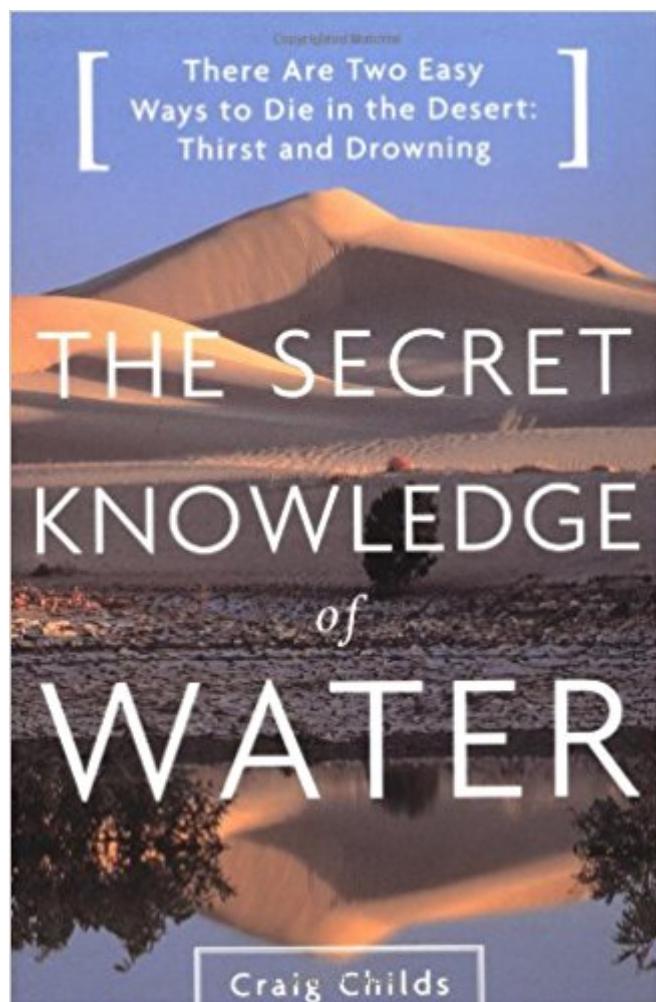


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The Secret Knowledge Of Water : Discovering The Essence Of The American Desert



Synopsis

Deserts are environments that can be inhospitable even to seasoned explorers. Craig Childs has spent years in the deserts of the American West, and his treks through arid lands in search of water reveal the natural world at its most extreme.

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Customer Reviews

The "essence of the American desert," as the subtitle of Craig Childs's book has it, is water. A desert, by definition, lacks it, but when water does come, it comes in torrential, sometimes devastating abundance. Childs, a thirtysomething desert rat with a vast knowledge of the Southwest's remote corners, knows this fact well. "Most rain falling anywhere but the desert comes slow enough that it is swallowed by the soil without comment," he observes. "Desert rains, powerful and sporadic, tend to hit the ground, gather into floods, and are gone before the water can sink five inches into the ground." The travels that Childs recounts in this vivid narrative take him from places sometimes parched, sometimes swimming, from the depths of the Grand Canyon to the dry limestone tanks of the lava-strewn Sonoran Desert. As he travels, Childs gives a close reading of the desert landscape ("the moral," he writes at one point, "is that if you know the land and its maps, you might live"), observing the rocks, plants, animals, and people that call it home. Some of his adventures will remind readers of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*--save that Childs writes without Abbey's bluster, and with a measured lyricism that well suits the achingly lovely back canyons and cactus forests of the Southwest. By turns travelogue, ecological treatise, and meditative essay,

Childs's book will speak to anyone who has spent time under desert skies, wondering when the next drop of rain might fall. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Childs's obsessive quest to find, map, observe and get wet in the waters of America's deserts has personal roots. Born in the Sonoran Desert of West Texas, this naturalist, river guide and author of four previous books (most recently, *Grand Canyon*) grew up learning to revere water, that fickle, scarce, elemental sustainer of life. More than a fiercely lyrical travelogue through Arizona, Utah, the Grand Canyon and northern Mexico's cottonwood-willow forests, his hypnotic new book describes an existential adventure. Trekking for days or weeks, alone or with a companion, in search of random waterholes, rare creeks, waterfalls, springs, shrimp-filled pools and sudden, furious floods, Childs mingles personal observations with a cosmic perspective ("Most, if not all, water on this planet came from countless small comets thumping against the atmosphere... ") to make readers feel an integral part of earth's hydrologic processes. Far from being arid, his narrative ripples with adventure. He descends into a slot canyon full of 800-year-old handprints left by the Anasazi people; spots desert fish found nowhere else and believed to be holdovers from the Ice Age; survives an Arizona chubasco, a violent convective thunderstorm that rips roofs off buildings and creates myriad waterfalls. Childs's sources are diverse: conversations with archeologists, ecologists, ranchers, conservationists, geologists; Native American legends; tales of backpackers, explorers and illegal immigrants who fell victim to the desert; and a meticulous, 300-year-old desert map made by a Jesuit missionary from Spain. His highly personal odyssey combines John McPhee's gift for compressing scientific knowledge and Barry Lopez's spiritual questing. Five-city author tour. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a beautiful book. Craig Childs is such a special human being with an amazing perspective on wilderness and water and the desert. I originally read this book when I was at university in Northern Arizona and recently I saw Craig speak at an environmental film festival. It prompted me to read his book again. It was WAY better with some years under my belt. I felt like some bigger life experience brought some extra gumption to the reading experience. I highly recommend this book to anyone who's never read it, or has read it years ago.

