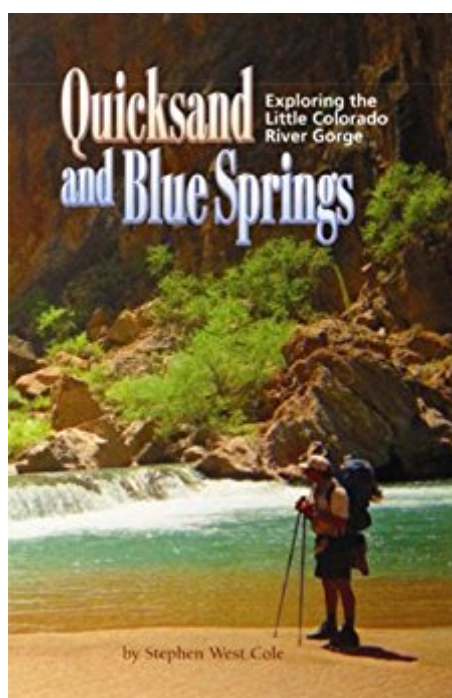


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Quicksand And Blue Springs: Exploring The Little Colorado River Gorge



Synopsis

In May 2001, Stephen West Cole and his brother hiked the Little Colorado River Gorge from the town of Cameron, Arizona to its confluence with the Colorado River, and out by way of the Beamer and Tanner trails in the Grand Canyon. He found the desert landscape so fascinating that he went back later to explore three remote side canyon routes which enter the chasm. There was very little written about the area then so here he shares some of his experiences and thoughts about it. The book is not meant to be a guide although we hope that anyone exploring the Gorge on foot or in an armchair will find it helpful.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is not a hiking guide and not purely a travelogue but a somewhat unsatisfying mix. It's mostly about one hike but mixes in others and has so many digressions that it's hard to get a feel for their experiences on the main hike. If you are interested in this area or intend to hike it, get the book but it won't be sufficient.

Quicksand and Blue Springs is a good read especially if you share the author's enthusiasm for hiking. Most readers will probably never hike the Little Colorado River Gorge, but the book is well worth reading even if you never do. It's full of interesting anecdotes and it does a good job of describing the area and the people and history connected to it. It even adds a few new twists to old stories. For example, the popular story about river runner Burt Loper's bones is replaced with a disconcerting new theory. Also, the chapter on the 1956 airliner disaster above the confluence is the only thing I've read which so concisely and movingly explains the tragedy. While the book has a lot of detail about the gorge, it also delves into parts of the author's life which are sometimes pretty funny. The most inspiring thing which emerges from the pages though is the author's passion for hiking. Any hiker can recognize and relate to the sheer joy of embarking on such an ambitious on-foot journey. Granted, it's not a boing guidebook which describes every obscure route into the gorge, and fortunately it never attempts to be, but it's a good overview and it's well written. If the book must have a criticism, let it be for its brevity. I was left wishing there had been more.

This is an excellent book written in a narrative style rife with humor and wit. I couldn't disagree more with the reviewer that panned the book. The author admits right up front that it not a book for the ultra-experienced canyon hiker; instead the author describes the experience in a way that resonates with the mid-to-novice hiker (or even the completely inexperienced hiker) in a way that piques the imagination of the reader. Many of us would not go on as rigorous a hike as this, and I think the narrative succeeds in dissuading the inexperienced hiker from even attempting this hike. That being said, the book is written in a way that makes the reader relive the experience and identify with the travails of the author. As difficult as this trek is, I know that it is even more difficult to write a great book with style and wisdom. I think Cole succeeds admirably in a way that only a great story teller can.

The author does a terrific job of describing his treks and the area. With artful prose, he winds his narrative through his experience and historical Grand Canyon events as the reader treads with him down the beautiful and wild Little Colorado River Gorge and on separate occasions, up tributary side canyons. While he does a good job of illustrating the wildness of the place with descriptions, he also peppers (or is that "sands"?) his accounts with humor. It isn't a guidebook, but it would be a must-read for anyone attempting the trek. It is, however, just as entertaining for someone who will never try it. I did find myself wishing for a serif typeface and clearer photos, but the book is

wonderful and easy to read, nonetheless.

Stephen West Cole has written a delightful account of his experiences through the Little Colorado River Gorge. Throughout his narrative, Cole weaves personal anecdotes (including the Blueberry Newton effect) that are both instructive and humorous. The area is brought to life through Cole's recounting of past events that have occurred in the gorge, such as the 1956 two-plane collision over the Painted Desert. His eye for detail as he traversed the gorge is remarkable; it made me want to take on the challenge of the gorge myself. Zip stove and all! A very readable book.

This book, with a courageous editor, could have been cut down in size to make one good decent magazine article. Instead the author wanders away from his subject frequently leaving one to wonder if he was just trying to fill pages to get this to book length. Its sub-title is "Exploring the Little Colorado Gorge" yet the book uses over 70 pages of its total written text of 160 pages talking of things not directly related to the Little Colorado --- for example the 1960s controversy over the Glen Canyon dam, the Spangler murder, the 1956 Grand Canyon Air Crash, etc. Personally I found the authors writing style unexciting, bland. The Little Colorado between Cameron and its confluence with the Colorado River has at least 12 trails and routes from the gorge bottom to the rim (I have hiked 10 so far.) Rather than writing about unrelated subjects the author would have helped the reader by hiking & describing some of the other routes. I have been hiking the Grand Canyon area since 1977 and have logged over 10,000 miles below the rim. The Little Colorado area is still very exciting for me. Some readers that have never hiked here may find this book exciting. Frankly, for me, the book was a disappointment. For the detailed 10 hikes and routes into the Little Colorado see my latest book: "Selected Grand Canyon Area Hiking Routes Including The Little Colorado River and Great Thumb" (Dog Ear Publishing, 2014).

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