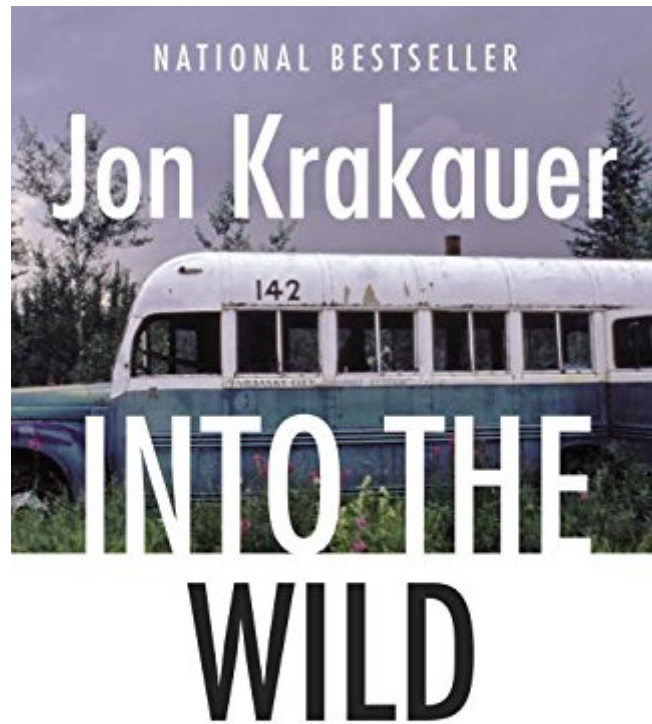


The book was found

# Into The Wild



In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter. . . .

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD



## Customer Reviews

There is little suspense (in the traditional sense of the word) in Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, as anyone who reads the synopsis or picks up the book instantly learns that it is the story of a young man, Chris McCandless, who ventures into the Alaskan Wilderness and who never gets out. Chris' body is found in an abandoned bus used by moose hunters as a makeshift lodge, and Krakauer skillfully attempts to retrace his steps in an effort both to understand what went wrong, and to figure out what made McCandless give away his money, his car, and head off into Denali National Forest in the first place. His book was one of the most haunting, unforgettable reads in recent years for me. I was mesmerized by passages in the author's other best-selling masterpiece *Into Thin Air*, such as the passage involving stranded and doomed guide Rob Hall, near the Everest summit, talking to his pregnant wife via satellite phone to discuss names for their unborn child. However, I was unprepared for the depths of emotion felt in reading *Into the Wild* - it literally kept me up at nights, not just reading but thinking about the book in the dark. Some reviewers criticized the book because they thought McCandless demonstrated a naive and unhealthy lack of respect for the Alaskan wilderness. This is no hike on the Appalachian Trail - Chris was literally dropped off by a trucker into the middle of nowhere, with no provision stores, guides, or means of assistance nearby at his disposal. He had a big bag of rice and a book about native plants, designed to tell him which plants and berries he could eat. "How could he have been so stupid?", they ask. Well, I certainly didn't feel compelled to give away my belongings, pack some rice and a Tolstoy novel and walk into the woods after reading the book, but the author does a remarkable job of exploring McCandless the person, including passages derived from interviews with the many people whose lives he touched in his odyssey as he drove and then hitch-hiked cross country from his well-to-do suburban home. Some of the more touching parts of the book involved tearful reminiscences by some of these old acquaintances when they learned he had perished. Krakauer also throws in for good measure an illuminating passage about a similar death-defying climb that he foolishly attempted at about the same age as McCandless, with little training and preparation, providing insight into what makes a person attempt a dangerous climb or hike. He even tells several fascinating tales, all of them true, of other recreational hikers who were stranded in the wilderness. By the end of the book, I thought I understood McCandless' character, and I thought Krakauer was probably right in putting his finger on exactly what caused his death. I was moved by his plight regardless of his possible foolishness in venturing into Denali, and the final scenes involving Chris' family were emotionally devastating. You need not be an outdoorsman to appreciate it, and in fact unlike *Into Thin Air* the book is completely accessible to those who know nothing about the subject. I think this book is destined to

become a classic.

