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The Life Works of RM Patterson

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Description :

Patterson wrote five Books that are the subject of this review. These are: Dangerous River, The Buffalo Head, Far Pastures, Trail to the Interior, and Finlay's River. Each of these works not only tell great stories, but gives the reader further insight into Patterson's life. All are excellent books.

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Patterson's five works reviewed here are: *The Dangerous River*, *The Buffalo Head*, *Far Pastures*, *Trail to the Interior* and *Finlay's River*. *The Dangerous River* was the subject of one of my earlier reviews so will not be extensively discussed here, but because it was Patterson's first book and in my view his best work I will again touch on some aspects of it, particularly in context with his other works.

***The Dangerous River*, 1954.**

Please see my [earlier review](#) for discussion of this excellent book. However, in this article I want to discuss the aspects of this first publication by Patterson that left the reader wondering. As we will see some of the mysteries of Patterson that arise in *Dangerous River*, are addressed by other of his works. Probably the major point that Patterson himself addresses in *Dangerous River* is where he gained the skills and knowledge of wilderness operations that allowed him to not only explore the Nahanni River area, but to have a good and safe time of it.

As I quoted in my *Dangerous River* review Patterson outlines his decision to go and his unique qualifications this way:

Then at Fort Simpson, one would turn up there northwest into the lonely mountain country of the Yukon divide, the land of the wild white sheep. Sometime soon I would do that, I decided-and strangely enough never doubted that I could, though exactly what I proposed to use in place of experience has since often puzzled me.

I then stated, and Jimbo followed up with in a comment to the article, that Patterson obviously gains the necessary experience to both explore the Nahanni valley and return. However, nowhere in *Dangerous River* are we given many details on his skill building. I think his following books addresses the acquisition of experience and skills necessary for not only this Nahanni River trip but many of his other ventures.

Dangerous River, William Morrow, 1954, is relatively easily found on bookfinder at reasonable prices in various editions and reprints with paperbacks from \$5 and hardback editions from \$20.

***The Buffalo Head*, 1961**

This book's title refers to the Buffalo Head ranch that Patterson acquired not long after his return from the Nahanni trip. It was located near Calgary, Alberta. The title seems to imply that this would be about the ranch and Patterson's time there, which part of it is, but a fair amount is an autobiography of his early years. Patterson lets us know early on that this is not a manual of ranching but a book about his hills.

In referring to his choices in life in the foreword: *A queerly assorted lot these places are: the Southdown country of Kipling's Sussex, the Black Forest, a fortress town in Silesia, Oxford, a cluster of stone huts in the Swiss Alps, the Bank of England. And then Canada---a Peace River homestead, Deadman's Valley in the Northwest Territories....And the Buffalo Head ranch in the Rockies of Alberta, a place that was home to me for more years than any home I have ever known. But this is not a book about ranching: It is a book of the hills---of all those hills, from Poland to the Rockies, that have been the background to my life. The one constant feature in a constantly changing scene.*

Many details of RM Patterson's early life are documented in the Part One of this book. Here we find details of his schooling, service in the British Artillery, his ability to visualize maps and terrain, his capture by the German Army, his

time as a POW, further schooling and then service at the Bank of England. These experiences and others lead to his decision in 1924 to homestead in Canada on the Battle River about 80 miles from Peace River. On these 320 acres he homesteaded. This was his base of operations for the 1929-30 seasons on the Nahanni.

He took a job at a lumber camp for George Macrae learning both lumbering skills and recognizing the dangers of such work. He describes it this way:

Three months went by in Macrae's Camp: three months at good pay under rough conditions, and with grub that varied for terrible---which was terminated by the one-man rebellion of old Mr. Waggoner who danced in his heavy boots the full length of one of the long tables, kicking stews, cakes and pies to the four points of the compass---to excellent with the inauguration on an Australian, Harry Bettany, as cook.

