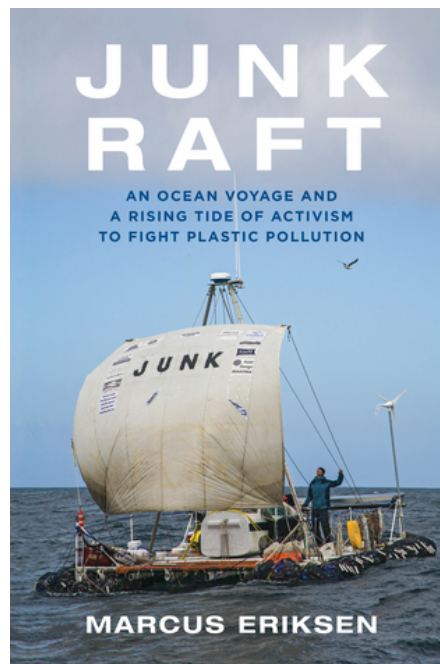




Junk Raft: An Ocean Voyage and a Rising Tide of Activism to Fight Plastic Pollution

Marcus Eriksen

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An exciting account of an activist scientist's unorthodox fight in the growing movement against plastic marine pollution and of his expedition across the Pacific on a home-made "junk raft"

News media brought the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch"--the famous swirling gyre of plastic pollution in the ocean--into the public consciousness. But when Marcus Eriksen cofounded the 5 Gyres Institute with his wife, Anna Cummins, and set out to study the world's oceans with hundreds of volunteers, they discovered a "plastic smog" of microscopic debris that permeates our oceans globally, defying simple clean-up efforts. What's more, these microplastics and their toxic chemistry have seeped into the food chain, threatening marine life and humans alike.

Far from being a gloomy treatise on an environmental catastrophe, though, *Junk Raft* tells the exciting story of Eriksen and his team's fight to solve the problem of plastic pollution. A scientist, activist, and inveterate adventurer, Eriksen is drawn to the sea by a desire to right an environmental injustice. Against long odds and common sense, he and his co-navigator, Joel Paschal, construct a "junk raft" made of plastic trash and set themselves adrift from Los Angeles to Hawaii, with no motor or support vessel, confronting perilous cyclones, food shortages, and a fast decaying raft.

As Eriksen recounts his struggles to keep afloat, he immerses readers in the deep history of the plastic pollution crisis and the movement that has arisen to combat it. The proliferation of cheap plastic products during the twentieth century has left the world awash in trash. Meanwhile, the plastics industry, with its lobbying muscle, fights tooth and nail against any changes that would affect its lucrative status quo, instead defending poorly designed products and deflecting responsibility for the harm they cause.

But, as Eriksen shows, the tide is turning in the battle to save the world's oceans. He recounts the successful efforts that he and many other activists are waging to fight corporate influence and demand that plastics producers be held accountable. *Junk Raft* provides concrete, actionable solutions and an empowering message: it's within our power to change the throw-away culture for the sake of our planet.

Junk Raft: An Ocean Voyage and a Rising Tide of Activism to Fight Plastic Pollution Details

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Plastic Pollution Marcus Eriksen**

From Reader Review Junk Raft: An Ocean Voyage and a Rising Tide of Activism to Fight Plastic Pollution for online ebook

Jim says

This is a perceptive examination of the proliferation of plastic pollution in the world - focussed primarily on plastics in the world's oceans. The author and a friend sailed a raft from L.A. to Hawaii to highlight the problem of plastic pollution -hence the name Junk Raft. The raft was supported by pontoons containing thousands of plastic bottles taken from recycling facilities. The book combines a story of the voyage to Hawaii with the author's description of the problem of plastic proliferation.

A popular, but false, myth is that there is a huge island - the size of Texas - of plastic materials floating around the middle of the northern Pacific island. This is not, says the author, the case. However, it is true that there are microscopic pieces of plastic in virtually all parts of the oceans. These pieces are ingested by fish of all sizes and are passed up the food chain, endangering each layer in the chain until the plastic reaches human beings.

The author makes the case for a change in the business model for plastic producers. At the present time, the model in use is linear, characterized by planned obsolescence. Plastic items - from bags to bottles to whatever - are created and designed basically to be used one time and then discarded. The current recycling effort by many communities supports this business model, providing for the incineration of plastic in hopes of producing energy while destroying the plastic items. The problem, of course, is increased air pollution with no effort to reduce the production of plastic. The author's solution is to move to a circular business model, wherein plastic items are produced in a manner that they can be re-used (not just recycled to incinerators). He supports bans on the use of plastic bags and urges that other items such as beverage bottles and milk containers be produced with the idea of re-using them.

This is an enlightening book and a significant step toward giving the layperson an understanding of how to address plastic pollution.

