



Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice

Belden C. Lane

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Carrying only basic camping equipment and a collection of the world's great spiritual writings, Belden C. Lane embarks on solitary spiritual treks through the Ozarks and across the American Southwest. For companions, he has only such teachers as Rumi, John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, Dag Hammarskjöld, and Thomas Merton, and as he walks, he engages their writings with the natural wonders he encounters--Bell Mountain Wilderness with Søren Kierkegaard, Moonshine Hollow with Thich Nhat Hanh--demonstrating how being alone in the wild opens a rare view onto one's interior landscape, and how the saints' writings reveal the divine in nature.

The discipline of backpacking, Lane shows, is a metaphor for a spiritual journey. Just as the wilderness offered revelations to the early Desert Christians, backpacking hones crucial spiritual skills: paying attention, traveling light, practicing silence, and exercising wonder. Lane engages the practice not only with a wide range of spiritual writings--Celtic, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi Muslim--but with the fascination of other lovers of the backcountry, from John Muir and Ed Abbey to Bill Plotkin and Cheryl Strayed. In this intimate and down-to-earth narrative, backpacking is shown to be a spiritual practice that allows the discovery of God amidst the beauty and unexpected terrors of nature. Adoration, Lane suggests, is the most appropriate human response to what we cannot explain, but have nonetheless learned to love.

An enchanting narrative for Christians of all denominations, *Backpacking with the Saints* is an inspiring exploration of how solitude, simplicity, and mindfulness are illuminated and encouraged by the discipline of backcountry wandering, and of how the wilderness itself becomes a way of knowing--an ecology of the soul.

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