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*Rockwell Kent, Doug Capra*

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In August 1918 Rockwell Kent and his 9-year-old son settled into a primitive cabin on an island near Seward, Alaska. Kent, who during the next three decades became America's premier graphic artist, printmaker, and illustrator, was seeking time, peace, and solitude to work on his art and strengthen ties with his son. This reissue of the journal chronicling their 7-month odyssey describes what Kent called "an adventure of the spirit." He soon discovers how deeply he is "stirred by simple happenings in a quiet world" as man and boy face both the mundane and the magnificent: satisfaction in simple chores like woodchopping or baking; the appalling gloom of long and lonely winter nights; hours of silence while each works at his drawings; crystalline moonlight glancing off a frozen lake; killer whales cavorting in their bay. Richly illustrated by Kent's drawings, the journal vividly re-creates that sense of great height and space -- both external and internal -- at the same time that it celebrates a wilderness now nearly lost to us.

## **Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska--Including Extensive Hitherto Unpublished Passages from the Original Journal Details**

Date : Published July 26th 1996 by Wesleyan (first published 1937)

ISBN : 9780819552938

Author : Rockwell Kent , Doug Capra

Format : Paperback 237 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Travel, Environment, Nature, Outdoors



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## **From Reader Review Wilderness: A Journal of Quiet Adventure in Alaska--Including Extensive Hitherto Unpublished Passages from the Original Journal for online ebook**

### **Michelle Loudon says**

Engaging account of American artist Rockwell Kent's winter on Fox Island, Alaska with his young son through the winter of 1918-1919. His vivid descriptions of days that were a mix of hard work, creative pursuits, housekeeping, exploration and adventure - all set in the wild beauty and power of the wintery Alaskan coast - captured my imagination. His son Rockwell and the trapper, Olson, their only neighbor, came alive through his eyes and made me want to know more about how their lives turned out.

The illustrations he did were fanciful and beautiful as well. So much so that I'm buying a hard copy of the book for the artwork - my paperwhite Kindle doesn't begin to do art/illustrations justice.

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### **Ace Varkey says**

This is a journal that Rockwell Kent kept of his sojourn in Fox Island, Alaska, for 7 months, from August 1918 to March 1919. He had gone there in a last ditch effort to save his career, find his art, as it were, along with his 9 year old son, also named Rockwell. He chose Alaska because he "craved snow-topped mountains" and because he "loved the north." Large swathes of the journal are about his quotidian tasks, which he referred to as "humble housewifely duties," such as baking, washing, mending, cooking. We definitely get a sense of his life there and parts of it are dull. It rains a lot. It's a small island and there isn't much to do. He plays the flute, he reads, he paints, he cuts wood. What leavens the journal are his drawings, absolutely gorgeous, as well as his writings about his host, an old Swede named Lars Mann Olson. I loved Olson. He personifies the adventurer and we learn that he has done just about everything from prospecting for gold to now running a fox and goat farm. He is described as "noting bott a broken down freunters man."

It was an easy read, sometimes tedious, but always there were the drawings and I looked forward to hearing Olson's stories as told by Kent. One does get a very clear picture of what we now call 'off-grid' living in Alaska. It is not an easy life, for sure. His son, Rockwell, is an engaging young boy who never seems to be bored. I loved the description of their Christmas together and the menu!

But most of all, I loved that Kent adored Alaska. These are his words: "America offers nothing to the tourist but the wonders of its natural scenery.....the night is beautiful beyond thought. All the bay is flooded with moonlight and in that pale glow the snowy mountains appear whiter than snow itself.....Fox island will soon become in our memories like a dream or vision, a remote experience too wonderful...to be remembered or believed in as a real experience in life. It was for us life as it should be, serene and wholesome."

It made me want to pack my bags and head north.

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### **Dan says**

Rockwell Kent was a well known American landscape painter of the early 20th century. I happen to love his artwork. His Alaskan landscapes are known for the vivid color choices.

This book though is Kent's diary from the winter of 1918 when he and his young son took up residence on Fox Island in Alaska. The island lies several miles across Resurrection Bay opposite Seward Alaska.

This diary made little mention of his artwork but rather focused on those things one must do to survive in the Alaskan wilderness. Now the diary wasn't bad writing but not particularly stylistic. There were some enjoyable moments.

