

A black and white photograph of a river with rapids in the foreground and a canoe in the middle ground, set against a backdrop of a dense forest. The image is high-contrast, with deep shadows and bright highlights on the water and foliage. The canoe is positioned in the middle ground, slightly to the left of the center. The rapids in the foreground are turbulent, with white foam and dark water. The forest in the background is dense and dark, with some trees visible in the upper left corner.

# Naturalist

AUTUMN 1961

**Sigurd E. Olson**

# Naturalist

CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION

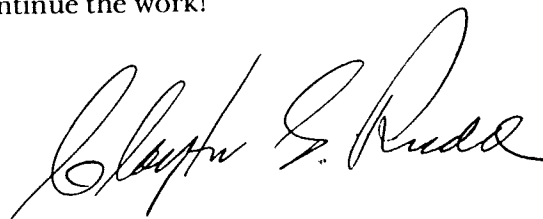
*Journal of the NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY of Minnesota—an independent,  
non-profit organization devoted to the study of Nature and Conservation.*

Editor—Clayton G. Rudd

## *Honoring* Sigurd F. Olson

OVER THE YEARS THERE HAS BEEN A REMARKABLE ASSOCIATION of men and women working for a common cause. This cause has been for Wilderness. Fortunately people from all walks of life have sensed the values involved and have dedicated their efforts to Wilderness Perpetuation. The purpose of our organization has been to bring together educators, scientists and lay people in a program of coordination and constructive action. Gifted people—artists, authors and scientists—have dedicated their talents to the portrayal of Wilderness Qualities inspiring others to see and enjoy our Wilderness Heritage. It has been the purpose of all to promote Wilderness Research of plant and animal communities, and watersheds so that scientific knowledge may be used in the management of Wilderness areas. The result, an awareness of the importance of perpetuation through Natural Means! Fifty years of dedicated involvement to our “Wilderness Canoe Country” has paid dividends for present and future Americans.

Sigurd F. Olson's lifetime contribution to Wilderness Awareness has been of tremendous value. While paying tribute to Sigurd F. Olson for his life work, he would be the first to say that it took cooperative work from every person involved to gain the goals we have reached. And, that consistent, constructive effort by young people must continue. We hope that young Americans will be inspired to continue the work!

