

Whisky, Kilts, and the Loch ness Monster: Traveling through Scotland with Boswell and Johnson

William W. Starr

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“Scotland as Myth is easy to recognize. Braveheart, kilts, tartans, Scottie dogs, Balmoral, Highland Games, haggis, shortbread.” But, facts and truth don’t often have much to do with reality...especially in the present day, says author William W. Starr. In his memoir *Whiskey, Kilts, and the Loch Ness Monster: Traveling through Scotland with Boswell and Johnson*, he says he tried to resist myths as much as possible during his travels retracing the steps of celebrated English writers James Boswell and Samuel Johnson on their eighteenth-century journey.

Starr’s memoir is a twenty-first century literary pilgrimage and homage to the two acclaimed writers. Demonstrating a curiosity and enthusiasm for Scotland, he follows his literary forebears in order to “find Boswell and Johnson in 1773, to hear again their experiences in their words, and write about what they saw in a latter-day perspective.” Readers are the richer for hearing all their voices.

Written in the first person, Starr frequently quotes people he meets along the way, describes his “tasty Scottish breakfast of eggs, sausage, tomatoes, and tea,” comments on the weather (mostly windy), and sizes up people and places: “It was a well-worn establishment...and the fellow in it looked a mite well-worn, too.” Starr writes a travelogue that includes history, exquisite and often witty observations, and comparisons of his own journey with that of Boswell and Johnson.

In 2007, Starr spent seventy-two days following in their footsteps. He visited Loch Lomond and Inveraray, Skye and Inverness, Pitlochry and Edinburgh. Loch Ness is Scotland’s best-known waterway because of tales of the sea monster said to inhabit its dark, cold, deep waters. Unfortunately, no “Nessie” sightings were made by Boswell, Johnson, or Starr.

As Starr makes his way he finds much to appreciate in Scotland. “I don’t have a drop of Scottish blood in me...but there’s something coursing in me that connects me to this very special place...” His connection comes through in his writing. Both the well-read globetrotter and the arm-chair adventurer will appreciate *Whiskey, Kilts, and the Loch Ness Monster*, a delightful and informative read.

William W. Starr is a native of Atlanta, a prize-winning writer and former editor for the *Columbia State* newspaper, executive director of the Georgia Center for the Book in Decatur, and a contributing essayist for newspapers and journals.

PENNY HASTINGS (January 20, 2011)

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