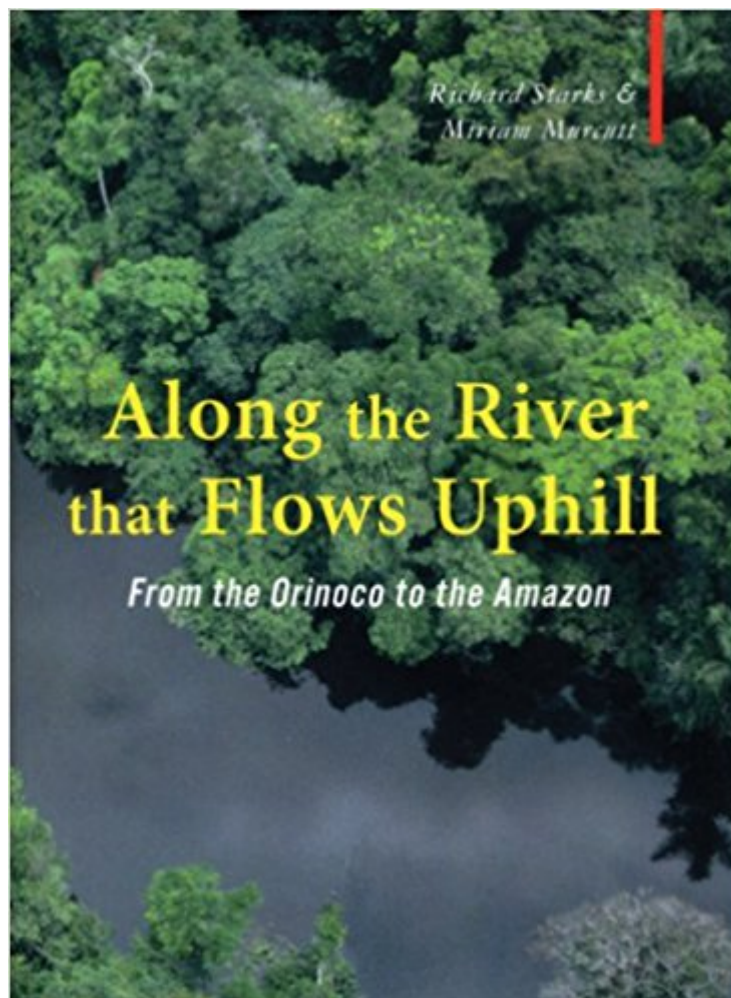




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Along The River That Flows Uphill: From The Orinoco To The (Armchair Traveller)



Synopsis

The Casiquiare is unique. There is no other river like it on the planet. Somehow it manages to unite the two river systems of the Orinoco and the Amazon that should, by rights, be entirely separate, and the Casiquiare performs the astonishing feat of flowing up and over the watershed that divides them. Richard Starks and Miriam Murcutt travelled along the Casiquiare at the behest of the Royal Geographical Society-and in the footsteps of exploring greats like Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland-to gather information about the river and the fierce Yanomani tribe that still maintains its austere and primitive lifestyle in the region.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Along the River that Flows Uphill: From the Orinoco to the Amazon is a travelogue of a journey along the Casiquiare river, unique among rivers in that it joins two separate river systems - the Orinoco and the Amazon - seemingly by flowing up and over the watershed that separates them. Former journalist Richard Starks and travel writer and editor Miriam Murcutt relate their adventure along the mysterious Casiquiare in vivid detail, including a brush with a tribe of Yanomami Indians and a potentially dangerous confrontation with FARC guerillas. Their reflections of the sights, wonders, and wistful beauties of a little-traveled path make for an unforgettably vivid travelogue. Along the River that Flows Uphill is a treat highly recommended especially for armchair travelers.' Midwest Book Review "Along the River that Flows Uphill" is not just a story but a real life adventure that takes twists and turns along a remarkable stretch of water that remains nearly untouched. The authors not only give a stunning account of their adventures but provide intriguing background information as

