

# **One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey Study Guide**

**One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey by Sam  
Kieth**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Going In.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">The Birth of a Cabin.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Camp Meat.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Freeze-up.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Breakup.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Cloud Country.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">The Red Runt.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">The Chilikadrotna.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Reflections.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Until Another Spring.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>



## Plot Summary

Sam Keith writes "One Man's Wilderness, An Alaskan Odyssey" in 1973, from the daily journals of Richard Proenneke about his Alaskan wilderness cabin building experience that begins in 1967. This book is the account of Sam's respected and dedicated friend, who he meets in 1952, when he lives in Alaska for three years. This 223 page non-fiction quasi-historical book records Dick's actual day-to-day life and events. Sam Keith spends two weeks living with Dick Proenneke in his cabin during the time he writes "One Man's Wilderness." Keith shares Dick's experiences through writing this book. Sam Keith turns daily journals of his friend into a lively study of successful wilderness survival.

Anyone interested in the story of surviving and thriving in the most extreme weather conditions can benefit from Dick's experiences. Although the Alaska wilderness is the setting for this story, its lessons can benefit anyone trying to overcome natural struggles in nature. Dick finds a homesite on which he builds a log cabin out of forest materials with hand tools. He survives fifty-one degrees below zero temperatures and a big brown bear attack. He plants a garden and tries to nurse an abandoned baby caribou back to health. He goes ice fishing through thirty inches of lake ice and snowshoes an air strip for Twin Lakes International Airport. Dick is skilled from his work as carpenter, diesel mechanic, sheep rancher, heavy equipment operator, and commercial fisherman. After six months of being bedridden from illness Dick becomes obsessed by testing and challenging himself. He relocates from Iowa to prove himself in an unspoiled Alaskan wilderness adventure.

"One Man's Wilderness" provides a comprehensive study of the beginning, development, and conclusion of Richard Proenneke's life. Dick's life is portrayed from the 1940s and 1950s through late 60s and early 70s in the wilderness to 1998, when in his eighties, Dick entrusts his homesite to the Park Service. Panorama of his life is presented by Sam Keith with simple grandeur like Alaska's wilderness itself. The book is particularly enjoyable to a reader who likes to see maps and pictures of what the words describe. Chapter Two describes Dick's cabin building and shows full color pictures of the steps he takes during construction. Chapter Six illustrates panoramic full color photographs of the cabin set in the trees against the Alaskan landscape. Detailed photographs of the cabin interior and furnishings illustrate the craft and skillful talent Dick uses to finish his wilderness home. Many photographs show Dick at work sawing and cutting or resting and reflecting. The Twin Lakes outline map puts the overall project and its environs in perspective.



# Going In

## Going In Summary and Analysis

Sam Keith writes "One Man's Wilderness, An Alaskan Odyssey" from daily journals of Dick Proenneke about his Alaskan wilderness cabin building experience. This book is the account of Sam's respected and dedicated friend who he meets in 1952 when living in Alaska for three years. Sam Keith turns the daily journals of his friend into a lively study of one man's successful journey to survive and thrive in the Alaskan wilderness.

The letter Dick is anxiously waiting for finally arrives from Babe Alsworth. Dick stays with Spike and Hope Carrithers at Sawmill Lake on Kodiak where he is doing odd jobs. Previously he stays at their wilderness cabin in the Twin Lakes region. They offer to let him use it and their tools and canoe until he builds his own. Dick's visits there encourage and persuade him to launch his own wilderness adventure. Dick drives his camper to the Carrithers and leaves it with them when he flies from Kodiak to meet Babe in Anchorage.

On May 17, 1968, Dick waits for Babe to arrive in his 180 Cessna at Merrill Field. The Chugach Range reminds him of his camper trip from Nebraska. He uses a felt-tip marker on his camper to print, "DESTINATION - BACK AND BEYOND" for cars behind him to see. Many wave or smile while passing. Dick flashes back to his trip west to Oregon working in the 1940s and on to Seattle when a lumberjack tells him about cutting timber where there are paved streets now. He drives north on Cariboo Highway through British Columbia and into a blizzard crossing Pine Pass before going on to Dawson Creek. He ferries across the Gulf of Alaska and on to Sawmill Lake and Anchorage. Babe arrives on time in the clear weather to meet Dick. They do errands and leave Anchorage on a 170 air-mile flight to Port Alsworth at Lake Clark. Dick looks down at the scenery and wildlife but they fly too high for much detail. Lake Clark is a silvery area in the dark spruce. They fly in low over water to the stony airstrip of the bush pilot layover. Dick helps unload cargo for Babe's Port Alsworth house. They work on his roof and prepare his Taylorcraft for the thirty-minute flight to Dick's destination. Dick is anxious to leave.

Despite uncertain weather Babe flies out May 21. They load the Taylorcraft, also called T-craft, but Dick thinks it is too heavy to fly. Dick looks down at frozen lakes and game trails in snow. His destination at the Twins is 2,200 feet higher than Lake Clark. Babe sees a connecting stream with open water in the frozen lower lake over three miles to Spike's cabin. After landing and unloading Babe and Dick talk about heaven and earth. Babe departs and Dick reflects on his dream becoming reality. He thinks about his age, ability and need for self-reliance at fifty-one. He plans to haul his cargo to Spike's cabin. Dick divides it in three piles by weight and importance. He covers two piles and takes one load with rifle and pistol. He hikes on shore through snow, ice, loose gravel and boulders. He inspects the logs he prepared last July. He remembers harvesting peeling and hauling fifty logs in a week. Dick's first load takes an hour and three quarters. His



next load weighs sixty pounds. He plans his last load the next day. He eats blueberries from last September and caribou sandwiches Mary Alsworth sends. Dick appreciates Babe waiving his \$30 charge for mail and grocery runs. The middle-aged Dick sees the Alaskan wilderness adventure as an opportunity to prove he can survive and thrive.



# The Birth of a Cabin

## The Birth of a Cabin Summary and Analysis

Dick's first morning on May 22 sets a daily routine. He wakes to watch the sunrise and awakening land. He starts a fire to take the chill off the cabin and heat water for washing. He fries bacon in the black skillet and adds a spoon of bacon fat to fermenting sourdough batter. He takes bacon from the skillet and drains excess fat before dropping a spoonful of hotcake batter in the pan. While eating breakfast he looks through the window. He fixes batter daily for sourdough biscuits and soaks beans for supper. He starts daily activities, which today is hiking back to get the last load. He returns at noon in time to avoid hard driving rain. He organizes his gear and supplies. When the rain stops, he finds a garden site for June planting. He bakes biscuits in an oven he makes from empty coffee and gas cans. He chops wood until he smells the baking biscuits. After supper he watches wildlife through his spotting scope. The next morning he rinses soaking beans, slices onions in them and seasons to slow cook. He looks around for spruce timber and Hope Creek for fish. He readies tools and splits wood for fuel because the aim, motion, and cleaving satisfy him.

He finds his harvested construction logs to be well-seasoned and light relative to their length. His building site is on a knoll seventy-five feet from a bay along the shoreline with a good beach for canoing and landing a floatplane. Hope Creek is one hundred yards away with good water and fish. The site is high enough to avoid Hope Creek overflows but a slide or quake could plug the Chilikadrotna River and fill up the country like a bathtub. He spreads the twenty-foot square cabin site with beach gravel for a foundation. Inside cabin dimensions are eleven by fifteen feet, located to face northwest with a big window looking down the lake. He embeds two large crooked logs into the gravel foundation. He notches two end logs on the underside so water does not lie in the notch. He places a first level of logs before quitting for the day. He picks wild fireweed greens for salad with supper of red beans and fish. Walking the shore he sees a moose and calf, ten Dall rams with eleven lambs and nineteen ewes. He stops at the connecting stream to catch a nineteen-inch lake trout. He returns home to prepare and eat supper.

