My world

of

Rivers

By

Carl Lahser

Seeing a river is a little frustrating. You can only see a short ways up or down stream. The physical factors like depth and speed are as ephemeral as a second changing as you watch.

Seeing a river from the air is different in that you get to see the rivers connection to people and the country it passes through – the woods and farms and cities and how the tributary streams connect.

I have seen many rivers in different places and would like to show you what I saw

Enjoy.

Carl

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**Alaska**

**Icefloes flowing Down to the sea**

Cold blue shapes on cold grey water

groan and growl as they go.

They float the length of Portage lake

and down the Portage River

getting smaller as they flow.

Black smudges

on some are stone

that mark the power

of the parent glacier

shaping its valley home.

Shakespeare, Byron and Portage are glaciers

that contribute abstract works of ice

exhibited in a broad valley confined by

on snow-mantled mountains clothed in

dark spruce forest and golden aspen groves

threatening grey clouds promise

 early-season snow.

Snow to feed the glaciers and

launch more ice floes of cold blue.

 carl940924

**Portage Glacier:**

Alaskan History in Snow

Since snow first fell upon the Chugach mountains

and gathered in steep V-shaped valleys

some valleys had just the right slope

that allowed the snow to

pile up hundreds and

even thousands of feet deep

compressing the snow into ice layers

like the rings in a tree trunk

preserving moments in time.

Layers of packed snow recorded

for a hundred thousand year

amount of snow that fell each year;

pollen blown from trees and grass and

flowers blooming at that moment;

dissolved gasses and their concentration;

air pollutants from volcanoes and

the first feeble efforts of man;

remains of plants, insects, and animals

that died on the snowfield each year.

The weight of the column of compressed snow

caused some melting at the bottom

 to lubricate the valley and

the mass began to move slowly.

Like a giant bulldozer it sculpted and

scoured the valley.

This mass of snow was called GLACIER.

The valley was scoured into a U-shape

and the ground rock and soil was pushed

into one or more piles called moraines

on the sides and at the foot of the glacier

as the glacier advanced or retreated.

+++++

**Portage Glacier**

**March**

Standing on the terminal moraine

in the wind and rain

we could see

but a couple hundred feet in the fog

Ice floes were dull white shapes in the fog

floating on non-colored cold water.

Ice floes battering each other

before entering the slow race to the sea

down the Portage River

to Turnagain Arm.

 +++++

**September**

The wind and rain broke as we

once again stand on this terminal moraine

and look upon a fleet of ice floes

brilliant white and cold blue.

Some have dirty faces

with ground stone flour and soil.

The picture is framed by spruce covered

snow capped mountains and

three white glaciers.

Layers of history melting

releasing primordial atmospheric gases,

ancient air pollutants,

animal remains,

other artifacts

from our distant past.

 +++++ carl940924

**Washington State**

**Iron Bridges**

Topping a hill I see

two iron bridges

protruding from the trees

a highway bridge painted silver

and a rusty railroad bridge

both spanning the Toutle River

Bridges from my childhood

far away in time and space

spanned another river

flowing through another wood

in another place

 **+++++**

**Snake and Columbia Rivers**

**Flying to Seattle**

Black, sticky gumbo soil of north Texas

gives way to the red Permian sand

of Oklahoma and Kansas and circular fields.

The bare, tan desert of eastern Colorado

becomes white mountains speckled

with dark forests of spruce and pine.

Blinding white clouds over Utah break

over the Bitterroot Mountains

and the Valley of the Snake River.

More round fields in the valley of

the Columbia River

green, brown and mottled.

The Cascade Mountains show

five peaks above the clouds.

Blue waters and green forests of Puget sound.

The Boeing plant and touch down.

 carl 940313

**Hell's Canyon**

Winding canyon filled with fog.

Snake River in eastern Oregon

Peaks on the rim cast dark shadows

on the white clouds below.

Clouds spilling out of mountain valleys.

 carl 940924

**JURASIC ALLUVIAL FAN**

An alluvial fan spreads for miles

before a western Wyoming canyon mouth

a thin stream meanders out into

the fan and disappears.

Up the canyon a dozen box canyons branch out

each with a snowfield at its head.

In many years, these cols do not completely melt

keeping the stream running and cold.

