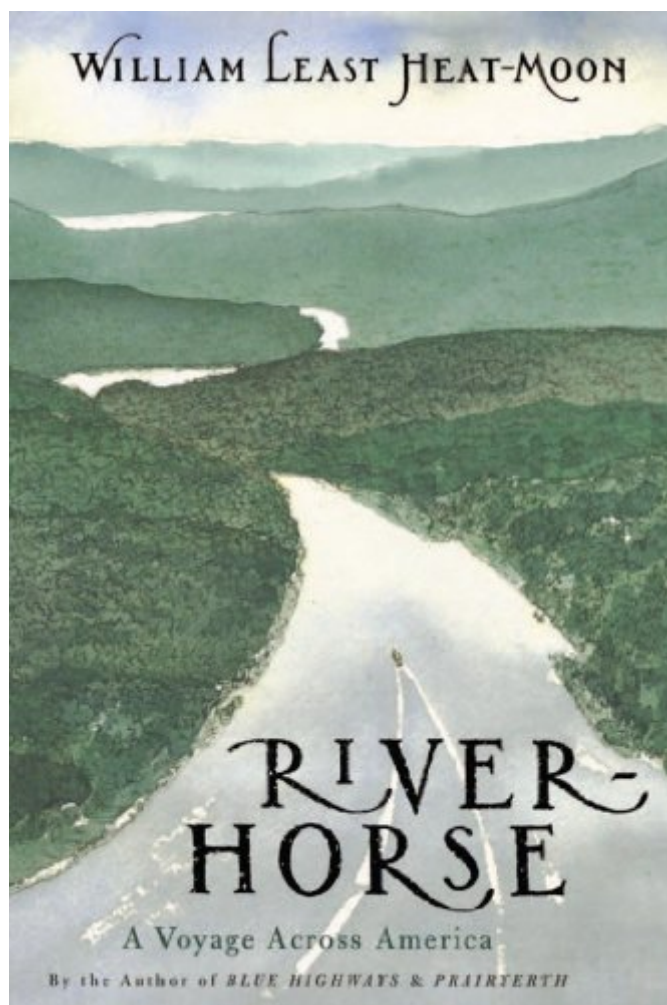


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River-Horse: A Voyage Across America



Synopsis

In RIVER-HORSE, the preeminent chronicler of American back roads -- who has given us the classics BLUE HIGHWAYS and PRAIRYERTH -- recounts his singular voyage on American waters from sea to sea. Along the route, he offers a lyrical and ceaselessly fascinating shipboard perspective on the country's rivers, lakes, canals, and towns. Brimming with history, drama, humor, and wisdom, RIVER-HORSE belongs in the pantheon of American travel literature. In his most ambitious journey ever, Heat-Moon sets off aboard a small boat he named Nikawa ("river horse" in Osage) from the Atlantic at New York Harbor in hopes of entering the Pacific near Astoria, Oregon. He and his companion, Pilotis, struggle to cover some five thousand watery miles -- more than any other cross-country river traveler has ever managed -- often following in the wakes of our most famous explorers, from Henry Hudson to Lewis and Clark. En route, the voyagers confront massive floods, submerged rocks, dangerous weather, and their own doubts about whether they can complete the trip. But the hard days yield up incomparable pleasures: strangers generous with help and eccentric tales, landscapes unchanged since Sacagawea saw them, riverscapes flowing with a lively past, and the growing belief that efforts to protect our lands and waters are beginning to pay off. And, throughout its course, the expedition enjoys coincidences so breathtaking as to suggest the intervention of a divine and witty Providence. Teeming with humanity and high adventure, Heat-Moon's account is an unsentimental and original arteriogram of our nation at the edge of the millennium. Masterly in its own right, RIVER-HORSE, when taken with BLUE HIGHWAYS and PRAIRYERTH, forms the capstone of a peerless and timeless trilogy.

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Customer Reviews

A must read for anyone who enjoys off beat travel narratives, particularly for anyone who enjoys boats and boating, although this is much more than just a boating story. It is a well crafted account of the challenge, both technical and personal, of taking a small craft across the country using river routes that are barely passable at times, routes that were used hundreds of years ago by both native Americans and the early settlers of the United States. There is a good smattering of history thrown in along the way, particularly with regard to the Lewis and Clark expedition which closely followed many of the same routes but without the advantages of modern equipment and the comforts of civilization..

