

Nature Writers Take Us Deeper in

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

*“In my part of the country, there comes each year one long and occasionally fruitful season when gardening takes place strictly on paper and in the imagination.” Michael Pollan, *Second Nature**

January is a quiet month. Christmas things are packed away, the hustle of gatherings has slowed down and the pace of the new year has not yet begun. It's time to read. Michael Pollan describes writing and gardening as “two ways of rendering the world in rows.” Both have a wonderful way of resolving things, of putting things right. Naturalist Ann Zwinger says she writes with the hope that her words will be “witnesses to grace and coherence.” And witnesses they are.

Reading about a region while travelling through is like having a personal guide alongside, pointing out things that might otherwise be overlooked. On a trip through Wisconsin, Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* will draw you deep into the forests, farmlands and marshes of the Great Lakes.

For a trip through the Sandhills, there are few better guides than Merrill Gilfillan. Here's how he describes the Sandhills in *Magpie Rising: Sketches from the Great Plains*: “Of all the geographical pockets on the continent, the Sandhills and their sheer rippling extent hang in the mind like clouds seen from a plane above. Their 20,000 square miles comprise the largest sand dune area in the western hemisphere. They remain the ‘greatest unbroken grassland in North America.’ They are among the great cattle producing regions in the world. As pure wilderness—in the sense of untrammelled and self-willed space—the Sandhills hold their own against any mountain terrain.... once you top the first real hill and drop into this utterly different topography with its more complicated spatials, something closes behind you and the earth feels possible and receptive again. From high points you see them ripple away, the hills, mile upon mile, muscular yet gentle, supple but Spartan. Wind-rumpled, pocked and dimpled. Dream mountains.”

The list below is far from complete and, for brevity's sake, only one book is listed for each author. University of Nebraska Press has some wonderful books on the Great Plains, including Steve Edwards' *Breaking into the Backcountry* and Steve Kahn's *The Hard Way Home*. Anthologies like Stephen Trimble's *Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing* offer excerpts from a variety of writers.

There's nothing better than first-hand experience. Still, with their knowledge of the land, its history and the natural world, the best nature writers can take us farther and deeper into the country than we could ever manage on our own.

Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*

Berry, Wendell. *The Gift of Good Land*

Bryson, Bill. *A Walk in the Woods* (humor)

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Ehrlich, Gretel. *The Solace of Open Spaces*

Eiseley, Loren. *The Immense Journey*

Gilfillan, Merrill. *Magpie Rising: Sketches from the Great Plains*

Hasselstrom, Linda. *No Place Like Home*

Hogan, Linda. *The Sweet Breathing of Plants: Women Writing on the Green World*

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*

Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods*

McPhee, John. *Rising from the Plains*

Muir, John. *The Wilderness World of John Muir*

Pollan, Michael. *Second Nature*

Pyle, Robert Michael. *The Thunder Tree: Lessons from an Urban Wildland*

Tallamy, Doug. *Bringing Nature Home*

Trimble, Stephen. *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places* (with Gary Nabhan)

Williams, Terry Tempest. *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

Zwinger, Ann. *Run, River, Run: A Naturalist's Journey Down One of the Great Rivers of the West*



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