On the remaining four days in May, Dick lays logs for his cabin. The logs are sorted and selected to match for its best fit. A gray jay he names the "camp robber" watches him. Dick makes sure every log fits the curve of the one under it. He prefers they be uniform and chips away any excess. He throws out a trotline to catch fish while he sleeps. After breakfast he pulls in the trotline with two burbot fish that he field dresses to eat. Back at the cabin site, he has twenty-eight out of forty-four logs in place. He is distracted looking at a ram and notches the wrong end of a log that he fixes the next day. At the end of May, Dick has thirty-five logs in place and nine more to go before building gables, which are the triangular sections at each end of a roof. He plans to construct and cover a pole roof.



In the first week of June, Dick builds the roof skeleton with eave logs and gables. He sets five twenty-foot logs aside to be eave logs, purlin logs and a ridge log. Gable design is a letter "A" of four logs each one shorter and atop the one below. Eave logs overhang the rear cabin wall by a foot and the front wall by three feet for the porch roof. Purlin logs run parallel to the cabin length, halfway between eave and ridge log as roof beams. Dick thinks through how to assemble and place gable, ridge, purlin and eave log framework to fit the roof slope. Dick starts a roof skeleton one day and finishes the next. He attracts an inquisitive beaver and some harlequin ducks. He trims logs and plans window and door frames. He uses oakum to chink between logs by drying moss on the beach. Dick takes a day off to look for roof pole timber. He canoes up the lake and sees signs of many animals before setting up his scope. He sees caribou bulls, Dall rams, four ewes, bull moose, an eagle and ground squirrels. He eats wild berries on his way back to the canoe since he forgets lunch. Lake winds make canoeing back to the cabin a struggle.

In mid-June, he finishes chinking between the logs and starts cutting roof poles. He finds, cuts, peels and loads fifty poles the first couple days that he rafts down to the beach but needs more. On a rainy morning he writes letters and finds sixteen more poles when the weather clears. He places them at right angles to the ridge log on five-inch centers but may need thirty more. He finishes with one hundred poles that he gathers transports and peels, knots trims and notches for the purlin logs and chinks. He plugs openings under the eaves to frustrate squirrels. He saws off roof pole ends and prepares it for tar paper, sheeting and moss. Using manufactured tar paper and polyethylene sheeting make him feel guilty but keep weather out better than wilderness materials. He finishes chinking and caulking with oakum and begins thinking about the inside. Cabin construction so far is twenty days. His garden grows well with the rain. Dick needs a fish to eat. He canoes to the connecting stream where he catches two seventeen-inch lake trout. He sees a wolf track he wants to take a cast of. He returns with a camera and plaster to cast it. He stalks and counts over 150 caribou. The plaster needs more time to set up, so he puts the whole mud track on cardboard to take along. The trotline has a twenty-inch burbot on it.

Dick plans to put tar paper and other material on the roof poles to complete it in July. It rains the first few days, so he finishes his wolf track frame and finds some tree stumps for hinges. Long hinges also act as battens to hold the door planks together. It is dry enough by the fourth to tar paper the roof and cover it with polyethylene sheeting. Babe does not bring sheeting by then, so Dick starts a woodshed and toilet. He cuts, hauls, and peels logs. Pesky mosquitoes make him wear a headnet and shirts to notch and place logs. Between building, Dick does laundry, writes letters and trims his hair. He uses empty gas-cans to make pans and a shelf. He plans a woodshed four feet high at the rear with roof sloping from a seven foot front. Between getting materials and building, he checks his garden and catches fish. He finds two boulders that he names "Grizzly Eggs" to mark his cabin path.

Dick is finishing his cabin. He hangs the front door and makes it a Dutch door so top and bottom sections open independently. He crafts a closet for storage. Dick makes a thermopane window with plastic outside to trap air between it and handiwrap on the



inside. A window gives the cabin more character and a way to see out. He sketches a chimney on the logs and uses scrap cardboard to model fireplace and mantel. He finishes the door with a door latch and lock that he hopes will keep a bear out. He uses empty gas cans to make tin water bucket, wash pan, dishpan, flour and storage cans. He fixes an old abandoned stove from Spike's cabin for his cabin. The first week of August is planned to move and clean. He cleans Spike's cabin and moves his gear. He lights the Coleman lantern in his new cabin. He spends the night on his new bunk listening to Hope Creek lap at the beach. Babe lands the next day at Spike's cabin before he knows Dick moved. They reload the plane and taxi to his new cabin. Babe brings polyethylene sheeting. He tells Dick he is impressed by the new cabin as he flies out. The next day is perfect to install sheeting on the roof. Dick lays the polyethylene and covers it with fresh-cut moss. Dick finishes putting moss on the cabin and woodshed roofs and attaches poles to hold the moss down. Dick is writing letters as he sees a big brown bear coming up the path. He walks past the window and climbs to the roof. Dick shoots in air to scare the bear away, but it races toward him. He slams the door just in time to hear the bear slam against the door that holds him off. The bear goes to the woodshed so Dick yells and shoots in its path till it disappears. The cabin is done mid-August except for a fireplace. Dick admires his work as the most satisfying in his life. Ironically his goal to be self-reliant is utterly dependent on the bush pilot Babe. Dick takes pride in attention to detail and plan that is disrupted by Babe's late delivery of plastic sheeting for the roof.





# Camp Meat

## Camp Meat Summary and Analysis

It is frosty in the late August mornings when Dick sees seven rams feeding on a grassy slope above Glacier Creek. He hears an outboard motor and sees two hunters heading towards the sheep. Dick takes his spotting scope up to the hump behind the cabin to pick berries and watch the hunters. He assumes they might kill the rams but will leave enough meat and carcasses behind for his supply. Dick watches them kill two rams and roll them down the hill to a level spot for butchering. Late in the afternoon he sees two very tired hunters lugging heavy loads to their boat and motor away. Early the next morning Dick heads out to scavenge the sheep meat left behind. He finds unopened carcasses of two rams with unspoiled meat. He loads the chilled and butchered meat in his canoe. Back at the cabin Dick removes the hide and hangs the meat high. He has ram ribs for supper and smokes the remaining meat the next morning. Dick covers the toilet paper with an empty coffee can so the squirrel can't steal it to paper any more trees.

Babe brings cement, a hoe and a fifty-gallon drum to build the fireplace. There is no lime to make cement stick to the stones, but Dick decides to start construction anyway. He plans ten days in the first part of September to build a fireplace with the supplies Babe brings and the rock pile he plans to move from the beach to the cabin. Dick marks logs for cutting and digs out the fireplace base for a solid footing. He uses fine and coarse grades of sand to mix with cement for the foundation. He is cautious about cutting the cabin logs up too high until he sees the progress of his rock layers. He uses snug-fitting cardboard to keep the cold air out at night while he raises the fireplace height through the rear cabin wall. He measures and sets the arch using a cross cut sawblade. After the fireplace arch is done, the remaining chimney section goes straight up so he expects faster progress. It snows big flakes in the middle of September just when he places the mantel pegs. He builds a collapsible form from gas-can boxes to act like a flue pipe while he builds fifty inches of chimney. While building his fireplace and chimney, Dick hears hunter planes coming and going until the boss hunter leaves on September 17. He runs the chimney through the roof to come out about fourteen inches higher. Babe visits to see Dick's progress. By the third week of September the fireplace is done except for curing and minor items.

