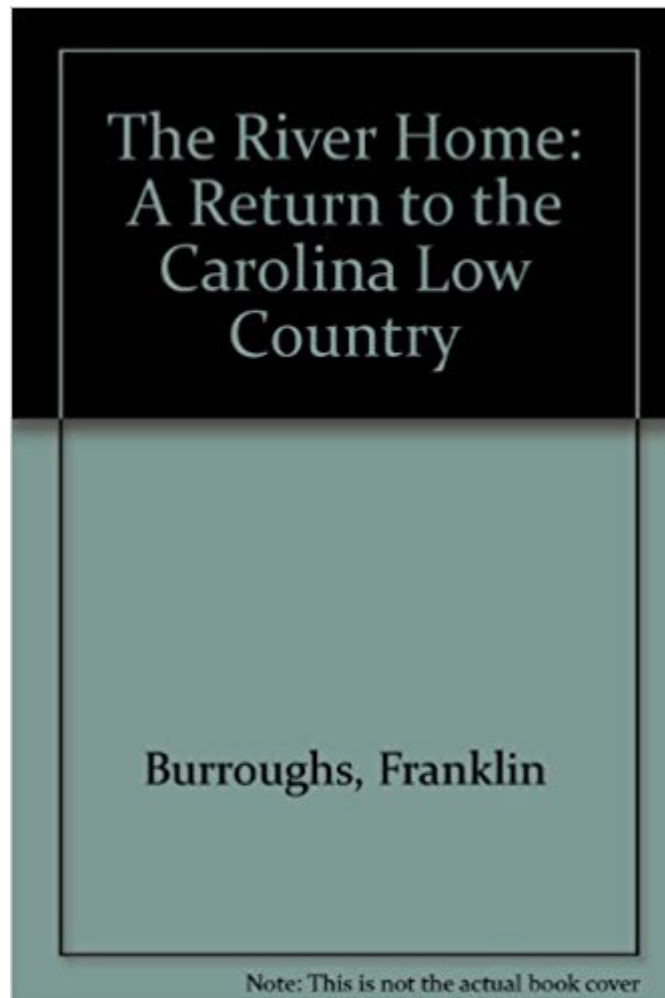




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The River Home: A Return To The Carolina Low Country



Synopsis

The American river has a rich literary heritage, extending from Twain and Thoreau to the more recent journeys of John Graves and Jonathan Raban. Following in this great tradition, Franklin Burroughs chronicles a canoe voyage through the Carolinas, visiting his ancestral homeland and the people who inhabit the banks of the Waccamaw River. His account of this distinctive and rapidly disintegrating backwater reflects on life on and off the river, topography, and how this landscape echoes in the speech, memories, and circumstances of the people he encounters. Their lives provide a kind of living archaeology, and Burroughs's careful descriptions of their voices and habits open a door into history. As quiet and powerful as a river itself, this is a wise and beautifully written narrative of nature, people, and place by one of America's finest writers. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Henry Thoreau seldom wandered far from Walden Pond but got a good book full of self-discovery out of the deal. Like Thoreau, Franklin Burroughs stays close to home ground in *The River Home* (originally published as *Horry and the Waccamaw*), an account of a six-day solo canoe trip along the Waccamaw River, a little-known waterway that flows from North to South Carolina, ending in the swampy Horry County of his boyhood. Along the way Burroughs encounters feisty water moccasins, backwoods fishermen, and a sage woodcarver who regales him with tales of the great wet forests being cleared for the development of nearby Myrtle Beach. "Accumulated memory is disappearing with the landscape," Burroughs writes, "and people can no longer assume that, simply by being

born in the country, they have its history by heart, and need not think further about it." Burroughs's quest for the idyllic South of youthful recollection is melancholic--the destruction of favorite places is, after all, a constant in most of our lives. His well-earned lesson is that of fellow Carolinian Thomas Wolfe: You truly can't go home again. --Greg McNamee --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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Franklin Burroughs looks at his natural world through the eyes of an Annie Dillard--or perhaps it's the other way around. Regardless, Burroughs, like Dillard, excels at translating his love of the natural world into language, words that speak to and of the wilderness he passes through. As Burroughs retraces the journey author and voyager Nathaniel Holmes Bishop took in the 1870s, we follow him stroke by paddle stroke down Horry County's Waccama River, meandering through not only the river, its tributaries and swamplands, but also the antebellum history, culture, and commerce of the South Carolina low country. We learn about characters as colorful as the wood duck that share the river with the author: Thomas Spivey, backwoodsman, craftsman and artist; Anson and Kenneth Babson, father and son, proprietors of an out of the way "Pop and Son" country store; Lonnie Cartrette, soft-spoken, shotgun toting caretaker of Sandy Island, an exclusive hunting retreat. Through their stories we learn more about the economic life of the Waccama past and present. Burroughs also discusses rice cultivation on the Lower Waccamaw in the rice plantations' heyday before the Civil War. The efforts of these large plantations to maintain their pre-war productivity and remain profitable in a slavery-free South is an economic struggle the author