After having had this book for some time, I finally set out to make it part of my summer 2000 reading schedule. I am drawn to books of the northern wilderness, which was the initial attraction to this one. I'll state up front that I have not read anything else by Krakauer, so I cannot draw any comparisons as other reviewers have done. Krakauer tells the tale effectively. He uses an intelligent vocabulary balanced with a conversational writing style. He easily held my attention as the facts unfolded throughout, employing logic and drawing inferences to fill in many questions that remain. He obviously did his research on the central character, Christopher McCandless, and must have invested countless quantities of money and time to gather accurate information. With so many of the facts of this distressing story remaining obscured probably forever, his assumptions and extrapolations about Chris' actual fate are posed as theories rather than as irreproachable conclusions. I appreciate this aspect of Krakauer's account. Hats off also to the McCandless family, since Krakauer relied upon them not only for information about their son, tragically lost, but also for their courage in allowing many private family issues to be exposed in support of telling the story as thoroughly as possible. Chris' father, mother, and sister are true heroes in my eyes. I have some degree of understanding of Chris and his northerly wanderlust, and also an appreciation for the not-so-uncommon desire to conquer the wilderness. What concerns me, however, is the apparent arrogance of the central character. According to the author's account, Chris seemed to possess an intermittent wariness about his closest acquaintances, along with outright rejection of others who cared for him much more than he cared for them. He treated some important people who crossed his path as disposable. But probably Chris's most crucial deficiency was the flippant and over-confident approach towards the actual work of survival in the wilderness. He even seemed a bit contemptuous toward relevant learning despite his quality education and intelligence. He especially needed important knowledge about survival in the wilds of the north. However, he apparently rebuffed all attempts from others to assist him in his quest. I have spent considerable time in the extreme north of B.C. (an area not entirely dissimilar to Alaska): it is ridiculous, misguided, and presumptuous to embark on such an adventure with the dearth of equipment, supplies, and knowledge as did Chris. I would want to know everything possible about how to survive such a life and death endeavor. Indeed, I feel a strange combination of sadness and anger as I reflect on Chris's unfortunate departure. Was his death ultimately caused by youthful innocence or arrogant ignorance? It is a question I cannot answer and I commend Krakauer for his deft ability to stimulate thought in the reader rather than provide tidy little assumptive answers. My only

complaint: the personal reflective chapter towards the end of the book. I understand why Krakauer included it (personal connections with the need for adventure, context, struggles with nature, etc.), but for me it was irrelevant and it de-railed the flow of the story. Perhaps we can learn from Christopher McCandless' experience, not in any attempt to qualify him as a martyr or to label him a fool. I have thought about how my appreciation for the north has changed, how families need to be close, the requirement to really listen to and understand people, and countless other themes which have been tweaked by Jon Krakauer's writing about Chris' misadventure. I recommend this book highly.

This is a poignant, compelling narrative about Chris McCandless, an intelligent, intense, and idealistic young man, who cut off all ties to his upper middle class family. He then reinvented himself as Alexander Supertramp, a drifter living out of a backpack, eking out a marginal existence as he wandered throughout the United States. A modern day King of the Road, McCandless ended his journey in 1992 in Alaska, when he walked alone into the wilderness north of Denali. He never returned. Krakauer investigates this young man's short life in an attempt to explain why someone who has everything going for him would have chosen this lifestyle, only to end up dead in one of the most remote, rugged areas of the Alaskan wilderness. Whether one views McCandless as a fool or as a modern day Thoreau is a question ripe for discussion. It is clear, however, from Krakauer's writing that his investigation led him to feel a strong, spiritual kinship with McCandless. It is this kindred spirit approach to his understanding of this young man that makes Krakauer's writing so absorbing and moving. Krakauer retraced McCandless' journey, interviewing many of those with whom he came into contact. What metamorphosed is a haunting, riveting account of McCandless' travels and travails, and the impact he had on those with whom he came into contact. Krakauer followed McCandless' last steps into the Alaskan wilderness, so that he could see for himself how McCandless had lived, and how he had died. This book is his epitaph.

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