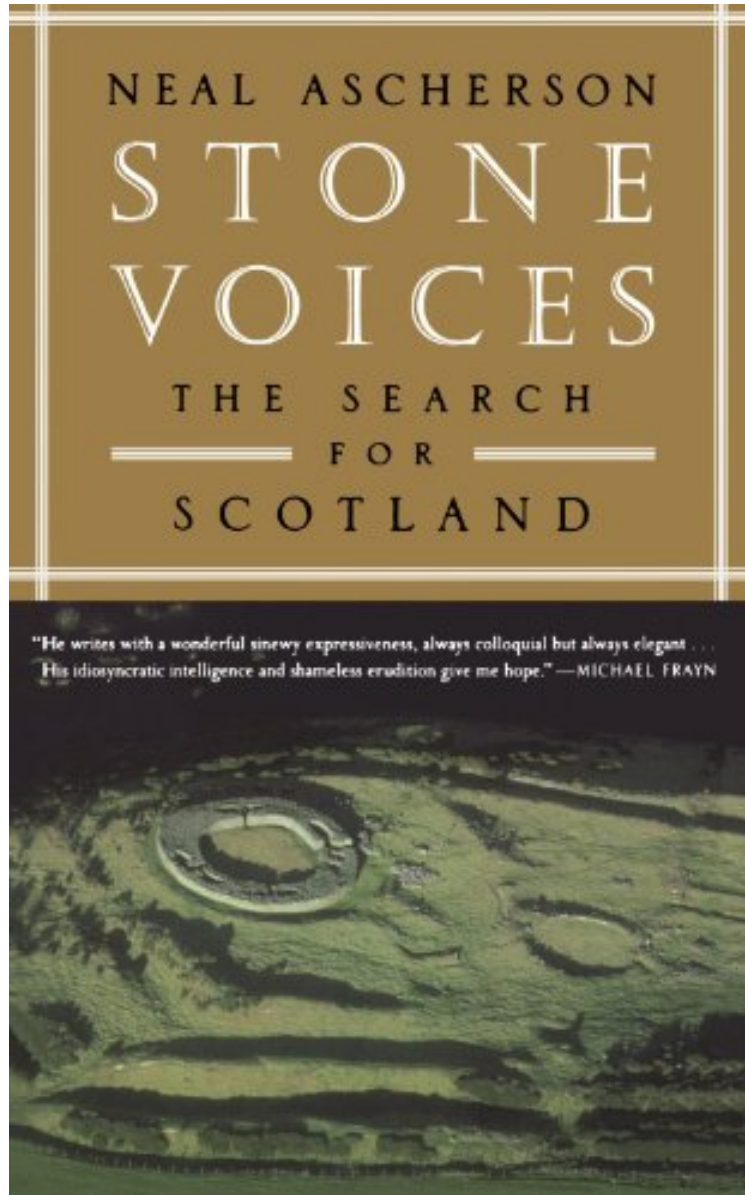


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Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland

Neal Ascherson

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Neal Ascherson : Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Understandable Scottish history
By Pictomaniac
I have read, or attempted to read, several books of Scottish history over the past 40 years. "Stone Voices" is the first that really connected the threads of this confusing saga. I first borrowed this book from the local public library, then wanted a copy for my personal library. I was happy to find a "brand new" book at . The author has a remarkable understanding of the age old "personality" of the Scottish people, from Pictish times to the present. He deftly links historical events to Scottish decision-making today. For example, the very different attitude of the ancient Picts about choosing a king: This was a representative system, rather than a "divine right of kings" kingship. He talks about the Declaration of Arbroath, a letter from the Scottish nobles to the Pope in Rome in 1320, during the kingship of Robert the Bruce. Practically unknown in the US, it served as a model for our Declaration of Independence. The ancient political system in Pictland likely formed the basis for governance in the Presbyterian Church and the US Constitution. This is a must buy for Scotophiles.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Scots awa...
By John the Reader
Another eminently readable work by this author, this time returning to his own homeland, Scotland, whose history, Ascherson says is like a "huge, reeking tip of unsorted rubbish across which scavengers wander, pulling off interesting fragments which might fetch a price or come in handy". This is not a formal "history" of Scotland, no chronologic exploring of kings or themes, more an exploration of that mysterious "Scottishness" and the fierce pride and sense of place that finally led to the enactment of a British Home Rule law that created a Scottish Parliament so that "this proud country could rule its own affairs". Ascherson does not venture too deeply into how much this ambition has been achieved or how it could be supported without the overall security and infrastructure of a parent - plus of course, like the creation of all of the new wave of "independent" countries from regional aspirations, just a little more taxes. Politically active always in the pursuit of Scotland's "fredome" Ascherson credits two events for the final concession from Westminster - the Scots youth fascination with Mel Gibson's populist portrayal of William Wallace in "Braveheart" - "a hairy Hollywood distortion" and the death of Princess Diana. The crisis of the monarchy in England after this death led to a surprising resurging of ENGLISH nationalism. This, Ascherson argues, engendered a sympathy for Scotland's (and Welsh) autonomy, causing a turn-over of the long, political denial that finally led to the granting of some measure of the equally long-held need for independence. The voices of the stones the author hears are from rocks, mounts, monuments and walls of the Scottish landscapes, rocks, he says, that are as open to the Scots as the "throat of singing birds". That land is so hard and scarred by man that "Scotland is like 'a poor woman with little flesh between her skin and bones' who carries the scars of many years' use. Och aye, but she's bonny still.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The idea of the book is terrific to me
By Charlotte Fairchild
I have it by my bed and once in a while I read it. I don't know how long it will take to finish it with all the traveling I am doing. The idea of the book is terrific to me. I was told I was Scot from the time I was old enough to know about my Mother's family. My DNA says the women were 30% Irish, 29% Scandinavian, and 18 Scot/English/Welsh. So I am curious about the part of the 18%. Silly me.

