

Title: *Border Country*

Subtitle: *The Northwoods Canoe Journals of Howard Greene 1906-1916*

Author: Martha Greene Phillips

Published: 2017

Publisher: University of Minnesota Press

Contents: 372 pp, illustrated throughout, glossary, further reading list

Cover: Hardback

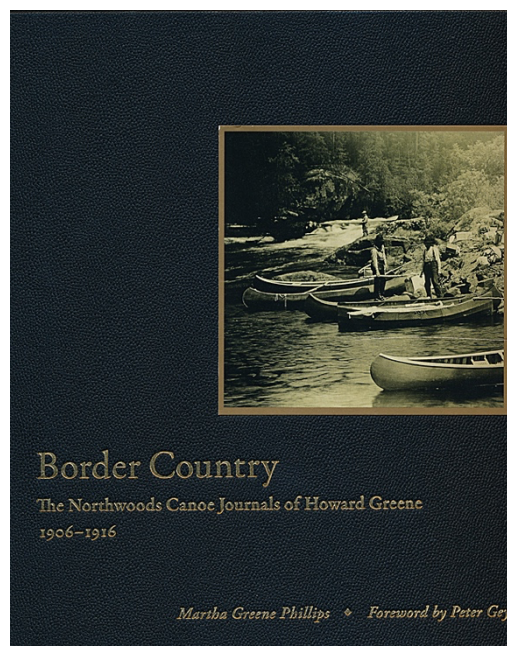
Size: 238 x 260 mm

Price: US\$ 28.58

ISBN: 978-1-5179-0107-3

Availability: Amazon

Review: Paul Caffyn



My first admission: I have a passion for collecting paddling literature. It is increasingly difficult these days to find a new or second-hand title not in my collection. Because my retirement role is desktop publishing, I am now quite critical of book design, layout, content, illustrations etc. In past KASK magazines, I often whinge about new books bring published in North America, my main criticism relating to ‘vanity publications’, diary style canoeing or kayaking accounts with no map, no photos, no reading list – just text. If the writer has poor descriptive writing skills, then the lack of illustrations leads me to consign the book to a shelf without finishing reading it. In many case, it will be the publisher cutting print costs by using cheap paper and excluding photos in the text or as colour plate sections. In some it be the author self-publishing and saving print cost by printing text only.

Once in a blue moon a book will arrive that leaves me struggling for superlatives. The author is the daughter of Howard Greene who in the northern summers between 1906 and 1916, made a serious of canoe camping trips with some his friends, his young sons and a few of their schoolmates. The paddling trips were into the north woods of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Canada. The paddlers became a close knit group and called themselves ‘the Gang’. On these three to four week trips, Howard wrote a journal each night and took hundreds of large-format photographs, using a heavy camera and glass plates.

Then after each summer’s trip, Howard typed up the narrative, printed photographs to include and included a map. To each of the ‘gang’ participants, he presented a bound and numbered copy, mounted as a journal in a leather bound book. Howard’s daughter, perhaps too young to have joined the trips, has put a power of time and effort into editing Howard’s eight journals, sourcing his photos and maps and illustrations, and compiling this beautiful book.

Lavishly illustrated applies to the book, rarely a page with one of more sepia toned photos, which are not thumbnail size, for the ‘almost coffee table size’ allows the pics to reproduced up to in good size, some up to two full pages. The only full colour plates are of the scarce original leather bound journals.

A prologue by Martha explains her rationale for producing the book and an epilogue describes what happened to the ‘gang’ after 1916. The book concludes with a glossary and further reading list. The cover design is superb, title lettering in gold and a sepia photo showing canoes and some of the ‘gang’.

I find it difficult to raise any niggles; the text is not crammed onto a page, and although many of the photos do not have a caption, the adjoining text describes who is who and what is

happening. A pic of what looks like one of the boys being baptized in the river, his head pushed into the water has a description in the text of his mouth being washed out with toothpaste!

This book 'spoke to me', and perhaps I have a second admission: it was such similar canoeing trips, that I blame on my lifelong passion for paddling. I was still at primary school in the 50s and going on week long white-water paddling canoe-camping trips with older canoe club members, just like young kids who Howard was taking paddling.

Adventures these days, seemingly have to be short duration and adrenaline-charged, without taking time to cruise and enjoy every moment of the adventure. This book is a marvellous view into family adventuring in the early 1900s.

If you are a lover of fine books, I suggest you put this tome on your Santa wish list.