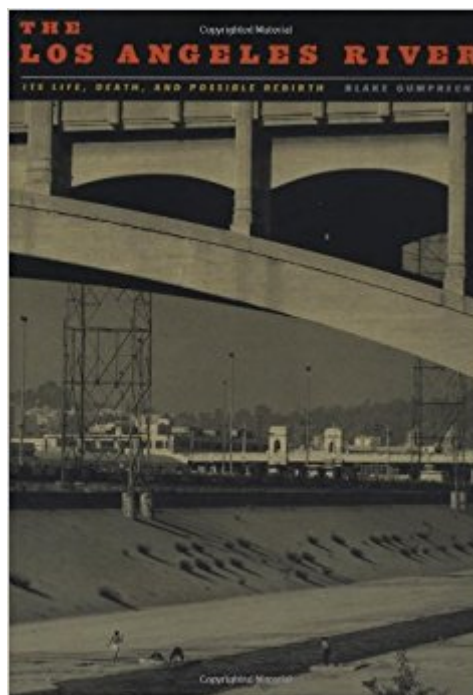




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The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, And Possible Rebirth (Creating The North American Landscape (Paperback))



Synopsis

Three centuries ago, the Los Angeles River meandered through marshes and forests of willow and sycamore. Trout spawned in its waters and grizzly bears roamed its shores. The bountiful environment the river helped create supported one of the largest concentrations of Indians in North America. Today, the river is made almost entirely of concrete. Chain-link fence and barbed wire line its course. Shopping carts and trash litter its channel. Little water flows in the river most of the year, and nearly all that does is treated sewage and oily street runoff. On much of its course, the river looks more like a deserted freeway than a river. The river's contemporary image belies its former character and its importance to the development of Southern California. Los Angeles would not exist were it not for the river, and the river was crucial to its growth. Recognizing its past and future potential, a potent movement has developed to revitalize its course. The Los Angeles River offers the first comprehensive account of a river that helped give birth to one of the world's great cities, significantly shaped its history, and promises to play a key role in its future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Why is the historic center of Los Angeles located where it is, 15 miles from the ocean and 10 miles from the San Gabriel Mountains, on an arid plain? The answer is the Los Angeles River, which once flowed freely across that flat land. In his book, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, Blake Gumprecht points out that before the course of the river was paved, Hollywood and

Beverly Hills were marshland and that in flood years, the river carried as much water as the Mississippi. "The destruction of the river had begun half a century before the first concrete was poured," Gumprecht writes, "when the river ... began to be viewed not as a giver of life or a thing of beauty, but as a dumping ground--for horse carcasses, petroleum waste, and the city's garbage." The river, he adds, was also viewed as a mere vehicle for a commodity, water, and a vehicle that could be improved with the addition of channels, culverts, and reservoirs. Such changes made the wide-scale development of the Los Angeles region possible, but they destroyed the living river. Now, years later, environmental activists are pressing to restore the river to something of its former self--and their efforts, if successful, will again alter the course of regional history. The Los Angeles River has figured widely in many ecological studies of Southern California; in historical work it has figured largely as a backdrop. Gumprecht grants the river close attention as a thing unto itself, one that has affected many other aspects of the area's social, economic, and environmental history.

--Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For those even aware that it exists, the Los Angeles River conjures up an image of a barren concrete channelAa place best suited for Hollywood car chases and gang brawls. There was a time, however, when the L.A. River, which runs from the San Fernando Valley into the Pacific, had an entirely different image, not to mention a different course. Before modern flood control programs fixed the river's path with high cement walls, it ran variously south and west, at one time emptying into the Santa Monica Bay. In this exhaustive and lively investigation, Gumprecht, a geography professor and former Los Angeles Times reporter, charts the waterway's evolution from a "beautiful stream, wandering peacefully amid willows and wild grapes" to the refuse-strewn, "ugly, concrete gutter" it is today. Gumprecht describes the crucial role that the river played in the settlement and growth of L.A.Aboth as a water source and as a symbol of the region's Arcadian promiseAand, conversely, how the river was remade in the image of the metropolis itself, becoming depleted and degraded by the very development it made possible. Like fellow L.A. historian Mike Davis, Gumprecht scatters an archive of startling photos throughout the book, from a man holding a 25-pound trout caught in the river in 1940 to the scene of a riverbed drag race broken up by the police in 1950. Conjuring images of Roman Polanski's Chinatown, Gumprecht's river "biography" breathes vitality into a subject that in the hands of a less enthusiastic author might be drier than the industrial wasteland that he describes. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a boy growing up in North Long Beach in the 1930s, I often camped out with my friends on the banks of the Los Angeles River. We would go skinny dipping, catch pollywogs and lizards, make willow whistles, and trudge through the oily sludge that lined the river bottom. We did not know that once the river flowed year-around crystal clear, teeming with fish and supporting a heavily wooded flood plain rich with swamps, lakes, and wildlife. My first surprise on reading the biography of this once-ample river was the fact that it supported one of the largest concentrations of natives in the country. The first Europeans who settled on its banks named their village after it. This book really tells three stories. The first is how the river contributed to the growth of agriculture during the first 100 years of European settlement, creating a lasting image of fertile vineyards and orchards in the sunshine. After the railroad came, the needs for water grew so rapidly they pumped the river dry and built an aqueduct to the Owens River in the north to supply their needs. The second story is about the river's revenge and the periodic devastation it caused by flooding. Time after time, the river, swollen by storms in the San Gabriel Mountains, would smash through its levies, carry off whole houses, factories, herds of cattle, orchards and vineyards, destroy roads, bridges, cemeteries, and towns, putting the whole county under water. It was not until the late 1930s that an earnest attempt was made to tame the river with a system of dams, catchment basins, and pavement. The third story is about the recent attempts to restore the river to its natural state, an exercise about which the author is skeptical. Blake Gumprecht has given us a splendid book that again shows us how much geology, climate, and topography affect how we live and think of ourselves as a people.

I first saw the Los Angeles River in TV shows and movies like Terminator 2 and have ever since been interested in learning more about this strange, concrete encased urban waterway. Blake Gumprecht's book does a great job of providing the history of the Los Angeles River from its pristine condition two centuries ago into the modern era as a "Freeway for Water" in the book "The Los Angeles River." The author balances his coverage of the river and fairly represents both sides of the struggle to restore it back to a more natural appearance versus the need to provide flood control protection with concrete fortifications. The book is extremely well researched and documented. Extensive maps and photos shed light on the topic and make the historical changes easier to follow. My only wish is that a future edition will include color photos.

Must read book. There are few others with quite as much comprehensive details about the different life stages of the LA River.

great book on the history of the LA River

author describes the evolution of water management in the LA area from the early small canals through the rape of the Owens Valley and the effect of the Los Angeles River - great book for an old LA guy

Another one that I needed for my project. Again arrived in great condition and in plenty of time. thanks.

Gumprecht's Los Angeles River is a well-written history of the Los Angeles River, from Native American and Spanish/Mexican pueblo days to the present. Looking at the concrete-lined flood control channel that the LA River has become, it is hard to believe that the LA River once was the main water supply for the City of Los Angeles. As the city grew, though, its water needs outpaced what the river could supply. An alternate source (which turned out to be the infamous Aqueduct), was eventually developed. With all the Owens Valley water coming into the city, the river became simply a dumping ground for wastewater and other undesirable things. The LA River, more or less also determined the expansion of the city. Since farmers in the San Fernando Valley had no rights to the LA River water (it all belonged to the city), eventually, the San Fernando Valley had to join the City of Los Angeles to access any water. The river was also known for flooding and changing its course unpredictably. These floods became more and more of a concern as areas near the river developed, first with agriculture, later with residences. After a particularly devastating flood in 1934, officials called on the Army Corps of Engineers to help with flood control. This led to the concrete channelization of the river. After that, no one thought much of the river. Occasionally, the concrete channel inspired uses such as movie shoots and vehicular uses. It looked so much like a road, that several people proposed making the riverbed into a freeway. Meanwhile, the river was starting to get some attention. Lewis McAdams founded the Friends of the La River, which is trying to get the river restored to its natural state. They have run into opposition by the Army Corps of Engineers, and other parties concerned about flood control issues. The future of the river becoming more than it is now (a paved channel with a trickle of water in it most of the time) remains in question. The book started its life as a masters' thesis, but the prose is accessible, not overly academic. Recommended for anyone interested in the history of Los Angeles.

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