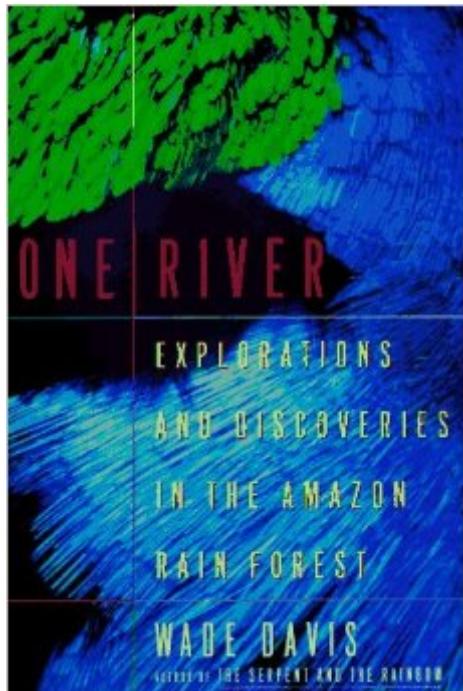


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One River: Explorations And Discoveries In The Rain Forest



Synopsis

In 1974-75, Wade Davis and Tim Plowman traveled the length of South America, living among a dozen Indian tribes, collecting medicinal plants and searching for the origins of coca, the sacred leaf of the Andes and the notorious source of cocaine. It was a journey inspired and made possible by their Harvard mentor, Richard Evans Schultes, the most important scientific explorer in South America in this century, whose exploits rival those of Darwin and the great naturalist explorers of the Victorian age. In 1941, after having identified ololiuqui, the long-lost Aztec hallucinogen, and having collected the first specimens of teonanacatl, the sacred mushroom of Mexico, Schultes took a leave of absence from Harvard and disappeared into the Northwest of Colombia. Twelve years later, he returned from South America, having gone places no outsider had ever been, mapping uncharted rivers and living among two dozen Indian tribes. He collected some twenty thousand botanical specimens, including three hundred species new to science, and documented the invaluable knowledge of native shamans. The world's leading authority on plant hallucinogens, Schultes was for his students a living link to a distant time when the tropical rain forests stood immense, inviolable, a mantle of green stretching across entire continents. It was a world greatly changed by the time Davis and Plowman began their journey, nearly thirty years later, and changed further today.

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Customer Reviews

"One River" will take you on a journey that you will never forget. It will introduce you to one of the twentieth century's most remarkable men--Richard Evans Schultes, as well as one of the world's

most fascinating places--the . The book is the story of the work of Schultes and two of his students, including the author Wade Davis. It will take you as close as you can ever be to lost cultures and lost ecosystems along with cultures and ecosystems that are very much endangered. Wade Davis is a champion of both human and ecological diversity. "One River" is probably the most eloquent testament to ethnic and biological diversity I've ever read. As the modern world encroaches on every last nook and cranny of this beautiful earth, "One River" serves as a primer about what once was and about the price we pay as we lose one more species, or one more human culture forever. This book is an adventure story. It is a story of incredible academic accomplishment. The term academic, with its connotations of being hopelessly removed from the real world does not apply here. Schultes and his students could not be more connected to the real world. "One River" is the story of man and nature and how the two interact, each forever changing the other. Read this book and then tell your friends about it. While it is hard to make such a claim (there are so many good books), I'd have to say this is my favorite book.

Anyone still doubting the superiority of truth over fiction need only take this book to a quiet corner and start reading. Wade Davis relates the stories of two Richards, Schultes and Spruce, plus his own in their respective excursions in the upper . Schultes, Davis' Harvard mentor, spent many years there seeking medicinal plants and new sources of rubber when access to Asian resins were lost during World War II. No work of fiction, including Hollywood's almost trifling account in the film Medicine Man, can match the scope of what Schultes accomplished during his extensive travels. Schultes had the good sense to approach the Native American shamans with respect, dealing with them on their terms and not as a latter-day conquistador. They responded to his inquiries in kind, leading to countless new medicines for treating our "civilized" illnesses. He became a "depswa" - medicine man - sharing their rituals while gaining knowledge. Davis is able to use his close relationship with Schultes to provide an engrossing and detailed account of Schultes' career in the bush. The second Richard is Schultes' own model. Richard Spruce came to the Upper from mid-Victorian England. Prompted by an inestimable source, Charles Darwin's account of the Beagle voyage, Spruce entered the country in 1849. Few of the celebrated explorers in Africa in the same period can match the perils Spruce faced and dealt with. As did his follower Schultes, Spruce avoided the overbearing colonialist image - his desires were achieved by finding new medicinal plants. Spruce dealt with the dispensers of drugs and their tales of visions incurred as an equal. In their turn they imparted valuable information leading to useful medicines. Clearly, both Schultes and Spruce operated as Davis stipulates: "botanists in the must come to peace with their own

ignorance." As Schultes, Spruce and Davis himself demonstrate, the peaceful approach brings substantial rewards in information and experience. Davis' own, modern, story enhances that of his mentor Schultes, carrying the research and adventure forward. Only the ability to travel further and faster than his teacher separates the two. Davis has a sensitive touch in describing the world of the Upper , its dense forests and often mysterious people. His grief at the loss of their culture is manifest, buttressed by a strong historical sense of what they once were. Certainly this account belies the image of the "detached" scientist scouring the forest's resources for personal gain. He is there to learn and to teach us. He accomplishes both with a fascinating narrative. This is a book to be treasured and read again. A single sitting with this book is but an introduction to this disappearing world. Read it and discover that adventure is not a lost experience.

I know nothing about ethnobotany, but am a fan of adventure and sociology narratives about people and places. Davis merges these two themes with history, biography and writing that is so lyrical and heartfelt that his passion for his subject comes across on every page. Documenting his own explorations and those of his mentor, the famous ethnobotanist Richard Schultes, Davis depicts the beauty and mystery that is the , and does it in an era when the area was yet to be despoiled by man and his pursuit of resources. I love adventure travel, but reading about real-life adventures that are done not for mere thrill seeking but have legitimate scientific, cultural and other values is always much more rewarding than reading adventure for its own sake. I have read this book three times and anticipate its appeal again drawing me back to its pages. Quite simply, this is one of the great books in the genre, and Davis is a great writer in any genre.

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