

River meanders.

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RIVER MEANDERS

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GSA Bulletin (1960) 71 (6): 769-793.

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Most river curves have nearly the same value of the ratio of curvature radius to

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channel width, in the range of 2 to 3. Meanders formed by meltwater on the surface of glaciers, and by the main current of the Gulf Stream, have a relation of meander length to channel width similar to rivers. Because such meanders carry no sediment, the shapes of curves in rivers are evidently determined primarily by the dynamics of flow rather than by relation to debris load.

Velocity distributions along river curves provide a generalized picture of flow characteristics. Evidence on flow resistance in curved channels suggests that a basic aspect of meander mechanics may be related to the distribution of energy loss provided by a particular configuration or curvature. No general theory of meanders is as yet satisfactory, however; in fact, present evidence suggests that no single theory will explain the formation and characteristics of all meanders and that few of the physical principles involved have yet been clearly identified.

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