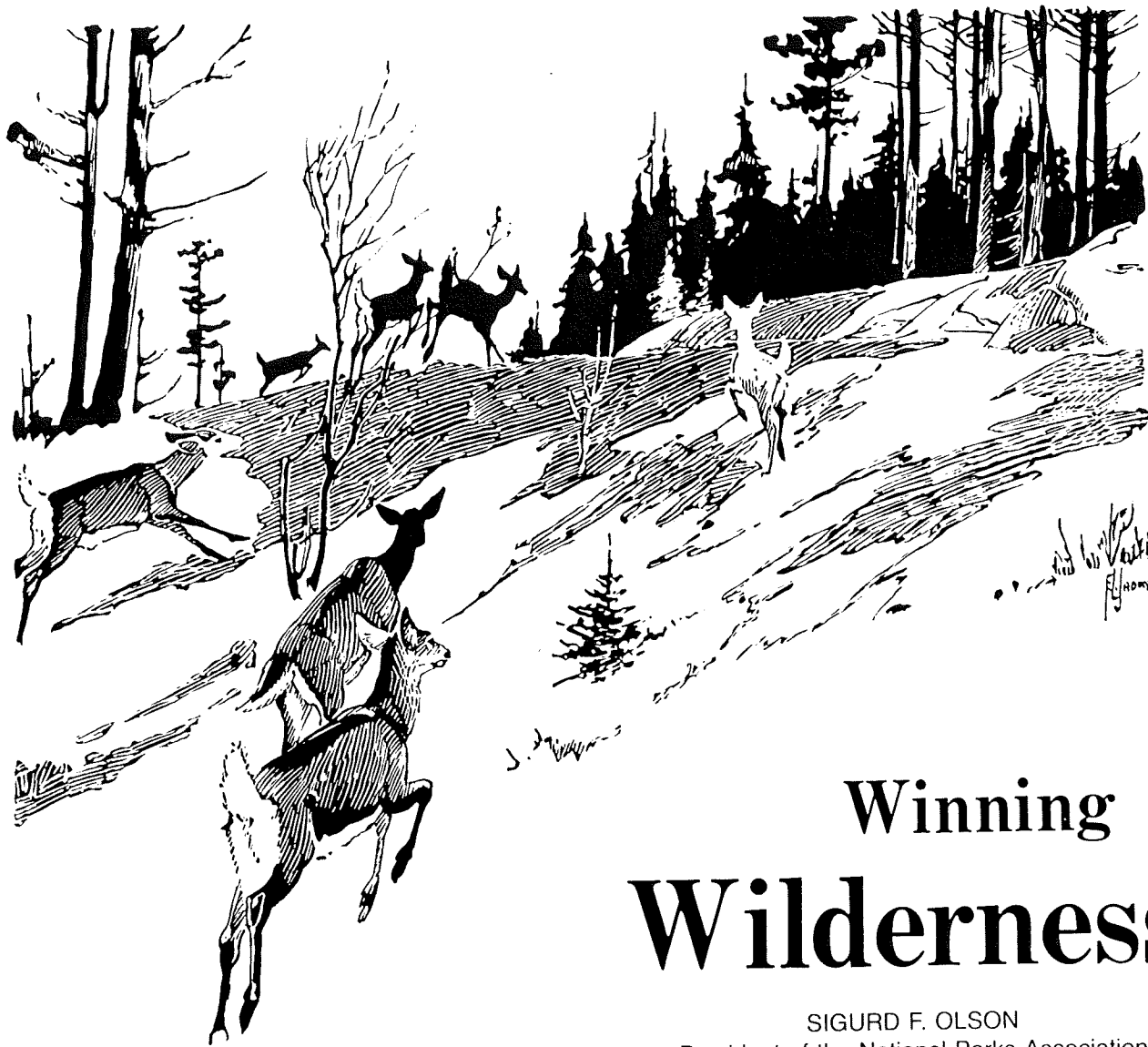


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This Portrait of Sigurd F. Olson by Barbara Peet is displayed in the "Sigurd Olson Institute" at Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin.



# Winning a Wilderness

SIGURD F. OLSON

President of the National Parks Association  
Reprint from *Naturalist* - Autumn 1958

**A**LONG THE NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA-ONTARIO border lies a wilderness lake region comprising the finest canoe country on the continent. Other areas have their lakes and rivers and forests but here alone seems to have occurred that ideal combination of physical features that makes the area superb from the standpoint of the canoeist.

The lakes and rivers with their rugged glaciated shores and campsites beneath white and red pines seem to be especially created for enjoyment. The country is rich in fish and game; the portages, those all-important trails to the wilderness traveler, are short and often lovely. Waterways penetrate to the utmost recesses and it is possible to travel for weeks without camping on the same spot twice.

Here is a part of the old wilderness and travel is still by the ancient method of the voyageurs, pack and canoe. Roads are only along the fringes of the real canoe country and it

is still possible to get away from the roar of traffic and the smell of gasoline. Within a day's travel of such great urban centers as Chicago, you can leave one night and on the next be encamped thirty miles from the end of the road where the only sounds are the calling of the loons and where the world of industry seems as far removed as the moon.

Americans by the thousands have come to know the Quetico-Superior canoe country and have come to love it as a sanctuary from the crowded towns and cities and for the chance it offers to live a life of freedom and joyous adventure.

They have discovered that a cruise through Quetico Provincial Park and the Superior National Forest is much more than just another camping trip, that it makes little difference if they catch fish, or see game or make so many miles by canoe; the important thing is that for a week or a month

they have lived the life of the voyageur and known the true meaning of peace and the joys of solitude.

One reason this area has come to mean much to the people of the United States is that it is open to anyone, rich and poor, that it is possible to enjoy a wilderness vacation without great expense, the only requisite being a love of the out-of-doors and willingness to paddle and pack and live simply.

Most modern voyageurs go in without guides, meet the problems of the wilderness in their own way and perhaps enjoy it more because they are actually on their own. The Boy Scouts and other organizations of young people use it and camps scattered throughout the middle west count a canoe trip as a regular part of each summer's program.

Countless young men, and women, too, whose salaries do not permit expensive resort vacations have also discovered the canoe country. They slip their canoes into any one of the dozens of starting places and disappear into the wilds. After a week or two they come out hard and brown and happy, carrying back to the cities memories of the wilderness.

This strip of country lying along some one hundred fifty to two hundred miles of the international border between Lake Superior and Rainy Lake just this side of Lake of the Woods has come to mean much as a recreational area and is destined to mean more and more as wilderness lake country becomes increasingly rare. Here is a vacationland that really belongs to the people, the kind of an area that contributes to the happiness and welfare of all.

The history of most wilderness regions in the face of an advancing civilization is one of swift destruction. When white men first settled the Atlantic seaboard, the great expanses of unbroken country to the west were a threat to survival. The wilderness was feared and there was no alternative but to subdue it or perish. There was no compromise. Roads were cut through the mountain passes, land was cleared, Indians and wild beasts slain. Farms, towns, and cities sprang up as if by magic.

