



## A Year in the Woods: Twelve Small Journeys into Nature

**Torbjørn Ekelund**

**Becky L. Crook, Translator**

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When responsibilities derailed his childhood dream of becoming a famous explorer, Torbjørn Ekelund felt bereft of intimate participation in the seasonal changes of his beloved Norwegian forests. So he made a decision: once each month, he would go on a solitary “micro-expedition,” camping and sleeping in a tent next to a glacial pond surrounded by peat bogs and marshes, doing nothing other than noticing the changes of the seasons. It would be, he writes in *A Year in the Woods*, his personal, humble *Walden*.

Ekelund’s fumbling efforts to stay warm during a January night are both poignant and funny. He struggles with freezing temperatures, wet firewood, the lack of snow pants, and an iffy sleeping bag. The acquisition of more adequate clothing (any real Norwegian knows the importance of wool socks, right?) and gear makes subsequent stays more comfortable, though he admits the power of a winter night, alone in a dark Norwegian forest, to make him feel like the last human left on Earth.

Having hoped for “big thoughts” to arise during his monthly stays, Ekelund instead found that it was emptying his mind and escaping social constraints in favor of a life on the edge that liberated his spirit and made every moment intense. Along with the deep silence of winter and the buzzing heat of summer, he describes how the industry and chaos of spring’s hormone-drunk birds, and the settling of autumn’s glorious colors into a thickening darkness, touched and transformed him.

In *A Year in the Woods*, Torbjørn Ekelund muses on the brevity of life, and how most people no longer know what real freedom feels like. But his book’s most memorable message is that, despite how human arrogance led to the loss of much of life’s magic, a single night out in the woods can help restore it.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2021)

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