



南方科技大学

Southern University of Science and Technology

# Project Report

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Course: Nature, Wilderness and Civilization

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Reading Book: A Sand County Almanac And Sketches Here And There By Aldo Leopold

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## **Introduction**

The founder of wildlife ecology and a fervent supporter of protecting and maintaining ecosystems was Aldo Leopold. Leopold's ground-breaking work, "A Sand County Almanac And Sketches Here and There," which he wrote about ecosystems and was gifted at both seeing and writing about them, pushes readers to comprehend how humans interact with environment via a lifetime of introspection. Leopold's book, which was first released in 1949, is divided into three primary sections that encourage readers to see how vulnerable nature is as a result of human rule. The first section is broken into twelve parts representing each month in a year on Leopold's farm in Wisconsin. Through poetic prose, the twelve parts allow readers a glimpse into Leopold's observations as the year's seasons unfold. Leopold takes the reader on incredible trips via his recollections in the subsequent chapters, which are about various locations he has visited. The necessity to instill a social awareness toward the ecology and the land is discussed in the last chapters. The overarching message of Leopold's book on how to cultivate a land ethic leaves readers feeling accountable for the wrong acts and choices made across centuries of human progress.

## **Summary and Analysis**

- Part I, January-June

The book has three parts and in brief, the first part is a record of Leopold's experience on the Sand County farm, the author uses simple yet vivid brushstrokes to describe the natural scenery of Sand County for a year, from January to December. The author roughly chooses representatives for each month. The clue of January is the skunk. In this season of ice thaw, skunks come out of hibernation and follow in the footsteps of skunks, you can see the whole world coming back to life. The clue for February is an oak tree. The oak tree, 30 feet in diameter and over 80 years old, was

struck by an accidental thunderstorm and withered. The author skilfully uses the saw cutting into the tree, to tell a flashback of events in the neighbourhood over the past 80 years. In the process of recalling, the author repeatedly refers to “Rest! cries the chief sawyer, and we pause for breath”. This marks the end of a short paragraph, making our reading easier. On the other hand, does it also reflect the long and heavy history of this period? In 1865, the second Industrial Revolution gradually emerged in the United States, and human plunder of nature increased sharply. Even a big agricultural state like Wisconsin is not immune. The number of wild animals has declined dramatically, and so have the natural forest resources. Later, people gradually realized the importance of nature and began to protect it, so 80 years later, in 1945, the author can still enjoy the wild near his farm. The clue in March is geese. Geese return from the south, the author says “wish I were a muskrat”, in order to observe geese closely. He even does a study for the number of birds in each goose team. There is no uniform thread in April, which tells the story of the season around the farm. The spring tide rises, draba blooms and the author introduces the bur oak. This tree is the only tree that can withstand prairie fires, and it lives at the boundary between forest and prairie. As humans intervened, prairie fires died out, and oak carried woodland and farmland across the prairie. The dance of the wood snipe makes the author appreciate and curious, and it is this sense of beauty that makes him limited and sparing in hunting. The representative for May is teeter-snipe. They returned from Argentina with a strong sense of territory and witnessed the establishment of the Joint Office Migratory Bird Protection Law. The representative event of June is fishing. The author recounted a fishing experience.

- Part I, July-November

The clue in July is Prairie. We can get that every month, different kinds of flowers will burst. In this part, the author typically describes Silphium in the country graveyard. Its roots extend in all directions and it can even break rocks. The clue in August is Green Pasture. The author really likes the process of grass growing from the very tinny to cover the whole mountain slope. The clue in September is Choral Copse. During the whole day, all kinds of birds around the house keep on singing. I am so envious that the author can live in this kind of fairyland. The representative event of October is Hunting. From the very long length of writing, we can guess that author really like hunting and he matches well with his dog. Although hunting is a kind of killing, the author can make it very harmonious in the writing. The clue in November is Trees. As the temperature is getting lowing, the writer needs to cut trees for firewood, and he discusses how he chooses the right one he thinks to cut. From the process, he gets the result that he likes all kinds of trees, but he prefers pine trees, from which we can clearly see the author's philosophical reflection.

- Part I, December and Part II, Wisconsin-Illinois and Iowa

- December

Leopold considers how seasonal variations impact how far and where each animal roams as he studies the influences on the range of various animals in "Home Range." He declares at the end of the examination that "ecology" is merely another word for "animal economics." This views animal behaviour as a series of decisions similar to human financial or economic judgments.

Therefore, animal behaviours are a sequence of decisions and transactions.