The fan is the sand and silt

deposited since Jurassic times

scoured by several Ice Ages.

Populated by thin creosote bush

and a hundred flowering plants

programmed over ten thousand years

to bloom and go to seed in the short moist spring.

 carl 941113

**Rio Grande River**

Cloud Desert and Quiet River

It’s just the average New Mexico desert

sand the color of old Army pink dress trousers

marked with irregular cloudshadows

of dinosaurs and rabbits and pirates in shades of blue

The sand pimpled with dunes and hills

and sliced by wandering canyons

that sometimes feed the Rio Grande River.

Distant mountains, reddish in the sunset

capped with snow dropped

as Natures own April Fool’s Day joke.

Maroon buds and flowering plants

hug the floodplains of the oxbows

creating white water rapids.

Oh, to be rafting this colorful river.

 Carl/980401/cloud

**eagle flight**

gliding on evening updrafts

just above the canyon’s shadow line

gleaming in the golden sun

spiraling higher in the falling dusk

a pinpoint of light

finally vanishing

among the gleaming planets

above the silver river

carl/110497

**A Little Bit of the Road to Oz**

Albuquerque camps

where Route 66 crossed the Rio Grande River.

Both were important highways in their day

but nothing lasts forever.

US Highway 66 now parallel to I-40

into town then it becomes Central Ave.

Some of the historic motels and restaurants remain

but a helping of nostalgia is the most they have.

Many cars on the way

to points west had stopped and stayed

a mile high deferring the desert trip

to Dream City - L.A.

Route 66,

a modern horizontal petroglyph.

+++++

**Mississippi River, Mississippi**

**Early Morning Spotlight**

A cloud bank on the eastern horizon

shades the earth

until a hole appears

and a shaft of sunlight

spotlights a small rural town

and the shining Mississippi.

 carl 941023

**INDIANA RELIC FORESTS**

Flying over Indiana in the Fall

I see relic forests that once covered all.

These forests are thin and serpentine

following the streams to the Wabash River

not at all like those found

by resourceful Native Americans

or by hardy European settlers.

The great trees were taken from the Indian

and laid to earth to free the land

for village

and farm

and hearth.

A relic forest , now yellow and red,

still harbors endangered plants

and sheltered copses where wildlife young are fed.

This new, artificial ecosystem

replacing an ecosystem

that was, itself,

a post-glacial immigrant ecosystem.

**+++++**

**MEMPHIS OXYMORON**

Orderly rows of warehouses,

parked tractor-trailers,

apartment complexes,

subdivision cul-de-sacs,

docks,

and barge strings

sit on an irregular flood plain

along the sweeping bends

of the Mississippi River.

Square pegs in round holes

 carl 950811

**MISSISSIPPI RIVER IN THE SNOW**

The cold November rain and sullen skies are left behind

at Washington National Airport. We climb

through the clouds of gray to find

bright sun and blue skies more settling to the mind.

West we flew above the white overcast

until we passed the front

and the ground appeared at last.

Tennessee and Arkansas covered with snow.

Roads, fence lines, ponds and forest show

blue-black against the fields of white

and the sinuous Mississippi River,

drained of its might,

cold and blue-black, silent, waiting

for the snow to melt and its power recreating

a floodtide, a tan mixture of water and topsoil

and pollutants depleting yet cleansing site for farmers toil

 carl 931106

**OXBOW LAKES**

Oxbow lakes are fossil remains of riverbeds.

The curving streaks of sand and water show how

the course of meandering rivers has changed.

They are stable only for that geologic moment called now.

 carl 931211

**Pearl River Flood**

a lead gray sky

over Jackson Mississippi

with and rain and hail

over the jasmine and the piney woods,

a mockingbird on the fly.

The Pearl River was up

bird nest high in the trees

dirty brown-gray water

overflowing their cup.

carl 950501

**Texas Rivers**

**Houston from the Air**

From a brown-gray cloud of petrochemical smog

two clusters of tall buildings

gush upwards from the coastal plain

like the oil wells that spawned them.

Chemical plants.

Reactor towers.

LPG domes.

Fuel tanks with rusty floating roofs.

The Houston ship channel and shipping.

Freeways packed.

