

Footprints in the Sand: the Hugh Miller Writing Competition II 2017-2018

Highly Commended in Poetry

Alison Seller: Deep absence

Footprints in the Sand: The Hugh Miller Writing Competition II carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aimed to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's rich fossil heritage. The competition was organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, The Friends of Hugh Miller and other partners.

Further details of the competition, and all the winning entries, are available at www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller/

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Deep Absence

No bones here.
No shell of skin, or feathers
brushed into the stone.
No marbled carapace, or
shale spiral.
Only outlines
traced in tropical sand
aeons past.
Now, like Pictish cup-marks, they
brim with soft Skye rain:
two footprints
one cradling the other.
An imprint of family.

Yet, here is deep absence.
A Jurassic mother and her hatchling
move on.
The record of life's urgency
pressed in stone.
And I recall
the melancholy of beaches,
our footprints
smooored by surf.
And, still, I see Hugh Miller,
who knew the worth and weight of stone.
I see him
lost and deep within his grief.
His fingers
tracing the letters he has hewn.
His sweet Elizabeth's name
preserved in tender stone.

Inspired by the discovery on Skye, in 2004, of a footprint (25 cms) of a Coleophysis-type dinosaur. The footprint, unusually, contained within it a less-than-a-month-old baby footprint (1.78 cms).

<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/amazing-fossil-puts-scotland-s-dinosaurs-on-the-map-1-465762>

Hugh Miller's first-born, Elizabeth Logan, died aged 17 months.