



Portage: A Family, a Canoe, and the Search for the Good Life

Sue Leaf

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When as a child she first saw a canoe gliding on Lake Alexander in central Minnesota, Sue Leaf was mesmerized. The enchantment stayed with her and shimmers throughout this book as we join Leaf and her family in canoeing the waterways of North America, always on the lookout for the good life amid the splendors and surprises of the natural world.

The journey begins with a trip to the border lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, then wanders into the many beautiful little rivers of Minnesota and Wisconsin, the provincial parks of Canada, the Louisiana bayou, and the arid West. A biologist and birder, Leaf considers natural history and geology, noticing which plants are growing along the water and which birds are flitting among the branches. Traveling the routes of the Ojibwe, voyageurs, and map-making explorers, she reflects on the region's history, peopling her pages with Lewis and Clark, Jean Lafitte, Henry Schoolcraft, and Canada's Group of Seven artists. Part travelogue, part natural and cultural history, *Portage* is the memoir of one family's thirty-five-year venture into the watery expanse of the world. Through sunny days and stormy hours and a few hair-raising moments, Sue and her husband, Tom, celebrate anniversaries on the water; haul their four kids along on family adventures; and occasionally make the paddle a social outing with friends. Along the way they contend with their own human nature: they run rapids when it would have been wiser to portage, take portages and learn truths about aging, avoid portages and ponder risk-taking. Through it all, out in the open, in the wild, in the blue, exploring the river means encountering life—good decisions and missed chances, risks and surprises, and the inevitable changes that occur as a family canoes through time and learns what it means to be human in this natural world.

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