

Transcript

Wild for Scotland Podcast

Episode S5E10 (E58): Water Books for your Reading List

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[main theme tune]

Hello there and welcome to Wild for Scotland,

a podcast full of immersive travel stories from Scotland.

I'm your host and storyteller-in-chief, Kathi Kamleitner.

Wild for Scotland helps you connect with Scotland
Its people, wildlife landscapes and histories.

In every episode, I either whisk you away on a beautiful adventure,
Or introduce you to inspiring locals and their stories.

In between, I share my top tips for your own Scotland trip,
And how to follow in my footsteps.

So, lean back and enjoy -
Let's travel to Scotland!

[main theme tune end]

Books have always been a huge source of inspiration for me. When I was young I loved reading fantasy books, dreaming about make-believe worlds and fantastic adventures. Later I discovered travel literature, bringing my dreams closer to reality as I spent winters in Alaska, joined historic expeditions to the polar seas and hopped on trains across the continents.

These days, I read a lot of non-fiction books about the natural world. Books about whales, molluscs, beavers and tidal pools - you can see where the inspiration for this season comes from.

The shelves in my office are filled with books about water - guidebooks for water activities, sciency books about animals and ecology, but also travel books and memoirs about adventures and personal experiences.

I'll tell you about some of them in today's episode as I speak with three authors whose books have moved and inspired me over the past year.

They are Freya Bromley, Alycia Pirmohamed, who recently won the Nan Shepherd Prize for underrepresented voices in nature writing, and Mollie Hughes. They have all written very different books about water, but what connects them is the boundless inspiration they draw from water.

Earlier this season, I mentioned that water is like therapy to me - but it's also a well of creativity. A source, I like so many others, draw from in their work.

Another well I draw from - and I'm sure you will appreciate this segue - is my Patreon community. I couldn't make this show without their support. For now, I'm nowhere near to being able to cover everything that goes into the production of this podcast, but your monthly contributions are a reminder that this show is meaningful to you. If you can afford it, consider joining for 3 or 6 pound a month, so that maybe one day, I'll be able to say that Wild for Scotland is 100% listener-powered.

Now, let's get back to the show.

Here are my conversations with Freya Bromley, Alycia Pirmohamed and Mollie Hughes.

[jingle]

[Interview 1: Freya Bromley]

KATHI:

My first guest is Freya Bromley. Freya is a writer and wild swimmer who lives in London. She's the creator of The Tidal Year, a podcast about the joy of swimming and the human stories of why we swim. Her book of the same title came out earlier this year and it tells Freya's own personal story about the healing power of wild swimming in Britain's tidal pools,

some of which are of course in Scotland. And that's what we're here to talk about today. Fya, welcome to Welford Scotland.

FREYA

Thank you for having me.

KATHI

In your book *The Tidal Year*, you describe many things that swimming has given you, like an awareness or an increased awareness for your own body. What do you think is it about swimming specifically that you find so beneficial for yourself and in your life?

FREYA

I remember the first time I kind of had a cold water swim was actually on New Year's Day. A friend took me to the Hampstead Heath ladies pond and it was just full of people bustling around this concrete pontoon diving in, lowering themselves in the water and the cold water was such a shock, but I also remember just having this amazing clarity once I'd been in and I find cold water so good for that. I was completely hooked after that. The piece that it gives me, the kind of inner serenity is so addictive, but I think also as time's gone on, I also realised what I've been very subconsciously drawn to is the community around swimming. Especially on that first swim I went to on Hampstead Heath being surrounded by women, it was kind of like this amazing maternal hug and wherever I swim, I really find that people are there to look out for you. Strangers say hello. I live in a city, it can be quite hard to that kind of camaraderie. And so I think one of the things I love about it is feeling part of something, feeling close to people, those little small interactions. It's definitely one of my favourite things about it.

KATHI

I really like that and I think the book as much as it is about your own personal journey and your own internal, everything that goes on internally for you, it is also so much you write so beautifully about your friendship with your swim partner and also about all the people like you say you meet at the pools, whether you've had just a hello or away from them or a more deeper interaction and conversation. That really comes across and is definitely something that resonates with me as well in terms of why I like swimming. And as much as it's nice sometimes to do it on your own, being part of that wider community, having other people there is just one of the most beautiful things I think about it. I fully agree with that.

FREYA

Oh, thank you. I'm pleased you picked up on that and that resonated with you because I think as we went on this journey travelling around Britain, swimming in lots of different places, that was something I noticed everywhere. I think at Clifton Marine Lake, which is in Bristol, someone actually said it to me, there was a woman there and she said, why do you swim? Everyone has a story for why they swim, and I've totally noticed that, and it's really encouraging and inspiring to be in an atmosphere where people are outdoors anytime of year, doing something to make themselves well, and I've really kind of found that something to hold onto some uplifting because it can be hard to keep yourself going sometimes, but to be out even in the rain committing to today, I'm going to find a little bit of joy in being outside and being in nature is something really beautiful to hold onto, especially when you can hold onto that with other people.

KATHI

Absolutely. And you do always feel better after a swim, regardless of the tempera swim. You never swim feel before as well. Exactly. One of my favourite lines in the book is when you say to your swim partner, MI, I don't know how to do quiet. When I read that, I just felt really, really seen. It really resonated with me and how I feel about myself a lot of times as well. Would you say that your year of swimming in tidal pools has taught you to be quiet? Have you learned how to be quiet or is there anything else that think stands out to you, something that you've learned from the experience?