Craig Childs has become one of favorite writers recently. I was at the Grand Canyon last fall and

saw a book of his on Wildlife encounters and bought it thinking it was about encounters at the Canyon. One story into that book I didn't even care that it wasn't, I was hooked on his creative descriptions and personal, easy style that I had to have more. This book is mind altering in the way I now think of water. I've thought for decades what an amazing element of our lives it is...all that it does for us and the limitless ways we use it and it's still here and available. But Mr. Childs has opened my eyes to completely different ways of seeing and appreciating this amazing substance we take for granted because of our modern plumbing. No matter where you live get this book. But if you live anywhere in the Southwest Desert this book will alter the way you approach the desert..

Craig Childs has a deep interest in water in the American Southwest. In this book he examines where one might find water in the deserts, and shares his knowledge of flooding in this arid environment. The hydrology that he discusses is presented in a lay person's terms, and he does a solid job of weaving technical information with history, both human and natural, as well as his personal accounts (several of which are harrowing). He anthropomorphizes water, ascribing genetic and intellectual attributes as he helps the reader understand the complexity of how water behaves. It is an engaging read that will capture the attention of anyone interested in the dichotomy of water in the arid part of the USA.

Enjoyed this one - the subtitle says it all. The desert is such an unknown for most people, and it's secrets and beauty go unnoticed by most. I started reading this while watching my grandkids at an air bnb in Denver. I was hooked and bought it here on for my ipad. The descriptive language, the progression from finding small secret water spots to major flash floods - a good read and good introduction to the SW Desert to anyone who does not have knowledge or appreciation for this amazing natural space we have and hopefully will preserve.

Wow this guy likes desert water! I cannot imagine doing what the author of this book has done. It's astonishing, really that someone can spend as much time walking around in the desert looking for water as this book describes. I loved this book at times and hated it at others. The author has a very interesting writing style, using a lot of analogies to make clear very complex concepts. Sometimes they worked for me, sometimes they didn't. He also uses a lot of very flowery language to describe somewhat simple natural actions. The first time he went on for five pages about water rolling down a canyon I was in awe at his ability to describe something so intimately. The tenth time I was bored to tears. I learned a lot of new things in the book - how to stay out of the way of flash floods; where

water is found in the desert; interesting history of the geology of the southwest desert, etc. It's an interesting read. I think it could have been better edited, but it's worth working your way through. 4 stars from me.

A beautiful book with a great balance between poetic descriptions and some fine hard science. Greatly enjoyed every page. highly recommended.

Child's adventures in the desert chasing down both the sources and effects of water in the Arizona desert kept me interested right up through his description of a touching and mysterious indigenous memorial to children sacrificed to quell a desert flood, at about two thirds of the way through the book. Thereafter, the cumulative effect of his hyperbolic descriptive language, rather strained metaphors and increasing insertion of his own "heroic" (or insane?) efforts to explore waterways in the Grand Canyon, severely eroded my estimation of the work. The denouement, built around a climactic adventure chasing a flash flood down a slot canyon feeding the Colorado that almost results in his falling into a "127 Hours"-like trap, left me questioning both his sanity and his motives for undertaking this trip and reporting it to his readers. The message I got was less and less about desert water and its effects on the inhabitants and landscape, and more about an author trying to draw our attention to his prowess in the wilderness. I'd recommend passing on this one and skipping directly to "House of Rain".

I first became aware of this book when Craig came to do a reading of it. I was amazed that he could go to the desert for such extended periods of time seemingly with no worries. His observations are wonderful to read and he knows his stuff. He is always careful of how he interacts with nature and the artifacts he encounters. There is a wonderful story of when he was younger following a flash flood in Arizona that is a lot of fun. Even though I live in UT and visited some areas like he goes to I could never do so with the ease that he does so. It's like he has a built in GPS. Wonderful insights and some fun packed into this book. You can't go wrong with this one if you're into nature.

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