As a Kansan, rivers have played relatively little role in my life, although I have enjoyed the occasional canoe trip down the Cottonwood and the K-State/KU canoe race on the Kaw. However, William Least Heat-Moon's earlier books fascinated me with their combination of travelogue, social history and natural history, and I expected the same from "River Horse." I wasn't disappointed. In fact, I enjoyed this book much more than "PrairieEarth" even though I grew up only a few miles north of Chase County, KS, the subject of the earlier book. Although he is constantly impelled to move onward and westward for fear (unfounded mostly) of having too little water in the West, Heat-Moon still takes plenty of time to learn and relate the histories of many of the small river towns he finds along the way. This is the sort of personal, anecdotal history at which he excels and which I enjoy. Unlike "Blue Highways," this book did not necessarily make me want to attempt the trip myself--my lack of familiarity with boats and rivers would be a major hurdle! However, it did send me looking for more information on many of the sites and I have my own list of places I now hope to visit as a result of reading this book. In a way, I feel some of the same need for hurry as Heat-Moon did, though, thanks to the insane amount of control large farming and corporate America have over what are supposed to be public lands and waterways. Who knows but that by the time I can visit some of these areas, they may be flooded by a new dam or eroded to nothingness by thousands of cattle

hooves? Some may not appreciate the political bent of this book, but I find it understandable that if a person loves an area enough to row, push and carry a canoe through it, then he should speak up for it in every way possible. Get in touch with the America too few of us appreciate by reading "River Horse"!

This son of the Kansas prairie knows Chase County as neighbor, shares William Least Heat Moon's love of Blue Highways and the people who live apart from freeways; close to the land. Like another Kansan, I'm a stranger to rivers, and thoroughly enjoy Moon's humor, his skill with words, his dream of what might be... beyond wherever we see now. I find River Horse fascinating, entertaining, and believable, a worthy companion to Blue Highways and PrairieEarth, and having shared the trials, fears, joys, and victories of the Northwest Passage, I store his travels with my own travels with my wife, on secondary roads, around, over, and through the middle and western states on our motorcycle (about 52,000 miles). I don't know who said it, but it's true that "Not all who wander are lost." I highly recommend River Horse, and suggest that all readers remember to laugh, whether it's the "right" places or not.

I am enjoying the book, but have only read a few chapters so far. Heat-Moon is a very interesting writer.

I, like the author, am obsessed with rivers; I've been an avid canoeist and kayaker for many years. This book's premise -- travel across America inland but on water, with a minimum of portages -- fascinated me. And the author did not disappoint; there's some very good descriptive writing here. Essentially, this is a travelogue, and the point of a travelogue, in my opinion, is to put you in the scene. Heat-Moon does that very well; I've been to a number of places along the Missouri, specifically, that he describes, and he absolutely nails it. Pretensions: Some have complained about the author combining his seven companions along the journey into one figure called Pilotis. I would argue this wasn't pretentious but rather a NECESSARY narrative choice. The whole point of the book is the watery trek, not the individual personalities of the first mate. Doing it the way the author did -- and also not naming minor real-life characters such as the Reporter and the Photographer -- keeps the story moving, and this book is all about movement. I will, though, agree with those who say that a bit of self-righteousness had crept into the author's writing by the time this book was composed, which is why I give it four stars instead of five. Still, it's an incredible read for anyone with a sense of adventure.

Heat-Moon chooses a most challenging transit of this country and recalls the experience in words of absolute stark reality. Often humorous and always from the perspective of ancient versus advanced civilization and the long lasting yet impermanent impression we are etching upon Mother Earth. A true celebration of water and it's countless capabilities. Highly recommended read....thank you Heat-Moon, I will continue reading your other works.

Great geography lessons but I was just bogged down by Least Heat Moon's penchant for details. In my opinion the manuscript should have had a tougher editor. I would have liked a little more detail about the crew, e.g., who were the Professor and the Photographer and how did they find their ways to the boat?

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