FREYA

Oh, that's funny because I'm not sure I am much better at it, but I make an effort and I make a continual effort, which is good. I think being outdoors gives you that sense of peace and a little bit of quiet, and I really got into swimming after my brother had died, and grief was grief I think put me in a mode of just distraction, and that was being busy, that was life being loud, that was doing anything I could to kind of fill any space in where the sadness of what happened would come up and then as soon as you begin to lean into life being a little bit more quiet or still that can be really difficult. And I think part of the journey of swimming actually taught me that it's okay to have difficult feelings. It's okay for there to be space in which to be sad, and the more that you run away from that, the bigger those feelings become.

And I think actually I thought that one day if I kept doing swimming, if I kept doing this thing that made me feel well, then one day I would be fixed and I would be better and I would be able to move on. Well, slight plot spoiler, that doesn't happen at the end of the book. You don't move on from grief. You don't just get better. And I guess I thought that that's what being quiet meant, that if I was able to be still, I could be at peace and be happy. But maybe something about swimming and something about being in nature is that sometimes nature is quiet, but often it's very loud. Sometimes there are days where the rain is incredibly intense or so is the wind and all of the weather outside can really match a lot of your mood inside as well. And maybe being around that has been quite comforting, being able to handle the extremities if that kind of makes any sense. And I feel like that's maybe why a riot is to try and make sense, make sense of these very complicated things. And I'm still trying to find the words, but sometimes when I'm out by the sea looking at an incredibly stormy sky, I feel like it's there. I feel like that's how I feel. I feel like it gets it

KATHI

And it's okay to feel like that. It doesn't always have to be sunny, beautiful, and warm. So yeah, absolutely. I do have to admit that as a reader, I almost felt that I was kind of intruding on your innermost feelings and your personal experiences in life because you write so open and you've mentioned your brother's death, your experiences of grief, but also other things, sexual experiences and how you felt in your relationships. How has that vulnerability been for you and showing that kind of vulnerability and having so many people read your inner most thoughts and experiences, what was that like?

FREYA

Scary, which I guess is it's scary for any of us being vulnerable and really the book is about grief and the restorative power of nature. And I worried that some of the things I was writing about love and sex and friendship were not part of that story or they didn't belong there. But I think the more I wrote, the more I realised that grief isn't a contained experience. It happens alongside everything else in your life. And I was falling in love while also grieving

somebody very close to me, and that changed that whole experience. I had a lot of anger about the fact that I was meeting a man who was never going to meet my brother, and that became very complex. And so I think the book became about all of those feelings and about lots of other things, and it was very scary putting it out there, but I'm really glad that I did because often when I do book talks or events, I get to meet people and they say, this really resonated with me, or I think about that, or I read some of your feelings about grief and sex and how those two are connected and not connected, and I actually feel like this and the connection that I've been able to have with people has been really great.

I guess that's the power of not just writing, but also reading and so swimming, which I think so much came from a desire to be connected to people. And then also writing has also put me there as well. So I'm very lucky that through both those things I've been able to find connection and shared experience because I think when I first encountered grief, I felt very alone. I felt like no one understood me and I don't feel like that so much anymore.

KATHI

That's beautiful. I'm going to change gear a little bit and speak to you, I'm going to change gear a little bit and ask you a little bit about Scotland specifically and the tidal pools that you've swam in here. Can you tell us about the Scottish tidal pools you've encountered and maybe you even had a favourite one and want to share a story?

FREYA

The coastline in Scotland, especially along the east coast, was just beautiful. It is beautiful. I'm so eager to return and go back. We did a little road trip and we started quite far north where we went to the Rinke, which is an amazing tidal pool sloped in these stones on the cliffs and the bottom has been painted white, so it's crystal clear and also shockingly cold I think. Not just when we were there, but pretty much anytime of year. We went in August and it was still freezing, but it was amazing. It just felt like we were at the edge of the world and not far from that. In WIC is North Baths, which is set into an old harbour, and we met some people there that had literally shuffled from their houses out into the nearest tidal pool to have a swim and we got to share a swim with some people from the local community there in the rain, and it was a beautiful, amazing experience.

And in the book I go, me and my friend go to quite a few tidal pools along the east coast of Scotland, and I think what was a common theme in all of them is how cared for these places are by their community. A tidal pool is a natural seawater pool that fills with water on an ebbing tide, but what makes them special and kind of different from natural sea pools is that they have some kind of manmade element, whether that's a cement boundary, a wall or metal steps. So they're like this perfect architectural harnessing of nature. People have looked after the nature a way to make it safe so that they can swim there and communities really care for and love these places. Everywhere we went, there was multiple generations swimming. We saw parents with children, grandparents, friends, and it was so important that people have a connection to the landscape in which they live because really the sea around us, the waters they belong to, the people that live there.

