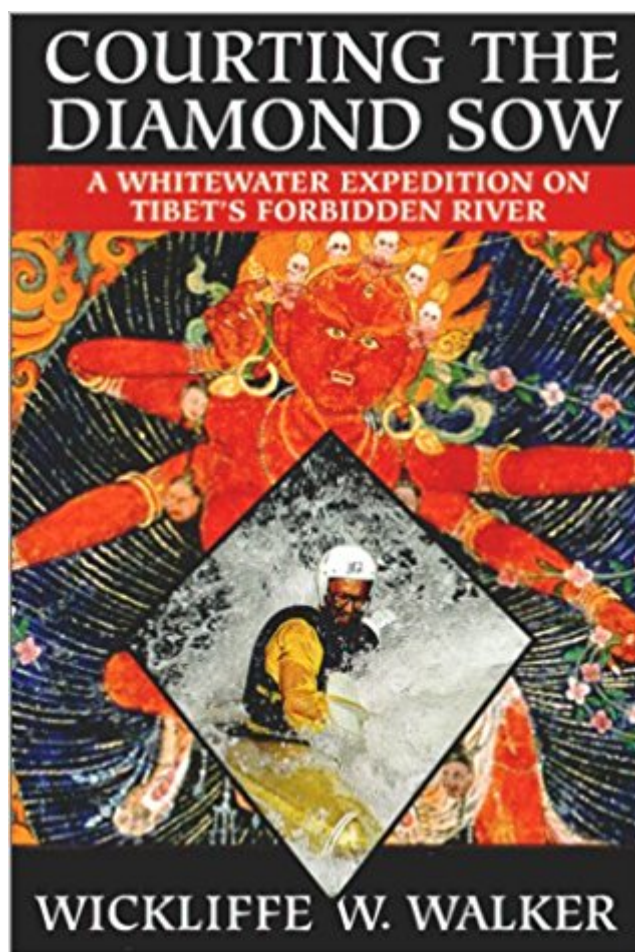


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Courting The Diamond Sow : A Whitewater Expedition On Tibet's Forbidden River



Synopsis

Recounts the story of a four-man, alpine-style kayaking expedition that attempted to be the first to navigate a remote stretch of Tibet's Tsangpo River.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Perhaps most appealing,...Walker's book is imbued with the excitement and wonder of discovery in a wild, exotic landscape. -- The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, OH, September 24, 2000

Having also read "Hell or High Water" by Peter Heller which is the account of the 2002 descent of the same river I was interested to read this account of the tragic 1998 expedition. I found it very interesting indeed, the difference between the two expeditions was very marked, and I think the experience of the 1998 organizers shows through with startling clarity. I think that the books and "Into the Tsangpo Gorge" the movie of the 2002 do their best to explain/describe/show the terrain and the river but I expect none come close to the real experience. Having seen the movie does help when reading the books. I did enjoy both but I think that "Courting the Diamond Sow" is a great insight as to what it takes to organize such a trip, and the detail that they cover is amazing. As various events take place you see the results of the careful planning and what must have been very detailed discussions coming into play, I marvel at the attention to detail and the tremendous effort they took into planning and executing the expedition. My heart goes out to the friends and family involved in the tragedy, one can only imagine the feelings and emotions for those on the ground at

the time.

Here's the thing. I did some serious rafting in India - I bought this book so I could see what was what in other places. Probably should have read this book BEFORE I went skipping down the Ganges on a rubber float with 8 strangers. Good book - but.. yeah Dry Land thanks.

Anyone interested not only in kayaking, but also in mountain expeditions, exploration and trekking should read this. An account of truly BIG WATER, Tibetan mysteries, individual courage, top-notch kayaking, featuring some of the World's best kayakers.

My sister recommended this book. We knew the author growing up. If you like kayaking and extreme outdoor adventures in remote places this is a must read.

