



River: One Man's Journey Down the Colorado, Source to Sea

Colin Fletcher

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At age sixty-seven, Colin Fletcher, the guru of backpacking in America, undertook a rigorous six-month raft expedition down the full length of the Colorado River--alone. He needed "something to pare the fat off my soul...to make me grateful, again, for being alive." The 1,700 miles between the Colorado's source in Wyoming and its conclusion at Mexico's Gulf of California contain some of the most spectacular vistas on earth, and Fletcher is the ideal guide for the terrain. As his privileged companions, we travel to places like Disaster Falls and Desolation Canyon, observe beaver and elk, experience sandstorms and whitewater rapids, and share Fletcher's thoughts on the human race, the environment, and the joys of solitude.

River: One Man's Journey Down the Colorado, Source to Sea Details

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Author : Colin Fletcher

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CynthiaA says

I read this in preparation for our own rafting trip in the Grand Canyon. It was good and I enjoyed it, but I expected more. It didn't make me feel anything. I wanted to feel his passion for places, and it just wasn't resonating for me.

Hoyt Acre says

Colin Fletcher described walking as "...a quite delectable madness, very good for sanity". I am in complete agreement. Years ago I was introduced to the "long grassy ridge", ten minutes drive from where Fletcher then lived, which shows up in various of Fletcher's writings, unidentified by him, but which I have always liked to believe to have been Mt. Tamalpais State Park in Marin County, north of San Francisco. Or Muir Woods. Or maybe it was Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Or maybe not.

It very well could have been one of the many state or regional parks of the East Bay. I suppose I will never know.

I never met Fletcher, although we lived on the same coast, if not within exactly the same generation, and so came to know him through his books. Having read most of them, I always wished I might have known him, if only a brief introduction at a signing. Fletcher was, nonetheless, the companion who came along on my limited and usually solitary offroad adventures along forest trails and ocean beaches. His words, his philosophy, his admiration of the earth he traversed came with me. From his writings, I knew him to be spare, rugged, entrepreneurial and adventurous, but at the same time possessing a dry Britannic wit and gentle soul. His dedication in "The Complete Walker" is to his mother, "...who understood that walking for fun is no crazier than most things in life, and who passed the information along."

Fletcher nominally wrote of backpacking, seldom using the verb form but instead referring to the more generic "walking", undertaken in an extended form, distances long enough to take one far enough to require equipment for shelter, sleeping and cooking. As a young man, I newly graduated from high school in the late 60's, I was captivated with the concept of going beyond the designated campsite by the road where I camped with my family, to wilder places, carrying everything I would need for the kind of long walks Fletcher described and wrote about. Simply walking, but with a "house on your back", as Fletcher called it.

I have all Fletcher's books. They are and have been, collectively, my favorite form of armchair adventure.

Kevin says

Overall, I really enjoyed this book. Obviously the concept of floating the entire river is something that really intrigues me. Compound that intrigue with the fact that Fletcher floated the river alone and in a manner that

showed the river respect and awe, and I was hooked. The travel narrative was very detailed, providing me with a great mental image of the sights, sounds, and feelings of the trip. But then again, I have seen some stretches of the river first-hand, so it wasn't that difficult.

Sadly, the book, like the river, ends more as a whimper than with a profound 'AHA'. I think that the river had much to do with that. Sadly, after Grand Canyon, the river is molested, degraded, and frankly pillaged. It's hard to be profound under those scenarios.

I also wish Fletcher wasn't so trout-centric, as the trout portions of the river are an abomination to me, but he barely touched on how unnatural those stretches are. He even seemed to enjoy them.

However, my criticisms are small. I think that Fletcher did an awesome job making this a memoir, not an exploit. He treated the river with more respect (both in the literature and on the trip) than most would, and he told the story of one of the greatest natural resources our country has (I speak of it as a natural wonder, not as a source of water for millions - that has been the river's downfall).

I think a lot of people in favor of more desert populations, desert farms, and mainstream dams should read this book and contrast the natural wonder one can find on the unaltered stretches and compare it to the 'death rings' of the reservoirs that supply 'recreation' and water supply.

One last thought - I like the Uinta Basin a lot more than Fletcher.

Ian Coats says

C. Fletcher is quickly becoming my favorite author. His descriptions of his hikes are inspiring.

Robin says

Years ago I used Colin Fletcher's *The Complete Walker* as my guide for learning solo backpacking techniques. At the time, I was shocked to see another reviewer describe him as "quirky as hell." Looking at this statement nearly 40 years later, I see that at the time I shared many of Fletcher's quirks, such as extreme wilderness advocacy, distrust of much of civilization and most humans, tendency to poke cynical fun at bureaucracy, insistence upon daily caffeine even while in the wilderness, and overall curmudgeonliness.

