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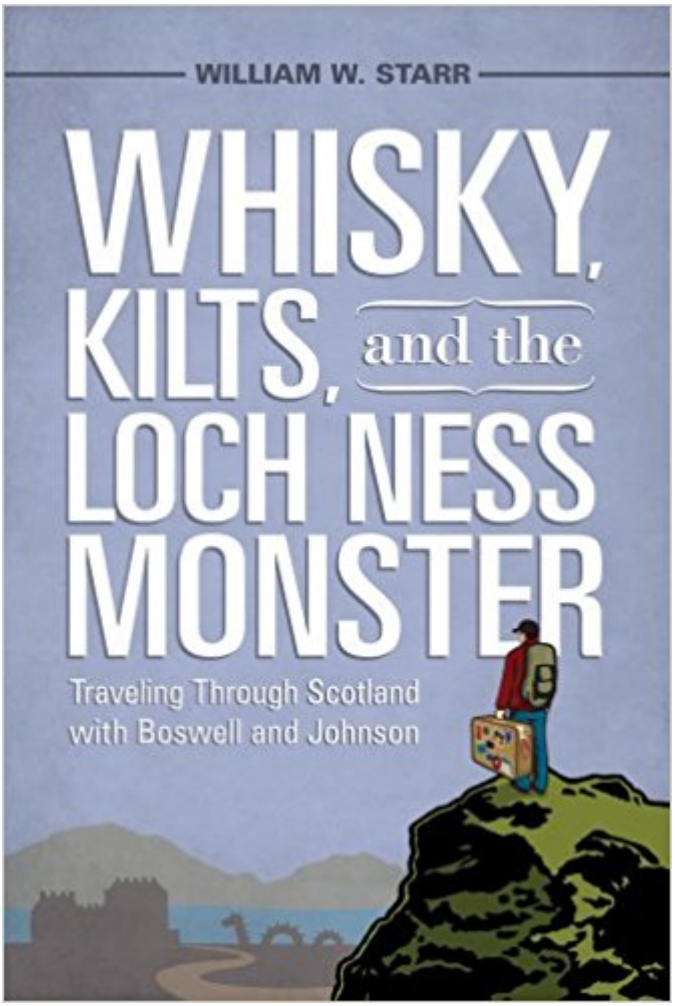
Whisky, Kilts, And The Loch Ness Monster: Traveling Through Scotland With Boswell And Johnson



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Synopsis

Whisky, Kilts, and the Loch Ness Monster is a memoir of a twenty-first-century literary pilgrimage to retrace the famous eighteenth-century Scottish journey of James Boswell and Samuel Johnson, two of the most celebrated writers of their day. An accomplished journalist and aficionado of fine literature, William W. Starr enlivens this crisply written travelogue with a playful wit, an enthusiasm for all things Scottish, the boon and burden of American sensibility, and an ardent appreciation for Boswell and Johnson--who make frequent cameos throughout these ramblings.In 1773 the sixty-three-year-old Johnson was England's preeminent man of letters, and Boswell, some thirty years Johnson's junior, was on the cusp of achieving his own literary celebrity. For more than one hundred days, the distinguished duo toured what was then largely unknown Scottish terrain, later publishing their impressions of the trip in a pair of classic journals. In 2007 Starr embarked on a three-thousand-mile trek through the Scottish Lowlands and Highlands, following the path--though in reverse--of Boswell and Johnson. Starr tracked their route as closely as the threat of storms, distractions of pubs, and limitations of time would allow. Like his literary forebears, he recorded a wealth of keen observations on his encounters with places and people, lochs and lore, castles and clans, fables and foibles. The tour begins and ends in Edinburgh and includes along the way visits to Glasgow, Inverness, Loch Ness, Culloden, Auchinleck, the Isles of Iona and Skye, and many more destinations. In addition Starr expands his course to include two of the farthest reaches of Scotland where eighteenth-century travelers dared not tread: the Outer Hebrides and the Orkney Islands, remarkable regions shaped by distinctive weather, history, and isolation.Blending biography, intellectual and cultural history, and comic asides into his travelogue, Starr has crafts an inviting vantage point from which to view aspects of Scotland's storied past and complex present through an illuminating literary lens.