Dick decides he needs more meat for the winter. He hikes into the high country across the lake and stalks a ram. He spots one and fires a shot that hits its target. The dead ram rolls past him down to the timber. Dick field dresses and butchers it to carry off in two loads to the canoe. He hangs the meat in the woodshed for smoking the next day. By the end of September, Hope Creek begins to freeze at thirty-one degrees. Dick cleans up the cabin for freeze-up. He tests the fireplace draft with seed feathers at first but not smoke. He tests the fireplace draft with smoke and finds the cabin too tight. When hunters leave for the season Dick cleans up campsite litter and scavenges what is useful. He is ready for freeze-up with enough meat, wood and a tight, warm cabin.



The difference in attitude towards conservation is evident between Dick and the sport hunters. Dick respects the value of natural resources to the extent he even scavenges carcasses sport hunters discard. More specifically Dick carefully takes aim to fell one ram for winter. He does not waste meat, bullets or hunting time to satisfy his needs.

# Freeze-up

## Freeze-up Summary and Analysis

Thanksgiving Dinner is suet and meat dust for the chickadees, camp robbers and squirrel. Dick eats loin chops, mashed potatoes with gravy, salad, sourdough biscuits and shortcake with blueberries and drinks hot chocolate and a marshmallow with cookies. Dick plans for seasonal freeze up by building a sled and mending his snowshoes. He makes a snow shovel and ice creepers from a fifteen-gallon oil drum. Dick uses Mylar plastic and silica gel to absorb moisture between panes for a thermopane window. He installs a fireplace damper to keep the cabin smoke free. He stores the canoe in Spike's cabin over winter. Strong blowing winds alternate with dead calm and freezing temperature to thicken an ice highway for travel. He is dismayed by wolves killing a moose calf left uneaten to rot.

He opens a waterhole by chipping through six and one-half inches of ice on the lake. Dick makes a hand warmer from a ram skin coat. He uses a kerosene lamp in the cabin, which is quieter and has a softer light than a Coleman lantern. Early December ice freezes to twelve inches and temperature is minus thirty-five. Dick's cabin is warm, and he tries to stay warm outside. Wearing a paper bag with eye slots over his head keeps his face from freezing while hiking. He protects his feet with felt insoles. Ironically, the weather gets warmer as ice gets deeper. Before Christmas, temperatures reach thirty-two degrees and ice is twenty-three inches. Dick likes it colder since warm spells dump heavy wet snow from the trees. Babe unexpectedly arrives with sacks and boxes like a skinny Santa Claus on Christmas day. Northern lights cast a golden glow on the horizon. He sees the spruce squirrel use a moss ball for a door and wonders where the birds go at thirty-two below.

Early January temperature is forty-five below zero. The ice is twenty-eight inches thick and the waterhole closes up. Dick challenges himself about survival at this temperature. He hikes four hours to 1,600 feet above the lake to find he can be comfortable and with an axe can survive. Babe returns on January ninth in the T-Craft. He brings supplies and visits while eating two bowls of beans. Mid-January warms to twenty-two degrees and thirty-five inches of ice. Dick snowshoes a flight strip he euphemistically names Twin Lakes International Airport. Babe arrives February 3 in forty-eight degrees below zero. He worries that the plane's oil may freeze so he drops off cargo and departs. Dick hikes in wool socks knit by Babe's wife in fifty-one degrees below weather. By mid-February temperature is thirty degrees. He enjoys watching an ermine occupy the squirrel's nest. Dick shovels paths like canyons in twenty-seven inches of snow.

Babe returns late February in calm winds, twenty-eight degrees and overcast. He might bring the mission girls his next trip. Dick ice fishes through the waterhole in March. He finds a sixteen inch trout on the baited hook but lets it go. Babe arrives on March 10 but does not bring the mission girls. Dick does odd jobs while the weather changes. Babe returns the end of March with a caribou quarter. Dick suggests he take it to Port



Alsworth since he has meat. In April he measures forty-three inches of lake ice. Babe lands mid-April with supplies and promises to bring the mission girls. Dick is surprised at Babe's visit the next day with Mary and a couple from church. By month-end, temperature is thirty-three degrees; the snow melts and a robin's song is heard. Extreme cold of freeze-up brings out Dick's obsession to prove his ability. Specifically Dick climbs 1,600 feet higher because he is curious whether a man can be comfortable and survive at the colder altitude.



# Breakup

## Breakup Summary and Analysis

The month of May begins with Dick's birthday on May 4. It is lightly snowing and thirty-two degrees. He spends the day chasing the three bear family to take pictures. He realizes that living in the country makes him younger than the number of his years. With characteristic planning and preparation Dick is already seasoning forty, four to six inch logs since last November to build his cache. He fries a thick ram steak for his birthday to celebrate with blueberries for dessert. He finds a giant rabbit with fourteen feet between hind feet and tracks that are six inches long outside the cabin door. He plans and visualizes his cache to store unused items five feet above the snow level on poles buried in the postholes he digs. Babe arrives with a birthday cake requested by Dick's sister Florence that Mary his wife makes. Babe mentions he is going to bring the mission girls, which keeps Dick busy doing laundry and cleaning house. Hope Creek begins flowing again.

Dick has a memorable experience hiking on an early May morning in the Kigik River area. He spots a caribou cow and her newly-born calf in a snow basin. He also sees a bear running directly toward the cow and baby caribou. Ironically, the bear does not see the calf in his path but chases the cow that runs away. Dick watches for a number of hours hoping the cow can outrun the bear and return to her calf. He sees the motherless calf struggle and finally decides to help her. He picks up the little calf to carry it back to his cabin. Safely inside he lets it loose and then feeds it powdered milk, oatmeal sugar and honey. In the morning he takes it back to the area where it is abandoned to find its mother, but she is no longer there. Dick has misgivings but he takes the calve back to the cabin to nurse. She dies on the way, so he saves her hide to preserve. In the mid-May morning he hears the roar of a snow avalanche coming down Crag Mountain to cover his cranberry patch. While hiking a few days later, he comes upon a herd of caribou with many cows and newborn calves; it is like a maternity ward. He returns to the cabin to light a fire that starts accidentally burning the dry moss on the roof. He puts it out and repairs it the next day. He decides to keep the roof moss damp and inspect it before leaving the cabin.

He decides to spend the next week or so building and filling the cache. He plans to build the parts and assemble it on the ground before its final assembly raised up on the poles. By May 22, he finishes fitting and assembling the cache on the ground for its permanent reassembly on nine foot stilts. He begins the high-rise construction the next day. He finishes the major cache assembly on May 25, with only a fifteen-foot meatpole ladder left to cut down to eleven feet. While building the cache, Dick also checks ice thickness to notify Babe of its safety. They prearrange the signal of leaving a wood block or oil drum on the ice as long as it is thick enough to land on. Ironically, Babe asks Dick why there is an oil drum on the ice. Dick makes the cache poles harder to climb with bands of empty gas can tin before he loads it up with stored winter gear and other equipment. In the first week of June the lake frees up after six and one half months of



ice. Babe keeps Dick busy looking forward to his next but unscheduled trip. For example, polyethylene sheeting arrives late and the mission girls never do arrive. Dick gives Babe the proper signal for safe landing on the ice but Babe asks why. Presumably an experienced bush pilot like Babe recognizes that anticipation and activity makes life in the wilderness more bearable than just leaving one to his own solitude.



