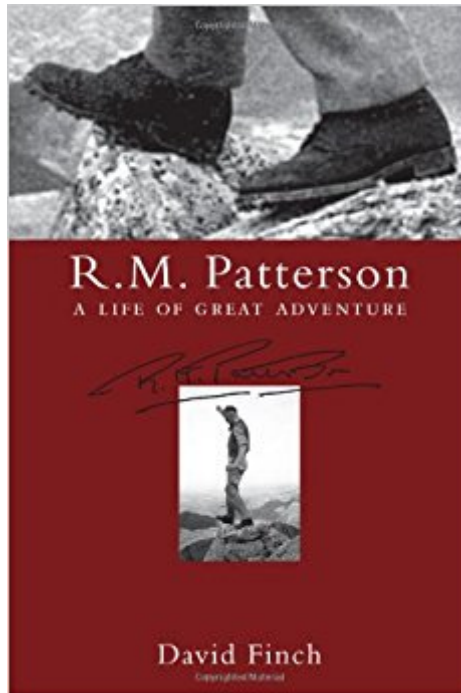




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# R.M. Patterson: A Life Of Great Adventure



## Synopsis

David Finch's highly regarded biography of R.M. Patterson is now available in paperback. The escapades of this great Canadian are brought to life in a story that combines the lure of gold, the thrill of wilderness exploration and comic tales about life on a southern Alberta ranch. With access to Patterson's diaries, letters and photographs, as well as numerous interviews with Patterson and members of his family, Finch recounts the adventurous life of this well-loved outdoorsman, writer and rancher and sheds light on some of what Patterson left unsaid. PRAISE FOR R.M.

**PATTERSON: A LIFE OF GREAT ADVENTURE** A worthwhile addition to the literature of the Canadian North, a good read for anyone who wants to know more about the man who helped turn the Nahanni into the legendary river that it is. Edmonton Journal Finch presents us with the unlikely portrait of the Oxford University graduate who, on a lark, came to Canada in 1924 and decided to stay. —•Calgary Herald Calgary historian David Finch has produced a richly detailed portrait of the gentleman adventurer behind the byline. —•The Beaver

## Book Information

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: TouchWood Editions; First TouchWood edition edition (March 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1894898958

ISBN-13: 978-1894898959

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.8 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #272,886 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in [Books > History > Americas > Canada > 20th Century](#) #25 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Canadian](#) #1480 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers](#)

## Customer Reviews

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--Edmonton Journal  
Calgary historian David Finch has produced a richly detailed portrait of the gentleman adventurer behind the byline. --The Beaver  
Finch presents us with the unlikely portrait of the Oxford University graduate who, on a lark, came to Canada in 1924 and decided to stay.

--Calgary Herald

What makes the Patterson story special? Like many others of his time in the 1920s, Patterson took some time off between his education and his career to seek adventure. Unlike the others, Patterson turned his quest for an exciting life into a habit. Instead of returning to England after homesteading in northwestern Alberta, he stayed on. Sheep and cattle ranching, guiding dudes into the mountains, questing for minerals with the old-timers and natives, Patterson turned many parts of his business life into opportunities to see the world. Patterson knew none of the skills necessary for a life in the wilds. But, being a quick study, having a photographic memory, and always willing to work hard, he acquired experiences that added to his enjoyment of the Canadian west. Patterson was always willing to play the fool in some tale. And, as a superb mimic, he was often the life of the party. Patterson's wildest adventures occurred while travelling alone. Taking advantage of whatever opportunities arose in the backcountry, he explored remote mountain passes, climbed mountains, canoed river canyons and rode on horseback through little known country. Five books and numerous articles distinguish Patterson from others of his generation. His unique ability to see the story in every situation, combined with a practiced writing style provided the basis upon which to build a writing career. Not until his mid-50s did Patterson begin writing for publications, though, and even then only as the result of years of pleading by friends. Finally, he submitted articles about his adventures to Blackwoods Magazine of Scotland and the Hudson's Bay Company's periodical, The Beaver. Publishers then fought to be the first to release his story about South Nahanni River, a book called The Dangerous River. Four more volumes followed, each full of tales about the Canadian west. Patterson died in 1984 at age 86, still dreaming of more adventures he would like to pursue and telling stories until his last days. Why did you write Patterson's story? Patterson's story attracted my attention for several reasons. First, he actually did things, and then wrote about them. "Write what you know about" is the advice often given to authors, but too many people write because they want to see themselves published, not because they know the material and want to tell the story from their experience. There is no substitute for first-hand experience. A great set of records also made this story appealing. Patterson's detailed diaries of his trips on the South Nahanni, the Peace River, the Stikine and other rivers all make for interesting reading. He wrote in great detail, in little books, in a careful printing that was small but very readable. Weather, animals, accidents, opinions, worries, amusing thoughts. And the thousands of photographs in the Patterson family albums are of outstanding quality too. The friends he made along the way were also a valuable resource and their letters to him as well as interviews I conducted added to the depths of information available to help tell this story. Another reason to write this biography was the fact that no one else had written it.