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Customer Reviews

Those who have traveled through Scotland know it as the myth-shrouded, precipitation-drenched northern kingdom of the island of Great Britainâ ”a ruggedly beautiful place. The author did just that, clocking 2,789 miles by car and ferry (Scotland has numerous costal islands), but he did so with a particular agenda: to retrace the three-month journey undertaken by 1773 by Englandâ ™s famous man of letters, Samuel Johnson, and his ever-faithful companion, James Boswell. Starr constantly references the activities and attitudes of the duo as he puts in his own many-miles-per-day travel, but in no way is this narrative technique distracting; rather, it adds a layer of interest for the contemporary reader, allowing us to compare and contrast past and present in this still-remote part of Europe. Equally well integrated are Starrâ ™s digressions into events in Scottish history. As with any good travelogue, engrossing anecdotes abound; and the authorâ ™s writing style is direct, comfortable, effortless. (â œEdinburgh is memorably striking to the eye,â • for instance.) This delightful book ends with a discussion of the issue of Scottish independence. --Brad Hooper

We read travel books in order to quicken the corpse of desire so much so that we imagine tramping over the hills and far away. Bill Starr carries us along as he follows Johnson’s and Boswell’s path across Scotland with the highly sensible intention of seeing what he can see. What he shows us is wondrously satisfying: castles and history, single malt Scotch, breakfasts, and days sweet and sour with appealing meanderings.Sam Pickering

Though I originally got this book from my library on a whim, I had to order my own copy from -- it was that GREAT. William Starr is such a fab writer that I contacted him myself and told him how much I loved this book. Starr writes with such personal humor that I laughed often and hard and my sides hurt. Of course, I didn’t want the book to end. I told him he wrote as funny as Dave Barry and he said he had met Barry too, so he knew what connection I was talking about. This book is about Starr taking a backwards journey through Scotland reversing the travels of Boswell and Johnson of the 18th century. I love non-fiction and learned fabulous histories of Scotland within each place he went. And a note to Mel Gibson > if you are out there somewhere reading this review, you need to read the book!

Oh my gosh was this book enjoyable!! I picked it up by accident when I was roaming the stacks in the local library one day and was hooked. The writing is superb and the intertwined wit of the author makes the journey though Scotland nearly as enjoyable as the whiskey he was tasting. I would highly recommend it to anyone - even those not planning a visit to Scotland. A great read.

An insightful and funny ramble through Scotland in the footsteps of Johnson and Boswell. . .done in reverse! William Starr is articulate, topical, historically informative and hilarious. This book is a must-read for those who enjoy eighteenth century literature, Scottish history, travelogues about the Lowlands, Highlands and islands of Scotland, or anyone who enjoys a hearty laugh.

Having recently visited Scotland made reading this book very interesting, but at the same time I wish I had read it BEFORE the trip as things I saw would have been even more meaningful. The book contains numerous references to historical events, but they are presented in a delightful and easy to read manner. Many things are mentioned that encourage further research or reading. One truly comes away with a vivid feel for the climate of this far north country.

This is a delightful book. The author is quite funny, and if you have a background in and or care about English literature, the stories about Boswell and Johnson are very interesting. It went on a bit too long and I did tire of it a little bit before it ended. That’s why I only gave it four stars, but it is well worth the read.

I was looking for a modern book related to Johnson and Boswell’s late 18th century travels in the Scottish Highlands and this filled the bill. It is a very enjoyable description of a trip where many of the places they visited (and a number that they did not) were described at the in the 21st century with the author’s unique spin. It is a nice little book and well worth the read.

Started reading this book over the Atlantic on the plane to Glasgow. I read it aloud to my three travel companions as we drove around Scotland the next 15 days. It worked to jump around to just focus on where we were headed at the time. It provided us with lots of insights and laughs. He was so right about the American 70’s music playing everywhere!

On the topic Bowsell and Johnson, but this author gave a nice account of his travel and how they

mirrored the trip of earlier.Nicely written. Enjoy...

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