

NORTHERN SANDSCAPES - EXPLORING SASKATCHEWAN'S ATHABASCA SAND DUNES

by Robin and Arlene Karpan Parkland Publishing, Saskatoon 29.95 (soft cover)

Some of us feel simply too busy, too economically constrained, or too out-of-shape to consider a northern wilderness trip. However, if you have never been to the Athabasca Sand Dunes here is the easiest way to visit a stunningly beautiful area located along the south shores of Lake Athabasca in northern Saskatchewan. Photographers and travel-writers Arlene and Robin Karpan have produced a collection of 115 very beautiful photographs of the dunes, gently laced together with stories of their travel through the area by canoe.

Written in the first person, in a conversational style for a general audience, this book eloquently describes the dunes, the authors' travel route, and offers tips on where to obtain maps and other information about travelling in this area which is now protected as a Saskatchewan Provincial Wilderness Park. With over 50 percent of the 128 pages taken up by images of impeccable quality and composition, the overall "feel" of this book is a luxurious photographic feast over light, almost incidental conversation about local landscape, plants, wildlife, history - largely from a personal, experiential point of view. It is an engaging and easy read and I highly recommend it.

To be sure, this is not intended as a guidebook to the area's plants, animals or ecosystems. Of these, the authors do introduce the Park's endemic plant

species, but of the ten endemics in total, only four are discussed in the text and photographs included of only six. (Unfortunately, and not the fault of the authors, the photograph at the top of p.35, identified as being of the COSEWIC-listed Tyrrell's willow is actually of another much more abundant endemic named Turnor's willow). Likewise, reference to mammals is largely restricted to tales of close encounters with moose and bears, and of birds to a dozen or so sightings en route. Of definite value to some readers are three checklists offered in the Appendix: one each for the Park's rare plants, birds and mammals.

Considering the authors' "hope that our book will help foster an appreciation of this special place, and that those who travel there will be aware of its fragile nature and the need to tread lightly," I regret not finding a chapter, or even an appendix, on responsible camping ethics and zero-impact travel and camping techniques.

As an introduction to one of Saskatchewan's most spectacular and fascinating wilderness ecosystems, take time out for this very fine publication. The Karpans deserve applause for their interest in connecting people with wilderness landscapes and for the very high quality of this publication.

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Snow Geese

Ralph Grosse