-week wilderness trip. Most importantly, this group consists of members who have become confident in their individual and combined skills to plan and complete a trip safely.

This leads me to my question: "How does someone become a wilderness paddler?"

A novice paddler must gain the skills, knowledge, and contacts to go on wilderness trips. There are commercial canoeing courses and trips available. These do not teach the

self-reliance and do not give the personal satisfaction of learning the skills as part of the WCA. Books and films provide knowledge but not experience.

I do not consider myself a wilderness paddler yet, but sixteen years from now, I may be one. I hope that I will be helping some new members, telling them about my first swim down Palmer Rapids, passing on what experience I have gained, and showing slides of my latest trip. Two of the aims of the WCA, as listed by Sandy Harris in the Winter 1988 *Nastawgan*, seem to express our commitment to being involved in developing wilderness paddlers. These are:

The provision of a flow of information pertaining to canoeing and wilderness matters to members . . . and the public.

The encouraging of individual responsibility in canoeing by *providing a program of practical canoeing experiences*.

Note the emphasis which is my own. The WCA has a program consisting of basic courses, readily available day/weekend trips, symposia, and regular meetings. This program is supported by numerous individuals who are willing to share their experience and give the time to help the novice. THANKS.

If we do away with the basic courses because we do not want to teach people, if the Canoeing Symposium is dropped because it is a successful social event, if the Fall Meeting is eliminated because of the social aspects, and other activities (day trips, whitewater weekends, rescue clinic, etc.) are dropped because they do not fit our wilderness image, what's left? It is my hope that the WCA remains an association willing to start the novice on the path to being a wilderness paddler and not become a private club for the experienced wilderness tripper.