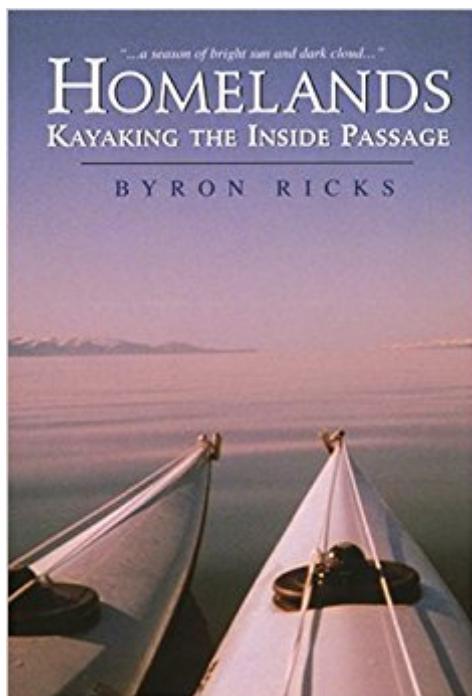


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# Homelands: Kayaking The Inside Passage



## Synopsis

"For five months in the spring and summer of 1996, Maren and I traveled the Inside Passage...It was a long and beautiful journey, a season of bright sun and dark cloud, above-average rainfall, and broad shoulders...It was a time before home ownership, before children, an open window and all we had to do was leap through. And we did...The very name, Inside Passage, seemed to carry an intimacy, a knowing. It would be a personal voyage. As much as anything, it would be a journey home."

## Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial (July 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0380809184

ISBN-13: 978-0380809189

Product Dimensions: 8 x 5.3 x 1.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 20 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,247,173 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in Books > Travel > United States > Alaska > General #122 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Nature Travel > Adventure > Kayaking #631 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Kayaking

## Customer Reviews

In an era of testosterone-charged adventure tales, Byron Ricks's *Homelands: Kayaking the Inside Passage* is a wonderfully introspective adventure-travel memoir. In 1996 Ricks and his wife, Maren van Nostrand, came close to making an offer on their first house, but instead decided to undertake an adventure of a different kind together--kayaking from Alaska's Glacier Bay down the coast of Western Canada to southern Puget Sound, near their Seattle home. They had no set schedule to keep and for five months lived by nautical charts and the rhythms of the tides, wind, and weather. Their plan was to paddle from the glaciers to the city, exploring a coast in flux and the ways of native peoples such as the Tlinglit, Tsimshian, and Haida--whose ancestors paddled the passage for centuries. The driving question of *Homelands* is this: how does the act of making a very long journey home, in this case by paddle--at an average velocity of a mere three knots--affect one's concept of home? This ocean-size question is fed by smaller tributaries: Do overcoming peril and danger make the rewards of coming home greater? How do native inhabitants encountered along

the way relate to their homeland? What do you do when you're camped in a bear's back yard? And what are the issues facing a husband and wife setting out across vast expanses of open water to confront--in the most literal sense--what lies beyond? A journalist with a background in history and anthropology, Ricks is gifted with both a keen eye and a poetic ear. The tale is written in diary form, and its voice originates in the pace of the kayak: tranquil, steady, respectful. An easygoing and astute companion, Ricks is clearly an old soul--with questions well worth asking and some lovely observations to share. --Kimberly Brown

In a book that is sometimes invigorating and sometimes maddeningly attenuated, Ricks recounts the five-month journey from Alaska's Glacier Bay to Washington's Puget Sound that he and his wife made by sea kayak. Ricks is obviously as well studied in the geology and the ecology of the terrain as he is blithely realistic about his ability to impose his plans upon it, bandying terms like "bathymetry" and "isostatic rebound" as freely as "ibuprofen." But while Ricks, an outdoors writer who lives in the Northwest, occasionally shows descriptive power worthy of John McPhee, the book's diary-entry structure limits his creativity, prevents inventive shifts in scene and leaves the narrative leaden in spots. Through his talks with people along the route, Ricks comes to an understanding of the term "homeland" not as something static but as a word that "speaks to the kind of relationship a people have with their place." With this interpretation, Ricks tries to find a connection to his own country even as he spends his voyage's last day paddling through a scum of oily water and past an island prison with high walls and razor wire. The book truly conveys the experiences of a long journey through remarkable terrain. Readers will share some of Ricks's elation over natural beauty and hard-won insight. But they will also be frustrated by a narrative that is as unnecessarily arduous as the journey it recounts was inevitably so. (July) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A wonderful, meditative journey through the inside passage. I read it in preparation for a sailing trip up the Northwest coast, and it increased my enjoyment of the experience and left me yearning to linger much more than I was able to in this incredibly wild place.