Cavak says

Activism at its finest: informative, firsthand, respectful, and concise. If you weren't aware about the potential dangers of plastic or microbeads in our world, then this book will do plenty to inform you about them *without* the condescending tone some other activism books may have. He is raw and curt about what the reality of the situation that currently pervades the world. It's unfortunate that it doesn't include the effects that plastic ingestion may have with people, something which has been not been widely addressed until just recently in the United States. But with Eriksen's insight, you can get an idea of why that is the case.

Eriksen's narrative is laced with the steps needed for his dangerous voyage and flashbacks to his fighting during the 1991 Gulf War. I have not read his first book, *My River Home*, to compare how the books' tone differ besides subject matter, but his life experiences help add urgency to his activism message. For one, you can tell that he writes from the heart. He wasn't testing ocean water in a comfy air-conditioned lab; he was getting blasted by the sun and vicious storms getting his samples. He's *seen* the damage plastic has had on animals himself. Dramatic as it may seem to some, it does provide vivid visuals and adrenaline to a subject matter that may have otherwise been dismissed for being "boring." The ending is a little cheesy to me because of it, but, well, you can argue that it isn't supposed to be the true ending.

While his skepticism towards lobbyists bleeds through, it's hard to deny that the United States *can* do better with its plastic production. I guess environmental issues in general, since there's also natural conservation, endangered species protection, and safe nuclear waste disposal that politicians still need to address and agree on.

If the US mass media has the gall to criticize Europe, India, and China over their pollution problems, even when these countries have started to show vast improvements in recent years, why can't they address and report on their own country's faults too? That's the question that Eriksen's book makes you want to ask yourself after you're done reading it.

I received the book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

Peggy Tibbetts says

At the outset, author Marcus Eriksen exposes the truth behind the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, supposedly floating between California and Hawaii that is twice the size of Texas. In 1997, Captain Charles Moore's actual discovery was billions upon billions of tiny, colored plastic particles -- from micro to macro -- floating on the flat sea surface and encompassing an area about twice the size of Texas. But the floating garbage island meme was a better sell with the media and focused public attention on plastics and other pollutants in our oceans.

Eriksen is a veteran and environmental researcher and activist. Prior to establishing the 5 Gyres Institute (dedicated to fighting plastic pollution) with his wife Anna, Eriksen sailed across the Pacific on "Junk Raft," constructed with plastic bottles, plus 30 old sailboat masts for a deck and a Cessna 310 airplane as a cabin. Eriksen and his comrade in environmental advocacy Joel Pachal (an accomplished sailor) embarked on June 1, 2008, on a course set to imitate the route that trash follows when dumped into the ocean. What they observed was neither a garbage patch nor a trail of plastics. Instead they found micro and macro plastic particles so pervasive in the ocean environment they had become part of the food chain, ingested by and in most cases killing all species of marine life. In one instance the fish they caught for dinner were so polluted with microplastics they were inedible.

Their journey was not without incident and harrowing close encounters with death, as well as days on end of boredom adrift on the flat sea. The most astonishing event was a meet-up in the middle of nowhere for a food and water swap with ocean rower Roz Savage. Eriksen infuses his Robinson Crusoe narrative with an exposition of the ongoing battle to fight plastic pollution in our oceans and waterways. Though Eriksen supports public awareness campaigns, better waste management, and bag bans, he places the ultimate responsibility at the feet of the plastics producers to produce less, recycle more, and foot the bill for reclaiming the tsunami of toxic junk that saturates our environment. You will never look at plastic the same way. "Junk Raft" is an unforgettable expedition through the sea of microplastics that charts our course out of this morass.

Lesley says

If you think recycling is enough of a contribution to our trash and plastic problem in this world you will quickly see how wrong you are. Told through snippets of a travel diary during a 2 month 2600 mile journey from California to Hawaii on a plastic raft, each chapter reveals another shocking disgusting horrible thing

that plastic does to people and the planet. Marcus and Anna do important work.

Lucy says

I picked this book up thinking that it would be about the author's voyage from California to Hawaii aboard a raft made from thousands of plastic bottles, which sounded fascinating. Erikson is a clever fellow, surely knowing that there would be many readers just like me who would be drawn to an adventure book more quickly than to a book about the perils of plastic trash. I have to admit that all that material about plastic was actually quite interesting. If I had intended to read a book about plastic I probably would have given it 4 stars.

Angela Howe-stemrich says

Great book telling the tale of plastic pollution first hand while taking the reader on a journey across the Pacific Ocean and through a beautiful romance. Marcus Eriksen gives the most accurate landscape of the current advocacy battles against plastic pollution and the major challenges lying ahead. This is a phenomenal book!

