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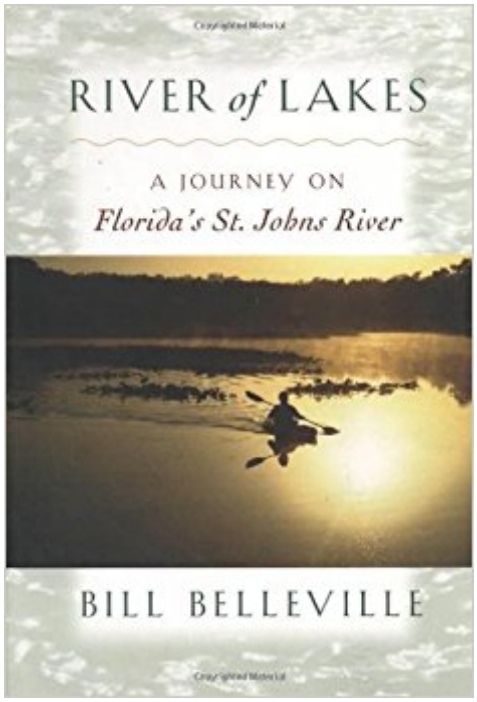
River Of Lakes: A Journey On Florida's St. Johns River



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Synopsis

First explored by naturalist William Bartram in the 1760s, the St. Johns River stretches 310 miles along Florida’s east coast, making it the longest river in the state. The first "highway" through the once wild interior of Florida, the St. Johns may appear ordinary, but within its banks are some of the most fascinating natural phenomena and historic mysteries in the state. The river, no longer the commercial resource it once was, is now largely ignored by Florida’s residents and visitors alike.In the first contemporary book about this American Heritage River, Bill Belleville describes his journey down the length of the St. Johns, kayaking, boating, hiking its riverbanks, diving its springs, and exploring its underwater caves. He rediscovers the natural Florida and establishes his connection with a place once loved for its untamed beauty. Belleville involves scientists, environmentalists, fishermen, cave divers, and folk historians in his journey, soliciting their companionship and their expertise. River of Lakes weaves together the biological, cultural, anthropological, archaeological, and ecological aspects of the St. Johns, capturing the essence of its remarkable history and intrinsic value as a natural wonder.

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Customer Reviews

Less well known than the embattled Everglades, northern Florida’s St. Johns River has long been subject to the same forces that have imperiled that vast wetland. "The St. Johns," writes naturalist Bill Belleville, "is surely one long and meandering palimpsest," a place that has been remade many times over as humans have sought to grow crops, raise livestock, and otherwise make the river bend to their will. With 3.5 million people now living in its broad valley, the St. Johns is coming under

increased pressure to change, its dense forests cleared for shopping malls and housing developments. The river harbors many secrets, and Belleville is only too happy to share them as he makes a case for why the river should be allowed to follow its own path. It is a place, he writes, of giant snails and nesting herons, a place of wild storms and suffocatingly hot days. And more: it is a place of rare qualities, one that deserves to be protected. The author writes approvingly of grassroots efforts to do just that. His book is a fine piece of advocacy journalism blended with memoir, as he recounts his long history kayaking and hiking the length of the St. Johns. In Belleville, the river has a gifted champion. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The St. Johns River flows for 310 miles from its headwaters near Lake Okeechobee northward through Jacksonville to the Atlantic. John James Audubon and Winslow Homer painted the river; Friedrich Delius was inspired by it to compose Florida Suite. John and William Bartram, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sidney Lanier, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and James Branch Cabell described its scenery and wildlife. Belleville, an environmental writer and filmmaker, ambitiously becomes the St. Johns's latest chronicler. His narrative of a journey through its waters, though perhaps less lyrical than his predecessors', is knowledgeable and compelling. Although much of the river's beauty endures, farm runoff, industrial pollution, and overdevelopment threaten its unique ecology. Although he does not neglect the historical and cultural richness that led to the river's 1998 designation as an "American Heritage River," Belleville emphasizes the need for careful stewardship of its unique biological diversity. Essential for Florida libraries, this is recommended as well for ecological or natural history collections.-Kathleen Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida at St. Petersburg Lib. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I really enjoyed this book as it is a wonderful mixture of history, exploration, and imagery. The author is so descriptive that you can easily follow the entire journey with a map. I suggest anyone really wanting to get into this book to follow the author in Google Earth - all of the coves, springs, rivers, points, towns, islands, lakes, and bridges are named, and on top of that there are Panoramio pictures to view in most areas. For example, when he describes the huge oak tree in Astor, I zoomed in and clicked a few pictures people had taken of it. Or you can follow the Oklawaha to Rawlings' house. I also used Wikipedia often for more back stories (and a dictionary).I did want a little more of some of the conversations/interactions with locals, some were condensed to a

paragraph, but maybe that's all they were. Others on the boat with him weren't named but only described in passing, but he probably wanted to focus more on the river/journey itself and not dialogue. As a personal preference (that probably wouldn't be wanted by others) I wished a lot of his historical facts were cited directly and not in one big massive bibliography at the end, and maybe a map and some pictures, but you can get those easily online. Also, some of the rivers and side lakes got cut short or not mentioned but I'm sure only so much can go into one book.Overall excellent read. This book has caused me to explore five different places this weekend alone that were mentioned in the book, and I could point out some interesting facts to people with me (such as the decrease in water cycling through Lake Jesup). I will definitely be investing in a kayak or canoe to explore some of the local tributaries.

Excellent natural history of Florida's largest and most historic river.

knowledge about fl and its lakes and rivers is all in this book.I have lived here all my 70 years and learned so much about the waterways read it , you will not regret it. I checked it out at library then bought it to keep

An informative and descriptive journey along the great St John's. I can't wait to explore for myself. I would have loved more pictures and a chapter by chapter map to more easily trace the route as I read the book.

Love the St Johns, many happy childhood memories on the river and at many of the springs detailed in the book. I enjoyed it very much.

This is one of those vacation-like books that I hoped wouldn't end. From the peaceful beginnings of the St. Johns to its rollicking arrival at the Atlantic Ocean, each page delivered a new marvel. Belleville followed his nose deep into the river-weeds, down into underwater caves, and out to the center of beautiful, bird-ful lakes. And he didn't shy away from observing that damnable human yearning to live as close as possible to the water's edge. All the world is wrapped up in this river: I found reason to marvel, reason to rail, and reason to hope for the future.

It's a great journey charting the entire course of the St Johns river and it's many lakes.It's lightly interspersed with historical facts and stories. Charming read like a quiet and refreshingcanoe ride

down the river itself.

River of Lakes is, indeed, a fascinating journey from the headwaters of the St. Johns River to the sea. Mr. Belleville's writing, while accurate and fact-filled, is almost poetic. I have read and re-read portions - tagged areas of our wonderful river thatI have visited and enjoyed and also places I want to visit.

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