



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

William W. Starr

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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 crafted 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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