# Cloud Country

## Cloud Country Summary and Analysis

The temperature is forty-five degrees above zero at the beginning of July. Dick panics when he cannot find his axe. Fortunately he just misplaced it and wonders why he put it where he finally finds it. He determines to put things in their proper place in the future. He celebrates finding his axe by taking a hike. Dick crosses the lake to see a bull caribou struggling with the insects through his binoculars. He wears a head net that he doesn't like to wear when hiking. He climbs up the slope to escape the bugs by climbing higher than they fly. When he is beyond range of the bugs, he unloads his gear to look for what he can find on the hills.

Dick watches a bear digging in ground squirrel dens. Nearby he spots a mother bear with three cubs. He locates a band of caribou bulls with massive antlers. He counts one with forty-two to forty-five points before losing count. Dick also spots sheep, ewes and lamb scattered about. The mosses and grasses on the hillside are full of tiny flowers. He watches an eagle soar while he eats biscuit sandwiches for lunch. He feels inspired as he leaves the high country but is unhappy at losing his walking stick on the way back.

On the way down he sees a clump of cropped parsnips but no signs of moose, which seems unusual to him. When the brush starts to rustle he expects a bull moose but instead sees a huge brown bear coming towards him not fifty feet away. Dick yells and throws up his arms as it is the only thing he knows to do. He trips, falls on his back and starts kicking at the huge bear head. He thinks he is at his end. Ironically for some unknown and strange reason, the bear turns tail and runs off up the slope while Dick keeps yelling at him to go away. All the rest of the way back down Dick shakes from fear. He resolves to never leave home again without his .06 rifle. He returns across the lake and lies awake at night for a long time thinking about the bear and his close call.

This experience makes Dick realize that no matter how self-reliant he thinks he is, some things are beyond his ability to control or understand. An attacking bear is unmistakably a frightening experience. Dick's adventure before this only brings him situations that his mechanical skills and common sense enables him to survive and thrive. The fear of this encounter with a bear is presaged by his panic from misplacing his axe. The loss of his walking stick adds to his anxiety. When the bear appears Dick comes face to face with potential disaster. If the bear strikes or bites and Dick is alive, he will undoubtedly be injured and maybe unable to get down the mountain. He might lose blood and could pass out. Even if he gets down from the mountain there is nowhere to find help or anyone to offer assistance, which is another of his concerns living alone in the wilderness.

Dick does not profess to believe in heaven or a God like Babe does. Dick may meet his God through the fear of a hungry bear. He defends himself by doing all he knows to do. Clearly that is not enough for a big brown bear that is serious about having a meal.

Fortunately the bear leaves for no reason. Dick is charmed by the natural wilderness surrounding him but ironically does not share Babe's belief. This frightful, near-fatal experience with a big brown bear may encourage Dick to reconsider his spiritual beliefs.



# The Red Runt

## The Red Runt Summary and Analysis

Dick has mixed feelings of aggravation and admiration towards the squirrel that occupies the same forest space with him. He names the squirrel "red runt." Dick admits that he invades the red runt's territory since it is there when he arrives. The red runt reminds him of that by his pesky and mischievous behavior. Dick compares the red runt to a neighbor he would like to get along with but attempts to do so just make the situation worse. The red runt seems to enjoy finding new ways to disrupt Dick's peaceful lifestyle.

For example, the red runt steals a roll of toilet paper from Dick's toilet to paper the trees like a high school prank. Dick generously shares his food with "camp robbers," magpies and other wild animals. He is happy to share blueberries with the red runt, but the squirrel knocks over the container to scatter uneaten blueberries all over the ground. The red runt knocks over Dick's rising biscuits and then watches him clean the mess from a treetop. Paradoxically, when the magpies steal the red runt's food, Dick hopes the squirrel catches one of them.

Dick's efforts to animal-proof his supplies challenge the red runt's cunning. While Dick is away, the red runt finds a spot at the ridge pole of his cache to chew his way in. Dick sees goose feathers floating among the spruce branches on his return. He inspects the cache to find his winter sleeping bag chewed open. The goose feather innards are strewn all over one side of the bedroll. The red runt likes chewing other items including Dick's suspender straps, Styrofoam chest, and the clothesline while his clothes are still drying on it. In an effort to be a good neighbor Dick holds out a scrap of food to him. The red runt bites his finger for thanks. Despite many aggravations, Dick respects the red runt as an admirable and resourceful survivor in the wildlife community. The red runt is a symbol of the animal environment being invaded by man. The squirrel does what animals do by nature when an intruder infringes on their territory. Unlike contact with a marauding bear that can be life threatening, Dick's experience with the red runt is merely irritating. Dick's sensitivity and appreciation of the squirrel's natural environment enables him to overcome the predictable human reaction to just eliminate the pest.

# The Chilikadrotna

## The Chilikadrotna Summary and Analysis

At the end of August Dick decides the temperature and season is perfect for an eight mile canoe trip. He paddles to the Chilikadrotna's start at the lower lake's lower end. Through the binoculars, he sees a caribou bull a long way from the lower end of the upper lake. The connecting stream current takes him to the lower lake where he sees the caribou again. He watches it wade into the lake and start swimming fast like he is racing away. Dick tries to catch up to take pictures. He is careful not to get too close and risk being overturned by the bull. He tries to turn him to the beach but the moose climbs out of the water and into the brush. Dick thinks the moose tries to escape the canoe by entering the water, like he would a wolf. Dick beaches the canoe to fish from the bank. He catches an eighteen inch grayling that he releases as well as several smaller fish.

Dick follows the bank to Frank Bell's deserted cabin where he looks around. He sits down to eat his pancake sandwich lunch of peanut butter and honey. While resting against a stump he listens to the rushing Chilikadrotna. He recalls the Port Alsworth stories of the Indian packers that supply the Bonanza Hills prospectors years ago. He reflects on their skill at making rafts using only axes and no nails. He hears the harsh calls of magpies and goes over to investigate. A hunter made a kill there a few days ago. He finds the caribou carcass partially scavenged by the wolverines that he sees along the slope. He decides to head home with the wind at his back and riding big swells in the canoe. He tows it from the bank through the connecting stream's strong current. He is happy to see his cabin's gleam from the sheltered stretch of lakefront. Dick reflects on the price he pays in physical exertion to tour the Chilikadrotna in the canoe. He is assured the sense of accomplishment and happiness he feels that day is more than money can buy.



# Reflections

## Reflections Summary and Analysis

Dick sits on a spruce chunk listening to the sound of Hope Creek and watching the Cowgill Benches. He reflects on his cabin, woodshed and cache that cost him just over forty dollars in actual cash. He reflects on the needs and comfort he feels after coming down off a mountain compared to the average American. Dick's need for food is simple and hunger is the best seasoning. Oatmeal with raisins and other ingredients, meat, gravy and sourdough biscuits with beans and a little rice and fresh greens are all he needs to fuel his day. Chopping wood in the fresh air to use for heating gives him the appetite to appreciate simple food.

Dick learns patience with "Grandmother Nature" in his surroundings. He is at peace and content taking the time necessary to complete a job right. He can take the time to enjoy the distance and views he sees as he travels the natural landscape of his surroundings. He finds pleasure in the rhythm of paddling and uses simple tools to make or repair anything he has or needs. Often Nature provides the solution if he takes the time to look for it there. For example, tree stumps can be fashioned into hinges and burls or branch growths can be turned into bowls and spoons. The wilderness makes a man learn to accomplish the whole task he does rather than just pieces of it like he would in a factory.

He is realistic enough to consider what he can do if he is injured or becomes ill, but he decides not to worry about something that may not happen. Dick decides if it is time for him to meet his maker, the wilderness is the best place to do it, just like the rest of nature's animals. Babe's regular deliveries of food, mail and supplies confirm Dick's notion that man is dependent on man, but must ultimately rely on himself in a jam. Reflecting on his life in the wilderness Dick faces zero crime rates, gets no sickness from a healthy lifestyle and has no regular bills always coming due. He wonders if the caribou chewing its cud is really just considering that this small part of the universe is enough to think about.