People jammed together in a sinking city.

Houston disappears

into a brown-gray dome of petrochemical smog.

+++++

**CATFISH HARRY**

Back when I was 5 or 6,

 just a little towheaded lad,

I tagged along to visit a fisherman,

an old friend of my dad.

He lived on a houseboat on a backwater slough

and catfishing was his fame.

A noodler, he caught the big ones by hand.

Catfish Harry was his name.

He also ran trotlines

with stink bait of sun dried clams.

He knew every creek for miles around

and every irrigation dam.

His houseboat stunk and was covered with flies

(you could smell it a mile up wind).

He traded his fish for food and beer

and other odds and ends.

We sat outside and talked for a while

then he asked if we'd like something to drink.

I took a soda and my dad took a cup

of coffee that looked like ink.

Harry said his coffee was special,

"Sock coffee", was the name he used.

"Ya put a hand full of grounds in a sock

and a glug or two of booze."

 "Then you add an egg or two and a pinch of salt

and some water into the pot.

Then, you boil it ‘til it’s done and what do you have?

 Good coffee, boiled eggs and clean socks."

We laughed at the thought of sock coffee.

Dad said, "You better change your brand of beers.

Just what the Hell would you do with clean socks?

You haven't worn shoes in years."

A little more talk and we picked out a big fish

then shook hands and said our good-byes

and drove back up the road leaving Harry

with his houseboat, sock coffee and flies.

 carl 951018

**St John’s River Florida**

**Jacksonville Suite, Feb 98**

**Sunrise**

Cotton balls dipped in

flamingo pink

and a thousand shades of

seashell nacre blues and lavenders

transmogrified into fluffy morning clouds

Consuming hot chocolate under giant oaks

while the sky pales with the rising sun.

+++++

**Morning Sun Across the St John's River**

A milky white sky reminds me of last night's rain.

The platinum sun, obscured by haze, explodes

in a blinding sun streak racing across the river

consuming a sailboat moored in the cove.

A red-wing blackbird calls from the rushes.

+++++

**The Intercoastal Waterway**

Meandering drainage channels

dissect the spartina marsh.

A tall white egret

spears minnows from the ebbing flow.

+++++

**Live Oak Treetops**

I love to see tall, old Live Oaks

draped with Spanish moss

and covered with lichens, mosses and Polypoid ferns.

The only movement in the treetop

is from skittering squirrels.

+++++

**Northeast Florida Spring**

Nibbled pine cones harvested by squirrels

male pine catkins and Sycamore flowers

lay ‘midst pale Bluets, Dichondra and Pennyworts,

yellow Oxalis blossoms

and fallen oak limbs covered with lichens.

Greenbriar pushes up through oak-leaf compost.

Native fire ants build castles

of gray and cream sand.

Mosquitoes hug the ground

navigating through young green grass

looking for my ankles.

+++++

**Evening on the St John's River**

A large live oak,

framed against a washed blue sky

and backlit by a mirror flat river,

stands draped in Spanish moss.

Its top branches and those of its naked neighbors,

a walnut and a sycamore,

lit from below by the setting sun.

Lights wink on across the river.

+++++

**River at the Edge of the World**

At 2 AM Florida’s overcast sky reflects gray

from the St John’s River.

The trees and docks darker black against black

And the channel markers are red and green eyes in the night.

Fog hides the sunrise

and marks the end of the world

there just beyond the screen of cattails.

A silver disc burns through the fog

 and a path of light

 briefly illuminates the way into forever.

 Carl 010226

**Athabasca River, Alberta, Canada**

**A Hundred-Year Perspective**

It’s after midnight here at Athabasca Landing.

I stand where, a hundred years ago,

my great-uncle stood on this same river bank

amidst the sprouting horsetails

and saw these same northern lights play

faintly in the black northern sky.

He waited anxiously for the morrow

to launch down the Athabasca and Mackenzie Rivers

to adventure and, maybe, Klondike gold.

I, too, leave tomorrow

but southward to Texas to home and security

but I had to see how it felt

a hundred years ago tonight.

Carl/980517/perspective

**WINNIPEG RIVER: SOLSTICE SUNRISE**

On the Winnipeg River

it was light at four AM.

The horizon was broken with trees.