Animal behaviour changes during the winter because food and shelter are more expensive. Because windy locations are economically unfeasible for them to visit, they lose some of their lands. Leopold observes as a detective

does, not as a poet, although there is often poetry in his writing. He has questions, he finds clues, and he concludes. This continues to be a driving force behind the structure of “Pines above the Snow,” in which Leopold observes various clues and gives explanations for them. In this sketch he personifies the pines, calling the clues he finds their “gossip.” For example, from the clue that deer are eating higher on the pines, he concludes they are hungry. From this, he concludes his neighbour’s cornfields have been harvested so the deer do not have access to this abundant supply of food. To this pine personification, Leopold adds another, suggesting that the growth patterns of certain trees represent their “opinions” about where to grow. If they like certain plants, you are better off growing them near those plants. A lot of the concepts from “Axe-in-Hand” from the previous month are referenced in “Pines above the Snow.” Leopold focused on the deity of the forest steward, yet planting trees is a universal act of creation: “To plant a pine, one need not be neither god nor poet; one need only possess a spade.” Pine tree planting is a creative endeavour, and the planter may subsequently reflect on his labour and consider it successful. As the last article in the Almanac of the Year, “65290” revisits several of the concepts from “Home Range” (such as animal ranges and birds' propensity to avoid wind), but more intimately by concentrating on one chickadee that he and his family grow to care about over time.

- Wisconsin

Except for “The Sand Counties,” the sketches in “Wisconsin” mourn losses. The passenger pigeon is the most extreme example, as the species became extinct in 1914. “Marshland Elegy” mourns the loss of the marsh's former glory and the reduction of the crane population because of human

greed. Although it comes before “On a Monument to the Pigeon” in this section, it is clear that as Leopold observes the cranes, he worries the fate of the passenger pigeon may also become the fate of the cranes. “Flambeau” mourns the loss of wildness and native species along the river as a result of human development. “Odyssey” mourns the loss of natural cycles because of human efforts to grow more wheat and then to solve the problems caused by growing more wheat. It also mourns the loss of soil nutrients, which, because of human engineering and agriculture, wash away to the sea far more quickly than they should. Evolution is another thread that ties these sketches loosely together. In “Marshland Elegy” Leopold compares evolution to an orchestra, and says the cranes that come to the marsh each year are “the ticking of the geologic clock.” In “The Sand Counties” he heaps praise upon those hardy plants and animals that have evolved to grow in the poor soil conditions of the sand counties. “Odyssey” contrasts the natural cycles that facilitated the evolution of complex organisms (journey of X) with the human-influenced systems that have developed into poor replacements for these natural cycles (journey of Y). “On a Monument to the Pigeon” examines what happens when previous evolutionary necessities become evolutionary liabilities. The passenger pigeons' large flocks, which ensured the survival of the species by protecting against predators, also made them unable to adapt to environments with fewer resources. These two threads, evolution and loss, are two ways of thinking about how humans influence and are influenced by nature. Humans are a product of evolution and the very natural processes described in “Odyssey.” Yet of all of evolution's products, humans seem bent on destroying

the very thing that gave them life. At every turn they interrupt and short-circuit natural processes, hastening the loss of wildlife and good soil.

- Illinois and Iowa

The concept that trees have a history recorded in their rings is a theme that also appears in the Part 1 sketch “Good Oak” and is brought up again in “Illinois Bus Ride.” They resemble books or even an entire library of books. The farmer regrets the destruction of a cottonwood tree because he only worries about the mess the tree makes when its fluffy seeds fall to the ground each year. As he observes some of the native Illinois flora maintained against a graveyard’s fencing and along the side of the road, he also references the sketch from Part 1, July, “Prairie Birthday.” Leopold makes fun of “conservation” initiatives throughout the bus trip. He observes both modifications intended to address the issue of erosion in the Green River Soil Conservation District and those that make erosion worse (such as a straightened creek bed and contour strips on a hill). It seems that when humans alter the environment, it creates difficulties that force them to make other changes to address these new issues. This part has a light-hearted tone that is resigned to human stupidity. The tone of “Red Legs Kicking” changes to one of wonder. Leopold describes two instances in which he felt particularly in touch with the “fundamentals” after describing life experience as “a gradual diluting of the essentials by the trivialities of living.” These early recollections involve both bird hunting and bird killing. This serves as a reminder that Leopold strongly supports hunting, both for food and for recreation, and he never doubts this aspect of his conservation philosophy.

- Part II, Arizona and New Mexico-Manitoba

Unlike the first part, whose characteristic is using months as clues, in the second part- Sketches Here and There - the essays are divided by place. The life fragments geographically spread across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, let the author recognize the disharmony of humans and nature. The author mentions nature with its original condition and the effects of human activities on it. At the end of the stories, the author further considers this relationship.

