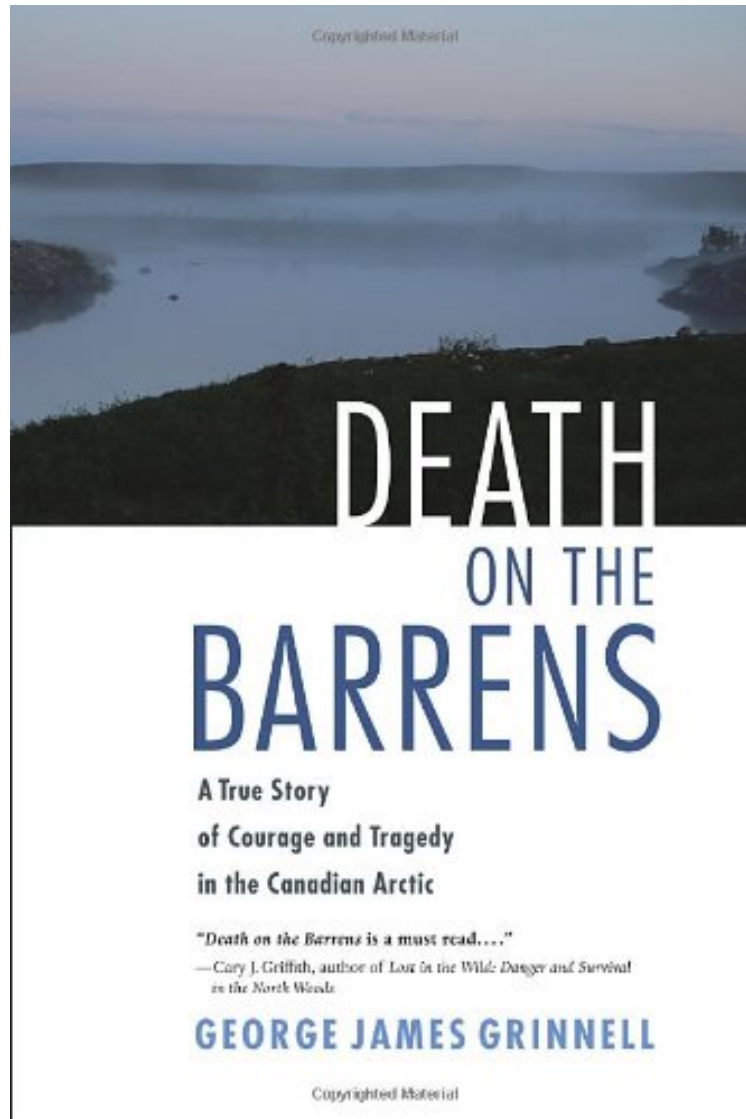


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# Death on the Barrens: A True Story of Courage and Tragedy in the Canadian Arctic

*George James Grinnell*

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**George James Grinnell : Death on the Barrens: A True Story of Courage and Tragedy in the Canadian Arctic** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Death on the Barrens: A True Story of Courage and Tragedy in the Canadian Arctic:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The resilience of humans By Lakewatcher I gave this book 5 stars because I read it from start to finish in one night the day after it arrived from . I am also a wilderness paddler although

I have not paddled a wilderness of the magnitude of the Dubawnt. On the negative side I would have to say that, as a paddler, I would have liked more logistical details - everything from cooking meals to portage details. Of course, I realize that this was not the underlying nature of this book. On the positive side (and this is really the wrong adjective), I found the book to have a certain melancholy throughout with an undercurrent of the pending catastrophe. As a result this kept me turning the pages. I truly felt for Mr. Grinnell whose life experiences led up to this ill-prepared trip into the Barrens and the personal struggle he had after his own near death experience and the death of the person they looked up to. Following this experience he had highs but he also certainly had real lows and then he lost two of his sons to a different part of the same region. I can't even begin to imagine what he feels, even now. This was not a trip report about a canoe trip nor was it ever meant to be. This was a deeply personal narrative about the struggles and successes of a man against great adversity both physical and spiritual. Throughout this story I have asked myself how I would fare faced with this same adversity and that is indeed its true value. N. Miller 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A lovely read, for which I am grateful to the author By L. Holtz For me at least, this book is one I regret finishing. In contrast to some here perhaps, it is exactly the poetry and personal discussion which made this book so enjoyable to read. Yes, six young men enter a wilderness and one does not survive. However the true journey is that of the author and is of a spiritual nature. Home on medical leave, I read the book at every opportunity and was nearly incapable of setting it aside. Very rewarding, and worth every penny spent. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Self Indulgent By Gail Monchik I love adventure/survivor stories. And this book did fulfill part of my desire to imagine surviving in the wilderness, etc. etc. etc. I appreciate the author's humility in admitting that he was not well prepared for this journey, let alone for a night in his own back yard. Grinnell sounds like a disturbed genius and a spoiled brat, and a lost soul. If I were to go out on an adventure, George would be the last person I would want to depend on.