They are their property and everybody was invested in keeping them open, keeping them restored, and that was amazing. We actually went to pit and Weam tidal pool, which has had a big problem trying to restore it and keep it open. There was lots of repair works that needed to be done, and without that tidal pool, lots of young children wouldn't have access

to the seawater around them because the water and the sea is just too dangerous there on the cliffs. So this tidal pool is such an important part of their community history. I met loads of people that said, my grandparents' mom, they taught her how to swim and their generation before that, we all learned how to swim here. And so to keep it open, the community have innovated this putting green crazy golf course and they charge you for a club and a ball and some tea, and then the volunteers run wildlife spotting days.

And it's amazing how everybody's come together for the shared effort. And for me, that's all about what swimming is. That's all about what community is. So it was just amazing. But I think maybe my absolute favourite would have to be St. Mona's Tidal Pool. There's a lot of archaeological history around there. There's these old salt pans, so as you are walking in your boots along to the pool, there's kind of this crunch beneath you of all of the history and the earth, and it is just amazing. And the rock there has a kind of red clay colour to it. It's almost like it's been charred and you really feel like you're stepping on the history as you go. There. Pool is this long amber coloured stretch of water, and when we were there, the sun was setting and I've returned once and it was just as beautiful and stunning, beautiful place to swim.

KATHI

That sounds absolutely amazing. I've actually walked past both of those pools, Pittenweem and St. Monans along the Fife Coastal Path. There is an episode about that if listeners want to go back to season two and listen to the East Neuk of Fife episode about the Fife Coastal Path, but I've not actually swam in them, so I think I do really need to make an effort in return and give that a try because I think what you see there about community is brilliant because I think especially sea swimming is so often something that people envision these wild places. And of course wild can mean many things and the sea can be wild and the coastal weather can be wild. But in the end you see there's a element to it, and these tidal pools are so important for local communities. It isn't just a piece of nature. It is so much about the people who've created that place and cared for that place and used that place day in then day out at some point. I think in the book you talk about, well, I think multiple times you about coastal, you talk about tidal pools that you thought were there but had actually been drained or closed or filled up with rubble basically. Can you maybe talk about some of those experiences as well?

FREYA

Yeah, and quite a few of those were actually in Scotland. I think when people began to holiday abroad more, a lot of these kind of tidal pools and also Leidos fell into disuse because people were in their summer holidays, not maybe going to swim around our coast, but going further abroad. And when they fell into disuse, they became very expensive for councils to maintain. And also I think there was kind of a move towards this idea of health and safety and signage with councils as well, and there being a shared responsibility and accountability towards safety. So for many councils they were like, this is too expensive for us to make these places safe, so we're going to shut them. But of course the difficulty with that is that you have the C beyond the tidal pool where you have riptides, strong currents, it's completely unbounded, and the tidal pool is actually much safer, but you can't of course be responsible for the C. So it can be a real shame there when so many have closed. And I think it's wonderful to see this amazing resurgence happening all over Britain for more and more communities coming together to say, this place is important to us. Let's fund to have it reopened. I think there's a big campaign going on in North Barwick at the moment to get

there, seawater lido back up, and I'm so hopeful and excited for that community that they have that space for themselves again.

KATHI

Well, and when it happens, you'll have to come back up and I'll come and join you and maybe we can go for a swim there together. I think

FREYA

I love that. A swim and fish and chips. Yes,

KATHI

And a nice cup of tea and some chocolate maybe as well. Anything to warm up really. I think what you said there as well about safety, it's really important to obviously point that out as well. You talk in the book about an experience of hypothermia in one of the tidal pools up in wic, and I don't want to go into too much detail with that, but I do want to point listeners back to season three where I talk to outdoor swimmer, Callum, McLean, and we talk a lot about water safety and other swim topics, cold water swimming, and some tips to get started with that. So if anybody feels like they need a refresh on that or haven't listened yet, please do go back. The link will be in the show notes. Before I let you go, are there any water books recently seeing that? This is an episode about water books for inspiration for our reading list. Are there any favourite water books that you've come across recently that you'd like to recommend to listeners?

FREYA

So many, but seeing as I spoke quite a bit about the East coast of Scotland, I wanted to talk about a book that I love kind of set or maybe inspired by on the east coast of Scotland, which is actually Peter Pan because Jay and Barry wrote Peter Pan inspired by Eileen Shona, which is an island off the west coast of Scotland. We've been lucky enough to visit and it is just as magical as the Peter Pan books. So that's a book that I absolutely love. I'm also a huge poetry fan, and of course a big fan of Alicia, you're going to be speaking to later.

KATHI

Amazing. How can people stay in touch with you and keep up to date with what you're working on?

FREYA

I'd love it if they could seek out a copy of The Tidal Year, my first book, especially if they're hoping to journey both in real life and in their minds to Scotland's tidal pools, but also you can find me on Instagram @freybromley.

KATHI

Amazing. And what are you currently working on? Is there anything coming up that we can keep our eyes open for?

FREYA

Yes, another book this time a novel, but so much still about the restorative power of nature. It's a subject that still got hold of me and has got hold of many of us, but this time travelling to an island, an island off the north coast of Devon. So that's what I'm working on at the moment.

KATHI

Brilliant. Well, I can't wait to get my hands on a copy of that when it's time and tell our listeners all about it then as well. Freya, thank you so much for taking the time and telling us about your work and your experiences of swimming in the tidal pools. Yeah, it was good to chat with you.

FREYA

Thank you. And a swim soon.

KATHI

Brilliant. Thank you very much.

