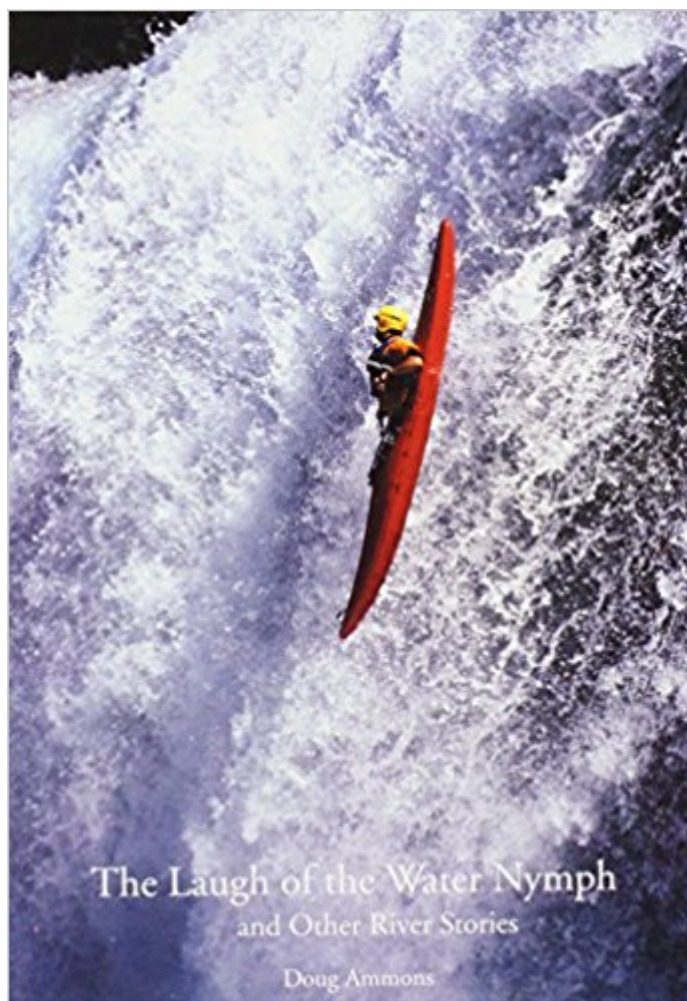


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# The Laugh Of The Water Nymph And Other River Stories



## Synopsis

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Writing through page 30.

I received this book last year for my birthday and could not put it down. I was literally laughing so hard, I was in tears. There are giants in the paddling world, Doug is certainly one of them - but he's also a master story-teller. The photos are exquisite, but his descriptions of various descents and characters adds to the experience... Just a month after my birthday, I had the privilege of meeting Doug under unfortunate circumstances - as he was the last person to paddle with my instructor. He have such a beautiful tribute to him, it gave me a sense of peace. Doug is working on a book about the Stikine, and I'm bugging him about it regularly because his imagery makes you feel like you're along for the descent. If you know someone who paddles, get this bill for them - cannot disappoint them with this book!

There are a lot of great stories in this book. Most are for Kayakers, but a few are great for non-boaters who might have a loved one involved in the sport. I find a bit of myself in many of these stories

While a lot of other paddler's have been out courting sponsorship dollars with daring and sometimes

shameful river stunts; another group of paddler's have been quietly running some of the most difficult and remote rivers on the planet. Although I don't know for sure, it's my best guess that most of the members of this loosely defined group live within a days drive of Stanley, Idaho. Very likely, their old beat-up fiberglass Holoforms, Mustangs, or Class VI kayaks hang in their garages or sheds..... testaments of their more than three decades of paddling together. They've made up no catchy name for themselves and carry on without hype, pretense, or the need for attention. Author Doug Ammons is a long time member of this elite group of friends and he has put together 22 stories that comprise; *The Laugh Of The Water Nymph*. My take on the book is that it is refreshingly entertaining... adventure writing at it's best. However, I believe librarians or booksellers are going to have difficult time deciding upon which shelf *The Laugh of the Water Nymph* belongs. Although it is a collection of stories that will appeal to anyone with an affinity for white-water, it just wouldn't seem right to place it in the "adventure travel" section. Moving water is clearly a metaphor for Doug and his observations oblige the reader to look inward and assess themselves. As such, it could easily be shelved in the philosophy section or even alongside books relating to spiritual growth or psychology. No doubt, some readers who are paddler's will regard *The Laugh Of The Water Nymph* as a guidebook of sorts for the description, or preview, of the remote and difficult river on their "intend to run" list. What I liked most about this book is Doug's ability to shift perspective.....In some passages of the book it's obvious Doug's narrative is rooted in the fact that his neoprene covered feet are firmly on the bedrock that embodies the river. In others; he's in his boat...gripped.... giving us that adrenaline charged, wide-eyed, white-knuckled, and tunnel-visioned perspective of what lies immediately downstream. And in other sections you'll find Doug philosophizing about the illusion of control....both on the water and in our day to day lives.....with only a half lung-ful of air remaining and hull presented skyward amidst churning rocky water. From these and other creative angles; Doug takes on a wide range of issues....wilderness ethics, ecology, river management, and the cycle of living, being, and dying. Subjects that are at the essence of paddling and that make his book difficult to catagorize. As for my wrinkled and worn copy; it's on my nightstand. --

Doug Ammons' book, *The Laugh of the Water Nymph*, is anything but the usual adventure narrative. It is a collection of good stories, well-written, often hilarious, sometimes touching, always fun to read. As might be expected, many are narratives drawn from his experiences in the 1980s and `90s on the far edge of kayaking in such places as Agua Azul in Yucatan and the Stikine Canyon in British Columbia. Mixed among the adventure accounts are essays and some fiction. Although the focus is kayaking, Ammons shows awareness throughout that there is more to life than paddling

down steep mountain canyons in small boats, fun though that may be. Ammons' account of being busted running the forbidden Yellowstone Canyon is a farcical tale about the collision of exuberant kayakers with intransigent bureaucrats. It has a posse of a dozen or more rangers pursuing rogue kayakers through the canyon on foot and by helicopter. The good guys win in this tale, more or less, but Ammons recognizes that the bad guys are not totally bad either, just doing their job with logic that's hard to follow. It reminded me, though, of why many people prefer to avoid the national parks. "Revenge of the Killer Radical Extremes" is another very funny piece satirizing the cult and culture of extreme sports. It called to mind some of the stories by Donald Barthelme and others that I used to enjoy in the New Yorker, back when the New Yorker published things that actually made me laugh out loud (a long time ago, but that's another story). Interspersed among the adventure narratives appear stories about people like Nara, the Nepalese porter, and Ammon's friend John Foss who died on a river in Peru. These well-drawn portraits give the book some balance. They help distance the reader from a simple chase after fun and adventure. Ammons' yearlong diary recounting the death of his father is a touching but balanced piece about things that matter, to use Ammons' phrase. The low point of the book is a piece that ridicules the commercialization of whitewater kayaking and mourns the loss or dilution of the true and genuine. The store manager and salespeople in this story may deserve some ridicule, most people do, but in the end the story comes off as both uncharitable and unrealistic. If we want good stuff, somebody has to sell it. It is hard to reconcile the harsh view of this story with the very humane, balanced tone Ammons strikes elsewhere in this book. That small criticism aside, *Laugh of the Water Nymph* is a wonderful book. Whether you fancy yourself flying down some impossible pitch upon the medium of your choice or prefer your adventures on the couch in front of the tube, it's a good read. I liked it, and I think others will too.

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