

Title: **Coastal Scotland**

Subtitle: Celebrating the history, heritage and wildlife of Scottish shores

Author: Stuart Fisher

Published: 2020

Publisher: Adlard Coles UK

Website: www.adlardcoles.com

Contents: 208 pp, maps, colour photos throughout, index

Cover: softcover (superb cover photo)

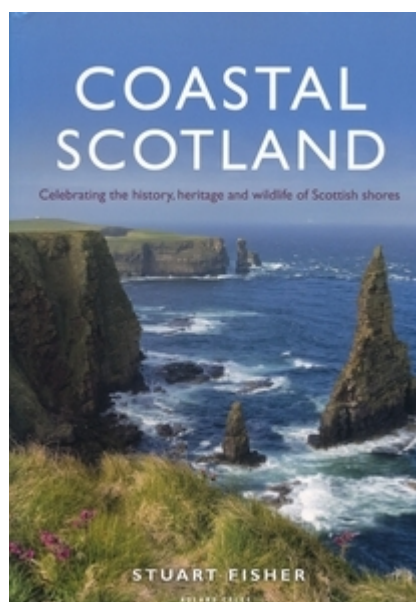
Size: 297 x 210 mm (A4 size)

ISBN: 978-1-4729-5870-9

Price: NZ\$70 (includes p&p)

Availability: Book Depository UK

Review: Paul Caffyn



Stuart Fisher, editor of the monthly British magazine *Canoeist* for over 30 years began, back in March 1989, to include illustrated guides to sections of the British coast that he had paddled and photographed (also sectional guides to the rivers and canals of Britain). Sixty two of those coastal guides, based on what Stuart maintained was the slowest ever (15 years) kayak circumnavigation of Britain, were compiled into a massive 357 page book in 2006, titled *Inshore Britain*.

Stuart's next book was an illustrated guide to the man-made inland waterways of Britain, *Canals of Britain*. It was published in 2009 and sold so well, a 336 page 2nd edition was printed in 2012.

In 2012, Stuart's third book, *Rivers of Britain*, moved to the inland tidal rivers of England, Scotland and Wales, with those tidal rivers morphing into estuaries, tideways, havens, sea lochs, firths and kyles. The same superb A4 size as used in *Inshore Britain* was followed, with 70 separate 'river' sections, working in a clockwise direction around Britain from Land's End. The upstream end of each section was where tidal action ceased.

Sea kayakers, generally being rather stingy in buying lavishly illustrated coastal/river guides, were not the best British book buying public, however after a better buying interest following printing of *Canals of Britain*, Stuart's informative book style led to two further books, *Coastal Britain – England & Wales* (2019) and this latest title, *Coastal Scotland* (2020).

The text is set in a very readable double column format, with place names when first mentioned, in bold, which is a nice touch. A relevant poetry verse introduces each chapter. This from for the Solway Firth chapter:

'Where'er we see a bonny lass, we'll caa' as we gae by;
Where'er we meet wi' liquor guid, we'll drink and we be dry.
There's brandy at the Abbeyburn, there's rum at Heston Bay,
And we will go a smuggling before the break o' day.'

Starting from the north side of Solway Firth, Stuart paddles/writes his way up the west coast of Scotland, across the top from Cape Wrath to the massive tide races of Pentland Firth, then down the east coast to the English border. Each numbered coastal section is highlighted on an easy to find summary map.

The text is not mere dry geographical descriptions of the coast, but flows along nicely along with a marvellous mix of historical snippets, weather extremes, and how times have changed with the small and big ports. Although *Inshore Britain* was written for coastal paddlers, *Coastal Scotland* delves deeper into murder and mayhem over the centuries, the rise and fall of the coastal fisheries, and the ebb and flow of port communities that were so reliant on fishing.

Each page is lavishly illustrated - a combination of full page width, or single column colour photos. With up to six per page, how Stuart kept track of photo locations and managed to cluster them in geographic order impresses me no end.

The inclusion of relevant book covers, adds depth to the book, linking classic tomes from long ago, either where they were set or written; such as Alistair Dunnett's folding kayak classic *Quest by Canoe* or Gavin Maxwell's story of the sea otters, *Ring of Bright Water*. Inclusion of relevant postage stamps is a lovely touch along with beer bottle labels.

Each coastal section concludes with a small sidebar column, listing relevant 1:50,000 map sheets, Admiralty charts, tidal constraints, the sea area (for forecasts) and rescue services. A full three page index completes the book.

If I was to nit-pick on the layout of Stuart's books, the text size (9 point or less) is a struggle to read for older eyes in poor light. The same applies to the lesser known 'place names' on the section maps. But as always, 'tis a sad compromise for a publisher, balancing the number of pages versus text point size.

For Kiwi paddlers with even just the slightest hint of Scottish ancestry, I do recommend sourcing a copy. Of hefty weight and size, 'tis not ideal luggage for the minimalist long distance paddler, however the wealth of information on all aspects of the islands and coast of Scotland is just staggering.

Having just recently completed transcribing my 'chicken scrawl' hand-written diaries from the 1980 round Britain paddle, Stuart Fisher's descriptions of the 'history, heritage and wildlife of the Scottish shore' were a nostalgic trip down memory lane.

If you have trouble sourcing the book in New Zealand, I suggest trying the British website: www.bookdepository.com

Stuart chatting up a local bird while researching sections of coastline for Coastal Scotland

