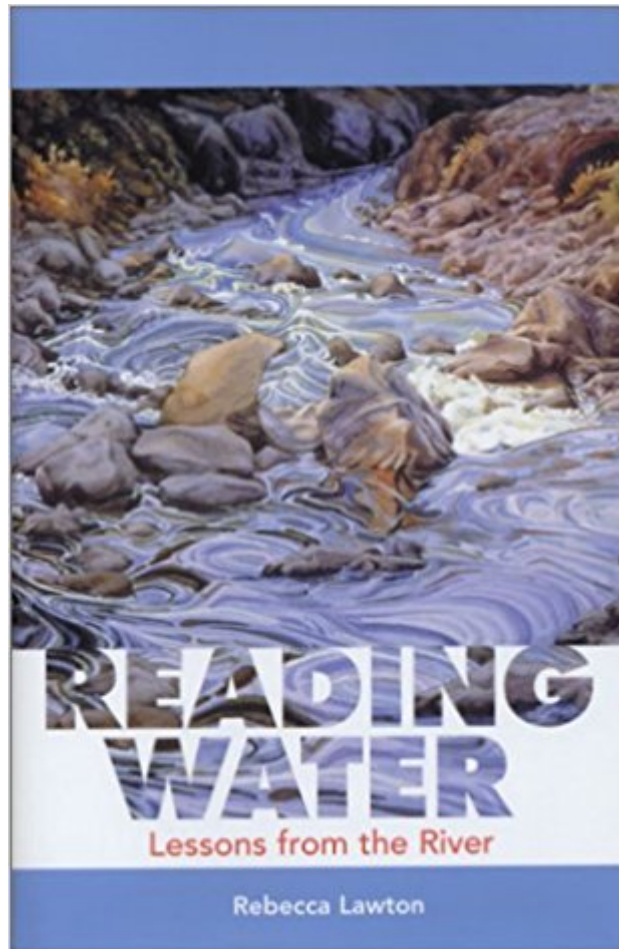




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# Reading Water: Lessons From The River (Capital Discovery)



## Synopsis

In the tradition of America's strong pioneer women, Rebecca Lawton was one of the first women river guides in the West. For millions of Americans and foreign visitors who have navigated America's great rivers by raft or boat - and for those who wish they could - this book will help them understand rivers and their impact on the human emotional landscape in a deeper sense. It offers such seekers, not only the thrill rides and vacation destinations of our rivers - but also their rich ecosystems and spiritual wellsprings. As Rebecca Lawton says, "To those who come to know them well, rivers are home." It was the river that taught me instinctive responses, in an unparalleled mentorship that led me throughout the American West every day for more than a decade. Being on the river every day taught me to read water - to psyche out where rocks hid in riffles, find safe passage in inscrutable rapids, and keep moving in flatwater sections." Now, years later, she offers *Reading Water* and the countless lessons she learned from interpreting rivers and currents, living in the river community, and becoming part of a boater's subculture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rivers provided the main routes for discovery of the American West. Today, rafting or boating those same rivers can still provide a vehicle for a different kind of discovery-of one's self. Lawton is a seasoned, licensed boatwoman who has navigated many of the most beautiful and technically difficult rivers of the West. Her experiences as a woman succeeding in a very physically demanding

profession (she was one of the first female river guides) and the people with whom she works are interesting by themselves, as are her passing observations about the geology and natural history of the rivers. The overarching theme of these short essays, though, is how she connects with nature, and ultimately with herself, on the water. Her reflections are not especially profound, and her prose tends to be a bit airy, but the thoughts and feelings that she expresses are affirmative, introspective, and unpretentious. For its honesty and relative simplicity, if this book were a river it would be broad, not deep. For larger general collections of nature essays. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Lawton, a retired river guide, came to her passion for the outdoors through her mother's love of the wilderness and her brother's river guide career. As these essays meander through time, they reveal not only her love for her calling, but also her development as a person, guide, and scholar of the rivers of the West. The hard work and danger that a river guide faces on a daily basis become a comfortable routine as awareness and familiarity with the ways of the rivers grow, and readers come to share Lawton's loves and fears, and the black hole of depression that follows her thrilling summers. Lawton does, however, make use of her off-the-river seasons in college and graduate school, where she studies the geology and history of the landscape that she loves; then, later, after marriage and parenthood, she starts a career as an environmental consultant. The lyricism of Lawton's prose mirrors the natural elegance of what she describes, and the excitement she conveys makes readers long for a run through the rapids. Danise HooverCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

great stories worth buying

Rebecca Lawton's book was a gift from a friend who I will always be grateful to. Reading *Water* took me back thirty years to my "river days" in California's Central Valley. Lawton is an excellent writer, yet unpretentious. To use a cliché, she writes it like it is...or, was.