# Until Another Spring

## Until Another Spring Summary and Analysis

Temperature on the last days of September is forty-eight degrees as Dick prepares to leave the wilderness. His dad needs help at home, so Dick is packing up to depart by September 25 or the next best flying day after that date. Babe agrees that Dick will appreciate the wilderness more after he experiences the "sick country again." Dick spends the next day cleaning up litter left by hunters at their campsites and surrounding Glacier Creek. He prepares his tools for storing. On September 23, it is twenty-five degrees and foggy. He watches a bull moose and cow as they enter into rutting season. Dick loads his cache full and stores his cache ladder in Spike's cabin so he is ready to leave on the next day. It is September 25 and a clear calm thirty-two degrees when Babe arrives to get him. The weather is fair and Dick finishes up some last minute odds and ends before flying out. His first day back to civilization is accompanied with a cold he catches returning to "the sick country."

### Epilogue

Before his departure Dick leaves a note on his table for anyone who wanders in. He spends twenty-four months in the area. He lives for sixteen months in the cabin he builds with his hand tools from natural materials available in the Twin Lakes region. His additional activities there include shooting over 3,000 feet of movie film and many rolls of still camera film. He hikes thousand of miles and picks up much litter left by others who do not share the respect he has for the area. He welcomes anyone who needs shelter in the wilderness to share his cabin. There is no charge to use it. Dick only asks that the visitor appreciate it as if the person carved it out with his/her own hands as Dick did and leaves it with a clear conscience.

# Characters

## Sam Keith

Sam Keith is the author of "One Man's Wilderness, An Alaskan Odyssey." The subject of this book, Richard Proenneke, records his daily wilderness experience in journals. The journals and photographs document his Alaskan wilderness adventure and experiences. The author writes this non-fiction work from Dick Proenneke's daily record. Sam communicates with Dick during this first year by mail and writes about students in the school where he serves as vice principal.

Sam is a sensitive writer in his portrayal of Dick's experiences and personality. There are no exhibits of Dick's actual journal in the book; consequently, the reader is introduced to Dick's thoughts and feelings only through Sam's written interpretation. Sam spends two weeks with Dick in his Alaskan wilderness cabin during this project. Sam writes as if he were Dick experiencing the adventure. In effect, Sam is Dick's "alter ego" telling the story of his life in the Alaskan wilderness. Presumably, it is Sam's writing skills that turn Dick into a living, breathing, friendly, philosophical and colorful character. Dick's lifestyle choice necessarily comes from the fiercely self-reliant, handy backwoodsman he is that makes his survival possible in extreme Alaska weather and its dangerous conditions. Though Dick is a tough woodsman, Sam shows him to be sensitive also, in such ways as the story of the runt squirrel and baby caribou.

Sam Keith writes in the Afterword that Dick is now in his eighties. He celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his Alaskan adventure on May 30, 1998. According to Sam, Dick Proenneke continues to return there but no longer stays the winters because chores take more effort. He spends his time taking pictures, clearing campsite blemishes and littered beaches. He is known as the guardian of the Twins. His concern about the area and man's intrusion into it leads him to take regular care to keep it pristine as he found it.

## Richard Proenneke

Richard Proenneke is the main character in Sam Keith's "One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey." Throughout this guide, Richard is referred to as "Dick." Dick writes the daily journals and takes the photographs upon which Sam Keith bases his writing. For this book Sam writes as if Dick speaks in the first person singular. This is the story of Dick's life with his feelings, thoughts and ideas expressed in Sam's words. Dick and Sam met in 1952, while they are both at the Kodiak Naval Base. Dick is originally from Primrose, Iowa. His varied background includes time spent working as a carpenter, diesel mechanic, sheep rancher, heavy equipment operator and commercial fisherman. Six months of being bedridden develops an obsessive drive in Dick to test and challenge his ability to outperform. When Dick is fifty, that drive is stimulated by Spike



and Hope's invitation to stay in their wilderness cabin, which becomes a turning point in his life.

Dick stays with Spike and Hope Carrithers at their Sawmill Lake home on Kodiak while doing odd jobs for them. His visits to their cabin in the Twin Lakes region persuade him to launch his own wilderness adventure. They offer Dick the use of their cabin, tools and canoe until he builds his own. Dick leaves his camper with the Carrithers when he flies from Kodiak to meet Babe. Dick's public commitment to his venture is on the camper for anyone who passes him to see, "DESTINATION - BACK AND BEYOND."

Dick is a can-do workaholic who is also able to reflect on his dream becoming a reality. He considers his ability and need for self-reliance as a fifty-one year old man. Dick is a perfectionist who takes time to make sure every log fits the curve of the one under it. He prefers logs that are the same and uses his hand tools to make them a better fit. A varied work experience gives him the skills necessary to achieve his goal to survive and thrive in the wilderness. With characteristic habits of planning and preparation, Dick builds a cabin by hand from raw forest materials; he fishes, hunts, forages and plants a garden for food. He lives alone amid birds and animals. He believes working is his best companion and living in the country makes him younger than his number of years.

He reflects on his cabin, woodshed and cache that cost just over forty dollars to build. He reflects on the needs and comfort he feels compared to the average American. Dick's need for food is simple and hunger makes it tasty. Regularly chopping wood in the fresh air for heating fuel gives Dick an appetite for simple food. He is realistic about his situation if he is injured or becomes ill and fatalistic by not worrying about what may happen. He believes the wilderness is the best place to meet his maker if it is his time.

## **Babe Alsworth**

Babe Alsworth is the bush pilot that Dick relies on to transport him and his supplies in and out of the Alaskan wilderness. Babe flies a 180 Cessna and a Taylorcraft on his regular routes in and out servicing Dick and other wilderness inhabitants of Alaska. Babe and his wife, Mary, share a big house in Port Alsworth on Lake Clark. Lake Clark is the location for bush pilot layovers. Babe and Mary have an eighth grade son, who Babe lets fly the T-craft to Dick's cabin thirty-minutes over the mountains from Port Alsworth.

Babe is essential to Dick's wilderness experience for a number of reasons. He is the bush pilot Dick relies on for regular contact and delivery of supplies, groceries, and mail. Babe shares his beliefs by talking about heaven and earth. Babe does not charge Dick a normal \$30 charge for mail and grocery runs. Babe flies on a regular schedule but drops in on unexpected occasions, which may provide a break from boredom in Dick's routine. For example, Babe arrives with sacks and boxes like Santa Claus on Christmas day. Babe tells Dick he might bring the mission girls on each next trip perhaps to keep Dick looking forward. Babe surprises Dick by a visit with Mary and a couple from his



church instead. Babe shares Dick's appreciation of the Alaskan wilderness and his dismay at the condition of civilization.

## Mary Alsworth

Mary Alsworth is Babe's wife. She sends some caribou sandwiches for Dick's first supper. Dick likes wearing the wool socks knit by Babe's wife in the fifty-one degrees below zero weather. In May Babe arrives with a birthday cake ordered by Dick's sister Florence that Babe's wife Mary makes.