touches upon, as well. In the final chapter of "The River Home," Burroughs draws from the memoirs of Elizabeth W. Alston Pringle. Pringle, described by the adventurer Bishop as "a light, graceful figure," recorded her experiences as the widowed overseer of the family's plantation in her book "A Woman Rice Planter." Not only does her account reveal the challenges she faced in keeping the plantation solvent, but also her optimistic attitude and handling of a variety of mishaps that occurred in the daily operation of Chicora Wood. The passages Burroughs excerpts from Pringle show Elizabeth to be a southern lady who displays a sense of wonder about and love for the natural world she and her plantation belong to, qualities the author obviously admires. The Waccama adventure is a homecoming for Burroughs, a nostalgic journey to reconnect with the old haunts of childhood--hunting and fishing sites his Daddy shared with his son. (These sections read like Ruark's "The Old Man and the Boy.") The trip is also one of reflection about his kin and their history with the river and surrounding low country; we clamber around a bit through the Burroughs' family tree, learn of their Horry County experience. If, in your youth, there was ever a special geography that resonated, meshed with your childhood, then "The River Home" will speak to you. Burroughs is a stylist, a master of description; Audubon might have captured the likeness of a bird, but Burroughs reveals a bird's spirit and personality. Even a creature condemned to be crushed beneath Man's heel is ennobled, revered by the author: "The one living thing I found was a dainty little moccasin, at the back edge of the churchyard. I saw him in plenty of time and stopped. He coiled tighter into himself and hissed, showing the shockingly white, silky inner lining of his mouth. I considered killing him, but didn't... the moccasin belonged here, as an index of oblivion. We watched each other for a while, and then he uncoiled and flowed away, in that strangely stately way of a snake." Why mine is only the third review of Burroughs' wonderful writing is as mysterious to me as the fens and cypress swamplands of the author's Waccama River and his South Carolina marshlands.

Book arrived in excellent condition. The author writes in a very descriptive, down to earth way. You will feel as if you are seeing the scenery yourself. The story is very interesting and will make you think and remember your past.

Burroughs's book is a wonderful tale of exploration into the dense, winding, wonderful Waccamaw River in SC, and into the mostly forgotten past of his native Horry County. His marvelous sense of detail, poetic sensibility, and grand sympathies with all things natural and human make this a memorable book indeed. I know Prof. Burroughs might hoot at the comparison, but I enjoyed this book as much as anything I've read in Thoreau.

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar, unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. -George Eliot (Daniel Deronda)

This sentiment and the chance discovery of Nathaniel Holmes Bishop's *The Voyage of the Paper Canoe* (1878), detailing a canoe trip down the East Coast which included a side trip on the Waccamaw River, were the twin impulses that lead Burroughs to return to his native Horry County, SC and make his own trip down the Waccamaw. Burroughs, a professor at Bowdoin, published a terrific collection of essays *Billy Watson's Croker Sack* in 1991 (it even made Mr. Doggett's Suggested Summer Reading List for Students) and this book is every bit as good. Whether he's detailing the history of the county, the river and his own family or relating his encounters with the river's unique residents or describing the wildlife he encounters, Burroughs has a sharp eye, a sympathetic ear and a silver tongue. Here is his description of one bird he meets: Yesterday a red-shouldered hawk had called the day to order, and got its business underway. Today it was a pileated woodpecker: a staccato drum-burst against a hollow tree, then the bird itself. It flew across in front of me, with its peculiar alternation of flap, swoop, and collapse, and its last swoop fetched it up against the trunk of a cypress. It clung there a moment, cocked and primed, a perfectly congruous mixture of Woody Woodpecker, frock-coated nineteenth-century deacon and pterodactyl. Then it gave the tree an abrupt, jackhammer strafing, rolled out its lordly call, and swooped away, leaving the day to its own devices. If you've ever seen one, you know that a pileated woodpecker has never been described better and if you haven't you must almost feel that now you have. This is a wonderful bucolic look at the history and nature of the Waccamaw, which will leave you wishing that you too had such a place coursing through your blood. GRADE: A

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