Mrs. Europaea says

As someone who stays awake at night due to anxiety-induced insomnia over our current pollution problem and what affect it will have on my children's future, I was highly anticipating the publication of **Junk Raft**. Erikson gives a thorough account of our plastic pollution problem in Junk Raft that will even make those deniers out there give zero-waste management another thought.

The two main questions that Erikson focuses on in this text is: *How much plastic waste is in the world's oceans?* and *What can we do about it?*

The obvious solution Erikson presents is to end throw away culture, that with our current methods of disposal and planned obsolescence of products the proof of the ocean Garbage Patch is that there is no proper method of thrown "away" as the manufactures driven by greed will have you believe. The plastic pollution in our oceans has a significant impact on wild life with microplastic particles showing up in the stomachs of many wild fish that society routinely ingests. This phenomena has caused sailors to turn into scientists, scientists to turn into activists, and activists to turn to politics to fight this pollution problem that is not taken as a serious matter that needs to be readily addressed.

Erikson fights for movements that support a zero-waste lifestyle as he describes how the plastic pollution which keeps multiply annually is wrecking havoc on our wildlife, coral reefs and health.

Jennifer Collins says

Junk Raft tackles a wide range of myths about pollution, plastics, and recycling, painting a picture of our world's trash & plastics issues against a backdrop of grassroots organizations, a large raft made of 'junk', and

hope for a sustainable world. And, yes, it's a lot. There are chapters here which are fast and easy to digest, as clear as they are powerful; there are just as many chapters, though, that readers will find harder to digest if they don't have any background in Eriksen's wide-ranging exploration that, fairly regularly, delves into details of chemistry, design, and even biology. In other words, although this book is powerful and worth reading, it's also not an easy read.

Still, at the center of the work is a sense of power and optimism that offers the work a certain inertia, and so I have to think that most readers will find this book worth the time and focus it requires. I will admit, I think it could have been stronger with a bit more time spent on the journey Eriksen took toward becoming the conservationist he is, offering the path behind him to make him feel more approachable and relatable, and the book might have benefitted from a bit more focus on the present moment of the journey to break up the science of plastics... but that doesn't lessen the book's insight and intelligence. This is a careful and smartly researched endeavor to inform interested readers of what should be common knowledge regarding plastics, recycling, and potential for change, along with all of the false myths perpetrated by big business. Readers who are interested enough to pick it up, and to stay engaged with it, will be glad they did.

Jill says

Marcus Eriksen is a man on a mission, which he sums up in the Prologue as "...to end the throwaway culture" (p. x). "Easier said than done," the cynic might snort. However, the author is enough of a pragmatist to realize that the human race has no other choice. Either we clean up our act or we drown in a sea of our own waste. He pulls no punches when he states forthrightly of his fellow Homo sapiens: "As short-lived, short-sighted, bipedal, big-brained primates preoccupied with war and sex, we risk consuming and overpopulating until we collapse" (ibid.). Eriksen holds out hope in that, if our race can change its ways, we can yet save our planet, and thus, ourselves.

Part seafaring adventure story and part anti-plastic pollution polemic, Eriksen relates the tale of his putting together a pontoon boat of sorts out of discarded plastic bottles and an eclectic assortment of cast off stuff, including the fuselage of a Cessna 310 airplane to serve as a cabin. Christening this barely seaworthy craft "Junk Raft," he and a friend/navigator set sail from Long Beach, California, and drift with the wind and currents across the North Pacific Ocean until, 88 days later, they make landfall at Waikiki, Hawaii. Entries from the journal he kept along the way are interspersed with both vignettes of his former life as a battle-hardened United States Marine and his newfound career as an environmental scientist. Slowly and methodically, he builds an ironclad case of why oft-hyped "solutions," such as recycling and incineration, just don't work. The bottom line is that, these days, plastic in some form is everywhere, from the guts of the fish they catch and filet on the deck of their raft to the calcified lumps trapped within the bleached bones of camels out in the middle of the desert. As Eriksen makes plain, the problem with plastic is that it doesn't rot, degrade, break down or any other term one would care to use. Plastic simply gets shredded by the elements into smaller and smaller pieces, until it becomes what is known as "microplastics." You might not be able to see it, but it's still there.

As befitting the academic rigor of one trained to parse fact from fiction, there is an ample selection of citations to books, websites and scholarly journals in the "Notes" section of the book.

While some might scoff that his was a mere publicity stunt, it is evident from the man's passionate language and sound reasoning that he risked his life for his principles. With luck and pluck, he succeeded, not only in bringing his voyage to a joyous conclusion but also in bringing a well told tale of a clear and present danger to the attention of the reading public.

Review by Michael Bemis.