The rediscovery of Scotland's past and a wake-up call about its future, from a leading scholar-journalist
Scotland has a new Parliament and it has North Sea oil, but is it yet an independent, self-sustaining democracy? Is it a true nation? In Stone Voices, Neal Ascherson launches what he calls an imaginative invasion of his native land, searching for the relationships, themes, and fantasies that make up "Scotland." Beginning with a breathtaking portrait of the country's landscape, and of the way humanity has indelibly marked even its rockiest contours, Ascherson takes us on a journey through Scotland's past, interweaving his historical accounts with a rollicking report on a back-country bus expedition he joined during the 1997 referendum campaign that led to Scotland's first modern Parliament. He asked voters then what kind of country they hoped for, what they feared, and what they expected questions that animate his book as well. In his search for a nation, Ascherson explores many themes: the slow, hybrid formation of the Scottish people over centuries of successive immigrations; the way their most renowned intellectuals and writers came to hate the national church; the peculiar nature of their diaspora; the coexistence of their search for an "authentic" Scotland with the myths others create; and the Scots' proud sense of true independence. Stone Voices enlightens us about Scotland, about Europe, and about the conditions for freedom that we must all seek today. "Greatly accessible compendium of scholarly passion." - Kirkus Reviews

From Publishers Weekly
Journalist and historian Ascherson (Black Sea, The King Incorporated) takes a close look at his native country-its history, its landscape, its populace, its aspirations for independence-in this richly textured portrait of a nation "at home in hard, stony times." For many, thanks to Braveheart, Scotland may conjure images of William Wallace crying freedom. But Hollywood drama aside, Ascherson's examination of Scottish movements for sovereignty, both political and cultural, and Scots' concerns for equality and popular rights during their turbulent history show how such a spirit rings true today. Culminating with the passage of the referendum establishing Scotland's first modern Parliament, Ascherson's account offers vivid scenes from the author's cross-country promotional campaign and intimate details of a nation's doubts and faith in the face of great political change. Ascherson investigates the elements that have shaped Scotland's oft-debated history as he meets them face to face,

including emigration, religious and racial intolerance, regionalist feuds and influences, bilingualism and the abundant interpretations and reinterpretations of what is considered "authentic" history. Ascherson also pays close attention to the Scottish geology-with its shallow, wind-thrashed soil and barren, boulder-filled valleys-that makes it a beautiful but difficult land for its people to inhabit. An enlightening read, Ascherson's volume will encourage readers to attend to Scotland's future, as well as to the forces that affect their own freedoms. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist

How does one define a country? What is nationalism? These are some of the questions journalist Ascherson attempts to answer in a book that is part history lesson, part travelogue, and more: one man's search for a nation. A small country on Europe's edge, Scotland is complex, and its changing identity can confuse. It now has its own parliament, yet it remains part of the U.K. Is it, then, a true nation? Ascherson explores aspects of Scotland's past, present, and future that include immense social change during the Industrial Revolution, the demise of clan society, the devastating effects of the Highland Clearances, and the search for an authentic Scotland far removed from the myths and half-truths still enveloping it. A highlight of the book is the sometimes amusing, often illuminating, back-country bus expedition that Ascherson and other Scots took during the 1997 referendum campaign that eventuated in the new parliament. In Scotland, Ascherson points out, love of country is, more often than not, a private affair. Scotland will continue to find its own way. June Sawyers Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

"This journey through the mind and inclination of the Scots is an absorbing one, beautifully written . . . breathtaking in its scope." -- Magnus Linklater, *The Spectator* "[A] greatly accessible compendium of scholarly passion." -- Kirkus s, starred "[Ascherson] is a subtle and insightful writer . . . This tough, closely woven book . . . was received with justifiable acclaim." -- *The Economist* "[Ascherson] is a writer with the vision to see around and beyond his subject even as he addresses it." -- Richard Eder, *The New York Times Book* Ascherson's impressive, continuously engaging, always enlightening dialogue with himself and a country he clearly loves, is well worth hearing." -- Ray Ryan, *Irish Times*