[Interview 2: Alycia Pirmohamed]

KATHI:

I am here with Alycia Pirmohamed. Alycia is a Canadian born poet who's based in Scotland. She's the co-founder of the Scottish Bipoc Writers Network. She teaches at the University of Cambridge, and she has also won many awards with her poetry, including the 2019 CBC Poetry Prize and the 2020 Edwin Morgan Poetry Award. In 2022, Alycia published her debut collection, *Another Way to Split Water* with Polygon Books, and that's what we are here to talk about. Alycia, welcome to Wild for Scotland.

ALYCIA

Hi, thank you so much for having me.

KATHI

Can you maybe start by telling our listeners a bit about your book, about your collection of poetry and what they can expect from your poems?

ALYCIA

Yeah, so I usually say my collection is deeply rooted in place. I think that's the way I kind of like to think about it because so much of it revolves around not just the natural world in an abstract way, but really specific place. So a lot of the collection spans different areas in Alberta, Canada where I grew up, but also in Tanzania where my parents were born. And then also there's a few poems in here about Scotland, which is where I live now. So I guess thinking about it in terms of place and the natural world, but also homeland is a big theme in this work. But then through all of that, all of this comes to provide a setting or a sort of platform on which I can think about things like womanhood and spirituality, spirituality and belonging, and different sort of aspects of my life that kind of fall into these different places.

KATHI

I think it's really beautiful how you bring together so many different elements and nature of course is something that is very, very obvious that it shows up a lot throughout your poetry from the prairies and the Boreal forests to river landscapes and of course the sea, the Atlantic. You mentioned multiple times as well, I guess because this season is specifically about water and in that sense also very deeply rooted in specific places of water. I wanted to ask you what role for you specifically water plays when you think about your writing and your creativity and the way you want to express your thoughts?

ALYCIA

I like that question. Obviously I guess water sort of becomes a framework of which the book is working within, but I guess more intimately I sort of think about water in different ways. I think about it metaphorically in terms of it being sort of a representation or a symbol of movement and migration. So crossing waters and what that means or being separated by water, whether that's feeling separated from history or from ancestry by like you said, the Atlantic Ocean, but also thinking about it in terms of being connected because water also connects all the land masses too. So metaphorically, I'm always thinking about those things. And then also the potentiality of it to be very, I guess spiritual but also ritualistic or cleansing or thinking about buoyancy and reflection and being reflective. All of those sort of elements play into it metaphorically as well. But literally I love being in the water. So the collection in that way water becomes quite important because it's a place where I'm very comfortable and that I enjoy and that I find joy in. So it also integrates some of that as well.

KATHI

I think it really reflects the fluidity of water as I read through some of the poems. On the one hand, some of the phrases that you used just made me feel like that fluidity and movement like you see of water in a literal sense, but also I guess that fluidity in a figurative sense of putting something into water and making it what you need it to be and using it as a mode of transport and transfer meaning I guess in a way as well. I think one of my favourite poems, and I think it's also maybe one of your own favourite poems, is a *Midnight Vessel Across The Great Sea*. I watched a video of you reading that poem and towards the end of the poem you talk about:

*[...] she glides like a reed a silhouette of green
across the great sea her poetry strikes through my window
like a stone breaking the skin memory of water.*

I thought that was just such an evocative way of painting a picture, an internal journey through these images of movement of water, and especially the breaking the memory of the water surface. That's an image I have in my mind a lot of times, figuratively and literally that tension and how it's broken through. Yeah, I guess I don't have a question. It's just so beautiful.

ALYCIA

It was really nice to hear you read that as well, and you're so right. That's one of my favourite poems to read and share. So yeah, I'm glad you caught that.

KATHI

You've already mentioned that there's a strong sense of place and you mentioned some of the places that resonate within your poems and that you mentioned within your poems as well. I think one of the themes that shows up a lot in the poems is that theme of belonging. And on the one hand I thought water is a really interesting medium to talk about belonging because on the one hand I get the sense that you're the author of the poems is almost pulled in different directions like the tides maybe, or bodies of water being pulled in different directions and at the same time, water is not really a place that we can belong to because we're human and we can't live underwater. So I thought water is a really interesting element to use to talk about belonging. Does that resonate with you or what for you made water and belonging connect in that way?

ALYCIA

I think about it a bit more broadly maybe when I think about belonging, thinking about the natural world and how I feel when I'm in sort of the environment, ecological environment, it's so hard to think about the natural world now as a specific thing because all around us. But when I'm, for example in water or if I'm in a forest or the boreal forest that you kind of mentioned earlier, I sort of go through all these phases or these questions of thinking of what does it mean to be in this space, but also do I feel safe in that space? And I don't always feel safe in that space and what are the limits of my body in that space because I love being in water. I took swimming lessons when I was younger, but my family in general, my sisters we're not really like swimmers.

So I guess in that way it's, there's also a danger when you are in the water or when I was in, or recently I was in the water and I had to be careful of the tides, for example, and also the coldness of the water. So I guess those kind of questions I'm always thinking about in terms of how I belong or how I perceive a place as safe or not safe or dangerous, both the most physical ways that are not socially as relevant, but also in the other ways in my social political status as well is as a racialized woman who maybe sometimes is perceived as not belonging in the natural world. And so those are kind of the questions that run through my head when I think about water for sure, but also more broadly, the natural world or the different places that are in this book.