While doing my research I ran into several people who wanted to write it, but actually sitting down and writing is not all that romantic. It took years to complete the research, the better part of one year to write the first draft, several more years to hone the material, find a publisher, edit the work down to a size that would fit between covers. I wrote about Patterson because I have always struggled with the balancing act that challenges most people: making a living and pursuing adventure. Patterson did it his way and though I liked many of his pursuits, I also had to make my own way in life. Writing about the story of the development of the Canadian west became my career and outdoor pursuits fed my desire for a passionate existence. Canoes, for example, intrigued me as they did Patterson. Finally, I wrote this biography because I was looking to write a big story, a narrative, the tale of a life of a man--warts and all. Not a hero story. Writing the life of another allows the author to examine his own life too. Describe the process of researching and writing this biography. Writing is not all that exciting, really. One must create a structure for the story, find the material to make it interesting, fill in the gaps and then begin writing. And there were many days when the writing was more of a chore than a thrill. But day after week after month after year the work of researching, writing, editing and getting this biography published continued. A project that takes more than a decade has a life of its own. Describe Patterson's impact on Canadian culture in terms of both literature and environment. Patterson's story is also about the effect one man can have on a culture and the environment. His books captured a time, from the 1920s to the 1960s, and showed the Canadian west as it went from the days of exploration and early settlement to the period of paved roads and motorized transportation. He put into words the experiences of trappers, prospectors, ranchers and hunters, just as their lives were changing. He also helped protect the environment from the ravages of unthinking progress. Patterson and his friend George Pocater both despised needless industrial development and championed the wild places of the west. Thanks, in part, to Patterson's writings, the South Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories, Kananaskis Country in Alberta and Elk Lakes Provincial Park in British Columbia were created to protect a bit of the west from the bulldozer, the plough and pavement. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

R. M. Patterson is always a great read. Puts you right there with him in his canoe ,camp or cabin. His Dangerous River got me hooked in the "60's".

R. M. Patterson never lets me down. I have high expectations and he delivers again! I am affraid I have read allof his books.:(

In *R. M. Patterson: A Life of Great Adventure*, historian David Finch brings the famous river explorer back to life. Patterson died at 86 almost twenty years ago, but *The Dangerous River*, based on his explorations on the South Nahanni River in the Northwest Territories, remains in print and his most popular work, as fresh today as its setting in the late 1920s. The Finch biography revisits the South Nahanni as well as Patterson's roots in England and his many years in the Canadian Rockies. It traces the events of "a life of great adventure," a theme suggested by Patterson's employer at the Bank of England as he wished Patterson well on his 1924 move to Canada to settle in the Peace River country of northwestern Alberta. Patterson was more than a river rat. He worked as a logger, a trapper, a prospector, before he began to explore the rivers of the region. He ran a sheep operation near Banff, a dude ranch in the foothills of the Rockies, an orchard on Vancouver Island. All five of Patterson's frequently-autobiographical books remain in print decades after they first appeared. In his exhaustive studies Finch dug into several archives, interviewed dozens of family members and friends, followed the rivers that Patterson explored, and hiked or rode horseback over Patterson's favorite trails. In this biography, Finch shares with his readers the essence of Patterson that he gleaned during a decade of research and writing. In this reader's mind, he brought Patterson back to life as well as any writer could. (I met Patterson in his latter years, corresponded with him, and interviewed him. Like Finch, I read all of his books, interviewed Patterson himself, his widow, only daughter, and older son. I had planned to write the biography myself, but Finch beat me to it. He did a fine job. --Verne Huser)

The book had an excellent pace. Enough detail to understand each adventure without getting bogged down. I will visit northern Alberta to see some of these places for myself.

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