The winter was spent working on the homestead, finishing the cabin, building fence, running a trapline, and winter camping. The homestead is two and one-half days walk from Peace River which he did in stages of 30, 30 and 20 miles, hitting neighbors or posts along the way. At one point in the mid winter he is caught between stages and camps out at -33 degrees with minimal kit. Here he describes this night camp:

I had no axe and no tarpaulin, but I did have a hunting knife, and I was carrying a packsack that contained one light blanket and a book, a teapail and some raisins, bannock and cheese. I got a fire going and then, with the hunting knife, I soon made a bed and shelter of spruce boughs. The empty packsack I made into a small reflector at my back. To assemble a stack of heavy firewood I climbed up onto dead leaning muskeg spruce and swung on them till they collapsed, crashing into the snow. Then I dragged the dead trees up to the fire. Very soon I had the place snug; the tea was made and I was stretched out on the spruce mat, warm and comfortable, reading by the firelight and downing a frugal supper. I was content: I had triumphed over my hostile surroundings; and the distant howling of coyotes---which, in my innocence, I thought were wolves---proclaimed that the Bank of England and the grey desert of stone, though less than a year away in time, were already things of another world.

These life experiences gave him some of the necessary skills to make the Nahanni trips and seemed to hone his wanderlust for wild places.

Part 2, *The Rocky Mountains* is really a very good story of his time after the Nahanni. He sells the Battle River homestead and buys The Buffalo Head ranch near Calgary. He marries and begins the life of a cattle and later dude rancher in the 30's and 40's. This portion of the book covers both ranch life and exploration of the area surrounding The Buffalo Head. He tells many stories of horse trips into the surrounding mountains for game, grass, pictographs, and other explorations, along with a flavor of normal ranch life, haying, calving, branding, moving cattle etc. One chapter covers the impact to the Buffalo Head and surrounding area from the Phillips fires of 1936. This fire which started in British Columbia was driven on the Chinook wind burned up the mountains and into Alberta. A near freak rainstorm saved the Buffalo Head from this fire. For 16 years Patterson and his wife Marigold worked this ranch, but finally they sold the place and moved to British Columbia. Instead of simply moving to the new place, they took 5 horses, 2 saddle horses and 3 pack horses up over the mountains to their new place in October. Heavy snows had already made the pass difficult, but with a few troubles with the pack horses they made it to BC and are warmly greeted.

All that remained was the descent and that was easy---the snow only reached down for a thousand feet or so. After that there was bare ground.

At the foot of the mountain slope we let the horses graze for a while in a little meadow set amongst the rocks; they had had practically nothing for over twenty-four hours. We ate, too---hardtack-and-bacon sandwiches, raisins and

cheese---sitting on a log with firm ground beneath us instead of snow, and with a gleam of wintry sunshine struggling through copper-colored cloud.

Over a sharp rise, just a hundred yards in front, came a grizzly. I checked Rex and every horse stopped dead in its tracks. The grizzly reared up on his hind legs to his full height and stared. We all stared---bear, humans, horses---and nobody uttered a sound. It was so silent that one could hear the distant roar of the wind up on the pass where a storm was now in full blast. The odd flake of snow came drifting down.

Somebody had to make a move so I made one. I eased myself off Rex on the off-side and started to slide my rifle out of its scabbard, wishing it was the old Mannlicher and not a light .256 Mauser. This slight movement was too much for the grizzly who dropped on all fours and fled, and there was no sound to his going. I shoved the rifle back into place and swung up on to Rex. We loped up to the crest of the rise---but the bear was nowhere to be seen. And that was that.

The welcome committee, do you suppose?

Might have been. The first British Columbian, anyway .

The Buffalo Head is a very good book in itself and an excellent book for those interested in Patterson. This is highly autobiographical and fills in many of the questions one has after reading *The Dangerous River*. *Dangerous River* can give the reader the impression that a London boy ventures into the wilds of Canada almost on a lark. *The Buffalo Head* gives us Patterson's woods skills background development and demonstrates a determination to learn new skills. I recommend this book both as a good story in itself and as a support volume to *Dangerous River*. It includes several excellent B&W photos.

Buffalo Head, William Sloane Associates, New York, 1961 is fairly commonly found on bookfinder for reasonable prices (\$5 to \$40) and occasionally on eBay. My local library has all of RM Patterson's works.