they go through the journey. From slight sidebars to detailed accounts of jungle, river and bugs, the reader feels as though she joined the authors on the trip... This is an extremely intelligent book that leaves the reader feeling wiser for having read it and more aware of the fragility of the world, as well as a bit of disgust at the corruption that plagues the political arenas.' 'A very well written book that has a few surprises along the way.' -- Melissa Koltes Rebeccasreads.com "I've nearly died three times in my life -- which is funny in an ironic way, since I was once accused of never taking any risks." This first line of *Along the River that Flows Uphill* sets the tone completely. We understand, just from that, that we're about to embark on an adventure. The other thing that we understand is that we're in the hands of a storyteller or, as it turns out, a couple of them. In 2005, the authors were commissioned to write an article for *Geographical*, the magazine of the London-based Royal Geographical Society. Their assignment was to travel the length of the Casiquiare River in Venezuela, the river that joins the Amazon and the Orinoco by apparently flowing uphill. One can see, however, where the material the pair were assembling might have overflowed from the article they'd been assigned. The book the two produced is both enjoyable and informative: and so much beyond the travelogue one might expect. It is creative non-fiction. It is literature. It is history. It is geography. It is adventure. And it is cracking good fun -- Aaron Blanton January Magazine 2009 1231

Richard Starks has worked as a writer, editor and publisher of newsletters and magazines in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. He is the author of six books, three of them co-authored with Miriam Murcutt. Miriam Murcutt is a writer, editor and former marketing executive in the travel and publishing industries in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. She has co-authored three books, all with Richard Starks. Their first book, *'Lost in Tibet'*, is a true-life adventure set against the political and cultural background of pre-Chinese Tibet. Their second book, *'Along the River that Flows Uphill'*, is a travel book that uses an account of an journey the authors made to assess the risks inherent in all adventurous travel. And their third book, *'A Room with a View - Sleeping our way through Spain's ancient monasteries'* is an account of a journey the authors took through Spain staying with communities of monks and nuns behind the walls of seven of Spain's ancient monasteries. The two authors have travelled extensively throughout South and Central America, Europe, the Far East, and the Himalayas. They say that the journey they write about in *'Along the River that Flows Uphill'* took them further off-the-map than most of their other journeys have done.

A compelling travel tale.

Author, Richard Starks, who narrates his travelogue, begins with an interesting reflection of his own life: "I've nearly died three times in my life. The first was due to exposure to extreme weather conditions in Canada. The second was in the Himalayas where he nearly died of boredom. The third time is recorded in this book as it occurs during his river voyage when a Yanomami Indian in Venezuela threatened to shoot him with a poisoned arrow. A reader's interest is immediately piqued by the title itself as it suggests that a river flows uphill. Will Starks explain that unusual concept while dodging the poisoned arrow during his exploration of the Casiquiare River? Starks' interest in unique and unusual travels began years before his South American journey. He stated: "I yearned to go where no other man had set foot - to be the first to penetrate lands so remote that not even meridians dared cross them." In order to fulfill his desires, he requested permission from the Royal Geographic Society of London to write travel articles for their magazine, the Geographical. The Society commissioned him to record and report on travels along the Casiquiare River; thus began his journey with Miriam Murcutt, a friend whose companionship he requested for comfort and assurance. The Casiquiare River "apparently" flows uphill and connects the Orinoco River to the . Note that the word "apparently" is used several times, at least by reviewers, and "apparently" questions the direction of the river flow. Starks gives an explanation of sorts in the latter chapters. Many pages are filled with a fascinating amalgam of history, math, science, religion, philosophy and even politics. Starks reads books by and about Stanley and Livingstone. He quotes the noble and famous explorers along with others like Joseph Conrad. He makes known his political feelings against G.W. Bush and Chavez. Did those political thoughts advance his narrative of a travelogue? I found that some of his "stories" were very interesting but often diversions from the purpose of the narrative - an insight and exploration of a river that is generally unknown to the public. Or is my perspective of the purpose incorrect? Is Starks' purpose to resolve a question within himself - how much of his life is he willing to risk by taking such a journey? He developed a formula for risk, expanded it, and then concluded that he knows he's at risk but his formula cannot apply as "events in our lives are controlled by chance. They're unpredictable....also unknowable." Yet, interspersed with all the science and philosophical lessons, Starks' story begins to focus more on the Casiquiare and the events that occurred during the journey. One of his boat companions, whom he calls "Y", belongs to the Yanomami - a tribe with a reputation of viciousness and mostly uncivilized manners. It is during their visit to a Yanomami village that a tribesman aims his bow and arrow at Starks' camera. No native inhabitants along the Orinoco and Casiquiare trust Starks to be friendly as he aims his camera in their direction. He lowered his camera to be safe. I wondered