The surge of civilization reached the middle west, plunged across the Mississippi to the bulwarks of the Rockies, then like a tidal wave recoiled and burst at last through the passes of the final obstacle to the shores of the Pacific.

So swift was the advance that pioneers failed to notice the isolated corner of beautiful and rugged lake country up along the Minnesota-Ontario border. The great wave had passed it by and like the backwash of a tidal pool, it lay forgotten. Only the voyageurs knew it was there. For two hundred years, they had used it as their highway of exploration to the wild country of the Northwest. Even though Grand Portage Post on the north shore of Lake Superior had been famous for over a century in the marts of trade both of America and Europe, to the mass of land hungry people of that time, it was an area of legend and mystery.

Not until iron was discovered in the eighteen-eighties did civilization begin its belated assault on the north. Then camps and later towns established themselves along its southern borders and the lumber jack's axe resounded through the stands of pine. By the end of the century, the

fringes of the Quetico-Superior country were a part of the network of civilization by the remote hinterlands were almost as wild and unknown as before discovery.

Then an amazing thing happened. The civilization which for two centuries had looked at wilderness as something to be eliminated at all costs, suddenly became magnanimous. Now that the primitive was no longer to be feared, men found they could enjoy it. The growth of this realization in the first decade of the twentieth century was responsible for the establishment in 1909 of two great preserves, Quetico Provincial Park on the Ontario side of the border, and The Superior National Forest on the south, two areas so alike in character that geographically they were one. The curtain rang down on the first decade of wilderness preservation with official recognition of the country's uniqueness.

The second decade marked the setting up of Forest Service administration on both sides of the border, the building of ranger stations, fire towers, and mapping the large blank spaces of the interior. During the early twenties, canoeists from the middle west began exploring the region and from that time on its fame spread swiftly. They discovered, these first early adventures, that this area was different from any other on the continent, a place still wild and free, where they could travel for weeks or months in solitude and peace. They found too that the fishing was good, the campsites superb, and the scenery more outstanding than any other lake country on the continent. They told their story through countless articles and news releases and the Quetico-Superior so long forgotten became famous over night.

The third decade was largely one of battle in which the wilderness character of the canoe country was threatened. This was the era of road building and the entire continent became acutely aware of the need of highways. Almost immediately pressures developed to construct roads into the very heart of this newly discovered lake land. Many saw an opportunity to create a great resort country. "A Road to Every Lake" became the battle cry, but the road builders had not counted on the canoe men who had discovered this last wilderness and were determined to keep it intact. A battle developed such as America had never seen, one group devoted to wilderness preservation aligned against another group determined to exploit it. Half a century before, such a situation could never have occurred for then wilderness was still something to be destroyed by any means within the power of man. But now it was different and the fine old pioneer tradition of opening up wild country was questioned for the first time. After years of bitter controversy, the highways were stopped by a Forest Service decree announcing plans for a Roadless Area of a million acres in the Superior National Forest.

No sooner were the roads eliminated than an industrialist proposed a huge power reservoir that would have dammed up the entire chain of border lakes, raising some of the water levels as high as eighty feet, flooding thousands of miles of timbered shore, submerging countless islands, rapids and waterfalls. Again wilderness men sprang to the rescue. The Quetico-Superior Council was formed and a grand plan out-



lined for the administration of the entire watershed that would protect forever the famous wilderness canoe country of the interior as well as the natural resources of the entire area on both sides of the border.

It was then that the American and Canadian Legions suggested that the Quetico-Superior region be established as an International Peace Memorial Forest dedicated to the veterans of both countries who had fought in World War I. The idea was electrifying and America went into action.

The fourth decade was one of accomplishment in the preservation of this area. In 1931 Congress now fully aware of the famous lake country up along the Canadian border and the dangers constantly confronting it, passed a law protecting the shorelines of the federal lands within the Superior National Forest from flooding or logging. The State of Minnesota followed with a similar law protecting the shorelines of state owned lands within the region. The International Joint Commission denied the long-pending application for water, power development and *President Roosevelt appointed the first Quetico-Superior Committee to correlate the efforts of all agencies working toward the proposed International Forest.* Toward the end of the decade the U.S. Forest Service formally established the Roadless Areas of the Superior and almost tripled the size of the National Forest itself. In the meantime, the use of the area had grown and its fame spread more widely than ever before. All America now knew about the Quetico-Superior.