***Far Pastures*, 1963**

This is Patterson's third book and it consists of a collection of magazine stories republished in book form. A number of the chapters were originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine* or in *The Beaver*. Patterson reworked these into a chronological book format. Again, like *Buffalo Head* these stories fill in more of Patterson's life. We have more detail and stories on the Battle River homestead, his Nahanni trips, Buffalo Head, and several other trips north, including a return trip to the Nahanni in 1951. This book alone is worth seeing just for the picture of the author as The Greenhorn Homesteader, Christmas Day 1924 . Here Patterson is standing hands on hips, rolled sleeves, striped tie, and a monstrous 10 gallon hat, the hat adding at least a foot to his height. Several other excellent B&W images are also included of various areas, animals or persons that played a role in his life. There is a very good image of Albert Faille from 1951. It seems that Patterson's hat volume decreased considerably on the Buffalo Head, but the tie remained.

As he states in the foreword this text completes some open issues from earlier works:

It clears up a point about which many readers of my Dangerous River have written, How, they say, did that trip of yours really end? Well now, if they read Chapter Eight, they will know the answer: it ended as it began---with a dog fight.

These three chapters (six, seven and eight) are excellent additions to the *Dangerous River* story. Here Patterson augments the second season on the Nahanni with several of the bits left out of the original publication. The dog trip North and the return trip South with Gordon are covered in these chapters and are as rich a read as any of the chapters in *Dangerous River*. These three chapters alone make *Far Pastures* well worth reading just to supplement *Dangerous River*.

The remaining articles are again excellent examples of story telling. The images Patterson paints with words are rich; he keeps you reading and traveling right along with him.

For instance, in chapter thirteen, *The Awkward Moose* we have an excellent and very humorous story from his Dude Ranching/Guiding days. A moose was shot by Kathleen Jackson to her husband Jim's horror; the mounted head becomes a major point of contention in these two New Yorker's lives. This story is a must read, for the immediate problems of the moose on the hunt and it continued contributions to the complications of the hunter's lives.

Here is another example of a dream for many of us (both the taxes and travel) from his early Canadian homestead days:

The taxes on my homestead and soldier grant (320 acres in all) amounted to \$4.50 a year. And there was no income tax---or if there was, none of us ever dreamed of paying it. Some of the fellows had war disability pensions. With a pension, and with that sort of taxation---or lack of it---and with a home and a garden, and a moose or two, and hay and oats and horses; and no money tied up in land, and a good trapline and a pack of fur to go out in the spring---well damn it, what more could a carefree bachelor ask?

And there was another thing, important in a community of young men with roving instincts: you could go away (as I did to the Nahanni River) for a year on end, leaving a cabin full of quite valuable things, unwatched and in the middle of nowhere, and locked with only a flimsy padlock that a single blow from an axe-head could smash. And not a thing would be touched. Indian, half-breed, and white man---you could trust the lot. That alone is enough to show that the whole setup was an anachronism, backward and primitive.

Patterson describes his departure for the South Nahanni in conversation with John Petersen who had come by the homestead to convince Patterson to not go away as the Scandinavian neighbors wanted him to represent their voices as the area was getting settled.

God's truth, but I felt honored that I had been asked to stay: I, a greenhorn newcomer, helped, taught---and now wanted. And not only honored but deeply touched. It was hard to have to tell old John that the thing---I mean the lure of the North---had made a lodgment in my head and that I had to go. But I'll be back, I said, after we had talked the matter up and down and inside out for an hour or so.

Maybe you will be back, but I do not think it will be for long. In English you say, 'Far pastures look green.' Some see it that way, and maybe you are one of them. But I tell you now Petersen---in all the North you will never find any pasture so green as in our Little Prairie. Yet you will always think is just one more Little Prairie, further on some place, maybe just over the next hill. So you had better go. But we will look after your place for you till you come again---as I have said.

And so they did, while I was away to the South Nahanni River.

This Patterson book is well worth reading if only for the additional details provided for the Nahanni second season,

but each story adds character to this author's life, and for that I consider this edition a must read. Patterson ends this book with this, an apt overview of the text in this old reprobate's smiling, honest, opinion:

And so, in my character of unrepentant old-timer, I have arranged these word-pictures of the West, from horse to helicopter, much as one might arrange a collection of old photographs in a family album, in the hope that---while not overlooking their inestimable value as source of material to the historian of the glorious future---some other old reprobate, reading them and remembering his own youth, may get himself a smile.

