

Downstream toward Home: A Book of Rivers

Oliver A. Houck

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We live in the age of stand-up paddleboards and kayaks the color of molten lava. Rare now to see the graceful reach and pull of two paddlers guiding their canoe along a lazy stretch of an American river, drifting for a moment then simultaneously reaching again, a river dance as old as the hills.

Judging by Oliver Houck's *Downstream Toward Home*, rivers have much to teach in the way of introspection, thoughtfulness, ecology, and writing skills. From Alaska to Florida, Arizona to Maine, Houck has been schooled by dozens of rivers in a paddling career spanning six decades—the thirty-two essays herein each recount his experiences on a different river.

In an early essay, in which he writes lamentably about not including his mother on a particular river trip, he tells this delightful anecdote about an old 35mm film clip of his mother and her father paddling together in Maine and coming across something in the water: "As the canoe approaches the object becomes a very large head with wide antlers, a moose, rolling one huge eye wildly back at this strange thing that was chasing it, coming right along side of it, and then this body with a hat on jumps and lands on its back. At her father's urging, which means direction, my mother had mounted the moose and was holding onto its neck for dear life. The film shows them together like an old rodeo act, the moose swims madly for shore, my mother abandons ship, it stands a brief moment, shaking, and then bounds off into the brush."

Appreciative of all his time on the water, Houck has worked on river conservation campaigns for the National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, Defenders of Wildlife, and National Academy of Sciences.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Spring 2015)

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