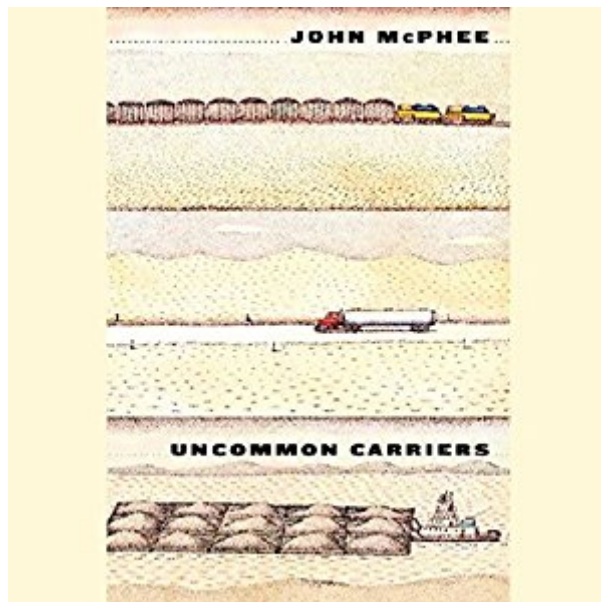


The book was found

Uncommon Carriers



Synopsis

From Pulitzer Prize-winner John McPhee, author of *The Founding Fish*, comes the fascinating story of an often overlooked, yet vitally important part of America. This first-hand account of the transportation sector features evocative portraits of the men and women who deliver our consumer and industrial goods. McPhee begins his adventure riding with Don Ainsworth, owner and operator of an 18-wheeler hauling nearly 30 tons of highly toxic chemicals from North Carolina to Washington. He continues his journey on a towboat pushing over 1,000 feet of barge up the narrow channel of the Illinois River. He rounds out his account crawling through Nebraska, Kansas, and the Powder River Basin of Wyoming in massive coal trains. Along the way, he tells the stories of the people he meets and the places he visits. McPhee's sense of humor, incisive observations, and historical asides make for a highly entertaining journey across America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Uncommon Carriers is a very interesting piece of non-fiction work by John McPhee. McPhee is a required taste not unlike Scotch, but if you are a fan of non-fiction story-telling, McPhee is very interesting. If a reader meets those preliminary reading requirements, which I do, then he should most likely enjoy the book. However, even for myself, I was constantly pushing it aside and taking a break for lighter reading, but nevertheless, I did enjoy the book. Uncommon Carriers covers various types of transportation of goods from trucking to UPS to trains to tugboats to name a few. John McPhee actually places himself into each of these forms of transportation and scenes. The book

begins with McPhee riding with a trucker who hauls fluids such as lubricants like WD-40. McPhee insightfully covers various aspects of the working life of the trucker from language used by truckers to number of hours worked, to washing the inside of the cylinder on the trucker, to fuel costs and truck stops and their amenities or lack thereof. From there McPhee visits a school for learning the craft of being the captain of an ocean liner or very large ship. This proves especially interesting in the art of steering and turning and balancing a large vessel. Next, McPhee joins the crew of a tug boat for a few weeks learning the craft of the work on the tugboat. McPhee canoes up a river that Henry David Thoreau used to travel. From there McPhee lands in a lobster plant, which is very interesting. Next, the lobsters are transported to the UPS Distribution Center. There, McPhee also spends time reviewing the travels of parcels of various sizes, which is also very interesting. Next, McPhee lands on a coal train. The ins-and-outs of train transportation of coal are outlined throughout the Midwest. McPhee ends the book where he began traveling with the trucker traveling around the country again. *Uncommon Carriers* is an interesting book. I am glad that I read this book and I enjoyed the book. It is not for everyone and even I had to read this book along with other books. This book is not for everyone, but if the subject matter piques your interest, then you probably will thoroughly enjoy the book also. I have read more interesting non-fiction by McPhee but this does not discount the quality of *Uncommon Carriers*. Cam

As a retired corporate employee of a national freight line, I found it very interesting to read the stories of the many very different modes of transportation with a look inside the workings of each.

After reading his "Looking for a Ship" I enjoyed his personal style of writing, and loaded this book into my Kindle. As someone in the transportation industry I travel a lot and can not carry too many books, but don't like kindles because they do not reproduce photos or charts and graphs well. However this book did not need many of these, and it was informative on the ways, means, and methods of travel we do not often think about. His stories give details into the lives of the people who keep our stuff moving around the country. The only part that seemed out of place was the canoe trip up the river from Massachusetts to New Hampshire, since the canal is no longer used, he could have covered the Erie Canal instead. Anyway it was fun to read.

This is a cool premise and the first couple of chapters are pretty good, but then it just kind of tails off and book becomes a bit of a slog.

You can't take away good marks for McPhee's writing -- he's a real pro. But he writes in the New Yorker style (where he is a contributing editor), which means he remains relatively unemotional and unexciting. It's as if he works hard to remove any of the romance involved with the "unconventional" carriers which are his subject. The notion of riding many miles in a freight train is one that has always fascinated me, but somehow, McPhee makes it boring. Ditto for riding along on a riverboat, or a UPS flight, or an 18-wheeler. These tales should be exciting and gripping, but they're not. They're devoid of drama. They're devoid of the story-tellers ability to make something interesting. Does good writing have to be that dispassionate? McPhee relentlessly gives you fact after fact -- as another reviewer says he tells you a lot about things you didn't know you cared about. Unfortunately, he writes it in a monotone. Interesting, but you won't be staying awake reading this book.

If you ever wondered what it's like for other high stress jobs, Mr. McPhee does a wonderful job with his writing.

This is an interesting account of various jobs, long distance truck driver, tugboat captain on main inland shipping rivers, train engineer, etc. These accounts were obtained by McPhee traveling with them and reporting on his interactions with them. This is interesting, light reading which exposes the reader to what these jobs are like. As someone with no experience with these careers, I found it informative and entertaining.

Uncommon carriers is a great dive into some of the more esoteric elements of, well, cargo. From 15,000 gallon liquid tankers that have to be sprayed out to be made chemically inert, to trips up the Mississippi on a string of barges with only a few feet to spare on each side, to cargo trains over a mile long, John brings a truly in depth first-person perspective on the people, passion, and practices behind moving things around the world. Overall, a really interesting read on what some might consider a dry topic, McPhee's "embedded" approach reveals personalities that keep you reading and dives in to the salient technical details that are fun to learn if you're the least bit engineering-inclined. If you've ever wondered what train crews do when they've reached their legal maximum time on the job, or what life is like on a barge in the Mississippi, or what truckers call shredded tire treads, Uncommon Carriers is a great read for you.

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