KATHI

I think that's a really interesting point you make there as well. At the end, outdoor spaces are so often perceived as inclusive to everybody, and of course they are not. And I think particularly in Scotland, a lot of conversation has been happening around that in the last few years. So I think that's a great lens, I think to look at your work as well is to think about reclaiming that space and taking that space because it's yours as well, and it's ideally so that's a really wonderful way, I think, to look at how we relate to nature and where our place is in that. So thank you for bringing that element to it as well.

ALYCIA

Thank you.

KATHI

Can you tell us a bit about the Scottish BPOC Writers Network and your work with that as well?

ALYCIA

So the network was co-founded by me and my friend Jay Gao in 2018 in early 2018. And it sort of brought together different people from different places in Scotland through an online discourse community, but also through workshops who are all people of colour who maybe were feeling a bit isolated, I suppose. But definitely felt, and we still feel underrepresented in the Scottish literary industry, though I think there have been some really amazing movements forward and projects that are available to read and to see now. But it's essentially, the Scottish BPOC Writers Network is an advocacy network where the organisation is trying to bridge systematic gaps or barriers between the literary industry and writers of colour. And so things that we work on include partnerships with organisations like publishers or publishing houses across genres, so not just poetry, but across playwriting fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, as well as performances and other aspects of the literary industry and literary arts with writers that are interested in perhaps being published around

the route to publication, but also with organisations like the Scottish Book Trust and Creative Scotland and writing residencies like Moniack Mhor.

We kind of connect writers of colour with these organisations to make them more accessible to people who face systemic barriers. But really excitingly, what I think is maybe one of the most exciting things about the network is that we also have a programme of events. So we offer through our organisation, not necessarily through partnerships, we offer workshops that people can join and they're always free and if not free, they're pay what you can in order to serve, develop their writing, develop a writing practise, develop writing skills, think about different forms of poetry or different genres more deeply. So we offer programmes like workshopping. We also offer opportunities to publish your work. So we have an anthology published on our website and we offer opportunities to read your work at different event spaces. So we had, for example, a reading at the Edinburgh International Book Festival this year, which is really exciting, and we pay all our artists as well based on Scottish Book Trust, recommended fees, and we have a committee behind the programme too. So has a lot of parts, but it's really fulfilling.

KATHI

That's amazing. And if anybody who's listening wants to learn more or feels like they might want to get in touch and participate in any of the work that you do, I highly encourage them to reach out and get in touch with you as well.

Do you have any favourite bodies of water that you like to visit for inspiration or to get away from it or you know, whatever it is, for whatever reason, to draw strength from any places? You've mentioned that Atlantic in a few poems, but I wonder are there any specific places that come to mind?

ALYCIA

Yeah, so there's actually so many, like, trying to choose one- but in a really funny way, one the places that's become really important to me is Lochend Park, which is in- really close to where I live in Edinburgh. And the reason it became, so I visited quite often as a walk to do when I needed a break for my day, but during the first lockdown or that first period of lockdown during the pandemic when you could only go so far away from your home for a short length of time, that coincided with Ramadan. So I'm Muslim and so, I was like trying to find a way to feel connected to something during this period of religious observation while also feeling really isolated during the pandemic, as most people probably did. And I found I kind of had a ritual of reading a poem outdoors at Lochend Park every day of Ramadan. And so that specific body of water, even though I don't- I mean I don't think a lot of people pay as much mind as maybe something like the Atlantic, it became really important to me and really special because of the sort of meaning that I imbued in that space. And I got really into- I got a book of Scottish birds for my birthday a few years ago, and so I was really interested in like, birdwatching at Lochend Park too. But besides that, lately I've also really loved going to Portobello and swimming there because it's just gorgeous really.

KATHI

I've never actually swam at Portobello Beach. I've been there a few times. But yeah, I think I need to make an effort to dip the ocean there at some point in the near future as well.

ALYCIA

That would be good.

KATHI

But I think that's a really good reminder to kind of look for inspiration and places of peace and meaning nearby and not just always having to go far or go somewhere that is on a top 10 list or whatever it is, but just forging that personal relationship with a place can actually be a lot more meaningful or is a lot more meaningful than I think following maybe someone else's path or a list of places to visit. So on the one hand, I want to tell listeners to visit that place, but on the other hand, I also want to encourage everybody to think about a place near them and finding a way to forge that relationship themselves. So that's really lovely. How can people find out what else you are up to? Is there any new collections coming out, any readings happening? How can people stay in touch with you?

ALYCIA

So I'm working on a few different things. I'm working on my second poetry manuscript, which is not really ready to be seen by anybody, so that's hopefully coming at some point. But I'm also working on a few poetry projects that are in response to some artwork. So Portobello, they have their Art Walk every year, I believe, and I'm responding to some of their visual art that they've commissioned through poetry. So that's kind of what I'm working on now. And it would be available, the exhibitions in September, and I think a few weeks down the line it'll be available online. So that's kind of the thing, the next thing that's going to be publicly available. I'm also delving into some writing creative nonfiction, so some prose as well and writing a few essays, which I hope will see the light of day at some point. But also they're so personal that if they don't, that's also fine. And then I also have a Substack I suppose, that I post on really intermittently, which is just, it's not a place for necessarily polished work, it's just sort of a place for me to experiment with my writing voice. And so those are kinds of the kinds of things that are happening now, I suppose.