Far Pastures, Gray's Publishing, Sidney BC Canada, 1963 is a bit less commonly available on bookfinder than its predecessors, but can still be had for reasonable prices if a careful eye is kept. My libraries edition, sadly, was printed on non-archival quality paper and is severely yellowed and brittle.

***Trail to the Interior*, 1966**

Trail to the Interior, in its simplest form, is a 1948 Patterson trip from Wrangell Alaska, up the Stikine River, across the portage road from Telegraph Creek to Dease lake (crossing the Pacific-Arctic divide) and then down Dease Lake and river to Lower Post on the Liard. But the book is really far more complex than another Patterson trip through the wilds. This trip to the interior of British Columbia via power boat, truck and canoe combines and blends Patterson's travel with the travels of various other outfits in the past. Patterson uses the journals and publications from the stampede era and earlier to flesh out his trip. He is essentially following the first portion of the all-Canadian stampede trail to the Yukon of the 1890's. The Skagway/Chilkoot Pass trail was the chief rival to the Yukon. The all-Canadian trail was established from Glenora (on the Stikine) and ended up at Teslin Lake, the water entry to the Yukon. Both trails were difficult and had their respective advocates. Patterson's assessment of the beginning:

the Glenora-Teslin Lake trail proved to be hell almost from start to finish and its length was estimated a hundred and fifty miles. So much for a short portage! Nevertheless, up the Stikine to Glenora in 1898 came hundreds of Klondikers, dragging their outfits over the ice in the late winter, poling and tracking upstream in summertime. Many also came the easy way, by river steamer to Glenora. Of those who used their own strength and skill, a number lost their lives on that stretch of river: frozen or drowned, some through the ice while sledding their outfits in wintertime, others by the hazards of lining or poling up through swift water.....the Stikine still remained only a stage on a long road to the Klondike and, as usual, everybody was heartily glad when they saw the last of it.

The changes and similarities to the trips over the previous 50-100 years are made at each point in the journey. The great Klondike gold rush of 1897+ established many over-land and water routes to the Yukon. This inrush of gold dreamers rarely understood the nature, distance and harshness of the trip into the Yukon fields. Patterson, in following this portion of the trail to the Liard, ties in the various establishments along the trail to the hardships, dreams and efforts of their creation. While the Klondikers provide many of the related stories for Patterson their experiences are not the only ones he draws upon for this book. Earlier fur trappers, hunters, and explores experiences figure strongly in many of the stories Patterson tells.

Trail to the Interior is essentially a historical review document made more readable and enjoyable by its combination with Patterson's trip. Patterson again, gives us some great camp/canoe flavor (not as completely as *Dangerous River* and other stories but enough to fix his place in the story. Here is an example of a blend of one of his camps on Dease Lake with some local history:

Dease Lake is twenty-five miles long as the crow flies and averages just over a mile in width. I set a course from point to point, keeping a wary eye on the mounting thunderheads. This took me almost dead straight and due north down the lake for sixteen miles and brought me to the east shore on its short north-west bend. A mile's further

paddle along that shore closed the long view to the southward and revealed a wooded point that guarded a small natural harbour with a good sandy beach. I was glad to see it, for the little canoe, only a fourteen-footer, was, if anything, overloaded....This bay was the safest spot in sight for a night's camp and I stepped ashore thankfully. I cruised around among the trees: here was a good, sheltered spot for a man to sleep; and there, on the beach, was good driftwood for a fire. Soon blue coils of smoke were wreathing out over the lake: soon the tea was made and bacon and eggs were sizzling in the pan.

As I was having supper the noise of a distant engine came to me. It grew louder---and then a boat with a single man in it shot round the point. The man cut the engine and the boat slid up on to the beach alongside my canoe. The small wash rippled amongst the gravel and then died down again. The man stepped ashore and introduced himself: he was Barney McHugh, the sole inhabitant of Laketon, the ghost town of the Cassiar rush of 1874.

