



Beyond the Trees: Stories of Wisconsin Forests

Candice Gaukel Andrews

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Explorers looking for an accessible, comprehensive naturalist guide to Wisconsin forests will be happy to read *Beyond the Trees: Stories of Wisconsin Forests*, by Candice Gaukel Andrews. While many nature books and field guides seek to achieve some semblance of interesting narrative that goes beyond a dry exposition of scientific names and geologic eras, Andrews's book takes the idea of nature exploration as storytelling to a new level.

Formerly a screenwriter, the author has indeed mastered the art of infusing visual description and first-hand experience into her nature and travel writing. Here, the reader is instantly catapulted into Andrews's journey of exploration around Wisconsin forests as she, in an authentic first-person voice, makes the journey lively and vivid with color and texture. Each of the fourteen chapters of the book examine a particular forest in the state, offering basic maps and photographs, giving a sense of the feel of the forest, describing its geological foundations from thousands of years back, and celebrating the plants, animals, and insects that thrive there. For the truly scientific, she offers appendices with scientific names, among other tidbits.

The information provides historical context and the reader also meets the human characters that are inevitably entangled in the stories from these landscapes: from Aldo Leopold, father of American forest management to the current caretakers of these state forests. It's clear from the text that the author has done her homework, as evidenced by the plethora of personal quotes from her interviewees. She additionally manages to give each forest a unique identity in a part of the country that can be sometimes depicted as homogenous. For the reader, the red forest and water of the Black River State Forest stands out against the deep quiet of the ultra-remote nature in the Coulee Experimental State Forest. Occasional sidebars highlight special aspects of each forest, such as historical events and personalities, updates on endangered species, or way-finding tips, and also give each forest an added sparkle of uniqueness.

In *Beyond the Trees*, the light and meandering character of the chapters and the feeling of 'quickness' within each section makes this book perfect for the casual naturalist, or someone looking for a glove-box guide for the spontaneous Wisconsin explorations. On the other hand, this book would also be good for a non-local looking for a nature travel adventure from an armchair vantage in Seattle. Either way, the author delivers a believable and vivid narrative of the diverse and rich forests of Wisconsin.

GABRIELA WORREL (May 10, 2011)

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