The sun rose at Oh Five Ten

ushered in by a brisk, cool breeze.

Half the river was a mirror

that reflected the rising sun.

The other half was covered with ripples,

the breeze was having fun.

Herring gulls called. The breeze disappeared.

The sky turned pink

then yellow

then blue.

The longest day of the year had dawned.

Half the solar year was through.

+++++

**Russian Rivers**

**Flying to Siberia**

Times change.

50 years ago this flight path

Would have encountered

missiles and interceptors and wrath

Across the top of the world

White ice of the Arctic Ocean

Blue cracks and pressure ridges

From the sea in motion

East Siberian Sea

South of Ostrov Novaya Sabir

Dirty brown ice

From Gobi Desert dust

Landfall between the Rivers Indigirka and Yana

West to the Lena R. delta.

South up the Lena Valley

Through tundra and taiga

Taiga miles Stunted conifers marred by long straight roads

Strip mines and clear-cut timber stands

Docks and loading areas

A tug and barges breaking the ice.

Tundra

Scattered aspen and conifers

A million prairie potholes

Over Zhigansk,

in the State of Sakha in Russia

Trans-Siberian Railroad tracks disappearing east and west

Rough mountains of the Yablonovy Khrebet

Lake Baykal

Ulan Ude in the Buryatia in Russian Mongolia

Over the Hentuyn Nuruu Mountains

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

The Gobi Desert

Flat with a few potholes

A railroad running north/south

Sand changing from light tan to a darker brown.

Into China under clouds.

 Carl 040306

**White Night Twilight in the Volga**

It was mid June

T’was twilight about 11PM

When the big red sun ball

Was sucked down into the black boreal trees

But the White Night twilight

Continued for another two hours

Until the sun climbed

Over the northeast trees

Staining the clouds and the White Night

Orange-pink

+++++

**China Rivers**

**Inside a Zen Painting**

Floating on the Li River

More real than a Zen painting

Rounded karst mountains

Three hundred millions old

Shades of green transforming,

Shifting shades of green

Clouds and sunlight changing values

Fog rising falling

Fog advancing retreating

Mountains appearing disappearing

Splashes of yellow and white and plum

Quiet river

Ancient farms

Ducks, cormorants, and water buffalo

Giant bamboos

Ancient caves

Thick silent sounds of the river

 carlApr0806

**Yangtze Passage**

The Three Gorges Dam

Was finally complete

And now 300 feet deep

Flowing gently over villages

Not moved up the thousand foot slopes

Four thousand years of history

Immersing in river water

Foot trails, monuments, hanging coffins

Going under slowly

Tributaries, gorges and historic rapids

Disappearing by the day

Cities and factories have been moved

New fields established

New roads and bridges built

River traffic adjusting

Crests of the slopes

Lost in fog

Crusted with frost

Still spawning cataracts

Wild vegetation remains

Osmanthus, Spirea, Henna

Wild plums, Mulberry, Oaks

Retreating up the slopes

The new river is safer, wider, and quieter

Wild no more

Carl 13Apr06

**Mexican Rivers**

**Grackle Love**

On the highest branch of a cottonwood

In the Rio Casa Grandes

turned golden by a frost

a gleaming black great-tailed grackle perched

Swaying in the breeze, he sang

sang to challenge any other golden-eyed male

Several other grackles strutted about the a corral

feeding on spilled grain

occasionally looking at the singer.

 carl 25 Nov 04

**Amazon River**

**Machu Picchu Trail**

A foot trail hangs on the mountainside

from Cuzco to remote villages

two miles above the tide.

Mercantadores make it in eight days

seventy miles to Machu Picchu.

Tourist cover this in two wet weeks

and are happy when they're through.

An electric train takes four hours

from Cuzco and the Anta Valley farms

and down the Urubamba River,

Father of the Amazon.

Let me make it clear and plain

from alpine meadow to cloud forest

at 13,000 feet

I'm glad I took the train.

**+++++**

**AMAZON SUNRISE**

Sunrise on the Amazon

did not assault the senses

but slipped in on the dying night sounds

as the light increased in slow increments.

Parrot-like Greater Ani

chased crickets

on the ledges outside the windows.

Trilling of frogs

and polymorphic insect noises

disappeared in the humidity

as day began.

