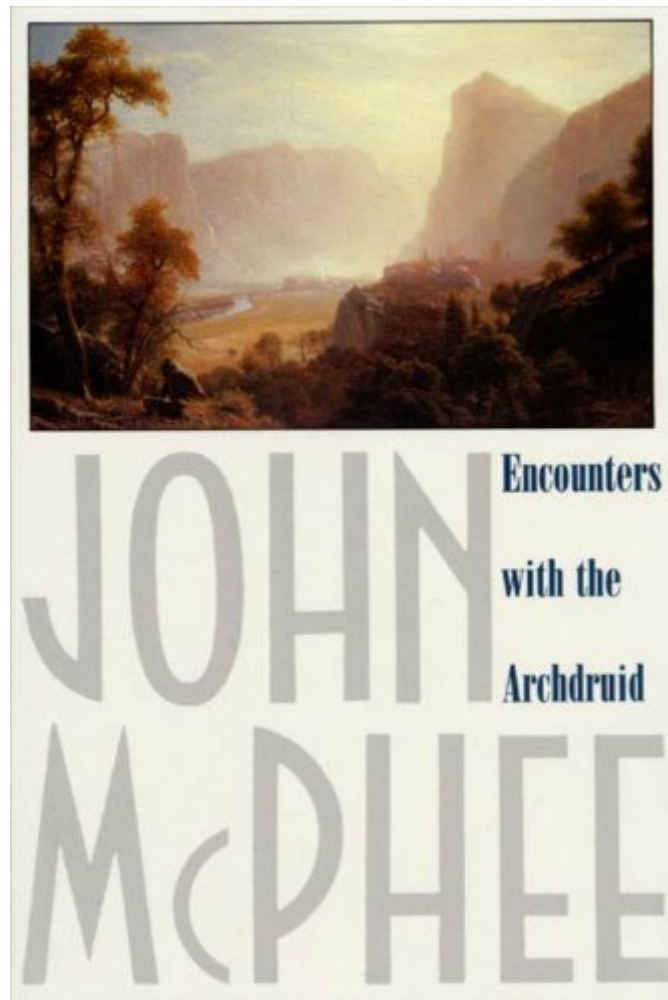


The book was found

Encounters With The Archdruid



Synopsis

The narratives in this book are of journeys made in three wildernesses - on a coastal island, in a Western mountain range, and on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. The four men portrayed here have different relationships to their environment, and they encounter each other on mountain trails, in forests and rapids, sometimes with reserve, sometimes with friendliness, sometimes fighting hard across a philosophical divide.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As the other reviewers here have noted, this is John McPhee's superb recounting of three episodes in the life of famous environmental activist David Brower. The three people he encounters are a geologist, a land developer, and a dam builder. The structure of the book allows a revealing contrast between one of America's greatest environmental activists on three key issues. These are: 1) the desirability and advisability of exploring and mining for ore and minerals in protected wilderness areas, 2) whether it is preferable to develop land on the Atlantic Coast or allow it to be developed, and 3) the desirability of damming major rivers in the Southwest. My favorite portion of the book featured Brower's encounter with the fascinating Charles Fraser, one of America's greatest and

most gifted land developers. At debate was whether to develop Cumberland Island as a recreational and residential area, or whether to leave it wild and protect it as a National Seashore. The editorial reviewer inaccurately stated that Fraser was successful in his goal to develop it. He was not. Today Cumberland Island is a designated National Seashore. Fraser had hoped to develop Cumberland much as he had Hilton Head. What is compelling about Fraser is his desire to develop land on the one hand, with an intent to respect the physical surroundings to the greatest possible degree. Brower himself says in the book that while he is opposed to developing Cumberland Island, if anyone were to develop it, he would want Fraser to be that person. The section of the book in which Brower and dam builder Floyd Dominy discuss a wide range of issues is fascinating not just in contrasting two fundamentally opposed viewpoints, but in bringing out both Brower's most conspicuous success and failure.

In chemistry, a catalyst is used to mix two substances unlikely to join in nature. John McPhee here acts as a catalyst in stimulating reactions between the Archdruid, David Brower, and three of his antagonists. As a catalyst, McPhee deals with each pairing in the most detached way possible. Even so long after its original publication, the attitudes expressed by the mineral engineer, the dam builder and resort developer through McPhee's superb journalism remain with us. He succeeds admirably at that in relating these confrontations, while his writing skills keep you aware of him at all times. Brower, a towering figure in several senses, is portrayed in an almost subdued manner. The strength of his message, however, so appropriate today, is conveyed by McPhee as a muffled riptide. Join McPhee as he struggles over copper-bearing mountains with Brower and geologist Charles Park. Park "would move the White House if there was copper under it." To Park, mineral extraction is mandated by the need of Americans to maintain the lifestyle they've achieved in the 20th Century. Brower argues that lifestyle growth must slow its pace to retain the remaining natural resources. Park counters Brower's desire to protect the wilderness with assertions that "managed mining" will achieve both aims. Park argues that mining need not destroy wilderness and that Glacier Peak's hiking trails will not be lost because copper is removed from its innards. Does this sound familiar? The Archdruid's second encounter is with the rather more flamboyant Charles Fraser. Fraser has a winning track record in development, particularly golf courses. He wants to "open" an island off the Carolina coast.

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