Set in the remote arctic region of Northern Canada, this book takes readers on a harrowing canoe voyage that results in tragedy, redemption, and, ultimately, transformation. George Grinnell was one of six young men who set off on the 1955 expedition led by experienced wilderness canoeist Art Moffatt. Poorly planned and executed, the journey seemed doomed from the start. Ignoring the approaching winter, the men became entranced with the peace and beauty of the arctic in autumn. As winter closed in, they suddenly faced numbing cold and dwindling food. When the crew is swept over a waterfall, Moffatt is killed and most of the gear and emergency food supplies destroyed. Confronting freezing conditions and near starvation, the remaining crew struggled to make it back to civilization. For Grinnell, the three-month expedition was both a rite of passage and a spiritual odyssey. In the Barrens, he lost his sense of identity and what he had been conditioned to think about society and himself. Forever changed by the experience, he unsparingly describes how the expedition influenced his adult life and what powerful insights he was able to glean from this life-altering experience.

.com A Letter to Readers from George Grinnell Dear .com readers, At the beginning of the trip that I describe in *Death on the Barrens*, I had said to myself, "If things get rough, at least I will not be the first to die." I had just been discharged from the Army and was in better physical condition than the others, but, by the end of the trip I was thinking very different thoughts: "I hope I will not be the last to die." By the end of the trip, I took pride not in my own strength, for it was laughable compared to the power of the wind that had ripped the tent I was sleeping in to shreds, or the power of the cataracts which had flipped our canoes as if they were toys, or of the cold which had killed Art--by the end of the trip, I took pride only in what I could do for others because I did not want to be the last to die. I was scared of dying alone. Although I was terrified of dying, there were moments when I felt so at peace that I just wanted to remain in the arctic forever. Having my terror transformed by beauty into awe was like receiving, what mystics call, the ecstasy of the grace of God. It is such a wonderful feeling--a mixture of awe, peace, and love--that, if I could, I would share it. Yours sincerely, George James Grinnell

Questions for George Grinnell

Q: Recalling the hardships of the catastrophic canoe voyage of 1955 must be difficult and painful, at times. What made you decide to write *Death on the Barrens*? A: I was telling the story to some friends at dinner one night, fifty years ago, and one of them, Professor Ed Chalfant said: "Write the book." The next day he gave me his typewriter. I have been typing ever since trying to convey what perhaps cannot be conveyed: the transformation of terror into awe.

Q: Something that makes your book so wonderful is that you offer philosophical insight into the Barrens expedition, and reflections on your life since. What do you want readers to take away from reading the book? A: I would like readers to take away the idea that awe transforms vanity into love, and love is the source of the inner peace which we all desire.

Q: Through your experiences and through the writing of this book, what have you learned about human nature that isn't common knowledge? A: I've learned that it is necessary to empty oneself if one wants to receive the gift of awe, love, and peace, which is the gift of the wilderness to troubled souls. Judges, such as this reviewer, are often asked to evaluate the veracity and credibility of distant accounts of misadventure culminating in a death. No one who reads this story should entertain any doubt as to the scrupulous accuracy of this narrative, which chronicles the author's 1955 journey through the Canadian arctic with four friends. Bad planning left them without food or adequate warmth as winter closed in, and the group leader

