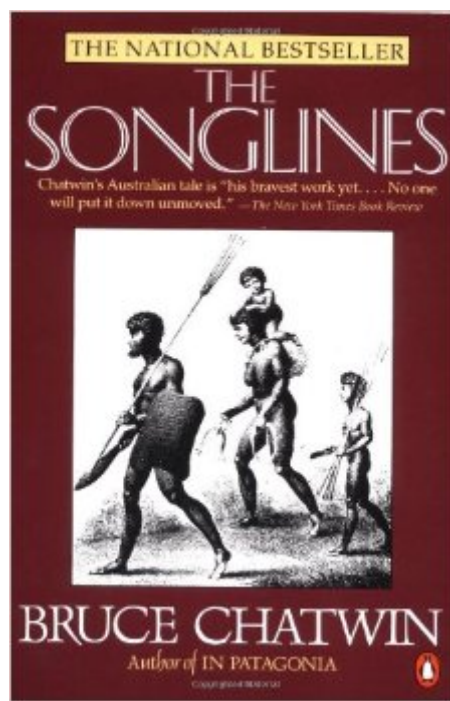


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# The Songlines



## Synopsis

Bruce Chatwin-author of *In Patagonia*-ventures into the desolate land of Outback Australia to learn the meaning of the Aborigines' ancient "Dreaming-tracks." Along these timeless paths, amongst the fortune hunters and redneck Australians, racist policemen and mysterious Aboriginal holy men, he discovers a wondrous vision of man's place in the world.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books (June 1, 1988)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140094296

ISBN-13: 978-0140094299

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (91 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

To really understand this book, of course, you have to understand that Chatwin knew he was dying of AIDS when he wrote it. Hence, (I think) the notes (which have raised so many pros and cons and head-scratchings among reviewers) tacked on at the end. He, sadly, was sinking fast and needed something to round out the book. The book, then, is not so much about the aborigines (which, as one reviewer has noted, it would be better to check out an Anthropology text on) as it is about the ailing Chatwin.-But who was Chatwin? I think he was primarily a) an erudite hyper-aesthete (He started out working for museums); and b) an unflagging disciple of Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher whose most famous dictum was "Everything is fire." In other words, everything is in constant change. Everything is on the move. Everything is being consumed and reborn. Whether it looks that way or not. As the poet Delmore Schwartz put it, "Time is the school in which we learn, that Time is the fire in which we burn."-This is why, I think the aborigines grabbed hold of his imagination at the end of his life, "Aborigines, in general, had the idea that all "goods" were potentially malign and would work against their possessors unless they were forever in motion." And, like Heraclitus, he inveighs against the members of his own race, "The whites were forever

changing the world to fit their doubtful vision of the future."-But what was Chatwin's vision of the future? What did he expect to find out there in his dying days?-I think he gives the answer on page 293, the penultimate page of the book, where he writes, "...the mystics believe the ideal man shall walk himself to a 'right death.' He who has arrived 'goes back.

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