Dlmrose says

3.5

Geoffrey Kelley says

As the subtitle indicates, this really a two-books-in-one exercise. There is the compelling story of the author and his colleague/friend who set out on a « junk raft » fashioned from empty plastic bottles , old masts and the cabin of a Cessna, and sail/ drift from a California to Hawaii, collecting water samples showing the omnipresence of plastics in our oceans. Weaved through this narrative are an amalgam of scientific debates, calls to activism, and a plea to move from a linear to circular economy. Our world consumes too much, designs too many single-use products, and wastes too much. We try to make ourselves feel better my recycling a small percentage of this avalanche of stuff. When it comes to plastics, only 9% of the 300 million tons produced annually is recycled. The rest finds its way to landfills, incinerators, or into our rivers and oceans. We must do better.

Pamela says

The message reinforced throughout the book is highly important. I'll never look at plastics, and or 'trash' the same way again. Despite recycling, there is so much more at stake riding under the radar than most consumers realize. Every single thing we buy, will, at some point, come to the end of its purpose, or usefulness, and/or its intended lifespan. Then what? We throw these trinkets, bobbles, gizmos, gadgets, bottles, doodads, shoes, boats, cars - away.

But there is really no 'away'. Away is here. Planet earth, and its oceans and waterways. And consumerism - plastic consumerism especially, is making our oceans sick. Which in turn, makes our ecosystems, animals, plants, and we humans - sick.

So yes, important message. I learned so very much. However, the portion of the book covering Eriksen's Junk Raft voyage was far less than impressive. Told in bits and pieces - a paragraph here, a page there, sometimes just a couple sentences; it was so disjointed and spread-out, almost as if inserted as an after thought, it jilted my overall reading satisfaction. Plus, there wasn't a single picture documenting any of it. Not the ocean voyage, the building of the raft, the plastic discoveries, nothing. Total Bummer.

Five Star Activism Message
Four Star Writing and Bibliography
Three Star Compilation/Structure
One Star - No photographs. Misnomer Title

Overall: Three Stars

Lynn says

Marcus Eriksen is a naturalist who saw that plastic was affecting wildlife so much, he became a scientist. In

2008, he sailed on a boat made of plastic bottles and bags to bring awareness to the public the effect of plastic on the the oceans and lakes. In this book, he tells his tale of his journey with his partner along with his knowledge of how plastic is affecting the Earth. He tells what he knows about plastic, plastic creating corporations and how the American legal process works when confronting environmental hazards. ALEC is mentioned and discussed. Eriksen doesn't tell his story in an angry manner but explains his concern and how corporations who contribute to ALEC work to sow dissension and confuse the public and keep actions from being taken to stop pollution. A short nice book that helps explain why plastic is hurting people, wildlife and the Earth. I have to say domestic animals are being hurt too.

Edwin Howard says

JUNK RAFT by Marcus Eriksen chronicles Eriksen's trek across the Pacific Ocean on a Raft made of repurposed/recycled materials (mostly plastic) in 2008. Eriksen couples the recounting of this event with an education on plastic; from creation, to consumption, to the end life of plastics and how the world is suffering on multiple levels because of the many misunderstandings and mishandling of plastics from creation to decomposition (or lack thereof).

I'll leave the heavy arguments to Eriksen about how we as a society and a world should deal with plastic, but my feelings on how we interact with, consume, and recycle plastics has totally changed after reading JUNK RAFT. Eriksen's passion is inspiring and he does an admirable job of explaining his thinking without coming off as a nutty environmental extremist. He is also realistic in acknowledging that while he believes there are an infinite numbers of changes to be made involving all aspects of plastic, only so much can be achieved at a time and that small steps in the right direction sometimes is all that can be done and that small step is still valuable and necessary. He throws in some stories for shock value, but really what fascinated me the most was the seemingly simple stories of how little things that every person can do to affect larger change.

A man you definitely want to meet because you will be inspired just by being around him, Eriksen's passion is infectious. JUNK RAFT is an adventure story for readers who want that and an education for readers who want that and Eriksen weaves both parts together in such a way that adventurers are inspired and activists are entertained.

I received this book as part of the Goodreads Giveaway program.

Chrissy says

The author's self-awareness, practicality, and nonjudgmental ardor repeatedly surprised me. The author begins by talking about his experience of sailing from CA to HI on a raft made of garbage. But instead using environmentalism to talk about himself, Eriksen seems more eager to use his experience as an excuse to talk about how our waste impacts both animals and marginalized people (for example, the workers who die early from sorting the waste that the US sends overseas for "recycling"). While the Junk Raft's voyage itself was monotonous and even a bit nauseating to read about (the guts of some of the fish they caught to eat were filled with shreds of plastic!), the informational portions were both convicting and useful.
