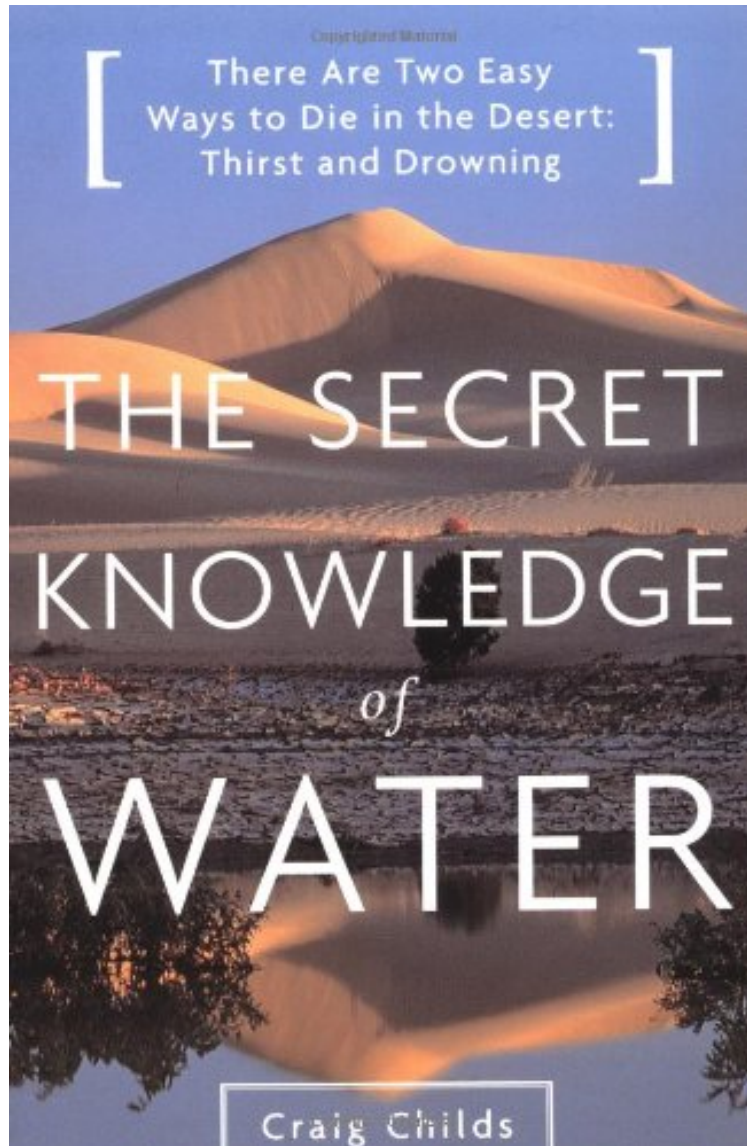


(Free and download) The Secret Knowledge of Water : Discovering the Essence of the American Desert

The Secret Knowledge of Water : Discovering the Essence of the American Desert

Craig Childs

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Craig Childs : The Secret Knowledge of Water : Discovering the Essence of the American Desert before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secret Knowledge of Water : Discovering the Essence of the American Desert:

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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.

.com 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 McNameeFrom Publishers WeeklyChilds'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.From Library JournalOver the course of two years, naturalist/ adventurer Childs took a series of month-long treks on foot through each of the North American deserts in search of water. An astute observer of nature and a concise writer with a knack for storytelling, he meticulously records each significant occurrence in an attempt to understand how the absence or presence of something most of us take for granted dictates life and death in the harsh environment. Highlights include terrifying accounts of flash floods and a fascinating cave exploration, complete with wet suits, deep in the Grand Canyon. Recommended for all regional and most natural history collections, although a bibliography would have been a useful addition.-Tim J. Markus, Evergreen State Coll. Lib., Olympia, WA Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.