## Spike and Hope Carrithers

Spike and Hope Carrithers are friends of Richard Proenneke from Sawmill Lake on Kodiak. Spike is a retired naval officer from Kodiak Naval Base where he and Dick first meet. Dick travels to their home in Anchorage, Alaska as a stopping point on the way to his final destination in the wilderness of Alaska. Dick drives his camper to the Carrithers and leaves it there when he flies from Kodiak to meet Babe in Anchorage. The Carrithers employ Dick to do odd jobs around their house while he waits word that Babe is ready to pick him up. Spike and Hope also have a cabin located a short way from Dick's cabin site in Alaska. Dick spends his first few months there while he builds his own cabin at Twin Lakes. They let him use it and their tools and canoe while he builds his own. They plan to visit him in August. Spike and Hope give Dick their stove for his new cabin.

## Boss Hunter

Boss Hunter is the name Dick uses to refer to an apparent big game hunting guide that leads hunting groups to secure their trophy animals. He frequently flies over Dick's campsite when he lands at his own cabin. Boss Hunter exemplifies a land resource user that disregards and disrespects the wilderness values. Boss hunter and his customers stand in stark relief to Dick's principles of healthy natural resource conservation. For example, Boss hunter flies in and out just to check his cabin supplies like stopping at a store. He locks his cabin when not in use, which violates the wilderness code of leaving cabins unlocked for the use of anyone who needs shelter from the elements.

## The hunters

The hunters are a name Dick uses to refer to the hunting groups boss hunter leads into the Alaskan wilderness to find and shoot big game for sport. In late August Dick sees seven rams feeding on a grassy slope above Glacier Creek. He hears an outboard motor and sees two hunters heading towards the sheep. Dick watches the hunters and assumes they might kill the rams but leave meat and carcasses behind for his supply. Dick sees them kill two rams and roll them down the hill to a level spot for butchering. Late afternoon he sees two very tired hunters lugging heavy loads to their boat and



motor away. Early the next morning Dick heads out to find they leave unopened carcasses of two rams with unspoiled meat that he loads in his canoe. Dick cleans up litter left by hunters at their campsites and Glacier Creek after they leave for the season to scavenge what is useful.

## **The Mission Girls**

The Mission Girls are mentioned by Babe in "One Man's Wilderness." They never show up in person. They appear in Babe's promises to Dick that "he will try to bring them next time." However, Babe's regular promise of their visit on his next flight, which may be unexpected as well, keeps Dick busy doing laundry and cleaning house just in case.

## **Dick's Brothers and Sister**

Dick's brother, Jake, is a pilot who flies up and down the California coast. His sister is named Florence. She makes curtains for Dick and pays Mary Alsworth to make him a birthday cake. Jake and Florence regularly send him mail and sundry supplies that he can use on his wilderness adventure. Dick has another brother Raymond that is mentioned in the Afterword about an airplane crash they both survive in 1976.

## **Dick's Father**

Dick's father is the reason given for Dick to temporarily leave his wilderness experience. His father is not as active as he once was and need help around the house. Dick closes up his cabin in September to help out his elderly father.





## **Objects/Places**

### **Sawmill Lake on Kodiak**

Sawmill Lake on Kodiak is the location of Spike and Hope's home where Dick does odd jobs for them while waiting to hear from Babe about the departure time to fly into a wilderness area.

### **Dick's Camper**

Dick's camper is the recreational vehicle that he drives north to Sawmill Lake on Kodiak

### **Spike and Hope's Cabin**

Spike and Hope's cabin is located in the Twin Lakes region of Alaska near the site where Dick builds his cabin. Dick spends vacation time at Spike and Hope's cabin. He later uses it as a temporary location for his own cabin building adventure

### **Spike and Hope's Grumman Canoe**

Spike and Hope's Grumman canoe is the means of water transportation that Dick uses to travel the Twin Lakes and connecting stream.

### **Merrill Field**

Merrill Field is the name of the airfield in Anchorage, Alaska where Dick meets with Babe to fly to Port Alsworth on Lake Clark.

### **180 Cessna and Taylorcraft**

180 Cessna is the name of Babe's smaller bush plane for regular flights with lighter cargo loads. The Taylorcraft is a second bush plane also called "T-craft" that Babe uses to fly heavier loads of supplies, materials and passengers into the Alaskan bush.

### **Port Alsworth, Lake Clark and Environs**

Port Alsworth, Lake Clark and environs is the name of the area in which Babe's home and bush pilot layover is located.



## **Twin Lakes and Environs**

Twin Lakes and environs is the name of the area in which Spike and Dick's cabins are located. A map of the area is included in the first few pages of this book. Hope Creek is a hundred yards away from Dick's cabin site. Chilikadrotna River is the name of the river that serves to drain the Twin Lake area. The area is also referred to as the Twins. The lakes are joined by a waterway called the "connecting stream."

## **Dick's .30-06 and .357**

Dick's .30-06 and .357 are the names he uses to refer to his converted Army Springfield rifle and magnum pistol. He calls the Springfield rifle the "ought-six" and keeps his magnum pistol holstered. He uses the pistol to shoot at the path of the bear that climbs up his cabin roof. After being attacked by another bear he resolves to carry the "ought-six" when hiking.

## **Dick's Double-bitted Axe and other Tools**

Dick's double-bitted axe and other hand tools are the only equipment he uses to build a cabin from raw materials in the Alaskan wilderness. Dick is an organized and systematic individual. The day he misplaces his axe is very troubling to him.

## **Dick's Homesite**

Dick's homesite is the name used to describe his hand-crafted cabin, woodshed and cache with components that include tables, bunks, chairs, benches, pans and utensils, hinges, windows that enable him to enjoy a relatively comfortable wilderness lifestyle in the Alaska bush. Also included in his homesite is a producing garden that Dick plants with rhubarb, potatoes, onion sets, peas, carrots, beets and rutabagas.

## **Boss Hunter's Plane, Motorboat and Padlocked Cabin**

Boss hunter's plane, motorboat and padlocked cabin are items that symbolize the difference in attitude and lifestyle between Dick and the sport hunters. Throughout the time Dick spends there, he is distracted by the sound of boss hunter's plane flying in and out. His customers, the sport hunters, use a motorboat to haul their equipment and big game trophies. At the end of the season, boss hunter locks up his cabin, which is contrary to wilderness principles.

## **The Red Runt**

The "red runt" is the affectionate name Dick gives to a squirrel that regularly visits and plagues him at the cabin. The squirrel is mischievous and causes Dick several

aggravations doing what any wild animal does naturally. The "red runt" symbolizes conflict between the natural order of things in a forest and man invading that natural habitat.

# Themes

## Self-reliance and survival

The overriding theme that pervades "One Man's Wilderness, An Alaskan Odyssey" is the requirement that Dick rely only upon himself every day if he wants to survive and thrive in the Alaskan wilderness. He has no social system or structure in place on which he can depend for his welfare like a city-dweller or even rural American might. There is no cell phone, no convenience store and no way out readily available. There is also no safety in the environment around him. Whatever he wants or needs must be found, grown, hunted or made by him, or he must do without. Babe flies in on one of his planes on a regular but unscheduled and often sporadic basis.

Dick is originally from Primrose, Iowa. His varied working background as carpenter, diesel mechanic, sheep rancher, heavy equipment operator, and commercial fisherman gives him the skills of self-reliance. He is bedridden for six months that forms in him an obsessive drive to test and challenge his ability to survive and thrive. Those factors and Spike and Hope's invitation to visit their wilderness cabin at the age of fifty becomes a turning point in his life. Dick stays at their cabin in the Twin Lakes area and is persuaded by the experience to launch his own wilderness adventure. Spike offers their cabin, tools, and canoe to use until he builds his own. Dick sets to work during his visit to select, cut, haul and peel timber into logs that season over the winter for use on his return in spring.