A White-capped Flycatcher

perched on a erect mango branch

sprang upward through a cloud of blackflies

staking his claim and calling for a mate.

+++++

**CROSSING THE AMAZON**

The John boat bounced over a low chop

Storm clouds spawned rain in the distance

the sunshine had stopped

The water was grey-brown and 18 miles wide

after a 30 foot of winter drop

No land in sight but rafts of hyacinths and pistia

and trees with epiphytes

hanging sideways in their tops

+++++

**Amazon Morning**

From the bow the Amazon River

was flat as a mirror.

Not a breath stirs in the false dawn.

The sun fights its way

through a cloud bank and

the first bright rays

lit up the tree tops.

Along the river’s edge

a lone fisherman tended his nets

from a dugout canoe.

A vee-shaped wake

points to a canoe with a man and woman.

the dipping paddles just audible

across the water.

+++++

**General Store**

On a bluff above the Apayacu River

a few miles from the Amazon

sits a lone general store.

Bright blue planks and a thatch roof,

a corrugated tin awning and no window screens

they sell cerveza, gaseosa and curichi

but no chocolates.

+++++

**BELEM**

Called the Venice of the Amazon

Belem is built mud, and stilts and

of floating homes that ground

on the mudflats of the Amazon summer.

Roofs thatched and patched with tin,

electric lines strung on trees and

on poles shared with vultures.

A raft of logs serves as a lawn

where children play,

and planks are sidewalks

floating on a sea of mud.

+++++

**The Belem Market**

People everywhere in the cool of dawn,

produce to market and products back home

carried on the backs or heads of Indians and Creoles

before it gets hot and the sun, humidity and flies rise.

Displayed on palm leaf mats, everything you need-

fish, chickens, rice, bananas, voodoo charms

and they can fix your motorbike too.

+++++

**Jungle Drinking Water**

Most natives drink directly from the Amazon

instead of boiling or filtering the water.

Then they drink some juice of the ficus tree

twice a year as a purgative just like they ought to

to kill the internal parasites from the river.

No tea or fuel to boil the water.

+++++

**Pevas Fast Food**

We stopped at Ft Pevas on the Amazon

for a passport check.

I watched a local ferry with people sleeping

in hammocks and on the crowded deck.

A dugout pulled up beside the ferry

two women and a pot of stew

The stew was sold from a single bowl

rinsed in the Amazon just for you.

One woman noticed the dugout

was taking on a little water.

She used the bowl to bail it out

before serving the next customer.

+++++

**Vietnam and Cambodia**

Mekong River

A mile wide and fifty feet deep

The Mekong flows from China

Then between Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia

Essential highway

Suddenly the halyards beat against the mast

Evening monsoon clouds slide in

Cool and loaded with rain

Sheet lightning backlights tall clouds

Humidity and rain fill the night

Overcast daylight drips humidity

It is light but the sun forgot to rise

Don’t breathe too deeply

Or you will drown

Carl 26Oct11

The River is Dropping

Typhoon rain and wind

Rushed up the Mekong valley

Raising the water level thirty feet

Backing up into Tong le Sap

Tripling its size

Six weeks later the river was falling

The farmers were following the river’s fall

Fishing in the water

Planting the silt covered banks

With pole beans, bananas,and taro

Time flows onwards.

carl30Oct11

**Mekong River Morning**

On deck with a pot of tea

Waiting for sunrise

Clumps of water hyacinth streaming by

In the tan water.

White sky

Dark silhouettes of teak and sugar palms

Shallow water with permanent fish traps

Fishermen setting new fish traps

Houses hanging over the river.

Near Tan Chau were

Floating fish farms

Floating markets

A casket factory

A silk factory where girls hand-made silk

Five yards a day in open factories.

Sa Dec

Where Swift Boats once docked

Cai Be

With its Franciscan Church

And floating market

A street market with fruits and vegetables

Both sides of the lane with traffic down the middle

Live fish, snakes, turtles, and frogs

Live or butchered on the street

Small farms with

Black pepper and pepper leaf

Taro, jackfruit, mangoes

Fish drying in the sun

Tea plants

Highway, homestead, outhouse

To millions.

Carl 7 Nov 2011