

**Title: *Ruthless River***

**Subtitle: *Love & Survival by Raft on the Amazon's Relentless Madre de Dios***

**Author: Holly Fitzgerald**

**Published: 2017**

**Publisher: Vintage Publishers, New York**

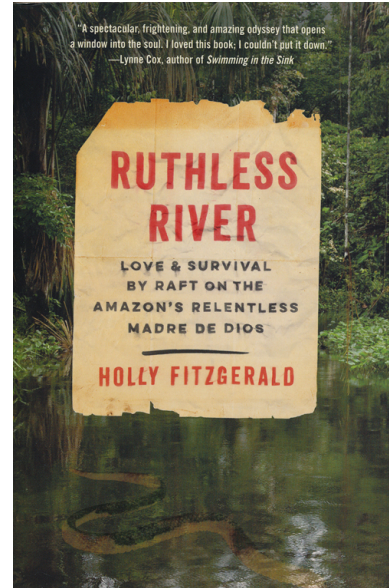
**Contents: 316 pp, one map, 2 sections b&w photos**

**Cover: softcover**

**ISBN: 978-0-525-43277-7**

**Availability: Book Depository UK**

**Review: Paul Caffyn**



This is a story of a round the world honeymoon in 1973 that went off the rails with an aircraft crash in the Peruvian jungle. The book opens with a young newly-wed couple on their last legs after some 26 days on a balsa log raft in a backwater of South American river, the Madre de Dios.

Five months into their backpacking trip, with a plan to cross South America from west to east, an old DC3 commercial passenger aircraft crashes on landing, leaving the crew and passengers uninjured but with the closest civilization across the river, a remote penal colony. For Holly and Fitz, the honeymoon couple, they have a deadline to catch a booked boat trip further downriver, but with the deadline and budget all commercial transport options, they decide to buy a locally made balsa log raft and head down river to link up with the booked boat trip.

And there the honeymoon trip unravels. With no survival skill experience, and their reliance on local natives paddling out in dugout canoes and providing sustenance, the initial downriver float goes well, in what they termed the 'Pink Palace', a plastic fly providing shade in daytime and protection from downpours over the six balsa logs. But the raft drifts into a backwater of the river. All their attempts subsequently made to re-join the main river flow, by swimming, towing the raft, and utilizing a smaller log raft are unsuccessful.

Salvation eventually with two local natives in a dugout canoe and a swift downriver trip to a mission station where the two are fortunately allowed to slowly recover from starvation and other ailments for six weeks. Described on the rear dust-jacket as 'the ultimate survival story', I could re-label this book as the 'ultimate disaster' story, where a lack of planning, research and gross lack of survival skills lead so close to death from starvation in a jungle back-water.

It is certainly a very readable story, with chapters based on the number of the day since trapped in the backwater. Despite loss of camera, typewriter and journal, the detail of the account feels like it has been embellished with a tad of journalistic licence.

One map shows the route travelled, while two slim black and white photo sections provide a bit of an idea of the journey. Unlike the lovely photos in *Hudson Bay Bound* printed on a satin finish paper, the *Ruthless River* pics are printed on cheap paper, and could have been much more effective if they had been bled out to the page edge.