There are many "how to books" on all aspects of sea kayaking. Byron's book captures the why of this mode of travel. To me it did not matter where the paddle took place but that it re-activated the feelings, the fears, the frustrations, the joy of travels by kayak in wild, almost unpopulated areas. Of walking beaches without human foot print and living day by day with the weather & tides; of seeing

how little one needs to live. It is the connection with the past and what has been lost. It is this essence that I hold to and try to take with me in my "real" life.

Byron and Maren sound like wonderful people, and I admire their spirit of adventure and commitment and respect of the land. I think I expected a lot more action in the story. I would have liked this more had they included pictures of the landscape, themselves, some of the people they had met, and a larger map. I understand their desire to protect the places they stopped, but, being an east coaster who "day kayaks" for four or five hours at a time, I wanted a bigger and better glimpse of such a worthy adventure.

I found Byron Ricks book to be a captivating tale of kayak travel through the Inside Passage. No, it doesn't tell us exactly how they did things or where they went but that was not the point of their story. They tell us of the people, the sights (good and bad) and about the daily trials they faced. It has given me a clearer picture of what I can expect when I paddle the Inside Passage. I highly recommend the book to partner with other how-to books on the Inside Passage.

I have sailed and paddled the Inside Passage from time to time over the last 24 years. I am an avid reader of true outdoor adventures. I usually judge a book by its ability to hold my interest and ultimately to motivate me to leave the comforts of home and to take a stroll down "the road less traveled." I have been eyeing my kayak and checking my gear since finishing Homelands. When the ski season is over, I'm packing my kayak and heading north. My only regret is that I do not have the luxury of duplicating the entire trip. The author provides an engaging and captivating description of this courageous undertaking in a journal format. This format serves the book and pace of the adventure well. The poetic language used to describe characters, places and events is excellent and conjures memories that parallel my own experiences along the British Columbia coast. The author has done an excellent job of capturing the flow, feeling and character of this region. This is not a Fodor's on kayaking the Inside Passage but rather an adventure of the soul and mind, at water level, along one of the most rustic, beautiful and inhospitable coastlines in America.

I enjoy a "journey book" and read a lot of them. I have kayaked in the area covered by the book by myself for weeks. The book chronicles the couple's kayak trip from Glacier Bay AK to Seattle, WA. I expected a journey book to weave 3 items between its covers. A good story. A written picture of the things (people, geography, and experiences) they met and saw along the way. I got an OK

written picture. A discussion of how their equipment planning and use worked. At a campground on the northern eastern tip of Vancouver, they gave Maren's sister hedge shears that they hinted that they had used to cut the thick coastal Salal for camp spots. That would have been an interesting discussion on how they did or didn't use the shears. He spent a lot of time talking about clear cutting. I know this is a problem in the area and I know it is very ugly but no soap boxing for pages. I really want to hear about their every day routine. His metaphors and descriptions used big words that are difficult at 10:30pm when I like to read and have dreams of a journey. His best description was of their Prince Rupert supply stop. We never learned what they needed and what they had too much of. What they craved during the trip. During one foggy crossing, they were very concerned about being run over by a cruise ship in the channel. They didn't use their Marine Radio for a general call to "ALL ship in the area of ... " to inform themselves of the location of the ships. They received offers of global positioning satellite information with disdain from kayakers he met along the way. The book lacked maps with enough scale to follow their trip. If you were not familiar with the area you would be lost. For all the kayaking, I could substitute the word mountain bike for kayak, remove tide information and for the most part it would read the same. I was very disappointed with the lack of camping, and equipment experiences which I think adds to the tension and interest to a journey book. I wanted passages like: "When we get to the motel in Prince Rupert, we will dry the tent and reseal the seams since it has been leaking during the last few rains." "We haven't seen the sun for days, but we would like get clean. We set the sunshower out even though we would only get tepid water from it. It is great to feel clean even though the squadrons of mosquito dived for our exposed bodies. Something to understand how their plans and equipment contributed to the trip. I have been reading Colin Fletcher for 30 years. He does an excellent job of weaving the 3 items I want in a journey story. His latest Book "RIVER" is a good example.

Ricks is a fine writer. The journey unfolds a day at a time, and for reasons which become obvious, he does not provide a lot of technical paddling instruction, maps, or 'broken stove' anecdotes. Homelands is an 'inside passage,' a journey of the mind through a landscape with a profound spiritual history. The relics and totems of European and American explorers and entrepreneurs are just as present as those of the First Nations peoples; Ricks sees the trees, the forest, the clear cuts, the log rafts, and the tides and currents as part of a personal and historical journey. It's a literate book and can be enjoyed by those who do not paddle. Readers are invited to go with the flow of the book, its weather days and paddling days, and to reflect on their own purposes in being outdoors, or on personal journeys. It is written with an authentic modesty about the considerable

accomplishment of the journey, and has a moving ending, much more about the relationships one makes in one's life than about 'getting somewhere.'

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