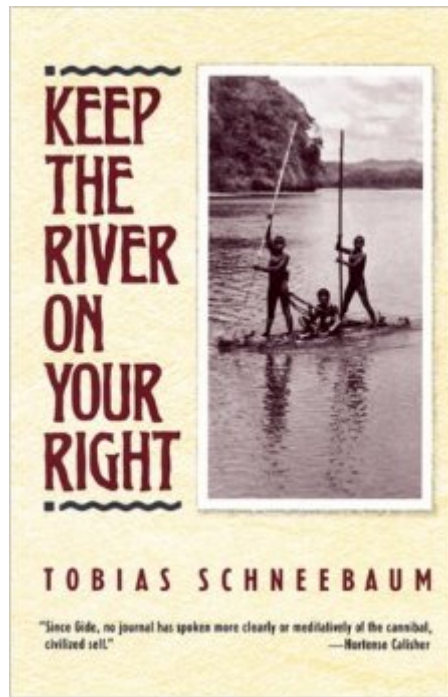


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Keep The River On Your Right



Synopsis

In 1955, armed with a penknife and instructions to keep the river on his right, Brooklyn-born artist Tobias Schneebaum set off into the jungles of Peru in search of a tribe of cannibals. Forgoing all contact with civilization, he lived as a brother with the Akamas; shaving and painting his body, hunting with Stone Age weapons, sleeping in the warmth of the body-pile.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I first read this beautifully crafted work in 1977. Shortly thereafter I had the great pleasure to meet Tobias in Northern California where he presented a slide lecture on his life among the Asmat of New Guinea. There is no question in my mind that *Keep the River on Your Right* is a work of non fiction. It is an astonishing journal as brutally honest as any I've ever read. It deserves to be in the pantheon with Beaudelaire (*Intimate Journals*), and Broughton (*The Androgyne Journal*). I've just reread this timeless work after 23 years after having recently seen the documentary on Tobias' life which no doubt will bring a new generation of readers to this elegantly written masterpiece.

If the life of this man seems incredible, it is because the man himself is incredible. I have just seen the world premiere of a documentary entitled "Keep The River On Your Right" in which Tobias returns with the filmmakers and relives his journey through Peru. He is 78 years old and not only did they find some of the tribes-people that he lived with while there, those same people remembered him, after 48 years. There need be no more proof of the validity of his book than that. Even beyond

the text of this book, Tobias's life offers a larger lesson, and that is one of acceptance and understanding of every human being and culture. I hope that people will continue to read this book and that this message will be taken into the hearts of the readers as a new way to live life.

I remember being a gay teenager and seeing this book in the library of an older, cultured gay man. When I took the book from the shelf he whispered, "He had sex with cannibals!" Naturally I skimmed the book very carefully, hunting for all the dirty bits. Twenty years passed before I sat and read it for real. It is a beautiful book, which tells a compelling and important story. It's true, too, that there are erotic scenes so vivid I needed to take a deep breath. Scenes so close to my own unspoken desires that I thought I might cry. Oh, for the warm body pile! Even though I enjoyed this book and revere its author, I still think it is acceptable to question to what extent this is a work of fact and to what extent it is a gay Carlos Castenada novel. I cannot imagine that he wrote this book without real experience of the Arakmbut, here called the Akaramas. Indeed, there is clear evidence which supports this. At the same time, I cannot imagine this book being written without Carlos Castenada. The quote at the front of the book is Castenada's and so is much of the book's tone and style. Now that Castenada has been thoroughly debunked, this will sound like an attack, but in 1969 he was widely respected. He was, after all, a compelling storyteller and Schneebaum, too, has made use of that style and tone. I believe, too, that some of the events and encounters in the book are also the creations of an artist's heart. They are true to that heart and, as to what actually happened, we will never know. Regardless of how factual it is, this has been and will remain an important and necessary book. It is possible to both respect Schneebaum and appreciate the book without reading it as a strictly factual account.

Schneebaum is an unusual man. When you first hear of him you might think maybe too unusual. That's where you need to look at the man and his journey from a larger perspective. The book has much to tell us about respect for other cultures and about how to relate to people who don't see the world in the same way we do. If you keep an open mind, you will enjoy getting inside the mind of a very caring and empathetic man.

Although his story is quite unique and incredible, and I truly admire his intrepid and spirited forays into uncharted and deadly territory, I did not find myself glued to the book as one that you couldn't put down. Was it his style of writing... his narration...? I'm not sure. Although, with the exception of his brief incursion into cannibalism, I duly envy his incredibly dauntless experience.

Managed to see advance press screener of the new documentary based on Tobias Schneebaum's life called *Keep the River On Your Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale* - the film was so mesmerizing and Mr. Schneebaum so articulate and intriguing I immediately ordered the original memoir by Schneebaum and read it in one sitting. An important "lost" book from the Sixties thank god restored to it's original importance.

We see from Stephen O. Murray and his ilk, a desire to suppress this important journey and its journal, by pretending it is not `scientific'. Schneebaum describes himself as a 'Painter' - not an anthropologist, and nor does he attempt to write in a scientific way. Insight into our own ignorance is an important part of scientific study; on occasion it can be a sufficient condition. I congratulate Schneebaum for making this and other journeys, and for the memoirs these create. This is most certainly not a textbook, or anything resembling a scientific treatise or paper. It is a stained glass window, decorated by Schneebaum's own homosexuality (sexual fantasy and desire). He views the `cannibals' from this perspective, and they view him in an equally astounding way. I recently saw Schneebaum on TV, and his current boyfriend explains Schneebaum's desire for an `aroused native'. Re-read this book from Schneebaum's perspective, and a flood of insight into this important people is revealed; rather like the Sun bursting through the colored window, illuminating the dark room within. Reviewer S. O. Murray appears to consider himself a voice of authority; possessed indeed by an intellect surmounted only by his overwhelming ignorance. His reviews are based on conjecture, rather than the content of the book or document reviewed. Ignore him, he is just incapable of understanding; blinded by the heavy drapes over his window.

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