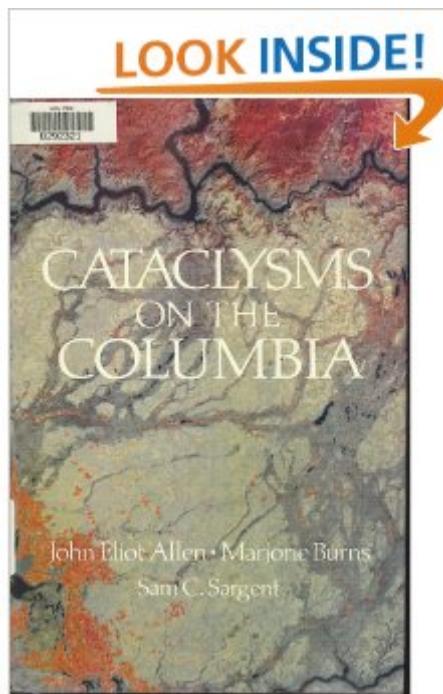


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Cataclysms On The Columbia: A Layman's Guide To The Features Produced By The Catastrophic Bretz Flood In The Pacific Northwest (Scenic Trips To The Northwest's Geologic Past, No. 2)



Synopsis

Cataclysms on the Columbia tells two stories. One follows geological research that challenged the scientific paradigm of the early 20th century, and the other chronicles the result of that research: the discovery of powerful prehistoric floods that shaped the Pacific Northwest. The cataclysms at the end of the last Ice Age left a scabland of buttes, dry falls, and rocky gorges, but it took the detective work of geologist J Harlen Bretz to prove it to the world. His lifetime of research and unshakeable belief changed geology forever. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

I'd like to give this book a higher rating, but I can't. Great subject, should be brought to the attention of everyone even vaguely interested in the forces that shape our landscapes, and a fascinating account of the Bretz "saga". Like Wegener, Bretz was ridiculed in his time for his outlandish theories; unlike Wegener, he lived long enough to see his theories dramatically confirmed. On a recent trip to the US I had the opportunity to drive across WA, ID, and MT, and was entranced by the coulees, Dry Falls, the scablands, and the stranded lake shores above Missoula. So what's my gripe? Simply that, while the authors have done a commendable job of making the whole story accessible to lay readers, they haven't really done their subject the treatment it so richly deserves. The writing (shared by three authors) is uneven, tends to be repetitious, and would have benefited from tighter editing. The chapters describing Bretz and his battles with the geological establishment are the best and most readable; those describing the details of the post-flood geomorphology (sensibly ordered from Lake Missoula to the sea) are more ponderous. The photos are also a big

disappointment - I would happily have paid extra for a book with up to date and well-produced colour photos, rather than the grainy monochromes which have been used throughout. Buy the book, marvel at the story, and imagine what it would have been like to watch the floods from a secure piece of high ground, but keep your eyes open for the day when the authors (or someone else) produce a livelier and more readable update.

This fascinating book, written in language easily understood by non-geologist, yet full of scientific facts that a geologist can appreciate reads like a detective story; describing in detail how the geologic history and formation of the Columbia River was finally understood. It can be used as a road guide and has many maps and photographs showing exact locations of features discussed in the book. **A MUST READ FOR ANYONE TRAVELING THROUGH THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE IN OREGON!** This book is one that has provided geologist with many of the keys and clues that are presently being used to understand the large flood features seen on Mars.

This book excellently explains why the eastern half of the State of Washington and the lower Columbia valley are so curiously carved. It also shows how a truly observant scientist works, even though his vindication may be slow in coming. While some persons might wish for more color photographs, I believe the black and white format, particularly in the Grand Coulee region, better shows the power and scope of the floods that carved these otherworldly channels from bare lava rock. The drawing of a typical Bretz flood has to be seen firsthand to be believed. Another exemplary book on the geology of the West. Don't see Grand Coulee or the Columbia Gorge without reading this book.

As a geologist who recently visited northern Oregon, I was eager to learn more of the Missoula Floods. After reading this book, I concluded that if there isn't a better written account, there certainly should be. The portion of the book on the geologists who worked on solving this puzzle was fine, but the account of the floods and the geologic evidence they left behind was less than adequate. The text was repetitive in some places and in others didn't provide enough context to be clear. There was a disconnect between the figures and maps and the text. Frequently the text referenced features and locations that were hard to locate on the maps or were missing entirely. Some of the references to figures appeared to be wrong and in at least one case the text referenced a figure number that did not exist in the book. It is difficult to understand how a "revised second edition" of a book can be in such dire need of majoring editing. Overall, the discussion of the sequence of events

and their locations was hard to follow. It seems the authors were trying to provide enough of the supporting information for a geologist and make it accessible to the layman. I think this falls on both counts.

Picked up this book in a book store because I thought it looked good. It was. I have to admit that I was already in the thrall of the scablands of eastern Washington but this book really brought it together. There is an interesting biographical drama as a separate story. The basin by basin description of the columbia valley that follows can be skipped over, used as a tour guide, or cherry picked. Or, like me, you can read every page. First go see the dry falls and the excellent interpretive center there with its satellite photographs and topographic maps. Then read this book and marvel at what Harlan Bretz was able to see from eye level. You will never look at Eastern Washington the same way again. A steal at ten bucks!

When it comes to the Channeled Scablands of Eastern Washington, I'm a bit of a fanatic. My family belongs to the Ice Age Floods Institute as well as Washington Trails Association and Rails to Trails. I am truly fortunate to live in this area. These coulees are my stomping grounds. The blades are my scrambling hills. I'm spoiled by an abundant beauty that is found in only a few places on this planet. Cataclysms on the Columbia is one of many books I own pertaining to "Bretz' Flood". This book, like many others, describe the cataclysmic destruction of the flood and the carving of the many coulees and creation of Dry Falls, which, at the time it was "active" was nearly 10 times larger than Niagara Falls. For those who have marveled at Niagara imagine nine more, side by side. This book does a great job of explaining the flood and subsequent creation of the Scablands. It tells both a story and allows the reader knowledge of places to see and go to. The pictures are a tad lacking, but if you go, you can take your own. The writing, owing to the several authors is a bit choppy. The book moves but it doesn't "flow". No problem, I'll deal with that. It also helps me to understand what is said when several have relayed that bit of information. All in all, even though there's nothing really new in the book, this is a great book to have as a first and introduction to the area or an additional to augment a collection (such as I have).

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