In this scene one of the sourdoughs tells Kent this funny story.

“Once a miner died and presently found his way to the gates of heaven. “What do you want?” said St. Peter.

“To come in, of course.”

“What sort of man are you?”

“I’m a miner.”

“Well,” said St. Peter, “we’ve never had anyone of that kind here before, so I suppose you might as well come in.

“But the miner once within the gates fell to tearing up the golden streets of heaven, digging ditches and tunnels all over the place and making a frightful mess of it all. At last a second miner presented himself at the gates.

“Not on your life,” said St. Peter. “We have one miner here and we only wish we knew some way to get rid of him. He’s tearing up the whole place.”

“Only let me in,” said the second miner, “and I’ll promise to get rid of that fellow for you.” So St. Peter admitted him.

This second miner easily found the other who was hard at work amid a shower of flying earth. Going up to him he cried in an undertone: “Partner! They’ve struck gold in Hell!”

“The miner dropped his work and sprang toward the gates. “Peter, Peter, open, open! Let me out of Heaven, I’m off to Hell!”

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### **Robin Hull hogg henley says**

Extraordinary picture of live in Alaska

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### **Diane says**

The book is the edited diaries of the time artist Rockwell Kent and his 9 year old son spent in a primitive cabin on Fox Island in Resurrection Sound near Seward, Alaska, in 1918. They arrived in the fall and spent the winter. Life involved the basic rhythms of making food and staying warm plus Kent did a lot of drawing and painting and kept a fairly detailed diary. It reminded me of our time living in a cabin in North Idaho – we were much less isolated than Kent and much more integrated into the community since we lived there for four years.

At least half the book consists of Kent's drawings and copies of his handwritten diary entries. I remember many books from my childhood with his distinctive black and white drawings/block prints.

This was a difficult book for me to read because it should have been Roy who read it – he would have read most of it aloud and he would have loved it.

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### **Judith says**

Loved this story, the illustrations, and a journey back in time to a place I've never explored.

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### **Samiam says**

Wild earth as self, as reflection.

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### **Chaybee says**

I picked this book up when I was in Seward, Alaska working on my dissertation research in 2007. I didn't have the chance to read it then, but just finished it. Its the story of a printmaker and painter who takes his 9 year old son to Alaska to live an adventure for 7 months in 1918-1919. It was a really interesting and fun read and had bonus illustrations by the author.

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### **Nancy says**

The copy I read came from the library and was printed in 1930. I enjoyed even the feel of the torn edge paper. The woodblock prints were beautiful.

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### **Jsmacclellan says**

I had just made a trip to Seward when I read this journal, and that colored my reading of the book. I could see the land and sea that I had visited from Kent's perspective, and share some of his sense of glory and reverence. His son was the true hero of the book, showing the energy and enthusiasm only a young boy can possess. It is with his eyes that we see the mountains, dense woods and stormy seas. Rockwell and his father

bring to life the spirit that finds endless joy in simple wilderness life.

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## **Donovan Hohn says**

In 1918 Kent, illustrator among other things of the most beautiful edition of *Moby-Dick*, spent six months roughing it on Fox Island in Alaska's maritime wilderness with his 9-year-old son, Rockwell III. This book, adapted from his journal entries, is, mostly on account of Rockwell III, quite possibly my favorite (along with McPhee's "Coming into the Country") of the many books—transcendental, survivalist, sociological, satirical—that outsiders have written about their Alaskan adventures.

"We came to this new land, a boy and a man, entirely on a dreamer's search," Kent writes. What distinguishes him from other travelers who'd dreamed of a "Northern Paradise" is the way in which he tried, and in some ways succeeded, to reconcile painting and adventuring with fatherhood. As for the son, fifty years later, now a balding, six-foot-four biologist, Rockwell the Younger would tell his father that the "year we spent together on Fox Island was the happiest of all my life," or so his father reports in the preface to the 1970 edition.