eventually died of hypothermia. Although the account reminds one of Farley Mowat's adventure novel, *Lost in the Barrens*, not to mention James A. Michener's *Journey: A Novel*, the detailed descriptions of the sensations endured by the writer, the haunting and evocative images he sets forth with poetic grace and erudite references, and the harrowing emotional roller-coaster he experienced in 1955 and every year since leaves no doubt as to the fidelity of this first-person story of exploration, adventure and tragedy. VERDICT Superbly illustrated, this work represents the best that human kind and nature have to offer: courage, beauty and the challenge to survive. Recommended for all readers of true adventure or memoir. Library Journal starred review, Gilles Renaud, Ontario Court of Justice *Death on the Barrens* is a must read for anyone who has seriously considered entering absolute wilderness, and for those who already know a step off the grid into a place like the Barrens can have a profound impact that reverberates through the rest of one's days. Cary J. Griffith, author of *Lost in the Wild: Danger and Survival in the North Woods* [The] three-month canoe trip across the uninhabited Canadian Barrens takes George Grinnell to the lip of the abyss that separates sanity from insanity and life from death. And it is his firsthand exploration of this uncertain edge that provides the profound insights that makes this a most powerful and unique narrative. George Luste, from the Introduction A finely wrought distillation of half of a century spent looking for an explanation where none perhaps exists. *Death on the Barrens* tells of many deaths in an austere and unforgiving land of imponderable majesty where sentience extends far beyond human kind. Farley Mowat, legendary author of *People of the Deer* and *Never Cry Wolf* A nice combination of struggling against nature and self-realization, this short book was enjoyable and thought-provoking. The Philbrick-James Forum George James Grinnell brings tragedy of *Into the Wild* and the philosophy of the poets to his non-fiction account of a three-month pleasure trip by canoe and portage across the Canadian Barrens in 1955 *Death on the Barrens* meditates on beauty, loneliness, and the meaning of life while roaring down the rapids or battling the black flies or trying to outwait a blizzard without freezing to death in a ripped tent. It is a clear statement of our need for belief in something more than ourselves. Read, Write, Laugh, Rewrite with Eileen Granfors This was an excellent memoir. For the outdoor and nature types I recommend [*Death on the Barrens*] highly. George, referring to himself as Jim in the book, tells us a heart wrenching and harrowing journey of six men through the Barrens Not only is the adventurous side of the story told, but the spiritual experience of being out in the wilderness is explained. This was an intense read. The Cajun Book Lady In these pages, you will learn how time and a doomed escapade into the Barrens can change a man how marvelous and wonderful nature can be and how it can also be your worst enemy The authors descriptions and recollections help to bring this powerful novel to life [*Death on the Barrens* is] a very powerful and intelligently written memoir about the 1955 canoeing expedition which took the life of one man and changed the souls of the others. BookPleasures.com Despite all of the obstacles in the book, the absolute honesty of the author shines through providing a tiny little ray of hope in his bleak world *Death on the Barrens* is beautifully written this book will keep you interested until the very end. The Book Buff Grinnell's account affects the reader on several levels. He details the practical side of the trip...the physical exertion of canoeing and portaging; the exhilaration of shooting rapids; the camaraderie of the men; the psychological signs of suspicion, paranoia, and even questions of sanity...there's also a spiritual element... Grinnell quotes literature, poetry, scripture, Zen koans and Indian legend. The writing is very nice, and at times even lyrical. The Record-Courier While the canoeists' trip could be critiqued inadequate food, too many days spent relaxing during good traveling weather Grinnell does not place blame. Instead, he remembers how their leader took them to a place of peace and a time when my fears had been elevated through beauty into awe, when my vanity had been transformed by awe into love, and when love had bathed my soul in the waters of eternal peace. For that he experienced starvation, frostbite, and near-drowning Yet though Grinnell admits to being lost in despair at times, this is a book of recovery and acceptance. Southern Rockies Nature Blog [Grinnell] tells this story with amazing poise, instantly drawing the reader in. One can almost feel the mist of the river and the bumping of the rapids, and later the cold and hunger. There is a lot of emotion caught within these pages. Add the stunning watercolors that help to break up the book and you have a true gem. Reading for Sanity [In the Canadian Barrens, George James Grinnell] revels in the pristine vistas devoid of man while vacillating between fear of dying and awe. Eventually he feels himself disappearing into the landscape, just another caribou in the food chain. *Death on the Barrens* is a fascinating glimpse at the actions of six men when they have nothing left to confront but themselves. Sheri, Village Books I am crazy about survivalist books; *Into the Wild* (this book completely changed the course of my life), *Into Thin Air*, *Alive*, etc *Death on the Barrens* is just as captivating a read. Six men plan to traverse the Canadian arctic on canoes and seem to become spellbound with the beauty and lulled into relaxing in the wilderness rather than hurrying to beat the oncoming winter. Jennifer Salita, *Midwestern Days* About the Author George Grinnell taught the history of science and intellectual history at McMaster University in Ontario from 1967 to 1991. He currently teaches meditation classes and lives in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Artist Roderick MacIver is the founder of Heron Dance, a nonprofit organization that celebrates the human connection to nature through art and words.