The Alaskan wilderness is full of natural building materials an enterprising, self-reliant and skilled backwoods person can put to use. For example, trees can be made into logs for walls, beach gravel can be used as foundation, rocks and boulders can form a fireplace, and small trees can be cut into poles for a roof covered with moss. The forest, hills and lakes are rife with wild berries and other edible greens, small and large game animals to hunt for meat and fish to catch. To round out his survival diet, a talented gardener like Dick can plant rhubarb, potatoes, onion sets, peas, carrots, beets and rutabagas. For other niceties of civilization, the Alaskan bush has several pilots like Babe that make deliveries of food, mail and supplies by planes fitted for ice or water landing with skis or pontoons.

Reflecting on his life in the wilderness confirms Dick's notion that man depends on man but must ultimately rely on only himself in a jam. For example if he is injured or gets ill, he can only depend on himself to survive. Dick chooses not to worry about the remote possibility that might happen. He decides if it is time for him to go, he'd rather go in the wilderness with the rest of nature's animals. Ironically, he has two potentially disastrous meetings with a big brown bear at the cabin and another on a trail when both just disappear for no reason. Either situation might have been the reality that Dick's skilled self-reliance alone does not assure the ability to survive in a jam.



## Building a Cabin

The immediate task of Dick's Alaskan wilderness adventure is building a cabin for shelter from severe elements of weather and wilderness creatures. Major components for this goal are available in the form of raw forest products and his energy, talent, ingenuity and labor. All work is done by hand. Dick begins the year before when he selects, harvests, peels and hauls fifty logs to season over winter. In the current year he picks a site on a knoll seventy-five feet from a bay along the shoreline with a beach for a canoe and landing a floatplane. Hope Creek is a hundred yards away from the site, which is high enough to block any overflow. He spreads a twenty-foot square cabin site with beach gravel as foundation. The cabin measures eleven by fifteen feet facing northwest down the lake. Two large, crooked logs are the foundation embedded into the gravel. End logs are notched on the underside so water runs off. He lays one course of logs the first day.

Dick lays cabin logs for the next four days. Logs are sorted and selected for the best fit. He makes sure every log fits the curve of the one under it and uses his tools to chip away if needed. By the end of this period, Dick has thirty-five logs in place and only nine more to go before starting gables, which are the triangular sections at each end of a roof. Dick plans to build a pole roof with covering yet to be decided. For the next six days he builds a roof skeleton that includes eave logs and gables. His skill keeps everything level as the cabin grows. He sets five, twenty-foot logs aside to be eave logs, purlin logs and a ridge log. He pictures the gable as a letter "A" with four logs each one shorter and atop the one below. Eave logs overhang the rear cabin wall by a foot and the cabin front wall by three feet for the porch roof. Purlin logs run parallel to cabin length halfway between eave and ridge log as roof beams. Dick starts to place the roof skeleton on one day and finishes the next. He maneuvers roof logs in place by himself. He trims excess from logs and plans the construction of window and door frames. He uses oakum, which is loosely twisted fiber material to chink between logs by drying moss on the beach.

He finds, cuts, and loads one hundred poles that he transports and peels, knots trims and notches for the purlin logs and chinks. He places them at right angles to the ridge log on five inch centers. He fills openings under eaves to frustrate squirrels. He saws off roof pole ends and prepares it for tar paper, polyethylene sheeting and moss which keep the weather out better than wilderness materials. Dick finishes laying sheeting and covers it with fresh-cut moss. He puts poles atop the moss to hold it down. He finishes chinking and caulking with oakum. Dick saws some logs into planks for a cabin door and spends a day assembling and building furniture and another day doing odd jobs. Dick looks for tree stumps he can make into wooden door hinges and finds a square, pale orange rock for the center rock in a fireplace arch. Dick works on the cabin two months to finish it for moving in. He hangs the front door and makes it a Dutch door with latch and lock to keep a bear out. Dick makes a thermopane window with storm window plastic on the outside to trap air between it and handiwrap on the inside. He sketches out a chimney on the logs and uses scrap cardboard to show how the fireplace and



mantel look. He moves remaining gear to the new cabin, which is complete except for cutting the logs for an opening to build in his fireplace and chimney.

## Synchronizing with the Seasons

No factor is as critical in the wilderness as being ready for the seasons. The Alaskan wilderness has extreme variation from winter to summer. Anyone attempting to live in the wilderness throughout the year must continuously prepare for the seasonal change. Being unprepared for the seasonal fluctuation may lead not only to inconvenience but to death. There is no way out of "town" in the dead of winter. Fifty degrees below zero temperatures make warmth and movement, cabin heating and food supply essential.

On his arrival in late May Dick eats blueberries preserved the previous September, and Mary Alsworth sends along caribou sandwiches for his first supper there. He finds a garden site for June planting. While on a break from building his cabin, Dick plants a garden with rhubarb, potatoes, onion sets, peas, carrots, beets and rutabagas. He bakes biscuits in an oven he made of empty coffee and gas cans and chops wood while baking. A frost ruins the wild blueberry harvest expected in August and September.

In the first ten days of September, he plans to build a fireplace both with supplies Babe brings and the rock pile he moves from the beach to the cabin. Dick decides he needs more meat to stay through the winter. He hikes into the high country across the lake to stalk a ram. He spots one and fires a shot that connects and he rolls the dead ram past him down to the timber. Dick field dresses and butchers the ram to carry off in two loads to the canoe. He hangs the meat in the woodshed to smoke the next day. By the end of September, Hope Creek begins to freeze at thirty-one degrees.

Dick prepares for the seasonal freeze up by building a sled and mending his snowshoes. He fashions a snow shovel and ice creepers out of a fifteen-gallon oil drum Babe leaves. The glass window from Babe steams and frosts up, so Dick makes his own thermopane window with silica gel to absorb moisture between panes. He installs a fireplace damper to keep the cabin smoke free when burning the log chunks he splits all year for heat. He takes his last trip in the canoe to Spike's cabin where he stores the canoe over winter. He is ready for the freeze-up with plenty of meat, wood and a tight, warm cabin. Babe offers him a caribou quarter, but Dick still has enough meat when the weather begins warming.

# Style

## Perspective

Sam Keith, author of "One Man's Wilderness, An Alaskan Odyssey" writes this book from daily journals of Richard Proenneke that record his Alaskan wilderness experience. Keith is a Cornell University English graduate, who lived in Alaska for over three years before beginning his writing and teaching career in New England. He spends two weeks living with Dick Proenneke in his cabin during this project. The book was originally published in 1973 to record Dick's cabin-building and other experiences beginning in 1967. This book is the account of Sam's respected and dedicated friend who he met in 1952. Dick is skilled from his work as carpenter, diesel mechanic, sheep rancher, heavy equipment operator and commercial fisherman. After six months of being bedridden from an illness, Dick is obsessed by testing and challenging himself. He relocates from Iowa to test and prove himself in an unspoiled, Alaskan wilderness adventure.

Keith shares Dick's experiences through writing this book. Sam Keith turns the daily journals of his friend into an interesting and lively study of one man's successful efforts at wilderness survival. The intended audience for this book is any reader interested in the story of a man surviving and thriving in the most extreme weather conditions. Although the Alaskan wilderness is the setting for this story, its lessons and experiences can be appreciated by anyone interested in the story of a man overcoming the natural struggles in nature.

## Tone

This book is written in the subjective first person singular tone that describes Dick's feelings, thoughts, attitudes, desires and goals. Sam Keith writes the book as an alter ego of Dick. The tone is particularly effective because it becomes an intimate expression of Dick's thoughts, ideas, and feelings while he undergoes his experiences in the wilderness. Dick daily copes with a pesky squirrel, attacking bear and cabin building are basic and fundamental to wilderness survival. Sam Keith's writing style brings Dick and his journalized experiences to life in living color.