In their one room cabin, they shared everything. They slept in the same bed. They cleared trees together, cut firewood together, ice-skated together, "holding hands like sweethearts." For entertainment, Kent brought along a small library of books, and at bedtime, by lamplight, he would read to his son from "Robinson Crusoe" or "Treasure Island" or the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. Aptly subtitled, Kent's book records genuine moments of danger, but little of the testosterone-addled, man-versus-wild drama one usually encounters in louder adventure narratives, and when those moments of danger do arise, Rockwell the younger responds to them in poignantly childish ways.

The woodcuts and drawings that Rockwell the elder produced during his Alaskan retreat, and which illustrate "Wilderness," are far more moving to me than the landscapes that inspired them. What makes them moving isn't the landscapes, *per se*, but the human figures whose inner lives the landscapes serve to dramatize. As winter sets in, so does disenchantment. Kent looks to "the sun going down with a kind of dread." He grows desperately lonely: "I have moments, hours, days of homesick despondency." One gets the impression that without the company of his son, Kent's lonely thoughts that winter might have turned, as they had in the past, suicidal. One also gets the impression that without animal playmates, the younger Kent might have gone bonkers too.

Just as little Rockwell delights in the local flora and fauna, elder Rockwell delights in his son, who increasingly becomes the journals main subject. What Kent discovers on Fox Island isn't mainly the transporting beauty of Alaska but the poignant beauty of his son.

[review adapted from endnotes to my book, "Moby-Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them."]

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## **Eileen says**

3.5 stars (liked it)

***"The still, deep cup of the wilderness is potent with wisdom."***

A simply written and heartfelt diary of Artist, Rockwell Kent, who, with his 9-year-old son, spend August 1918 - March 1919 settled in a primitive cabin on Fox Island in Resurrection Bay, Alaska from where they embark in relaxing activities, including painting/drawing, reading, and exploring their natural surroundings by land and by sea. In so doing, they strengthen their bond and find themselves:

*"It seems that we have both together by chance turned out of the beaten, crowded way and come to stand face to face with that infinite and unfathomable thing which is the wilderness; and here we have found OURSELVES—for the wilderness is nothing else. It is a kind of living mirror that gives back as its own all and only all that the imagination of a man brings to it. It is that which we believe it to be. So here we have stood, we two, and if we have not shuddered at the emptiness of the abyss and fled from its loneliness, it is because of the wealth of our own souls that filled the void with imagery, warmed it, and gave it speech and understanding. This vast, wild land we have made a child's world and a man's."*

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### **Ints says**

T?da jauka dienasgr?matu par ziemošanu uz Lapsu salas A?ask?. Nek?da stresa, nek?du varon?gu p?rdz?vojumi, rakstnieks ar savu d?lu vienk?rši dz?vo prom no civiliz?cijas. Ikdiena nav diez ko piepild?ta - gleznošana, malkas z???šana, ?st gatavošana. Sarakst?ta lab? valod?.

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### **Buck Swindle says**

Wonderful book and the perfect companion to be reading on a boat anchored in Dutch Harbor, Alaska. The sense of wonder and optimism expressed by the author is so refreshing and there were several passages in the book that have made my favourite quotes list.

The illustrations were wonderful as well but made me wish I had the paper version instead of ebook.

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### **Steve says**

Something different, but extremely worthwhile. I bought this on the recommendation of the Alaska museum staff while in Anchorage - otherwise it would not have captured my attention or interest. Long before the modern era of the modern graphic novel, long before Alaska was a state, and far from urban life as we know it, Kent took his young son to live, almost entirely alone, in the island wildness of Alaska. Accompanied only by an elderly miner (with a couple of goats and foxes), they embraced a simple, Spartan life recorded through a journal, sprinkled and enlivened by drawings of how they lived, what they saw, and what they dreamed. Apparently, this book's success was not fluke: Kent would become one of the nation's pre-eminent graphic artists (creating, among other things, the iconic "Random House" mark/image). The whole - published, supplemented, and improved over the decades, merits the label "timeless classic." As a special treat, the tale contains a handful of poignant vignettes that, standing alone, made reading the book worthwhile.

My only criticism - and, indeed the reason that I rated this 4 rather than 5 stars - was that I would have been

far happier had the (extremely informative) preface been an afterward. Unfortunately, I learned a couple of things (no spoilers here) about Kent and subsequent events that diminished some of the magic and the joy of the book itself. (Of course, you could avoid this mistake by ignoring the preface until after you've read the book.)

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