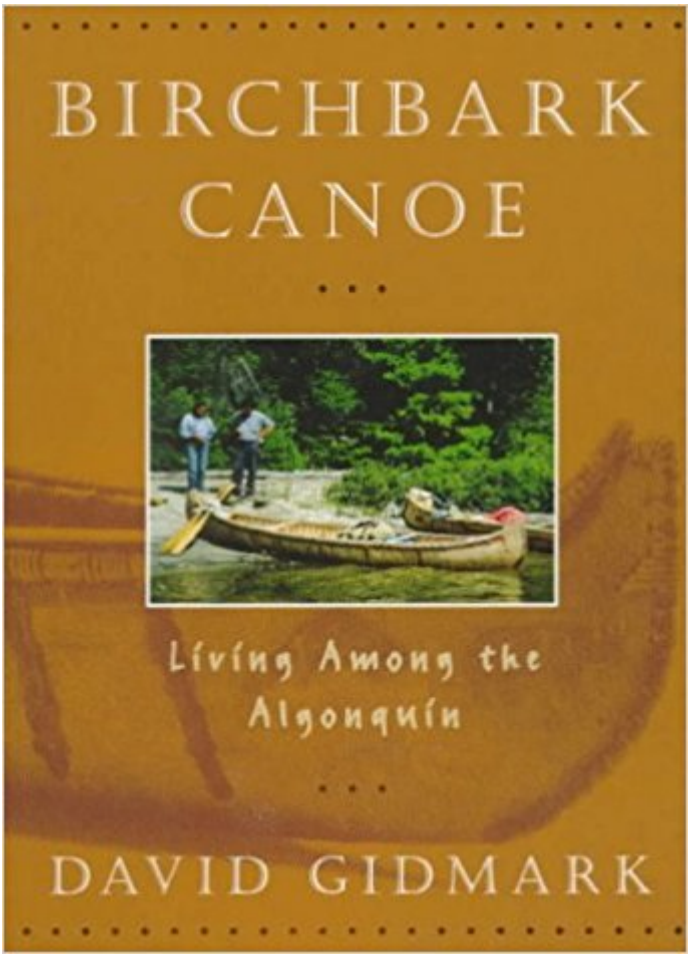
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Birchbark Canoe: Living Among The Algonquins



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Synopsis

Discover the dying art of birchbark canoe building as seen through the eyes of someone who is passionate about it. In this book David Gidmark tells the story of the building of a traditional birchbark canoe and his apprenticeship learning the skills and the language of the Algonquin of western Quebec. Through learning how to do (how to strip the bark from the tree, fashion gunwales from the cedar logs, carve the ribs with a crooked knife and sew the huge sheets of bark onto the frame with spruce root) David Gidmark learns how to see the wilderness and relate to it in Algonquin ways that are very different from ours. As his knowledge increases, so does his respect for the culture and wisdom of native peoples. Part way through this odyssey, he meets his future wife, Ernestine, a young Ojibway woman who was taken at the age of five from her family and placed in a residential school. As she and David made a life together in the woods, she was able to begin relearning her language and culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For over ten years David Gidmark has lived deep in the woods of Quebec. He teaches canoe building in Wisconsin, New York, Tahiti and Quebec.

Good read. Gives good starting insight into an alternate social system and the evolution caused by contact with today’s society. Brings back memories of birch bark canoes and hand made boats from my youth. I didn’t see any particular bias in the presentation. It was a reasonable account based on

his observations. Like the Amish or some of the South American and African tribes, these folks are all too soon locked into modern society by economics. Unlike coverage by author John Perkins of some of the South American tribes, there isn't a presumption of evil on behalf of capitalism or communism. The observation rather chronicles the assimilation and shrinkage of the Algonquin legacy brought about by increasing social, economic, and political pressures.

Lots of story line and lots of photos of how to build a birch bark canoe. Just what I needed.

love it

I came to a quite different opinion about David Gidmark's book than did the first reviewer; I think it is a very elegant book that combines practical information about birchbark canoes with a very human approach to the relationship between the White and the Native cultures. Gidmark addresses fundamental questions of how one should live in this world and comes to conclusions based on his personal experiences.He discusses Thoreau's interest in the birchbark canoe, and says, "I admired innumerable things about Thoreau, but one with which I most empathized, and most wanted to emulate, was his idea that people could best flourish by living on the borderline, literally, between civilization and wilderness, thereby deriving the greatest benefits from each." Gidmark goes on to describe his simple lifestyle in his cabin by a "lake with no name," and concludes that he was "far ahead of four billion people-at least-on the planet in terms of material possessions. I had a truck, all the food I wanted and needed, the money and time to travel freely to various countries, and money for clothes and books. In peace of mind I was immensely richer than hundreds of millions of people, particularly in North America, who are so wired into the contemporary consumer society that both husband and wife have to work outside the home and have neither time nor money for significant travel, for instance." Perhaps this is "holier-than-thou," but that could be said about any book that advocates the benefits of an exercise program, for example.Gidmark criticizes the "materialistic" society only from the standpoint that it leads to stress. I'm sure that he is happy to have people buy his books. The book, by the way, includes a sixteen-page insert of beautiful color photographs of Jim Jerome and Jocko Carle building a birchbark canoe at Rapid Lake, Quebec.I highly recommend it to anybody interested in birchbark canoes.

I think this book would be great, but the version has showing is not the quality version you will get. The one they have listed has a color cover and is printed on nice paper . . . . the one you get in the

mail is printed on coloring-book style paper with very very poor image quality. You know the greyish color book paper that are in kids' coloring books? So the photos and illustrations are useless as far as detail goes. You can't even read Chapelle's writing on the lines drawings or see the photos. Get it somewhere else and make sure you're paying more than $15.

This book is pretty good when the author sticks to the point. There is a lot of good information about birchbark canoe making and the present state of Algonquin Indians on a few reserves in Canada. When the author sticks to actual information like canoe building, conversations/interactions with present day Algonquin, etc...this is a good read. However, the author drifts too much (mainly after chapter 12) and goes on about how materialistic our society is (is he including the folks who PURCHASE his book and thus support him?)., How everything Indian is good and things relating to White civilization bad or ignorant, etc...Even when I agreed with his political position, I found his holier than thou, smarter than thou...attitude annoying. I wish he did less spouting off his opinion and include more dialog/information with the Indians he befriended, and let the READER draw their own conclusions.

I'm hard-pressed to expand upon the comments of the previous reviewer (Mr. Wheaton), except to say that I thought the book was highly readable, enjoyable, and very informative. I especially appreciated the author's attention to the Algonquin language. Gidmark intersperses many Indian words and phrases throughout the text, giving the reader a feeling for the tongue's complexity and beauty. I recommend the book to anyone interested in canoeing, and the north.

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