The things in nature migrate and cycle in a wild and aesthetic way, just like Odyssey. Creatures grow, such as cranes that call in the marshes, diverse plants that breed in the dunes, pigeons that soar in the forests, grasslands, and skies, and trout that swim along the streams across the meadows. During the trips in the wilderness, the author climbs trees for a better view and digs Wells for drinking water. The wilderness makes him think about home, freedom, time and many other profound concepts. He mentions in the preface that he cannot live without wild animals. From his description, we can understand his love for nature.

At the same time, there are human influences. People blindly and frantically cleared the land and then withdrew, leaving the damaged swamp for the cranes; People build DAMS on the river, and cut down the trees on the banks, so the songs of the river are cut off; The remains of the lawn are only visible between the fences that people built; Fields are pinned by signs, bound by tape-like roads; Hunters killed those flying partridges, those wolves with green flame in their eyes, and many other animals which were thought to have affected human; Foothill grasslands were set ablaze, and animals had to migrate for food. In people's aggressive research, many animals suffer undeserved harm; Compared to the rhythm of nature and wilderness, the rumbling machine, a bank account, or a message from a city is obviously much more appealing. Although there have been some measures to protect nature, it is sad



that many of them are greatly affected by economic, political and other factors.

Humans tend to view land as a commodity rather than a community, so in many cases, there is a lack of love and respect for land and nature.

I personally like the section Odyssey. While the epic Odyssey tells the story of the hero's adventures at sea, in this article it is the experience of Atom X and Roots Y. In this section, the author uses the rhythmic method, describing the interaction between X, Y, and life or inorganic matters in nature, as well as human creations. for example, here is the migration of atom X between animals, plants, microorganisms, and between aquatic, terrestrial, and flying creatures. This kind of cycle shows the magnificence and wonder of nature, and also lets us feel the author's love for nature.

We discussed that the three parts of the book are loose-looking, but actually closely connected. The Sand Town Almanac refers to the first part, and the next two parts are obviously not almanacs. And to some extent, the third part can even be regarded as an academic article alone. But actually, it will not be as good as now if any part is lost. It is the events mentioned in Parts I and II that give rise to the author's ideas in Part III and enrich these theories. For example, human influence is greatly mentioned in the second part. It brought the transformation of nature, leading the author to summarize the concepts such as land ethics. Through the author's words, we can feel his disapproval of the use of mechanization to obtain a higher "standard of living" at the expense of natural, wild and free things.

- Part III, Conservation and Esthetic-The Land Ethic

In the third part, Leopold concluded his ideas. he talked about conservation esthetic, and he criticized some selfish recreation chasers, those who called themselves preservationists are actually hunters, they were just trying to protect their own benefit via laws and organizations and so on. He also disagreed with some trophy

hunters, they were just seeking their satisfaction, and gradually destroying the wilderness. He then talked about wildlife in American culture, he mentioned the American cultural value buried in the wilderness: value in any experience that reminds us of our distinct national origins and evolution, value in any experience that reminds us of our dependency on the soil-plant-animal-man food chain, value in any experience that exercises those ethical restraints collectively called “sportsmanship”. Leopold also worried about the impact brought by modern techniques, the intervention of mechanization had totally changed the environment of hunting, along with catastrophe to wild lives. At last, he turned to the wilderness and land ethic, he appealed to the multiple usages of wilderness besides recreation. Leopold considered ethics as the progress of evolution, it started from human to human, to human to society, then to the whole of nature. He raised the concept of land—the comprehensive system of all the creatures, which is in need of being in a harmonic situation. However, the comfort brought by modern technology is far beyond the wilderness, for most of us, it’s hard to escape from its shackle. In the end, Leopold said, “the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land”. It’s true that land is “out of time”, especially nowadays little of us have the experience of the land. Since we can’t stop the tide of modernization, we shall arouse the awareness of land ethics, only in this way humans and nature can reach a balance.

### **Answer to the Questions**

- Question 1: Do you think wilderness is beautiful and valuable? Why?
  - 冯柏钧

Wilderness is beautiful and valuable. It provides us with a greatly different world from human society and awakes the origin impulsion deep in our genes. You can find the origin of life in the wilderness, find who you originally are, and find your original desires for life. It gives us a different answer for our existence from complicated social relations and provides us with a brand-new perspective for self-reflection.

- 冯添期

Yes, of course. Wilderness is essential for our human beings. It can provide beautiful views which are hardly seen in the cities. It is also a wonderland for wild animals to survive. Protecting the wildness is meaningful and impending.