KATHI

Well, if listeners want to find any of these things at any of these places, we'll put the links in the show notes to the exhibition in Portobello, but also, which will have been out by the time this episode airs, but also to your CK and any other, your website and where people can find out more about you. Before I let you go, I'm going to put you a little bit on the spot there and ask you, because this is an episode about books, if you have any recommendations, maybe any top picks of books about water that are related to Scotland, whether the writers are based here or it's about Scotland that you've enjoyed recently or that stand out to you?

ALYCIA

I would say, I'm going to name three pamphlets that came out. One is more specifically I think related to water, but all three of them sort of about the natural world or are more ecologically themed. So the three pamphlets are *Tapping At Glass* by Tim Tim Cheng, *Nemidoonam* by Nasim Rebecca Asl, and then the one that is probably a bit more watery themed is called *Bird Cherry* by Roshni Gallagher, and they're all published with Verve Poetry Press.

KATHI

Fantastic. Thank you very much, Alycia. Thank you so much for taking the time and telling our listeners about your poetry and your writing process and also the other work that you do, giving some reading recommendations as well. I hope you are having a wonderful autumn and winter time and enjoyed speaking with us as well.

ALYCIA

Thank you so much. Yeah, these were great questions. I really appreciate it.

KATHI:

Amazing. Thank you so much.

[Interview 3: Mollie Hughes]

KATHI

Last but certainly not least, I'm very happy to introduce you to Mollie Hughes. Mollie is a world record holding mountaineer, adventurer, and motivational speaker based in Edinburgh. At the age of 26, she became the youngest woman in the world and the first English woman to successfully summit Mount Everest from both the north and the south sites. And less than three years later, she became the youngest woman in the world to ski solo from the coast of Antarctica to the South Pole. And while she is doing all of these exciting international expeditions, she is also no stranger to adventures closer to home. Her book *Blue Scotland* is an adventure bible for anyone who's looking to explore Scotland's waterways by swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking, or surfing. Mollie, welcome to the show.

MOLLIE

Hey, thanks for having me. An Adventure Bible. I like that.

KATHI

I think that's pretty accurate because there's just so much information in this book. So first off, for anyone who hasn't come across it yet, can you describe *Blue Scotland*, the book for us and also how the project came about?

MOLLIE

Yeah, so *Blue Scotland* is, yeah, it's an adventure bible, isn't it? Or it's a guidebook to Scotland's blue spaces. So that includes the lochs, freshwater and seawater, the coastline, extensive coastline. We've got around the mainland and around the islands, the riverways and the canal systems, and it's for water sports, for adventuring on these spaces, for surfing, for kayaking, for paddleboarding, and also for wild swimming. And the project came about in lockdown. I think a lot of people's projects came about. It was 2020 and I just got back from Antarctica in January, 2020. So I had about two months of freedom where I could settle back into normal life in Scotland and enjoy everything that we have here in Edinburgh. And then lockdown happened in March, 2020 and obviously everything stopped. I'd had social isolation in Antarctica for two months that I was skiing, and then I was thrown back into social isolation here in Scotland, but very different by the four walls of my flat as opposed to big open spaces of Antarctica. Very quickly I found myself kind of wanting and needing to be in these open spaces when I was kind of stuck in the city. So I started thinking a bit closer to home what is closer to home and Scotland and it's blue spaces. I've had a love affair with water and water sports since I grew up on the south coast of Devon and did a lot of water sports there. So I wanted to explore these places in Scotland and share them with as many people as I could through the book.

KATHI

And it's very clear from the photography, if anything, that you had a lot of fun exploring all of those waterways around Scotland. And you see in the book that it took you about a year to

travel around and visit all the places that you wanted to include. Is it possible, can you maybe pick a couple of highlights from that journey to share with our listeners?

MOLLIE

Yeah, so the book contains 65 locations and yeah, we spent 9, 10, 11 months myself and the photographer Rachel Keenan, who's taking all the incredible photos in the book. We travelled around Scotland whenever we could find the time from the west coast, the north coast, the Outer Hebrides, a few highlights, I mean there were so many. One really cool one is Loch A'an up in the Cairngorms National Park, and I wanted to book to have some really accessible locations, but also some kind of big adventures. And Loch A'an was that, and especially for us, we were there, I think it was the beginning of May and there'd been a massive snowfall just a few days before. And all of that snow was starting to melt and come into the loch and it's about a four hour hike to get up to the loch. And then we swam.

We didn't hike paddleboards or kayaks up there. It was definitely a swimming journey, so we swam in those freezing waters. Rachel took some absolutely stunning photos with the kind of last of the winter snow, just kind of clinging to the Cairngorm mountains above us. And yeah, we swam as quickly as we could, had a quick cup of tea on the beach and then headed out of the other four hour hike back out, but it was an incredible day. Wow, that incredible was amazing. And be surrounded by all of those mountains, just kind of looking up for them whilst you're swimming is super cool. I'd probably like to go back in summer next time, but it was cool in the snow as well.

KATHI

I guess the water wouldn't necessarily be that much warmer though, wouldn't it?