Fletcher's opinions and writing style hadn't changed much by age 65, when he wrote *One Man's Journey Down the Colorado*. As he journeys down the river though, he occasionally adds an elder's perspective, reflecting on his earlier life and life-shaping choices. This adds depth to what we can learn about the man behind the writing as compared with Fletcher's earlier books.

One Man's Journey takes the reader on a 1741 mile, 189-day trip from one of the Colorado River's sources in Wyoming to its end in Baja California. The Colorado, famously dammed, requires some cooperation with government officials to raft from source to sea. Fletcher, distrustful of anything that impedes nature, is surprised to find that he gets on well with the various men in the bureaucracy that he must navigate. Though he goes on endlessly about the "dirty bathtub ring" that scars the reservoirs, in this book he also appreciates those who would argue that damming improves a river and its usefulness.

Characteristically, Fletcher's chooses equipment that is superbly suited for his expedition. He describes his gear in great detail. He describes the journey itself in similar detail, mile-by-mile and rapid by rapid as it were. The slow pace of the book mirrors the slow progress along the river that a raft necessitates. Each camp and each side trip are noted. One side trip in particular is especially heartwarming, where he unexpectedly meets two men after a rough and isolated climb. Instead of resenting the intrusion, he welcomes the company. Even a curmudgeon can mellow as times goes by.

River runners and fans of Colin Fletcher will like *One Man's Journey* a lot. Backpackers and wilderness lovers, as well as environmentalists and wilderness advocates who are concerned about damming will likely enjoy it. Nature lovers who enjoy rivers, whether or not they ever plan such an extensive expedition, will like reading this travelogue. Senior citizens who have scaled back their wilderness travel might find inspiration in Fletcher's musings about overcoming challenges unique to older outdoorspeople.

Kev says

From the head water natural springs of the Green River in Montana -- the longer of the 2 tributaries which rightly ought to be called the Colorado -- to the marshy swamps of a dead delta in the Sea of Cortez; this book retraces the mighty Colorado River through the remaining wilds, over the severally dam-impounded waters from source to sea solo. It's great.

Earle says

I found this book that day that Colin died and I saw it as a sign. It took me a while to get started but I enjoyed the reading, for the most part.

Anthony Whitt says

A great tale of exploration and adventure.

David Kessler says

Not many humans could pull this trip off. He floated by every kind of boat imaginable to float from the headwaters of the Green R in CO and all the way to the Sea of Cortez. The Colorado R runs into the Sea of Cortez

Kayaker says

What an adventure and what a boring book.

Joe White says

A long story, now dated. The fabric weave of the story consists of personal reminiscence, geological observations, some rafting details, and conservation observations regarding attitudes and effects. This is not strictly a travelogue. There are many details, each isolated within an encapsulated incident. The rafting insights are only useful if you are very familiar with the river, or if you are following the story and plotting progress on topo maps. Since the 1987 trip is now 25 years in the past, many details will have changed for anyone attempting to recreate the trip, and as per the wisdom passed on, no trip can ever be repeated.

Eugene Miya says

I purchased this book decades after reading *Thousand-Mile Summer* and *The Complete Walker: The Joys and Techniques of Hiking and Backpacking* (two excellent books) and Fletcher's *The Man Who Walked Thru Time* (assigned class reading), and other writings by Colin Fletcher. But this time I'd met mutual friends and once in high school attempt to write fan mail w/o hearing back. My friend Steve notes that Colin did not respond nor care for fan mail.

This is Colin's Conrad? Heart of Darkness? Heart of Redness? Descent of a river as a metaphor of life? I would not attempt to read too much into this book. Fletcher does himself admit that these are the writings of an older man in the twilight of his life. He doesn't quite walk as fast nor take the risks as he did in his "youth."

River (the book) is river novice Colin Fletcher's attempt to return to the scene of two prior trips in his two major non-fiction accounts. He deals with the bureaucracy (being a writer has its perks) of dealing with managers of the Colorado Rivers (dams and parks and more). Colin briefly covers his minimal river running experience and his brief period of training.

One nice bit of writing dealt with his brief encounters during his professional life with Edward Abbey. He thought Ed angry and a shame to lose him without getting to know him better.

Fletcher relives (however faster and in the opposite direction) the Grand Canyon. More subtle is his reaching the border area where Mexico, AZ, and CA meet. This is an area I've also now spent some time. What's nice about Colin's writings about this area he does go into Mexico and it's not quite the wasteland most Americans think of it (yes, you can witness illegals attempt border crossings by the hour). This is all part of Colin's non-secret world.
