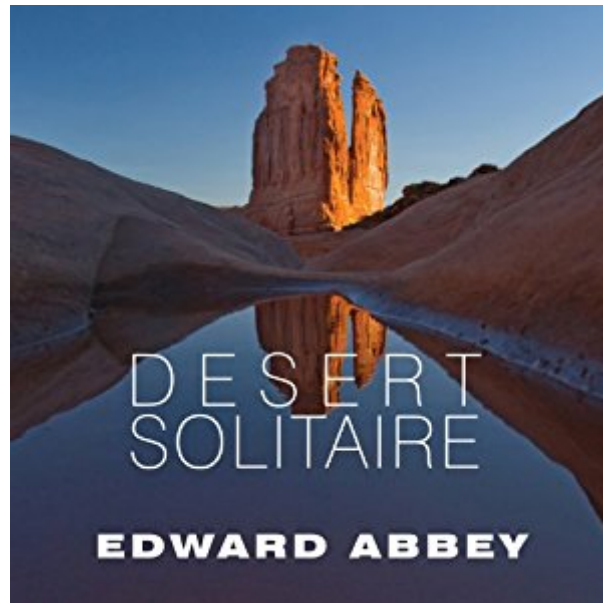


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Desert Solitaire: A Season In The Wilderness



Synopsis

When *Desert Solitaire* was first published in 1968, it became the focus of a nationwide cult. Rude and sensitive. Thought-provoking and mystical. Angry and loving. Both Abbey and this book are all of these and more. Here, the legendary author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, *Abbey's Road* and many other critically acclaimed books vividly captures the essence of his life during three seasons as a park ranger in southeastern Utah. This is a rare view of a quest to experience nature in its purest form -- the silence, the struggle, the overwhelming beauty. But this is also the gripping, anguished cry of a man of character who challenges the growing exploitation of the wilderness by oil and mining interests, as well as by the tourist industry. Abbey's observations and challenges remain as relevant now as the day he wrote them. Today, *Desert Solitaire* asks if any of our incalculable natural treasures can be saved before the bulldozers strike again.

Book Information

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Nature & Ecology > Nature Writing & Essays

Customer Reviews

Edward Abbey's *DESERT SOLITAIRE* belongs on the shortest of several short lists of 20th century classics, whether we are talking of classic literature of the American West, nature writing, or environmentalism. Why is this such a brilliant book? It isn't the originality of ideas. Other writers-Aldo Leopold, Wallace Stegner, Bernard DeVoto, Mary Austin-had already articulated many of Abbey's central ideas either about nature or about Western policy. Bernard DeVoto was an innovator; Abbey is not. Nor is Abbey's anger and fury at exploiters and defilers unique: DeVoto was just as irate and just as incapable of pulling his punches. Nor is it Abbey's overall vision that makes his book so compelling. Again, both DeVoto and Stegner-and especially DeVoto-evidenced a broader and more

systematic understanding of the broader issues confronting the West. None of this is accidental. DeVoto exerted a major influence on Stegner, and Stegner taught Abbey in the Stanford University Creative Writing Program. What makes *DESERT SOLITAIRE* so marvelous is the almost tactile love and passion Abbey displays for the Desert Southwest. Over and over Abbey summons up specific places, particular mountains, individual landscapes. Although he can write about the desert in general, he more frequently writes about particular spots in Arches National Park and the surrounding environs that help explain his attachment to the West. He is the literary equivalent, in his more somber, reflective moments, of Eliot Porter and Ansel Adams. As a result, what one recalls upon remembering *DESERT SOLITAIRE* is not words so much as a collection of images. Structurally, the book only resembles a memoir of his time working as a park ranger in the Arches National Park.

I just ordered *Desert Solitaire* for my dear friend Joel Stone after having a great conversation with him about his trip to Utah to visit his wife's family. It has been over twenty years since I read the book, back when I was living in Utah, teaching at East High School in Salt Lake City and going to the desert every chance I had. Abbey brings the desert to life like no other author I have read. In fact, he is the one writer who portrayed the desert as a real living scene. When I go back and read passages from *Solitaire*, it is like I am back in the desert trudging through the sand between some fins or gazing across the vistas watching the waves of heat undulate. Abbey's accomplishment in this book is his focus on the minute details of the desert and how it feels to be there. His description of how the whole world comes to a stop in the middle of the day when the heat hits hard is right on target. My wife and I and our oldest daughter Margo were camped in the Arches in July and had to seek refuge from the heat by climbing up between two fins and simply sit there on the slightly damp sand and spend the afternoon reading and playing games. There was a cool, damp breeze coming down between the fins less than a foot thick off the ground. This is the kind of experience that Abbey can bring to you with his writing and which gets you to the point where you want to go out and strap on the roof rack and head for the desert just to feel the heat and watch the eagles and vultures circle overhead. His treatment of the local human culture of Moab in his early desert days is outstanding. The characters are bigger than life, although essentially none of them were famous people. You can smell their sweat and hear their curses and feel the bumps as you ride around with them in their old pickups and jeeps.

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