

★ **The Secret History of Here: A Year in the Valley****Alistair Moffat**

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In his joyous book *The Secret History of Here*, Alistair Moffat uncovers the rich history, and natural wonders, surrounding his Scottish border farm.

Moffat's observations and discoveries come through descriptive diary entries that cover his walks with his Westie. He shares the rhythms of days and seasons that transcend schedules, and he imagines the humans who preceded him here. He and friends theorize about the land beneath their feet and draw upon maps, historical documents, census data, and found objects to confirm their suspicions and uncover the histories they reveal.

When he notices signs of an abandoned road, Moffat surmises by the sizable trees blocking it, and its absence from maps of the 1790s, that it fell out of use in the 1770s. Discovering a Henry VIII sovereign penny and an Elizabeth I sixpence confirms his suspicions that it was a medieval trade route to a village. Other artifacts, like a flint chiseled of stone from far away, a relic of the Ninth Crusade, and ancient carvings, reveal the impact and activity of humans through the ages.

Drawing on known history, Moffat reveals the land through its various eras. He also provides an intimate glimpse of others who lived or traveled there. He is artful in connecting meteorological, astrological, and seasonal phenomena to people of the past; he imagines what early hunters, farmers, night raiders, soldiers, and mothers may have experienced. Interwoven with these explorations are family stories and memories that magnify the connection between humans and the natural world.

Fine pencil drawings of flora, fauna, and other discoveries complement the text's deep respect for nature; Moffat expresses a fervent wish that it survive the threats of climate change. *The Secret History of Here* is a delightful meditation on a place, and on the role that humans played in its evolution.

WENDY HINMAN (July / August 2021)

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