Some sections of the book are more objective in tone. The author describes the steps to building the cabin with some of its dimensions. Number and quality of forest materials used in construction are described. For example, the cabin foundation dimensions are listed and the cabin logs and roof poles are numbered. Roof layers are listed that include poles, tar paper, polyethylene sheeting, moss and more poles to hold moss down. The process of building fireplace and chimney are described with almost as much detail but is more interesting than a how-to-build-it manual. A knowledgeable reader may be able to build his own cabin from objective data in building construction sections of the book.

## Structure

"One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey" is a 223 page non-fiction quasi-historical book about the life and experiences of Richard Proenneke in the Alaskan wilderness. The book is comprised of ten chapters plus front matter with Preface, Table of Contents, Map and Poem. Back matter includes an Epilogue, Afterword, and About the Author sections. In Chapters Two and Six, there are two separate full color photo sections of fifteen pages each.

The preface, dated in 1973 by the author Sam Keith, is about meeting Dick and his background and experience. Table of Contents lists ten chapters with descriptive titles such as "The Birth of a Cabin" and "Camp Meat." The following facing pages present a Map of the Twin Lakes area with an Alaska state inset. A Poem titled "I'm Scared of it All" is on the next facing pages. Chapter size ranges from two pages to sixty. Pictures in Chapter Two on pages 65-80 show various scenes of the cabin under construction. Pictures in Chapter Six on pages 177-192 show various scenes of the completed cabin, homesite and surrounds. A one-page Epilogue is a message from Dick; Afterword is a two-page follow up from Sam Keith in 1998, and About the Author is a one page biography with a picture of Sam Keith. Chapters' dated subheadings indicate dates taken from Dick's daily journals.

Format of the book including its front and back matter provides a comprehensive study of the beginning, development, and conclusion of Richard Proenneke's life. Dick's life is portrayed from the 1940s and 1950s when he meets Sam and Spike, through the late 60s and early 70s in the wilderness to 1998, when in his eighties Dick entrusts his homesite to the Park Service. A panorama of his life is presented by Keith with as much grandeur as the Alaskan wilderness itself. The book format is particularly useful to a reader who looks at maps and pictures while reading the words. For example, Chapter Two contains a description of Dick's cabin building and pictures of the steps his construction takes along the way. Chapter Six provides panoramic pictures of the cabin in its setting and detailed interior pictures of its finished product. Many pictures illustrate Dick at work sawing, cutting and resting. The Twin Lakes outline map puts the overall project in perspective with the Twins, cabins, mountains and connecting stream.





## Quotes

"This is truly God's country,' I said, my eyes roving above the spruce tips to the high peaks." Chapter 1, pp. 20

"When you have miles and miles of lakefront and picture views to consider, it is difficult to select a building site. The more a man looks, the fussier he gets. I had given much thought to mine. It sat atop a knoll about seventy-five feet back from a bight in the shoreline. There was a good beach for landing a canoe, and a floatplane also could be brought in there easily." Chapter 2, pp. 34

"The cabin is in a good spot. That up-the-lake wind is blocked by the timber and brush between the cabin and the mouth of Hope Creek." Chapter 2, pp. 44

"August 8th. Really had a time here this afternoon. I looked up from my letter-writing to chew on my pen end and peer down the lake through the big window. For a moment I thought I was having hallucinations. Lots of motion and here comes a brown bear up my path." Chapter 2, pp. 93

"This evening I sat on my driftwood pile admiring my cabin. Pale blue wood smoke rose up through the dark boughs of the spruce, and beyond, looming huge and majestic, the jagged peak of Crag Mountain. The cabin was complete now except for the fireplace and, maybe later on, a cache up on poles. It was a good feeling just sitting and reflecting, a proud inner feeling of something I had created with my own hands. I don't think I have ever accomplished anything as satisfying in my entire life." Chapter 2, pp. 98

"The boss hunter left this afternoon. I heard the sound of his hammer as he boarded up and put a big chain and padlock across the door. A padlock went against the code of old trappers and prospectors, who left a cabin ready for any passerby who needed food and shelter. The lock was there last year, before I came, so perhaps experience has taught him that the cabin code has gone down the drain with a lot of other values." Chapter 3, pp. 110

"I had heard bush pilots say that sometimes you can locate a bear in hibernation by the vapor rising from his bunk. I couldn't tell if it was coming from above or below the ridge. I climbed toward it. Sheep tracks and scuff marks exposed grass. Then just above me a few hundred yards I saw three ewes feeding. Their warmth was causing the vapor column that rose perhaps seventy-five feet before it faded out." Chapter 4, pp. 127

"Then the bear saw them and broke into a lumbering run. On they came, the calf doing its best with its legs going in all directions. I knew it wouldn't make it. They would pass me at 100 yards along the top edge of a high bench with an open rock slide face." Chapter 5, pp. 162



"On the trip back, my passenger was quiet. Now and then she licked my hand and rubbed alongside my ear with her nose. She was not too lively when I unloaded her, probably tired from the long trip. I put her down in the warm sun and fed her. She lay quietly, nibbling weakly at some small brush. But she didn't call out as before. She just wasn't acting right. She lay stretched out instead of curled up as before. When I checked her again, she was warm but stiff and dead. How I wished I had left her on the mountainside!" Chapter 5, pp. 165

"A huge brown bear was coming head on, bounding through the willow clumps not fifty feet away! His head looked as broad as a bulldozer blade. I threw up my arms and yelled. That was all I could think to do." Chapter 6, pp. 199

"He has caused me no end of mending, many delays in my plans, and at times severe strain on my self-control. But in spite of all these things, in spite of his temper tantrum personality and his efforts to chase me out of the country, I continue to turn the other cheek. He was here first. I respect him as a resourceful member of the community, always making himself heard, full of mischief, forever curious - but always one to admire. He holds his own in all seasons with the best of them." Chapter 7, pp. 202

"After a supper of navy beans, I sat on my threshold and gazed off toward the volcanic mountains. I had been close to them today. The Chilikadrotna River showed me the beautiful fish and I returned them to her. I thought of the sights I had seen. The price was physical toll. Money does little good back here. It could not buy the fit feeling that surged through my arms and shoulders. It could not buy the feeling of accomplishment. I had been my own tour guide, and my own power had been my transportation. This great big country was my playground, and I could afford the price it demanded." Chapter 8, pp. 207-8

"I was proud of my cabin, my woodshed, and my cache. The actual cash layout had been just a shade over forty dollars, and that figure included the glass window Babe had flown in but which was still in storage. The Mylar thermoplane had been better for my needs." Chapter 9, pp. 209

"Amazing what a man accumulates! I rearranged my cache and now it is filled to bulging. I hope Babe is right, that few are brave enough to climb that high. I will store the big ladder in the timber and put the cache ladder in Spike's cabin." Chapter 10, pp. 217



## Topics for Discussion

Identify, list and describe the steps Dick takes to prepare for his wilderness adventure.

Explain and discuss the significance of the bush pilot to the self-reliance of the Alaskan adventurer.

Identify, list, and describe at least five small animals and their habitat the Dick discovers around his cabin and homesite.

Identify, list, and describe at least five large animals and their habitat that Dick discovers while hiking, exploring or mountain-climbing.

Identify and describe the regular daily duties Dick follows, and why it is appropriate for his life in the wilderness.

Describe and discuss what Dick could do to survive if he is seriously injured or takes ill between the times that Babe is expected.

Describe and discuss what Dick could do if Babe does not show up when expected for an extended period, say one or two months

Identify, list and describe the steps you would take if you were to undertake a wilderness expedition like Dick did.