Molly

Yeah, potentially not. I think it probably felt colder. I was looking at snow whilst, swimming.

KATHI

Yeah, it's a psychological thing going on there as well. Yeah. You say you also wanted to make sure that places are, you say you also wanted to include more accessible places, and that's what I really like in the book as well. You describe how far is it if you were to bring your kayak or your paddleboard, how far is it to carry your equipment? Can you maybe pick another location that is more accessible that you could describe like that?

MOLLIE

Yeah, for sure. I absolutely wanted to make sure People are a very different levels of the venture and it's a journey when you become comfortable in these spaces. So one of the early ones that we did was the Clyde, which was really, because the book really links to the concept of blue health and how good these blue spaces are for us. And people often overlook or maybe forget about city centre blue spaces, but actually that's super important for us. If you're working all day in Glasgow city Centre and you need to get out on your lunch break, going for a walk along the Clyde is incredible, just for your wellbeing, just to calm down a little bit.

So I wanted to include the Clyde and the city centre and we paddle boarded on it, and it was sunrise in April, so again, it was freezing, but it was actually really cool. And we got in at the Transport Museum and it's like a two minute walk from the car park, paddled down past the

big BBC building past the Armadillo, all of these kind of highlights. It was like a sightseeing tour of Glasgow and turned around, came back and got out, which was amazing. And we saw a little seal on the way as well and had an incredible sunrise.

KATHI

That's amazing. I never even considered paddle boarding on the Clyde until I got my hands on your book of course. Because it is one of those places that you just take for granted for being there and you forget that it's actually a natural place.

MOLLIE

Yeah, for sure.

KATHI

Even though it of course has been heavily shaped by humans as well. But yeah, that's really cool.

MOLLIE

It is really a special place actually, the whole of the city of Glasgow kind of grew from the banks of the reline and all the trade that happens there. And I think going at sunrise really helped because it kind of felt like Glasgow was still asleep. There were a few people walking around, but everyone was still quite, it tucked away in their beds and we would just have our own private tour of the highlights of Glasgow.

KATHI

That's amazing. And is there anything that surprised you on that journey? Anything you didn't expect to come across at all?

MOLLIE

I think probably just the diversity of the different parts of Scotland. So before the book, I'd lived in Scotland for seven or eight years I think, and travelled a lot. I definitely didn't stick in Edinburgh travelled around the islands and all over the Highlands and everything, but with this book, we had to go to every corner that we possibly could. So I think the diversity from the east coast to the west coast and even the diversity along the north coast, you start off on the Northeast and it's quite a lot of farmland, it's quite barren. And then as you're coming along that north coast, suddenly the mountains, the west coast just open up in front of you and the whole of the place just completely changes. So yeah, I love that diversity that we've got in this tiny little country and from the islands as well. You can jump on a ferry and very quickly be in a what feels like a completely different place.

KATHI

Are there any areas you wish you had included that you feel like, [Mollie: Oh, man] maybe there's a second book coming, or any other places you've discovered since?

MOLLIE

There's so many, isn't there? So the book 65 locations on our initial spreadsheet, I think we probably had like 107 locations. So there's some that just couldn't make the cut or we couldn't get there on this journey. So there's so many more, more even ones that are just

next door to locations that we did go to. Yeah, every time I go out it's got know finding new places.

KATHI

That's brilliant. It's good for listeners to remember as well that there is so much more to see and it's worth taking out your OS map and finding your own adventure spots. In addition to the 65, you've included in the book.

You touch on the many amazing community-led initiatives you've come across while researching your book and doing the trips as well. One of the other authors I spoke to mentioned a community run mini golf course in Pittenweem that pays for the upkeep of the tidal pool there. And I was wondering if you could tell me about any other community ventures that you found, that you came across and thought would be really good for people to know about?

MOLLIE

Yeah, so a lot of these kind of rural areas of Scotland do rely on community-led initiatives, mostly for the kind of protection of the areas that they live in and that they love. With increased travel - and I'm very aware of this because I've written a book that's pushing people off into these remote areas in Scotland. With increased travel, you get issues, you get people needing to bins for their rubbish toilets, showers, campsites, accommodation. The roads are tiny in some of these places, and a lot of the best things I saw were community-led initiatives. People on the ground that know their areas so well, they know what's right and they know what's needed. One of the best that I always remember is on the Isle of Harris and there's a place called Hùisinis, and it's where you've got to come the main road and you're on a single track road for, I can't remember, it feels like forever, quite a few miles to get to this beach at the end of the road.

So it's pretty remote, but over the last few years, the community have really come together and turned it into this really great visitor centre. So there's a toilet block, there's bins, tons of different parts of recycling. There's places you can park your camper van and motor home, because they're always going to be there, so making space for them is really good idea. But one of the coolest things is in this visitor centre, there's also a room that has a massive window that overlooks the bay. And in that room you've got all of these notice boards, the talk all about the wildlife and the nature and the construction of this visitor centre. So really educating people as they visit it. You don't just go there and think it's a beach, you feel much more connected by knowing what wildlife is out there and you can spend half an hour staring at the sea trying to spot whatever's out there, even learning about the plants and the machair around the area. So yeah, I think the best things that can happen to Scotland are always going to be community-led.