- Sinrithy Vong

There are six key factors that contribute to the value and appeal of wilderness. The wilderness is our treasure first and foremost. Wilderness provides biological diversity. For many endangered species of animals, plants, and microbes, wilderness areas serve as their sole substantial habitats. Furthermore, cross-linked biotopes increase the odds of survival for migratory species. Second, wilderness is essential for preserving the climate. The ecosystem benefits from wilderness. Moors, forests, and floodplains in good health permanently absorb carbon dioxide and counteract the extreme weather patterns brought on by climate change. They provide animals space and time to adapt to shifting environmental circumstances. Wilderness is a natural capital in addition to this. A wide variety of natural resources are available in wilderness. For things like drinking water, oxygen, and plant pollination, we depend on nature. The wilderness has inestimable riches. The wilderness also

provides a wealth of knowledge. The wilderness is a crucial site for researchers. With this knowledge, workable solutions for agriculture, forestry, flood control, and other issues might be created. Our love is centered on the wilderness. When nature is more untamed, more people appreciate it. The uncultivated landscape acts as a counterbalance to the developed one. Both the body and the spirit can rest. Wilderness regions are popular vacation destinations all over the world due to their attractiveness to tourists and creatives as well as their capacity to assist rural populations. Finally, we are responsible for the wilderness. Since nature provides us with many benefits, we should all do our share to protect and maintain the wilderness.

- 田存鑫

Yes. The wilderness is beautiful in many layers. From the accumulation of layers of rock and the variety of surface states to the wild, chaotic and endlessly regulated vegetation, and the variety of animals that live in it; from the atom of an inorganic substance in the wilderness, and the cell of an organism, to the magnificence of the wilderness as a whole, there is all beauty. It is the beauty of sight, the beauty of revelation that contains the secret of life and cycle, and the beauty that arouses the call of belonging to nature in the human heart.

- 汤令鹏

I do think wilderness is beautiful and valuable, at my young age, there were not so many constructions near my home, so I could hang out with my friends in the woods and grass, we caught grasshoppers after school, and laid in the meadow enjoying the sunshine, wilderness can really bring that little happiness to us thus it's beautiful. The value of wilderness is buried in its

beauty, maybe we cannot gain much visible profit from it, but the stability and harmony of the environment are the basis and guarantee of our development.

- Question 2: Why is Aldo Leopold full of respect and aesthetic appreciation of wilderness? Can you identify some deeper reasons for it from the book A Sand County Almanac and Aldo Leopold's Biography?

- 冯柏钧

From these accounts, it is not difficult to find his deep affection for the land, and I think this is the reason why he devoted himself to land protection. He lived in the wilderness for a long time, observed and experienced the wilderness by heart, and he fell in love with the wilderness gradually. He cut wood for burning, hunted and fished, but these did not prevent him from being limited, sparing and loving. This lays the foundation for his theory in the following parts. As a literary work, these words give it more flesh and blood.

- 冯添期

Because Aldo Leopold loves to live in the wilderness and is a biologist at the same time, which gives him a new view to appreciate the beauty of nature. And as a scientist, Aldo Leopold can foresee the importance of environmental protection.

- Sinrithy Vong

It's because Leopold believed that wilderness was a healthy ecology in its unaltered nature, one that required human preservation. This contrasts with previous notions that viewed wilderness as a blank canvas that humanity might modify as they wished through agricultural settlement or hunting.

Additionally, Aldo Leopold enjoys living in the forest and is also a scientist, which offers him a fresh perspective on how beautiful nature is. I cannot live

without the wilderness and its creatures, as Aldo Leopold put it. The book does a good job of describing his love of the nature. He lived a long time in the woods, and he loved it.

- 田存鑫

As the author himself says, “I cannot live without the wilderness and its wildlife.” His love for the wilderness is well described in the book. His long life in the wilderness was complemented by his love for it. Because of life, found more wilderness loveliness. In addition, I think his love for wilderness also comes from thinking about the relationship between man and nature, commodity or community. These thoughts led him to straighten out the relationship between some objects, including land and wilderness. Inspired by the love of the author and others like him, I personally, although I may not systematically study wilderness in the future, will probably spend my spare time learning more about it.

- 汤令鹏

The reason why Leopold has so much passion for wilderness is that he thought nature nurtured us, it is the origin of our life and culture, and we can't forget where we come from. Without love and respect for the wilderness, we can't develop in the long run.

## **Distribution**

- 冯柏钧: Part I, January-June
- 冯添期: Part I, July-November
- Sinrithy Vong: Part I, December and Part II, Wisconsin-Illinois and Iowa and Report Combination

- 田存鑫: Part II, Arizona and New Mexico-Manitoba
- 汤令鹏: Part III, Conservation and Esthetic-The Land Ethic