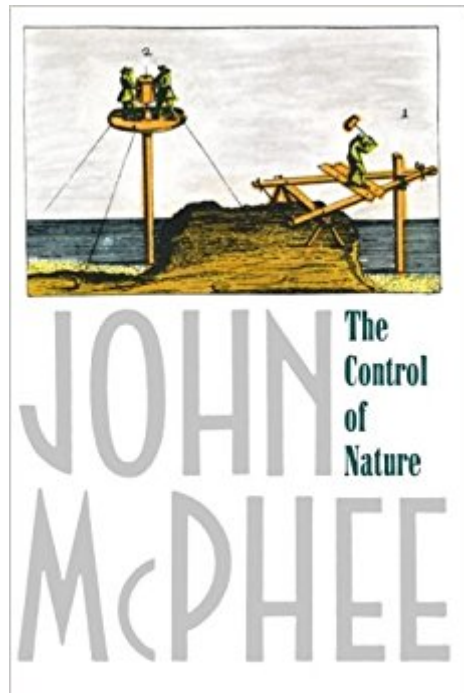


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# The Control Of Nature



## Synopsis

The Control of Nature is John McPhee's bestselling account of places where people are locked in combat with nature. Taking us deep into these contested territories, McPhee details the strategies and tactics through which people attempt to control nature. Most striking is his depiction of the main contestants: nature in complex and awesome guises, and those attempting to wrest control from her - stubborn, sometimes foolhardy, more often ingenious, and always arresting characters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Master how-it-works writer John McPhee has instructed his readers in the arcana of how oranges are commercially graded, how mountains form, how canoes are built and oceans crossed. In The Control of Nature he turns his attention once more to geology and the human struggle against nature. In one sketch, he explores the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' unrealized plan to divert the flow of the Mississippi River into a tributary, the Atchafalaya, for flood control; in another, he looks at the ingenious ways in which an Icelandic engineer saved a southern harbor on that island from being destroyed by a lava flow; in a third, he examines a complex scheme to protect Los Angeles from boulders ejected from mountains by compression and tectonic movement. As always, McPhee combines a deep knowledge of his subject with a narrative approach that is wholly accessible; you may not have thought you were interested in earthquakes and flood control, but he gently leads you to take a passionate concern in such matters.

“All three elemental battles recounted by the masterly McPhee are unified by the most uncontrolled and stubborn of all forces: human nature.” R. Z. Sheppard, Time  
“It is difficult to put these stories aside. If the stories bear witness to the ultimate triumph of nature over human engineering, they also testify to the triumph of art over nature.” Stephen J. Pyne, The New York Times Book Review (front page)  
“This book is unmistakable McPhee: the silky narrative, with keen detail and sharp dialogue, the finely drawn characters, the nimble metaphors.” Stephen MacDonald, The Wall Street Journal  
“Some of his passages left me gasping for breath.” [This book gave me more pure enjoyment than anything I've read in a long time.] Christopher Shaw, The Washington Post Book World

For the reader with a technical mind or an interest in science, this is a highly entertaining must-read account of three of man's failed efforts to control nature: an attempt to control lava-flow in Iceland, the losing flood-control war near the Mississippi Delta (written well prior to the actual failure and predicting much of what actually happened), and the doomed construction on the hills and canyons east of Los Angeles. McPhee tells of impending doom in a way that makes us laugh at the arrogant folly of mankind. In any battle, Mother Nature will always win.

Excellent book by John McPhee on man's attempts to "Control" nature. McPhee is a wonderful author who brings technical topics readily accessible to any reader, while bringing in the human element of those who practice their craft, in this case - engineering.

This book really opened my eyes to a lot of dangerous situations in nature that are being lived with everyday with very little publicity. It caused me to do some research on my own location. Nature will eventually prevail.

Wanna hear what happens when humans try and stop a volcano from reaching a town, or how about limiting the extent of flooding from the Mississippi River? Better yet, let's talk about how people are building homes in one of the most unstable landscapes where fire has been excluded for >100yrs and rich people decide it's the only way to get out of the smoggy mess that is LA (then complain about landslides and fires near their homes)? A great portrayal of how Mother Nature will do what she feels like. I have read a couple books from McPhee and it's surprising to know he is not a geologist. I was surprised with his proper usage of geologic terms and, as always, his ability to

manipulate words allowing readers to picture the landscapes around the world. Great read and, as a geologist, thoroughly impressed with his complete/easy to understand mechanisms behind the forces of Nature.

As a former teacher and geologist I am always interested by how people interact with the world around them: The one word answer is "BADLY". People just don't get it, either because of ignorance or stupidity. McPhee tries to educate the former (the latter are beyond hope). Anyone with a desire to learn more about the world around us should read this book. McPhee writes for understanding, so whether you are a college professor or a high school student who wants to avoid the mistakes of those who are supposed to know better, this book is for you.

This is my second time reading this books. It reads easily and appeals to my interests of challenges faced by people, how we alter the natural world and it's consequences, and quality storytelling.

John McPhee tells 3 riveting stories of human efforts to control nature, in the form of the mighty Mississippi, a volcano/island in Iceland, and fire and flood along the seismic spine crack of the San Gabriel Mountains that surround Los Angeles. As usual, there's a lot to be learned here, about economics, science, and the wisdom, ingenuity, foolhardiness, bravery and tragedy of our own species. I read the Kindle version and will buy a hard copy to loan.

McPhee is a very talented writer...I am reminded of Mark Twain in his use of words and wit. He dives in to cover his topic both on the ground as well as more abstractly, as in what are we learning here. Reading this book was just delightful and I learned about three huge and important examples where humans have pitted themselves against nature, only to raise the stakes to catastrophic levels when nature finally wins...there is no way we can win the battles with nature portrayed in this book. We need to really develop new human systems which are in a long term healthy and sustainable relationship with nature as well as other human systems...

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