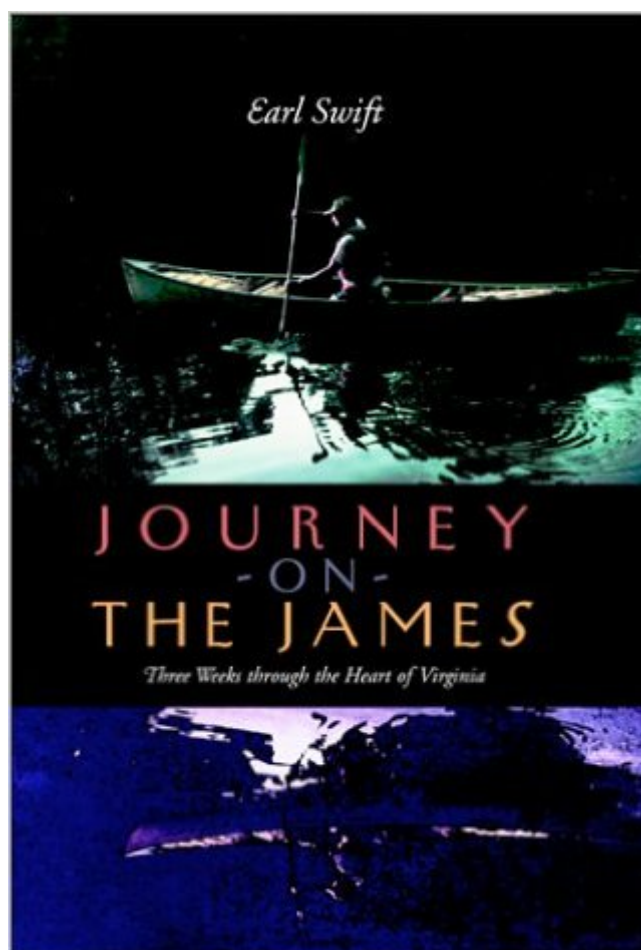


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# Journey On The James: Three Weeks Through The Heart Of Virginia



## Synopsis

From its beginnings as a trickle of icy water in Virginia's northwest corner to its miles-wide mouth at Hampton Roads, the James River has witnessed more recorded history than any other feature of the American landscape -- as home to the continent's first successful English settlement, highway for Native Americans and early colonists, battleground in the Revolution and the Civil War, and birthplace of America's twentieth-century navy. In 1998, restless in his job as a reporter for the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Earl Swift landed an assignment traveling the entire length of the James. He hadn't been in a canoe since his days as a Boy Scout, and he knew that the river boasts whitewater, not to mention man-made obstacles, to challenge even experienced paddlers. But reinforced by Pilot photographer Ian Martin and a lot of freeze-dried food and beer, Swift set out to immerse himself -- he hoped not literally -- in the river and its history. What Swift survived to bring us is this engrossing chronicle of three weeks in a fourteen-foot plastic canoe and four hundred years in the life of Virginia. Fueled by humor and a dauntless curiosity about the land, buildings, and people on the banks, and anchored by his sidekick Martin -- whose photographs accompany the text -- Swift points his bow through the ghosts of a frontier past, past Confederate forts and POW camps, antebellum mills, ruined canals, vanished towns, and effluent-spewing industry. Along the banks, lonely meadowlands alternate with suburbs and power plants, marinas and the gleaming skyscrapers of Richmond's New South downtown. Enduring dunkings, wolf spiders, near-arrest, channel fever, and twenty-knot winds, Swift makes it to the Chesapeake Bay. Readers who accompany him through his Journey on the James will come away with the accumulated pleasure, if not the bruises and mud, of four hundred miles of adventure and history in the life of one of America's great watersheds.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

On pages 4-5 of the book, the author gives an account of how the idea came about for his canoe trip: "The seeds of our odyssey were sown one afternoon in early 1998, as I stared at a computer screen...this particular afternoon I was awash in ennui. I felt trapped in a routine of regular stories cranked out on regularly spaced deadlines...Then something happened that made me feel a game piece in some cosmic chess match. I was called into a conference with my boss, Dennis Hartig,...I don't remember what he wanted to see me about, but I clearly recall the conversation taking an unexpected turn. 'You know what I think would be a great story?' he suddenly asked. 'You know what story I'd love to see you do someday?'...'No,' I almost whispered. 'What?' And apropos of nothing we'd ever discussed before, Dennis said: 'A series on canoeing the whole length of the James River.' He clapped his hands, stood up from his chair, practically yelled: 'Wouldn't that be great?'"In addition to recently reading the book, I had also kept abreast of the author's journey when he initially published it as a series of newspaper stories as he travelled the river in 1998. That paper also ran the series in installments over the Internet, where readers not only could follow the writer's passage down the James, but communicate with him via a chat room at the journey's end. The series and the author's comments to readers have been permanently archived on the Internet, and can be found by locating the series, "Journey on the James," clicking on the prompt that says, "Write to Earl Swift", which leads the reader to the Hampton Roads Internet site. At that site, both story and author's dialogue with the readers can be found in the News and Opinion section under the heading of Special Projects.

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