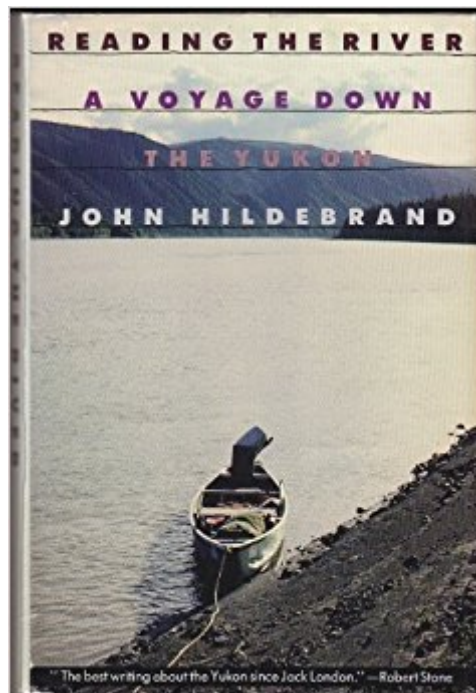




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# Reading The River: A Voyage Down The Yukon



## Synopsis

John Hildebrand sets out in a canoe . . . to explore the great riverway of northwestern Canada and Alaska. . . . The geography is closely rendered and the characters especially sharply drawn. The country is filled with mad dropouts at river fish camps, good-hearted girls in the towns, sullen natives in tumbledown villages, cranky old-timers, terrible drunks and worse moralizers who live off the wild landscape and its abundant resources. . . . This is a fine work, and Hildebrand is a fine writer.

Charles E. Little, *Wilderness* --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a sense, this recounts a journey of expiation: Hildebrand and his wife had gone to Alaska in the early 1970s, hoping to homestead and be self-sufficient. The death of a child and breakup of the marriage forced a change of plans. Ten years later, Hildebrand returned alone, to set to rest the ghost of his dream by canoeing the length of the Yukon. He particularly wanted to meet people who had gone to the wilderness and remained. In his three-month, 2000 mile journey, Hildebrand met trappers, aging hippies, biologists, dog mushers, fishermen, Athabaskan Indians, Eskimos, missionaries and politicians. He camped in abandoned cabins during rainy weather. As he approached the Delta, he was beset by wind, rain and rough water; 90 miles from the sea, he left the river, sold the canoe and flew home to Wisconsin. His book is more than an adventure story; it is a fine portrait of individual people and communities in a rugged environment. Illustrated. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In the early Seventies, dreaming of the simple life, the author wandered to Alaska, built a cabin, and taught English to Indians and Eskimos at the the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. But the dream collapsed, and he left the area. Ten years later he returned, seeking the "North that had eluded" him. He canoed the length of the Yukon River, drifted into other peoples' lives, and sought how life there used to behow for some it continues to be. The result is a vivid, sometimes lyrical picture of the Alaska of homesteaders, fishers, woodcutters, and small town people, who live off the land in a way the author could not. It also is a finely written account of coming to terms with one's self, of the realities of one's dreams. Recommended for anyone who would follow Thoreau into the woods, even now. Roland Person, Southern Illinois Univ. Lib., Carbondale Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book is the story of a motorized canoe trip down most of the Yukon River in the late 1980's. The author had spent some years in Alaska years before and built a cabin in the bush with his then wife. 10 years later, he returned to the North, recently divorced and went from Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory Canada, west across Alaska to the mouth of the Yukon River in the Bering Sea. This book is not a mile-by-mile description of landscape and campsites. Rather it mostly concerns the current inhabitants of the area and the history of the area. It is well-written and does not contain any "world's greatest" claims. (You know, the claims in many travel books that a certain place is the prettiest, biggest, greenest, or ugliest place in the world.) Such honesty is refreshing. Having spent one summer on the upper Yukon in Canada and parts of other years, I can tell you this book catches the ambience of the area perfectly - from the Indians (now called "first nations" in Canada in PC talk) to the miners to the malcontents trying to get away from it all. I found it wonderfully evocative and representative of the people who live up there. If you've ever read Robert Service's "Spell of the Yukon" you will understand when I say this work is a book-length treatment of the same subject - the strange lure of the North. I'll close with a couple of excerpts from Service that will give you a sense of the place and the book. "No, There's the land, Have you seen it? It's the cussedest land that I know, From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it To the deep, deathlike valleys below. Some say God was tired when he made it - Some say it's a fine land to shun. Maybe, but there's some as would trade it For no land on earth, and I'm one. It grips you like some kinds of sinning, It twists you from foe to a friend, It seems it's been since the beginning, It seems it will be to the end. There's a land where the mountains are nameless, And the rivers all run God knows where. There are lives that are erring and aimless, And deaths that just hang by a hair. There are hardships that nobody reckons, There are valleys unpeopled and still. There's a land, oh it beckons and

beckons. And I want to go back and I will" Read this if you've ever felt the urge to go North and you'll get a feel for it.

A little slow paced, like the river itself. Interesting, none the less. If you paddle the river, read the book.

A well written account of a remarkable trip. This comes under the heading of journeys I'd love to take but may not have the guts to actually do. Fascinating observations of the huge forgotten swaths of country up at the top of the American continent and the few characters who inhabit it. The river provides an ideal vehicle for the journey and the story....taking us from one remote fishing camp to the next as Hildebrand rides and paddles downhill toward the Bering Sea.

Great book.

I loved this book and enjoyed every page. I've been reading a lot of Alaskan/Northern frontier books and this is definitely one to put at the top of the list. The different people John met on his trip were fascinating. It's told in such a flowing and easy style, that you don't want to put it down. By the end, I envied not being able to take a trip like this myself.

A great story of life along the Yukon.

A well written book; good primer for anyone planning a Yukon River trip, or anyone who just likes good adventure reading. Ride down the river with author in his canoe-with-motor and see Alaska through the eyes of a now-grown hippie returning to Alaska to find the self he left behind years before.

A complete surprise. Much more than a travelogue or river guide. Excellent prose from a gifted writer. One of the best books I've read in years.

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