KATHI

Absolutely. And it's such a great way, like you say, to feel more connected to those places and not just see the natural beauty, but really understand these places as someone's home and what it means to live there and to be in those spaces as well. So that's really good to draw attention to that. Like you say with a book like this, making sure that you're not just sending people somewhere, but you're sending them there with responsible behaviours, tips and advice and good intentions as well. I guess that brings me to the question of how you hope that people use your book?

MOLLIE

A really good question. And so the book's been out for just over a year now, and I met people in all sorts of situations where they've got a copy of it and they've maybe done one or two locations or they're avidly ticking them off as they travel around Scotland. So it is really cool. I guess on a kind of initial level, I just want people to flick through it and look at all of Rachel's incredible photos and realise how amazing Scotland is. I think people sometimes in Scotland, even if they come from Scotland, do limit themselves a little bit to the places that they know or places that their friends have been staying in the Central Belt, maybe pushing off into Aviemore or Fort William and exploring around there. But Scotland is, there's so much more to this country. There's the whole of the Highlands amazing islands out there. So I hope it inspires people, local people for sure to get out there and see their country a little bit more. And for visitors as well too. A little bit of a guide to the best places to go.

KATHI

I'm sure it will. I've certainly bookmarked the few of the places in your book that I haven't been to yet or haven't swum in yet, or done any of the other amazing water sports in. So yeah, I hope many people find it a really useful resource for their trips and a travel inspiration as well. Finally, before I let you go, what are you up to next? What's coming up and what can we expect from you?

MOLLIE

Yeah, so busy at the moment. So tomorrow actually, I'm flying back to the Himalayas, which I'm super excited about, heading out in Nepal, my favourite country in the world apart from Scotland. And I have a company based in East Lothian in Dunbar called Ocean Vertical. We're an adventure company and we take people on adventures into the ocean and the mountains. And this is our first overseas international trip and we've got 12 amazing people coming trekking with us in the Annapurna region for two weeks. So that's where I'll be for the next couple of weeks back in Nepal, the country that I love, and then sharing it this time with some great clients.

KATHI

That's amazing. And we'll make sure to put the information to Ocean Vertical as well as your own information, how people can find you and keep up with your adventures in our show notes. Mollie, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me before this very exciting expedition and I hope, yeah, lots of people find *Blue Scotland* in their preferred bookstores and yeah, find lots of inspiration in it.

MOLLIE

Thank you so much for having me.

[jingle]

I hope you enjoyed my conversations with Freya Bromley, Alycia Pirmohamed and Mollie Hughes. You can find their books *The Tidal Year*, *Another Way to Split Water* and *Blue Scotland* wherever you can buy books.

I've added them all to my list of Water Books at bookshop.org - an online bookshop that financially supports local, independent bookshops with every purchase you make.

You can find the link to that list in the shownotes.

The essay collection Alycia mentioned is of course the project she just won the Nan Shepherd Prize for, so I hope to see that coming to life soon.

I've also added a few other books that I think you might enjoy.

They include former Wild for Scotland guest Calum Maclean's *1001 Outdoor Swimming Tips*, Amy-Jane Beer's book about rivers *The Flow* which just won the Wainwright Prize for nature writing, and *Celtic Sea Stories*, a small book filled with myths, legends and stories from the Scottish coasts.

You'll also find all the books I read to inspire this season, like Robin Crawford's *Into the Peatlands*, tracing a year in the Scottish moorlands, and Helen Scale's *Spirals in Time*, which is a book about seashells and the creatures who produce them.

With Christmas just around the corner, I hope you find some books for your own wish list, or a present for a water-loving friend.

In this week's newsletter, I'm sharing my top pick from the list - a book about the Scottish coast that has truly encouraged me to think deeper about our responsibilities towards the sea and its inhabitants, but has also inspired me to plan future adventures. You can find the link to sign up in the shownotes.

For our Patreon subscribers, I've got a bonus episode coming soon, with some folklore and stories to enjoy with a dram or a cup of tea.

[main theme tune]

And with this, I send you off to curl up with an inspiring book, head to your local bookshop and peruse the shelves, or browse my reading recommendations into the world of watery literature.

That's it for season 5 of Wild for Scotland. Over the past few months, we've sailed on the west coast, talked about swimming and Gaelic culture, learnt about restoration projects in peat bogs, salt marshes and seagrass meadows and snorkelled through the shallows. I shared my personal journey with cold water swimming and spoke to experts about marine tourism, citizen science and nature writing. And don't forget the animals we've encountered, from bioluminescent plankton to hermit crabs and beavers.

I am already working on ideas for new episodes and if you'd like to play a part in their production, consider supporting my work as a writer and storyteller by joining my Patreon community, buying books via my lists on bookshop.org or sharing your favourite episode with a friend.

Thank you so much for listening to Wild for Scotland!

Wild for Scotland is part of the Tremula Network - adventure and outdoor podcasts off the beaten path. The show is written and hosted by me, Kathi Kamleitner. Thanks to Fran Turauskis who is the co-producer and editor, and does the sound design. Michelle Payne and Anesu Matanda-Mambingo are supporting us with social media and transcripts. Podcast art is by Lizzie Vaughan-Knight and all original music is composed by Bruce Wallace.

Until next time, when we travel to a different place in Scotland.

[main theme tune end]

[post roll ads]