Barney had been at Laketon for twenty years. He had made his home there and done a bit of trapping and a bit of prospecting---but now, he told me, the trapping was all shot to hell because they had been putting out poison against the tremendous upsurge of wolves that had taken place during the forties. The crazy fools had probably fixed up the wolves all right, but they had also managed to wipe out every other damn thing in the country that ate meat, from weasels to wolverine and from ravens to eagles.

That reminded him: was it Friday, August the twentieth? He had forgotten to ask at Dease Lake.

No, I told him, it was Wednesday, the eighteenth.

Ah, well---that was just as good, and a couple of days longer for a man to live.....

These settings of Patterson's combined with old stories of the location or of individuals from the present or past are typical of the passages in *Trail to the Interior*. The combination of present and past events can make for some difficult reading at times, but with some close study the prose sorts itself out. Patterson includes many pages of sketch maps to orient the reader and these are essential to fully grasp the scope and scale of the travels, both Patterson's contemporary travels and those from the past. It is simply hard to imagine the time and effort required of Klondike era and earlier travelers to these lands. It is truly awe inspiring to know that these hardy individuals made such trips across very rugged terrain at extreme risk.

In the end Patterson decides against an additional 140 mile upriver trip to Frances Lake with a fly out, as the winter could arrive anytime, and Patterson had badly damaged his left wrist earlier in the trip. So camping on the Liard, just off the Alaska Highway at Lower Post he ends the trip with a flight out the next day.....

Returning from the dusty world of the Alaska Highway and crossing the clear, fast flowing Liard to my camp on the island was like dropping back fifty years in time. That camp, except for the growth of trees, could scarcely have altered since the Klondikers passed by, since Watson saw it for the first time. Not a sound reached there from the road: one heard only the murmur of the water as it raced down the head of the snye.

Nothing could have been more perfect than that evening. I enjoyed every moment of it as I sat by the fire, turning and re-turning the fool hen, which was now plucked and cleaned and spread wide open on a forked willow above the glowing embers. My attention was divided, part being given to the roasting bird and its delectable smell, and part to the delicate pattern of trees against the cloudless glow of sunset. So tranquil was the close of that September day that it seemed as though autumn must go on forever and winter never come.

Nor, if the truth must be told, did winter come until the last days of October, after one of the finest autumns of all time---thus making a mockery out of all our wise precautions.

But that, unfortunately, I could not possibly know on that last evening; and for the moment the vital thing in my small world was the fool hen, done to a turn and demanded my undivided attention.

Can you not smell that fool hen too?

Trail to the Interior, William Sloane Associates, (William Morrow & Company), New York, 1966 is less commonly found than the above books on bookfinder and ranges in price from \$25 up. This text includes a comprehensive appendix, citation notes and bibliography for the diaries, books and notes of the earlier travelers. This text also included several good B&W plates.

***Finlay's River*, 1968**

Finlay's River is again a historical review of earlier travelers on the Finlay River combined with a Patterson summer 1949 trip with his 13 year old son, Alan. Here Patterson and Alan canoe from Summit Lake, down the Crooked River and the Parsnip River to Finlay Forks (just upriver from the confluence of the Parsnip and Finlay which form the Peace). This land in British Columbia is part of the geological anomaly called the Rocky Mountain Trench. Patterson's discussion of this area is good study of this unique physical area. Here is his discussion....

When two rivers collide in the Trench they must immediately find a way out, for there is nowhere else to go. When for example, further south, the Columbia meets Canoe River, their united waters break out of the Trench to the west by way of the Big Bend of the Columbia. This is normal procedure. But when the waters of the Finlay and the Parsnip have united to form the Peace, they do an odd thing: they launch themselves straight at the Rockies and break through---through the mountains and the foothills to the eastern plains. Just how they have contrived to do this tremendous thing is not material to the story of the Finlay, but the fact remains that nowhere else does any river escape out of the Trench to the eastward: this is the only navigable, water-level gap in the Rockies, from their faint beginnings beyond Santa Fe in far-away New Mexico to their end south of the Liard River in Northern British Columbia. And that distance is two thousand miles.

