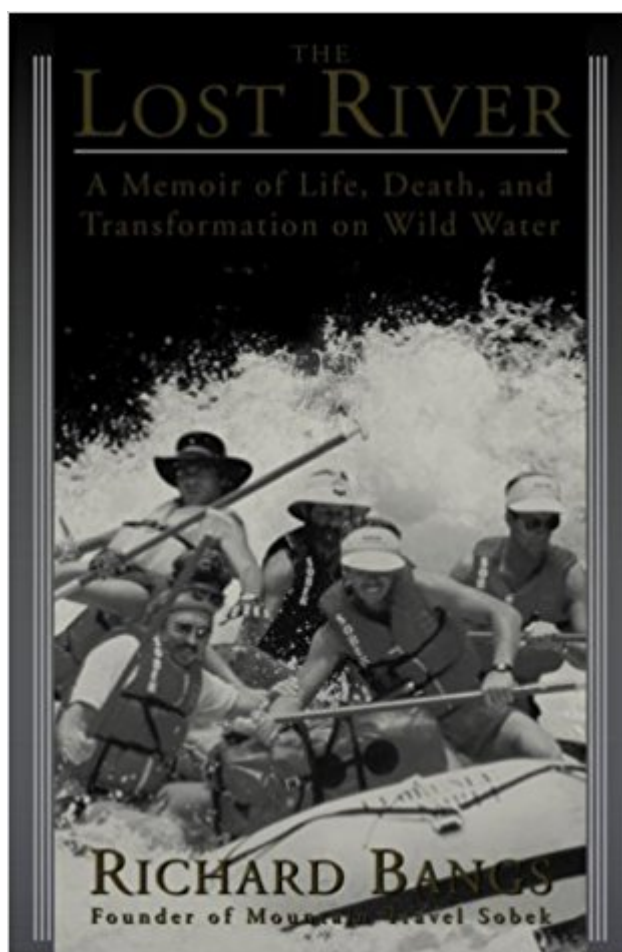


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# The Lost River: A Memoir Of Life, Death, And Transformation On Wild Water (Sierra Club Books Publication)



## Synopsis

In this award-winning book, Richard Bangs recounts his dramatic expedition to raft Ethiopia's unrun River Tekeze.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's tempting to write off *The Lost River* as just another adventure story. It certainly has all the trappings of a formulaic action blockbuster--raging rapids, hungry crocodiles, mysterious natives, even the lost Ark of the Covenant. But as veteran river-runner Richard Bangs chronicles his lifelong pursuit of "aqua incognita," he proves a refreshingly introspective adventurer, a thinking man's Indiana Jones. Not content to justify his risky forays onto earth's wildest water with a glib "because it's there," he crafts an intimate journal of his astounding trips and scrutinizes the adventure travel industry he helped create. With a ragtag band of friends and smuggled equipment, Bangs sets out in 1973 to run Ethiopia's untried rivers. But revolution and the tragic death of a friend cause him to quit the country without running the Tekeze, one of Africa's most fearsome tributaries. When he returns to run the virgin river in 1996, the Internet revolution is dawning, and Microsoft (via satellite uplink) and the Turner Corporation (via a ride-along film crew) are among his travel companions. Such fascinating historical contexts might easily have been reduced to Forrest Gump-ish window dressing for Bangs's journeys. Instead, he makes them integral to his story, using anecdotal encounters with Candice Bergen, Haile Selassie, and even Richard (Shaft) Roundtree to gently steep readers in the history of Ethiopia. As they encounter ecosystems and peoples making first

contact with Westerners, Bangs and his companions also explore the ethical and ecological ramifications of adventure travel. But rather than preach a certain course of action, he judiciously presents the various arguments for "conservation" and "progress" and lets readers draw their own conclusions. Though lacking the stylistic verve that Mark Twain or Joseph Conrad bring to the river story, Bangs is clearly a kindred spirit, with lessons well worth pondering and incredible stories to tell. --Andrew Nieland --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

With straightforward storytelling, Bangs recounts a nearly 30-year obsession with rafting some of the swiftest, most dangerous waters on earth. Bangs (Rivergods), editor-at-large of Expedia.com, Microsoft's online travel service, tells his tale with the ease of a worldly relative who swoops in for Thanksgiving dinner and regales the table with stories that keep everyone's attention. Readers will especially enjoy the descriptions of Africa in which Bangs makes both the water and its wildlife bristle with peril. Even a pair of marabou storks acquire a sinister aspectA "with their bald red heads, dandy gray feathers edged in white, fleshy pink necks, rattling bills, and wings folded into an oval, they looked like undertakers in morningcoats." And the lugubrious undertones are not mere exaggeration: in the 1970s, two of Bangs's rafting partners, one his closest friend, drowned in the course of their adventures. The title refers to Ethiopia's Tekeze River, which Bangs and his friend had intended to run together and to which Bangs ultimately returns. Though Bangs occasionally falls prey to macho clichés ("I felt I had to prove to myself that I had the right stuff") and hackneyed constructions ("So much water, so little time"), readers will meet such instances like rocks in midstream: distressing for a moment, but easily passed, and hardly enough to ruin an otherwise enjoyable trip. (Aug.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The river running and discovery sound like fun, until the crocodiles show up, along with the tsetse flies and other deadly bugs, bad food, bad booze, etc., and people die and get diseases from the insects. The final descent of the Tekeze is something of an anti-climactic episode, too drawn out with the technicalities of organizing a large expedition. The initial chapters are interesting enough, but I kept thinking these guys were like a bunch of rich kids out looking for adventure and trouble, and sure enough, they find it. Some of Bang's language is a little overwrought, and you'll need to research meanings occasionally. Not a real page-turner for me.

