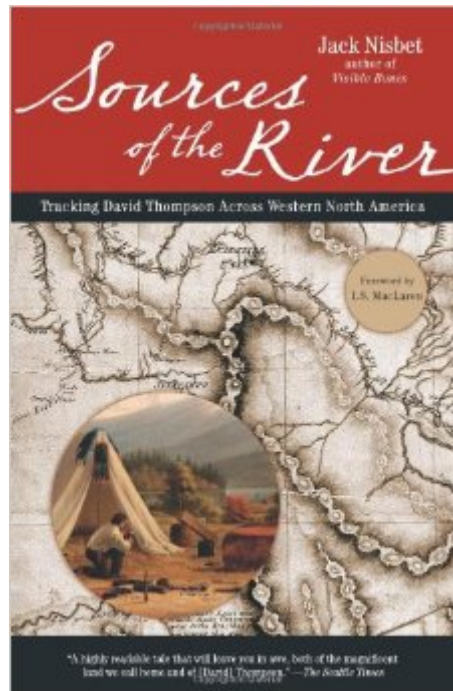


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# Sources Of The River, 2nd Edition: Tracking David Thompson Across North America



## Synopsis

In this true story of adventure, author Jack Nisbet re-creates the life and times of David Thompson—fur trader, explorer, surveyor, and mapmaker. From 1784 to 1812, Thompson explored western North America, and his field journals provide the earliest written accounts of the natural history and indigenous cultures of the what is now British Columbia, Alberta, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Thompson was the first person to chart the entire route of the Columbia river, and his wilderness expeditions have become the stuff of legend. Jack Nisbet tracks the explorer across the continent, interweaving his own observations with Thompson's historical writings. The result is a fascinating story of two men discovering the Northwest territory almost two hundred years apart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first read about David Thompson in a National Geographic magazine and I couldn't put it down. David Thompson has done more for the exploration of North America than anyone in the school history books. It is a shame that I have only met one person who has ever heard of David Thompson. Most people would be shocked to find that some of the maps used by Lewis and Clark were drawn up by this Hudson Bay Company explorer who was only in his teens. This man had an amazing life and for more great reading get a hold of his diary of travels.

As we reach the bicentennial of David Thompson's crossing of the Rocky Mountains, it appears that "Sources of the River" is becoming the definitive popular reference. The book deserves it. Like all of

Nisbet's books, this one is very well written and enjoyable to read. The book covers Thompson's entire life but focuses on the five years he spent in the Rocky Mountain region of Canada and the United States. That period includes his exploration of the entire length of the Columbia River, the first non-Indian to do so. Because David Thompson was a contemporary of Lewis and Clark, reviewers are inclined to compare them. This is only partially valid. The latter was a military expedition sent on a mission of exploration. David Thompson was a fur trader working for a commercial company. He had the desire and talent to explore, but trading had to come first. Thompson was the point person for expanding the fur trade across the Rocky Mountains and into the Columbia River drainage. As he advanced his trading territory, his journals recorded an expanding knowledge of the territory and its inhabitants, plants, and animals. Thompson was a geographer and surveyor; his maps are much more accurate than those developed by Lewis and Clark. Thompson was a rugged individual and this book covers the challenges and hardships of the fur trade. The Indians were an important element in both his trading and his exploration. This book chronicles those relationships. Thompson took a Cree wife who bore him thirteen children and they were together until his death at age eighty-seven. In addition to the well-researched historical account of David Thompson, we are treated to an occasional aside from Jack Nisbet, often describing his visit to one of the sites important to the history. This book deserves its wide acceptance.

David Thompson. A man of untiring capabilities for exploring, surveying, trapping and trading in western Canada. From the age of fourteen, he gave twenty seven years of his life towards these goals, of which not too many men could begin to attain. His duties for the Hudson's Bay Company and later the North West Company were to map, trade, trap, locate future trading establishments and discover a passage to the Pacific for commerce. Herein exists tales of endurance, perseverance, stamina and survival in unexplored regions of Canada and the U.S. Pacific Northwest from 1784-1812. An extremely well written book by Jack Nisbet, along with very good, easy to read maps by Jack McMaster in order to follow the whereabouts of Thompson.

Based on David Thompson's own account of his explorations of the western North American continent, this is a perceptive tale of hardship and adventure. Jack Nisbet has the intuitive ability to cut to the heart of the subject, not just how this area was discovered but how the discovery influenced the native people and the natural history of the area. His own brief but discerning anecdotes about his interactions with the land and its people provide counterpoint and context for

the main narrative. The writer follows the life of David Thompson from his birth in London in 1770 and his education at a charity school to his apprenticeship with the Hudson's Bay Company and arrival in northern Canada. His major life work was to explore and map what became known as the interior of British Columbia, eastern Washington, western Montana and northern Oregon, focussed on the Columbia River and its tributaries. He crossed and re-crossed the Rocky Mountains through passes known only to native people and he established trading posts and trading relations with native people so he could supply the Hudson's Bay Company, and later the Northwest Company, with the furs they sought. Later in life he "retired" to Montreal and later to Ontario where he became astronomer for the International Boundary Commission, guiding the U.S.-Canadian survey of the 49th parallel from Quebec, via the Great Lakes to Manitoba. This is a story well told. It doesn't bog down in tedious detail yet still manages to convey the day-to-day routines as well as the excitement of discovery and the hardships faced by explorers in harsh terrain in an often bitter climate. The book has an immediacy and depth that are seldom realized together in an historical narrative.

Jack Nisbet does an excellent job by citing David Thompson's journals, including some of his original maps (lack of maps in a book can be annoying when you are talking about early explorations) and commenting on the area today. Wonderful accounts of early Indians in Northwest. The story of this early explorer is a must-read for all Lewis and Clark fans as it occurred about the same time. I found the book easy to read and it makes one want to explore that area of Canada.

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