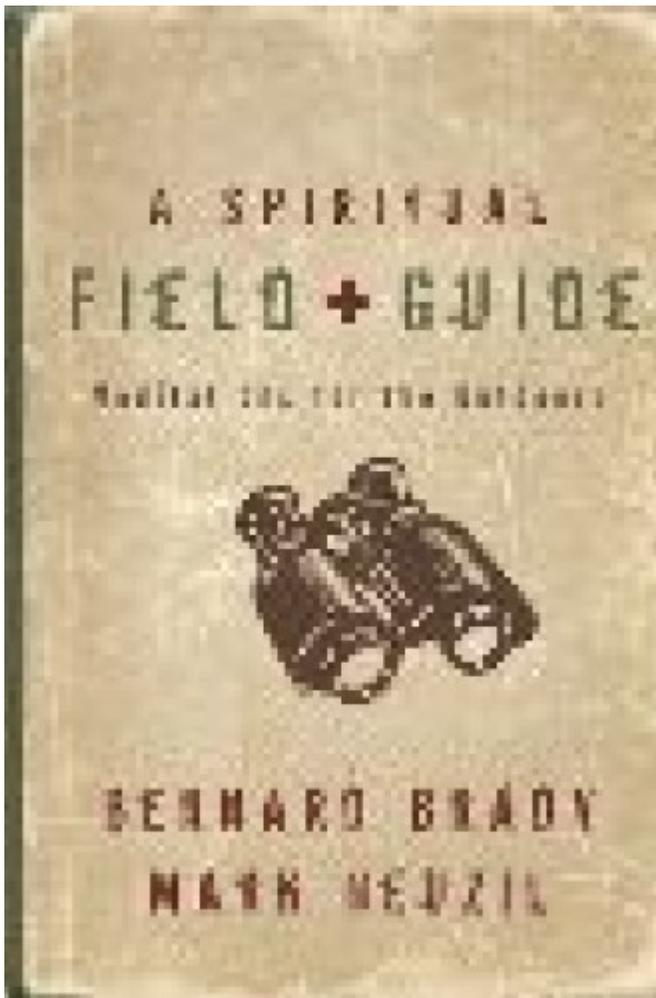


A Spiritual Field Guide: Meditations for the Outdoors

reviewed by [Arthur Paul Boers](#) in the [January 10, 2006](#) issue

In Review



A Spiritual Field Guide: Meditations for the Outdoors

Bernard Brady and Mark Neuzil

Brazos

Five years ago a casual decision unexpectedly changed my life. I had resolved to use days off to hike the Bruce Trail, a 500-mile route following the Niagara Escarpment in southern Ontario. I did so even though I have never been athletic or outdoorsy. This trekking commitment unexpectedly presented me with new realities and questions that have since affected my daily mode of travel, my choice of church to attend, my priorities in shopping and eating, my understanding of how our cities and suburbs are arranged and my decisions about recreation. I thought I was taking on a temporary challenge; instead, the Bruce Trail converted me.

A Spiritual Field Guide is a delightful resource for people of faith who want to be more deeply in touch with God's good Earth and to attend to God's voice in nature. It will inspire both the most adventuresome outdoors people and those who appreciate short walks, gardening or sitting in a park. The point is to pay attention in and to nature. The authors quote the late Sigurd Olson, one of the finest naturalist writers ever, who once wrote of the importance of regularly going to a particular wilderness spot:

I named this place Listening Point because only when one comes to listen, only when one is aware and still, can things be seen and heard. Everyone has a listening-point somewhere. It does not have to be in the north or close to the wilderness, but some place of quiet where the universe can be contemplated with awe.

The authors blend biblical insights, theological reflection and personal experience into winsome and challenging reflections. Included are excerpts from the works of such noteworthies as Annie Dillard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Mother Teresa, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Henry David Thoreau, Pope John Paul II and Francis of Assisi. These selections are fodder for prayer and contemplation. The book can be read straight through or slowly pondered, especially when the reader has opportunity to encounter nature directly. Thus the authors present suggestions for how to use the book and pray with it during backyard breaks, day or weekend trips and weeklong journeys.

Reading this book, I was no longer surprised that the Bruce Trail had deeply converted me, even though that was never my intention or expectation when I took on the challenge. Bernard Brady and Mark Neuzil show that the outdoors can awaken in us religious sensibilities of dependence, gratitude, responsibility, hope

and purpose. Given the rapidly declining state of the environment, one can only hope that many people will undergo such a conversion.