We follow Patterson and his son down river to Finlay Forks like his travels in *Trails to the Interior* but this time biographical sketches of individuals from the past are introduced in short chapters. This makes for easy reading and understanding of both the times and reasons for these past individuals to appear at the various places on Patterson's trip. Here is a bit from the chapter covering the British Columbia Land Surveyor FC Swannell's 1913 trip to the Finlay area, excellent historical facts told in a memorable manner, both by Patterson and Swannell....

Five days later, from Camp 64, Swannell, Copley, Alexander and dog Dick embarked, with a heavy load, on a second raft to run the Mesilinka. They found the river very swift and badly obstructed by driftpiles---dangerous piled-up jams of dead and uprooted trees. Careering downstream, steering their heavy craft by means of long pike-poles, they crashed into one driftpile, sheered out and spun end for end three times, being swept in the process under a low sweeper---that is, under a long spar or fallen tree projecting horizontally from the bank or from a driftpile. The sweeper just cleared the load, but the three men had to jump over it as the raft drove beneath. They all cleared it, landing on the raft again, and no man dropped his pole---a neat piece of work. Dog Dick, however, standing on the load, failed to get the jumping idea and was swept overboard into the river. He made for shore and will have no more rafting, thereby showing sound common sense. That day they traveled seventeen miles.

Alan flies out at the beginning of August to attend school, leaving Patterson to further retrace the trails of the past

explorers of the Finlay. We have shades of the great story telling found in many passages of *Dangerous River* as Patterson prepares to head up Bower Creek. He caches much of his equipment and proceeds overland.

The morning was busy. I baked a couple of bannocks, sliced bacon, and sorted out grub for about a week---say eight days for good measure---and made up my pack, which seemed to me to weigh about fifty-five pounds. I sharpened my little 1 ½ pound Hudson's Bay ax till it was like a razor and cleaned my rifle....

Then on in the afternoon, I hit the trail up Bower Creek. I went about seven or eight miles and camped by the good pool at the foot of the cliff that Alan and I had seen....

Almost immediately next morning the creek and the trail forked, the main stream of Bower Creek coming in here from the south. I followed the trail that headed west, up the smaller fork---sloshing through wet places, jumping from tussock to tussock among springs, crossing the creek to the south side on a log jam, and then climbing steeply, as up the side of a house....I kept on till I came to an ideal place for a camp: on dry ground between two pines that were just the right distance apart for my lean-to shelter; and there I dumped pack, ax and rifle---thankfully.

The first thing on my list, even before setting up camp, was tea---lots of it and soon. To my utter amazement, when I got to the creek with the tea-pail I found the water was still flowing east to Bower Creek. I stared around at the valley and the mountains, wondering if I was going mad. I could have sworn that water was flowing uphill, so sure I had been that I had crossed the hump and was dropping down again to the river. I have seen one or two other places in the mountains like that---it's something to do with the lay of the country and the dip of the strata and they fool the stranger every time.

Thunderheads had been banking up in the west all that afternoon. Now they were climbing high, great masses of cumulus, anvil-headed, blotting out the sun....I made a good job of camp: I stretched the lean-to between two pines and pegged it down solid; I unrolled my bed beneath it and laid in a good supply of dry wood and a pile of resinous pine branches that would flare up and give a good light. And after supper I refilled my mug and tea-pail from the creek and set things handy for the breakfast porridge....and that was that. With a sigh of contentment I took my mountain boots off and put on an old and beloved pair of moccasins, old favorites made for me long ago at old Fort Nelson on the Fort Nelson River. They had been several times re-footed and the colours of the porcupine quill work on the insteps had faded a little, but for me those moccasins had become a sign that camp was made and the day was ended.

Passages from the historical archives of early explores coupled with chapters of Patterson's experiences alternate or are blended together to produce some very fine reading. Patterson obviously researched this book very well, and pulled the heart of many travelers' stories into this fine book. He very effectively blends his trip with Alan and his solo times together to produce an excellent and engaging book.