I ordered this book for my daughter, who is an adventurer and outdoor-woman. She asked for this

book and loved it. It was shipped to her at a post office where she was able to receive mail at her outdoor camp. It got there on time and she was very happy.

Richard Bangs and his Sobek rafting company were clearly the early trend setters in world-wide adventure travel. Those who enjoyed other books by Bangs including *River Gods* and *Riding the Dragon's Back* will enjoy this first-hand account of Bangs's early development as a world-class rafter including his teen adventures on the Potomac, his first summer working on the Colorado as a swamper and finally a guide through the Grand, and his first major first descent of the Omo River in Ethiopia. It was the Omo trip, which cost the members a total of \$1400, where Sobek beat a well-financed National Geographic expedition by three months to what was then billed as the Mt. Everest of Whitewater, a distinction many now bestow on the Tsangpo in Tibet. The first 2/3 of the book are well-written and include Sobek's tragic initial commercial trip ending with a client death in the first major rapid and later the death of Lee Greenwald, who Bangs met as a client on one of his Colorado trips. Greenwald had provided the financial backing to get the fledgling Sobek company off the ground, and became an accomplished river-runner under the mentorship of Bangs and one of his closest friends. The book builds towards a climax of the much-anticipated exploratory descent of the Tekeze, a trip Bangs had promised to do with Greenwald two decades earlier and one he must complete to bring closure to Greenwald's premature death, but here the book begins to fall a little flat. The account of the Tekeze expedition reads more like a sequence of daily journal entries that could have used a bit more editing and the writing itself takes a slight downhill turn. There are daily accounts of setting up the satellite phone to transmit reports back to Microsoft's Mungo Park online travel magazine which Bangs was hired to create. For some reason, Bangs turns to language he must feel required to use to match the technology he is using and some of his phrases are a bit heavy handed: "...the tail of the wet season has made every tree and shrub burst into hectic leaf... it feels like we're in an oversized diorama, or the middle of an IMAX film--everything is exaggerated, the colors more brilliant than enhanced photos, or HDTV." "...and every night I have slept fitfully, as though the night currents were arching through my cerebellum, conducting bytes and bits or worried thought." "I contemplate pulling out my Minolta for a parting shot but instead grab my DC50 Kodak digital camera..." Although the adventure aspects of the trip do not live up to the hype the reader anticipates, the story of Bangs coming to closure with the death of Greenwald provides a thread that keeps the story interesting. While the book does not hold the reader with the drama of *Into Thin Air* or *The Perfect Storm*, as promised on the dust jacket, it is a revealing and deeply personal account of the joys and sorrows that come from modern exploration of uncharted territory. The book is a

must-read for anyone who has enjoyed previous books by Bangs and those interested in the development of modern adventure travel, exploratory boaters, and those who want to learn how Sobek came to be.

Our body is largely composed of water. Richard Bangs shows us our attraction to water can be delightful, glorious, and sometimes fatal. "The Lost River" reads like a good river trip -- with rambunctious and ribald rapids and eddies of insight and human warmth. I enjoyed reading this book. It made me want to immediately drive to a put-in and get on a river, any river. I especially enjoyed the recounting of the dilemma of cultural exchange and how Bangs wrote to all the anthrodepartments around the US and how Sobek's policy evolved. Paddle or die!

Having navigated only a few rivers, none of them virgin, my interest was piqued when a former boss of mine told me about this guy Richard Bangs she knows. So I ... read the reviews, ... Suffice it to say I sat down with the book in hand, looked up roughly three hours later, and noticed I finished the book. The last book I recall which captivated me so was Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground. In any event, the narrative is always fascinating if the prose is somewhat heavy-handed or purple at points.

When I first heard that Richard Bangs had written another book I immediately ran to it. I figured that I would read it over a two week period. After work on a Friday night I picked it up and started reading. Within three pages "The Lost River" grabbed me and when I looked up it was 3:30AM. I didn't want to stop reading, but I had a lot to do the next day, so I headed straight to bed. In the morning I decided to read some more and by 2:00 in the afternoon, I was making phone calls to cancel my appointments so I could finish the book, which I did by 6:00 that evening. This story is one that will stick with me for a long time. It is not only a wonderful adventure story about how he and his partners started Sobek, his rafting company, it is also an intensely personal self examination by Mr. Bangs. He dives deep into his own feelings. Ultimately, he triumphs over these feelings and by bringing the reader along this journey with him he teaches the value of good friends, the hope of great visions and the catharsis of confronting your past, head on. This is one of the great adventure stories of all time, but for me, it also served as a "self help" book. You'll be amazed and entertained by a fabulous story while going through your own internal exam at the same time.

I love this book! I had no idea that there are still places on this earth that no one has ever seen.

Bangs' account of what he saw and experienced is unbelievable. "Heart of Darkness" meets Indiana Jones. Awesome!!

If you like adventure travel books and aren't interested in reading the fifteen thousandth book about Mt. Everest (enough already!), then you've got to read this book. A real winner. When's the movie?

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