If you love rivers and being on the water this is the book for you. Great insight on rivers from an expert who has all kinds of experience.

This lovely book seems simple enough on the surface (the memoirs of a woman river rafting guide), but, like water itself, there's much more going on beneath the surface. Reading *Water* is part of the

Capital Discoveries Book Series from Capital Books, chosen for their focus on "journeys of self-discovery, transformation, inner awareness, and recovery." This book is a perfect fit for that series. Lawton weaves many threads into each essay, much like the interwoven currents of the braided rivers she describes in one essay. Some threads are past, present, and further past; others are experience, observation, and research. These threads feel somewhat unrelated until the questions gradually flow over the reader like a gentle sprinkle as opposed to a downpour of forced epiphany. Her writing style is beautiful and poetic (with the minor exception of an undue fondness for sentence fragments). Her style takes a few pages to get used to, but then it becomes hypnotic. To pose an obvious metaphor, her phrasing pulls the readers along with the sureness and variety of a peaceful river with occasional rapids. Lawton's greatest strength as a writer is how she combines a scholar's depth of knowledge with a romantic's depth of feeling. She does a great job of interlacing fact and experience. The curious patterns in the lives of salmon might be discussed objectively in one passage, followed closely by the delight of feasting on their flesh in the next. Turning the pages of *Reading Water*, like reading the best of memoirs, is a learning \*and\* feeling experience. As a memoir or as an investigation of the power of moving water to affect human beings, *Reading Water* is strongly recommended.

I keep *Reading Water* in my library for examples of fine writing to share with my writing students. I also turn to it to give myself some time in nature when I can't leave my office. Lawton approaches her material with a quiet and steady gaze. Whether she's describing her first view of the Stanislaus, the mixing of the green and brown waters at the confluence of the Colorado and the Green rivers, or the terrifying roar of life-threatening rapids, each word carries the reader toward a deeper understanding of the natural world. Lawton does not shy away from loss, grief, and other untamed regions of the human heart. And she never loses sight of the life-affirming forces that help us grow beyond sorrow and limitation. Other books come and go, but *Reading Water* is part of my permanent collection.

"reading water" is the river runner's term for seeing things below the surface, things that might leave only a subtle sign on the surface but may be crucial to your survival. Lawton is a trustworthy guide to the subtle signs--signs of time and geological forces and biological creativity and poetic wonders and human truths--that are easily missed but which make life far more wonder-ful. This is a gem of literary nature writing, with a keen poetic eye, but unlike much of the genre, in which writers may have spent too many years in the classroom and then tried to impose too many abstractions or too

many other writer's styles onto nature, Lawton's classroom has been the roaringly real and deep and raw and beautiful nature of the Grand Canyon and other wilderness rivers, where river guides must face real matters of life and death and meaning, and she has allowed it to speak to her directly and meaningfully.

This collection of essays, in which Rebecca Lawton recounts adventures she's had in her many years as a boatman on Western rivers, is lovely. Though her descriptions of nature are not particularly lush, they capture memorable scenes with a brief, snapshot effect that leaves detailed images in the reader's mind. She fleshes out her descriptions with scientific and geologic facts--her writing is not burdened by science, but rather enlivened by it. Lawton tells of how she nearly drowned a friend of hers with her own hubris; how she learned to get out of swift eddies; and how she became a boatman in the first place, despite the bias against females in that profession. She also talks about her failed marriage, her mother's death from cancer, and a faithless lover. She draws life lessons from the characteristics of rivers, and although a few of the lessons seem too pat, or contrived to fit the river motif, many of them seem right on the money. And always Lawson's writing has a sincere, honest tone, as if she is not trying to make herself look good so much as pondering what she has learned, from life and the river. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading about lives they will never live, or who values the wisdom others have worked hard to attain.

Rebecca Lawton is a wonderful writer. I found this series of essays to be engaging and informative. I also found her work as a woman in a primarily-male field to be inspiring. I can't imagine doing the work she did, and I always love reading stories about adventures I will never take! I also loved her descriptions of nature and the power of her connection with the natural world. A strong, informative read!

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