My comments come after finishing the books "The Last River" and "Courting the Diamond Sow", both of which I read over the last 2 weeks, and was provoked to write by a couple of factors. Reading the existing reviews for "The Last River" particularly, I was struck by the number of people who felt it necessary to slam the book. First, after reading these books I have a better appreciation for the writing skill needed to write a book that is entirely engaging, brings the personalities to life, allows the reader to become part of the adventure, all the while being true to its subject. Second, I appreciate that the writers made the story available so that we could learn about this trip and I don't mean to suggest that either effort was a waste of time and that the writers should hang up their quills. Sadly, in my opinion neither of the books written about the same 1998 Tsangpo journey is terribly engaging. Last River is an easier read while I found the first half, particularly, of Sow a literary slog. Not sure if it was bogged down in description or what; I just found it slow going. Neither book had much of an ebb and flow in the narrative. Even as the tragic events of Doug Gordon's death neared, there was nothing to indicate that one's blood should be heating up and that now was not the time to put the book down. They were very flat in that regard. I differentiate between sensationalism and a literary tidal cycle; perhaps the authors were extremely cognizant of avoiding the former. The Last River spends a greater percentage of ink relating the experiences of the 4 paddlers on the river and off while Sow balances more equally the stories of both paddlers and support team. Also, Wickliffe Walker in Sow deals with the 'fallout' from Gordon's death much more comprehensively than does Todd Balf; Walker spends several pages relating the effort needed to battle rumours and judgments that were circulating at home half-way around the world. While the

actual journey and the salient events I expect to remember, these books I expect to forget quickly (but then, I forgot *Into Thin Air* fairly quickly also). If there are poignant moments from the tale and thoughts to come away with, the one I recall most easily is the second-guessing of Gordon's paddling buddies as described most clearly in *The Last Rivers* account of Roger Zbel's "What if" self-flagellation. As a paddler, I pray that I am never faced with that..It was disappointing that *The Last River* did not have any photos at all of the area and only a minimalist map. On the other hand, Sow's small collection of photos was hardly comprehensive though the satellite photo was helpful in placing the story. Nether book rates more than a 2.5 - 3, in my mind, nor does one stand head and shoulders above the other. My context: Canadian class IV kayaker; 3 Himalayan river trips in Nepal (in fact and unbeknownst, I was on the Tamur River at exactly the time this group was on the Tsangpo); read years ago the *American Whitewater* article of the Gordon/McEwan trip down the Homothko in BC.

This is a pretty good book, all in all. Of course, it's not too hard to produce something good when one has such a powerful story, but Wick is able to maintain both stories -- that of the support team (their tense dealings with the natives, their desperate race to find Doug Gordon's body, and later their difficult trek back to civilization) and that of the paddlers (especially through Jamie McEwan's journal entries). My favorite parts are actually these entries, actually, vivid and powerful. The power of the Tsangpo River is hard to imagine. These were some of the best paddlers in the world. Roger Zbel ("King of the Portages" on the Tsangpo . . .) was locally famous back in the States for his still-unmatched descents of massive, flood-swollen rivers. Tom McEwan (and Wick Walker, at that) were the first to run Great Falls, back in 1976, and that run is still perhaps the most famous extreme run in the East. Since then he has spent his life charging down dangerous rivers, leading trips for his paddling school. Jamie McEwan is a two-time Olympian, a bronze medalist, and Doug Gordon was apparently the best of them all . . . Why buy this book over Balf's *"The Last River"*, also about this trip? I asked Jamie, and he said, "Well, Wick's book has pictures . . ." I've never read Balf's book, but I do know that the paddlers themselves had much more input into Wick's book. I don't even think Balf's was authorized. This book was written by a team member, and it shows. There are details, anecdotes, lots of quotes. All in all, it's a fascinating story of four men -- not the type of crazy adrenaline-junkies one might imagine, but middle-aged Ivy League types, who left their domestic lives for a while to take on "The Everest of Whitewater."

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