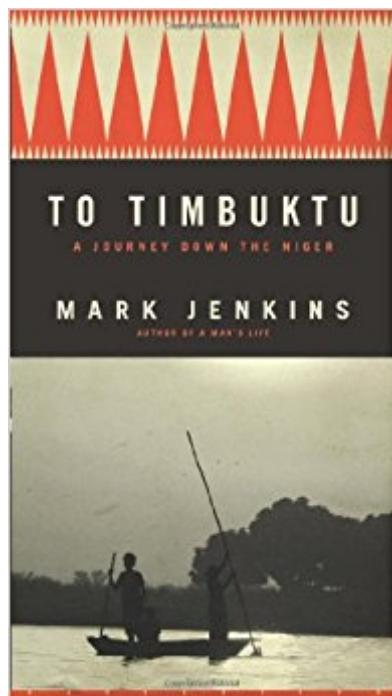


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# To Timbuktu: A Journey Down The Niger



## **Synopsis**

For nearly eight years as the monthly columnist for Outside magazine, and in his award-winning books, Mark Jenkins has held fans spellbound with his riveting accounts of expeditions to remote parts of the globe. In *To Timbuktu*, he sets out with three friends to attempt their first descent of the Niger River, hoping to reach the legendary city of Timbuktu. Along the way they are attacked by killer bees, charged by hippos, and stalked by crocodiles. They stumble upon a group of completely blind men living alone in the bush and dance with a hundred naked women. That Jenkins finally reaches his goal—“riding alone across the Sahara on a motorcycle”—stands in sharp contrast to what befell earlier explorers who tried to find Timbuktu and whose fates the author interweaves with the narrative of his own journey. A rich combination of cultural exploration, history, and gripping adventure, this beautifully repackaged edition of *To Timbuktu* is a journey not to be missed.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

“Here is a lust for rigorous adventure . . . Jenkins displays a Whitmanesque openness to experience. He has the descriptive and narrative skills to bring off a vivid and gritty portrait of a little-explored corner of the world.” Bill Berkeley, *Los Angeles Times* “Jenkins’s story is remarkable, and he is a major writing talent, able to see the world and describe it in ways that are new and refreshing.” Craig Holt, *The Durham Herald-Sun* “There is a melancholy . . . implicit in Mr. Jenkins’s writing, that travel involves something futile, a disregard of Pascal’s epigram about all evil things coming from man’s being unable to sit still in a room. But it is just that touch of

melancholy, of regret, of the hopelessness of the quest that gives To Timbuktu its resonance."â "Richard Bernstein, The New York Times

MARK JENKINS is global correspondent for Rodale magazines and a former monthly columnist for Outside magazine. Besides writing the critically acclaimed books *A Manâ™s Life*, *The Hard Way*, and *Off the Map*, Jenkins is featured in *Best American Travel Writing* and has written for *Menâ™s Health*, *Backpacker*, *Time*, *the Atlantic Monthly*, *National Geographic*, and other media. When heâ™s not off adventuring, he lives in Laramie, Wyoming.

A fascinating book by a truly skillful writer. I admit to being put off a bit by the fact that the author and his childhood friend (both uncontrollable danger junkies) took off on their insanely hazardous journey (to paddle the largely uncharted Niger River hundreds of miles through jungle, desert and local war zones) when both their wives were pregnant, an indulgence I thought somehow hung over the narrative like a shadow. That said, the tale Jenkins spins is epic, a remarkable chronicle of will and courage, and he tells it with a fresh, imagistic, you-are-there kind of prose characteristic of only the best travel writers. If you like harrowing, virile adventure stories with a touch of existential rumination thrown in you won't be disappointed with this one.

As an accomplished long-distance motorcycle rider, and owner of the formidable BMW R100GSPD (Paris-Dakar) Offroad Adventure Tourer, I had been long fascinated by Timbuktu. When terrorists and Taureg raiders ambushed rally racers in recent years, and the Dakar rally moved to South America, this book explains why this has been a land barred to Western adventurers for many centuries. These are true stories of both recent and historical attempts of intrepid travelers to reach the legendary city, and was for me an opportunity to live vicariously through their attempts, struggles, defeats and eventual success without mortal risk.

great book with the mix of history and the story line. I read it with my class of 7/ graders and while I had to 'retract' a handful of choice words and a few passages they enjoyed its realness of it. Maybe better for 9th grade.

This is a wonderful adventure narrative written by a white American from Wyoming about an adventure (undertaken sometime in the early 1990s) kayaking West Africa's Niger River with his best friend. Along the way Jenkins (the author) & company locate the source of the Niger (with help

from an African guide, of course), are swarmed by bees, upended by crocodiles, and charged by hippopotami. Some of my favorite passages are Jenkins' descriptions of his encounters with Africans and African culture. In this regard, in Guinea, where Jenkins &Co reach the literal end of the road, and in order to continue their journey, find it necessary to hire local porters. There being an insufficient number of willing men available to accommodate Jenkins' request in the village where they've landed, the method by which members of this village communicate Jenkins' need to the next village miles away is, in my mind, worth the price of the book. Jenkins' writing is sometimes unnecessarily flowery, at least to my taste. But that criticism in no way takes away from the book's beauty and the strength of its storytelling.

Good book, Takes a bit of reading to get into but once you are hooked its a great book.

A generally well-written travelogue of a trip down the Niger River, with periodic digressions into the history of African exploration and the author's personal life and history. Unlike a previous reviewer, I did not find these separate aspects of the story and the transitions between them to be distracting--in fact I found them some of the most compelling aspects of the book. My biggest gripe was that the book really is not about a trip to Timbuktu, which was what I was looking for when I bought it. The book is about the trip down the Niger, and the author's relationship with his friend, much more than it is about Timbuktu or even really Africa, in more than a broad sense. The final trip to Timbuktu, made after the main journey, seems almost completely superfluous and disappointing. It's basically the story of a trip down the Niger, followed by "Oh, yeah, and I went to Timbuktu". It didn't make me like the rest of it less, but it didn't really add anything, and it left me on a note of disappointment, since Timbuktu was really my reason for reading.

I found this book describing a kayaking journey down the Niger river generally well-written, but not what I was hoping for. My interest is more about African history and exploration. This book seems more about the authors and the adventure of the trip (they smuggle handguns into Africa to protect themselves from crocs/hippos) rather than the history, culture, and experiences associated with the trip. I found three elements unappealing. First, the book tries to interweave three semi-connected components: the current trip by the authors, a previous trip to Morocco by two of the authors, and the history of Saharan exploration or at least the search for Timbuktu and the Niger (Park, Laing, Caillié). This seriously disrupts the flow in my opinion as it jumps around rather abruptly. The second aspect is the author's style of writing where he includes occasional words that seem

unnecessary. For example, in one case he is describing an African man with normal language then throws in the fact that he has a "cicatrice" on his face. Why not just say a scar? The third element I found unappealing is that the author and one of his colleagues quit the river trip prematurely. The author did continue to Timbuktu by motorcycle overland, one companion returned home to Wyoming, and the remaining two continued to the Niger's Atlantic terminus. I will admit that the authors search for the "source" of the Niger and adventures in Guinea were something that is generally not included in similar travels. Overall it was an interesting book, but did not contribute substantially to my interest in Africa.

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