It is easy to compare *Trail to the Interior* with *Finlay's River*. Both are historical biographical texts interwoven with a contemporary Patterson trip, but *Trail to the Interior* has a slightly more integrated style than *Finlay's River*. The historical bits and pieces are woven into the passages in *Trail to the Interior*, but in many cases in *Finlay's River* Patterson has dedicated short chapters to the individuals that explored the river in the past. This style makes the biographical sketches more prominent and in some cases easier to read and understand than the more integrated approach used in *Trail to the Interior*. Both styles work well and the books are not exclusively different in the use of this writing style, but personally I prefer the brief biographical sketches presented in *Finlay's River* to the more tightly integrated method of *Trail to the Interior*. This is probably due to my lack of education concerning the history and geography of these areas of British Columbia. The more direct style of *Finlay's River*, for me, required less study of the maps etc to understand the discussion.

Finlay's River, William Sloane Associates, (William Morrow & Company), New York, 1968 is also less common than Patterson's earlier books on bookfinder and ranges in price from \$15 for soft covers to near \$30 and up for hard covers. Patterson includes a short appendix and bibliography and several excellent B&W plates. The sketch maps supporting the various points along the trip are excellent and essential to the understanding of the story.

Conclusions

Reading all of Patterson's works is an excellent introduction to the wild nature and huge scope of Northern British Columbia, Alberta and the Northwest Territories. The magnificent scale of these lands and the varied terrain can be appreciated by studying these books. *Dangerous River* is just a magnificent piece of writing, which holds the readers' attention, educates on wilderness operations and dangers, and introduces some of Canada's essential characters. *The Buffalo Head* and *Far Pastures* are autobiographical books of Patterson's life combined with some excellent stories of wilderness travels, and are excellent supplements to *Dangerous River*. *Trail to the Interior* and *Finlay's River* are historical studies of specific geographical regions and the persons and events of the past 150 years that shaped these places.

I believe that everyone should read *Dangerous River* as it is Patterson's quintessential work. My guess is that anyone who enjoyed *Dangerous River* would also greatly enjoy *Far Pastures*, *The Buffalo Head* and *Finlay's River*. Students of the gold rush and fur trades eras would most likely find *Trail to the Interior* and especially *Finlay's River* excellent reading. In my opinion, *Dangerous River* and *Finlay's River*, are the best of Patterson's works, but overall, the whole collection is a grand example of the finest in outdoor writing.

Additional Reading

The Nahanni Portfolio, Volume 2, 1988, Pat and Rosemary Keough

My library also had an excellent coffee table picture book of the Nahanni area. Pat and Rosemary Keough created an absolute beautiful book of images and history of this area. The book includes several historical images, introductory chapters briefly covering the Land, First Peoples, early explorers, the legends, the miners and travelers such as Patterson, Faille and the bush pilots. These introductory passages augment Patterson's discussions in his works. The heart of this book consists of the 110 color plates of the area. They present absolutely stunning images that are works of art that truly demonstrate the wild nature of this land even now, nearly 70 years after *Dangerous River*. The quality of the images is first rate, both in the publication aspects and in the initial image capture. The beauty of this land and its scope is amazing. Patterson's B&W images, while good, do not convey the vastness or the contrasts that the Keough's have presented in this volume. I highly recommend this both as a companion volume to the *Dangerous River* reader, but as a stand alone introduction to this land. The Canadian government created the Nahanni National Park to preserve this place and after reading Patterson and studying the prose and images of this text I can see why. It is a beautiful and intriguing unique place.

According to the dust jacket, the Keough's spent over a year in the area capturing the images for this book. Their text is as engaging as the images.

The Nahanni Portfolio, Volume 2, 1988, Stoddard Publishing Company, Ontario Canada. This is a large sized 12 x 11 coffee table type book with excellent color printing by Dai Nippon Printing (Japan) of the Keough images and excellent historical photograph restoration and reproduction, many from the Glenbow Museum in Calgary Alberta or from the Hudson's Bay Archives. An excellent references page includes many more resources for the interested reader.

Web Resource

In a comment to my *Dangerous River* review, Jimbo kindly left a link to the Albert Faille Nahanni reference site. I present it here for additional reading. It contains much of interest to this character plus additional links to this grand area. Thanks once again Jimbo.

[Albert Faille Nahanni Site](#)

Post-scriptum :

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Again I want to thank the King County Public Library system for making all of these books available to our community.