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The Gulf Stream: Tiny Plankton, Giant Bluefin, and the Amazing Story of the Powerful River in the Atlantic

Stan Ulanski
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The Gulf Stream is a powerful force in nature and in history. Stan Ulanski, a professor of Geology and Environmental Science at James Madison University, examines the impact of this amazing current of water on marine life and human history. Dividing the book into three sections, Ulanski guides us first through the science, describing how the Gulf Stream acts as a river or conveyer belt carrying animals and humans across the Atlantic Ocean. He describes the scientists from the seventeenth- to the twentieth-century who discovered where it was located and how it functioned, and he explains the major role the Gulf Stream plays in bringing in Nor'easters and hurricanes to American shores.

The second section is devoted to life in the Gulf Stream. Moving up the food chain, he begins with plankton, moving up to marlins, dolphins, and tuna. Ulanski's fishing experiences provide personal points of interest.

The final section covers the human element. Ulanski suggests a plausible element in history, that it is no coincidence that Columbus landed in the region of Central America, or that pirates settled in the Caribbean to take advantage of cargo ships full of gold, or that Florida and the Carolinas were early North American settlements. While explorers found navigation difficult between Canada and New England, the Gulf Stream acted as a kind of oceanic interstate for picking up slaves in Africa, heading west for sugar and spices in the Caribbean, then sailing north to North America for rum, rice, tobacco, and other crops destined for Europe.

The book's strength is its versatility. It can be used in an introductory oceanography or environmental science class, and is also geared to nature and outdoor enthusiasts with its section on marine life and fishing. History buffs will appreciate the power of the Gulf Stream in setting the stage for settlement in the Americas.

Bryan Craig