throughout the narration why Starks did not include his photographs in his book. Perhaps it was because as they finished their journey from the river to San Felipe, guards appeared and captured Starks and Miriam. They took his camera and demanded a ransom fee of \$20,000. The guards were members of the narco-terrorist organization known as FARC, which is still active today. Starks and Miriam managed to escape. Dangers of FARC are explained in the Afterword. In an attempt to understand the flow of the Casiquiare, Starks asks Junta, a female scientist, how does the Casiquiare "manage to flow over the watershed that separates the Orinoco from the basins." Junta says "It changes directions. Sometimes the river flows from the Orinoco to the Negro, and sometimes it switches around and flows from the Negro to the Orinoco." Starks disagrees with this theory though "it has merit." He believes that the Prussian explorer, Humboldt, who made the statement that the "river frequently changes its direction" was misinterpreted. Starks believes that he did not mean the river reverses the direction of its flow, but "merely that it changes direction. In other words, it meanders." Starks says "the Casiquiare flows in one direction from the bifurcation down to the confluence. Of course, at no time does it run uphill." (See p.196) So why is the title "Along the River that Flows Uphill"? So much information in a fairly short book of 234 pp. Worth reading.

This low-budget journey along the Casiquiare River in Venezuela should be called a 'quest' rather than a 'vacation,' since it involved not only a goal, but also a fair amount of unpleasantness, such as an attempted kidnapping by the FARC guerillas. Richard Starks and Miriam Murcutt were commissioned by "Geographical," the magazine of the Royal Geographical Society in London to explore a river that joins two great South American river systems, the Orinoco and the , by apparently flowing uphill over the watershed that divides them. Most of the journey is by boat, so there is plenty of time for reading and musing. I was especially fond of the author's riff on the creation myths of the Yanomami Indians versus the Old Testament versus the latest cosmological Big Bang. Stanley's journey through Africa to find Dr. Livingston (who didn't really want to be found, most especially not by an American journalist) is interwoven with the authors' own journey up the Casiquiare River. There are also up-close and personal encounters with the Yanomami, one of whom nocks an arrow at the author while he is taking photographs. In common with many Stone Age people, the Yanomami believe cameras are soul-stealing devices. Or possibly, the guy with the bow happened to be in a bad mood on that particular day. The Yanomami don't lead very easy lives, especially the women. However, the misery of the Yanomami women still contrasts favorably to the lives of the FARQ kidnap victims, some of whom have been captives in the Columbian

jungles for over a decade. The operations of the FARC guerillas are funded by kidnap for ransom, illegal mining, extortion and the production and distribution of illegal drugs. The authors were very fortunate to escape from these narco-terrorists, and write vividly and indignantly of the treatment of those who currently languish in captivity."Along the River that Flows Uphill" is adventure-travel writing in the grandly eccentric British tradition: a horrid climate and high adventure, laced throughout with acute observations on geopolitics, anthropology, and geography .***review copy supplied by authors***

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