The fifth decade marked the beginning of World War II and the most dangerous development of all. The airplane entered the scene with the discovery that in a country with literally thousands of landing fields, seaplanes could penetrate remote hinterlands that hitherto had been accessible only by canoe and portage. Resorts sprang up on the remaining private lands within the interior and airplane service developed to once remote fishing grounds. During the war there were no funds for federal acquisition, no time to worry about the preservation of wilderness or consolidation of the gains already made. Civilization itself was at stake on countless foreign battle fronts. During this decade, the little town

of Ely, Minnesota, in the heart of the Superior became a large seaplane base and the wilderness that had been fought for so long began to disintegrate.

At the close of hostilities, the battle for its preservation began once more. Realizing that there must be additional funds for private land acquisition at once, a bill was drafted and presented to Congress asking for half a million dollars. During the two years of waiting for its passage, development went on apace. It was then that the Izaak Walton League of America raised a fund of \$100,000 by popular subscription to aid the Forest Service in the purchase of private properties, but this was only a beginning. Congress passed the needed legislation in June of 1948 but not until 1949 was the first installment of \$75,000 made available.

Knowing that unless plane traffic was controlled the wilderness would still be doomed, the U.S. Forest Service, backed by the President's Quetico-Superior Committee, the Department of Interior, the Izaak Walton League and many other organizations appealed to President Truman to create by Executive Order an Air Space Reservation over the Roadless Areas of the Superior National Forest. Plane operators, the entrenched Roadless Area resorts, local Chambers of Commerce, the Civil Aeronautics Administration, fought the proposed order at every turn. Again the forces of exploitation were aligned against those of conservation. But President Truman signed the Airspace Order on Dec. 19, 1949. The sixth decade marked the testing of the newly created airspace reservation. Violations were carried from the District Court to the Court of Appeals and finally to the United States Supreme Court, each one in turn upholding the validity of the Executive Order. This decade also marked an increase in tourist travel to the Quetico-Superior country and a growing awareness of the vital importance of completing the federal acquisition of private lands within the Roadless Areas. The funds of the Thye-Blatnik Bill were exhausted and it was necessary to ask Congress for an additional two million dollars in order to purchase the remaining properties. This was granted through the passage in 1956 of the Thye-Humphrey-Blatnik-Andersen Bill (Public Law 607). With the use of these funds great progress was made and as a result through direct purchase and ex-

***The Lure of The North*** is many things. The sighing of the wind in tall pines, the calling of Loons at sunset, the contentment at campfire after a day's paddle, the rhythmic melody of water that lulls you to sleep... these are the rewards of the wilderness for Sig Olson—author, naturalist, crusader. As President of the National Parks Association, member of the President's Quetico-Superior Committee, ardent contributor to the program of the Izaak Walton League of America, and member of many other Conservation organizations Sig has lived a life of service to all Americans. Many years ago his study of the Timber Wolf was a source of information to students of Nature. Recently his "SINGING WILDERNESS" has brought pleasure to thousands. A sequel, the "LISTENING POINT," will be released in September.

change government ownership approached 98% of the Roadless Areas' 1,036,000 acres.

On the Canadian side progress was also very evident. A "Quetico Committee" was organized to work toward the preservation, proper zoning, and utilization of the resources of the area. Special Zoning Committees were appointed by the N.W. Associated Chambers of Commerce to study the pattern of land use and to advise the government. Quetico Provincial Park was declared a wilderness region with a mile-wide protective buffer strip surrounding it. All private holdings were appropriated and prospecting for minerals prohibited. Airplane regulations were invoked which permitted landing only at certain designated ports of entry outside the park.

A new highway was constructed from Port Arthur and Fort William on Lake Superior to the iron mines at Steep Rock near Atikokan north of the park, making it possible for the first time in history for Canadians to have access to the canoe country from their side of the border.

The Quetico Foundation, an outgrowth of the original

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Quetico Committee, embarked on a program of education to acquaint Canadians with the area. Many research projects were initiated and completed on history, archeology, geology, and related fields of interest, and a beautiful moving picture in sound and color — "Quetico" — depicting the region in four seasons was sponsored and completed.

This period also marked the development of the Q.S. Wilderness research center on the American side of Basswood Lake, a privately sponsored institution which encourages all types of research by scientists of both countries.

All during this last decade there was more and more evidence that both Canada and the United States, now fully aware of the great social values of the region, were cooperating more closely than ever before in mutual programs of administration, protection, and education.

It is the hope that before this decade comes to a close that agreement will be reached as to land zoning and resources utilization that will insure permanent protection for the wilderness values of the area. Only through such an understanding between the two countries can these values be preserved.

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