

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2019-2020

Under 18 Prose 1st Prize Luining: Kate Knight

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aims to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's geoheritage. The competition is organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and The Friends of Hugh Miller.

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

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Luing

By Kate Knight

'Life itself is school and nature is always a fresh study' - Hugh Miller

Waves of the small stormy channel crash against the side of the tiny ferry boat travelling across to Luing. A mist of sea spray hits me stinging my skin as the salty spray flies forcefully off the tips of waves. The wind whips violently through my hair, making it swirl around my head in a messy cloud. The back of my throat burns as I breathe in lungfuls of salty air. The air is filled with the sound of frantic barking from the boisterous dog standing at the bow of the boat. The ferry boat slides in beside a tiny concrete pier.

The pier is encrusted with salt crystals and seaweed has fastened itself to the edges, growing out in great clumps like ivy growing in gaps between the crumbling bricks of long forgotten houses. By the pier, the rocks are pitch black mottled with chocolate brown. Shallow pools of crystal clear water have collected in the indents in the rocks. I start splashing around in these beautiful pools, glad I wore my wellies, but there doesn't seem to be anything to find except a thin coat of slippery slime on the rocks. Suddenly something catches my eye inside one particularly large pool. A tiny vibrant green spiral shaped seashell and a crab scuttling sideways across the edges of the pool, desperate not to be noticed. Like the shell the crab is a fluorescent green and as large as my hand. I wonder why they are so green?

The steep winding road climbs up the hill passing a field containing two horses. The horses munch their grass contentedly as I pass, seeming not to notice me. One has a beautiful sleek chestnut coat and the other is grey, white dappled with black. I wish I could stroke them but there is a sturdy barbed wire fence and a maze of thorns in my way. Finally, I come to a small gravel track leading off the main road. The small track tapers away into a dirt path, slowly becoming more and more boggy until my feet are sinking so far into the mud, I can barely walk. Jumping from tuft of grass to tuft of grass they are like islands amidst a swirling sea of mud. Eventually the path disappears all together and I emerge in a field of chestnut cows, baying and tossing their massive heads. Keeping my distance, I walk around the edge of the field, careful to avoid the numerous cowpats and piles of sheep's droppings.

Bare indents of tractor wheels form a track leading out of the field and into the heather covered hills, blooming in soft pinks and purples. However, the track is less beautiful, so muddy it could almost be mistaken for a war zone. I trudge up a steep, nearby hill to avoid it. Suddenly a gaping crevice opens up before me. I stumble. Chunks of slate and moss sliding out from under me. I have found one of the long-abandoned slate mines which scar the landscape slicing through the hills! Massive chunks of slate still remain; some scattered everywhere and some sitting in neat piles cemented together by tufts of moss.

Scrambling down the hill I find a gentle slope, which I skid down and walk through the mine. Massive uneven walls of solid rock tower above me blocking out the sun.

The slow trickle of water seeping from the walls makes it eerie yet beautiful in a strange way. As I emerge the sun blinds me, high up in the sky as it is. How time flies? After trudging through the hills as the sun begins to sink, I reach a small village of neat white-washed houses with slate tiled roofs. The village smells fresh and salty with piles of sparkling seashells scattered outside every door. As I walk through the village the smell of seafood drifts lazily through the air, up my nose and down my throat. I can almost taste the salty muscles and freshly caught shrimps.

As the sun touches the horizon, I reach the beach. The gigantic seaside slate mines tower over me on one side and the water cuts me off on the other. I walk along a narrow ledge, at least 5 feet above the beach and as soon as I get a chance, I jump off the ledge landing on the rocky beach below. Not a grain of sand in sight. Massive slabs of solid dependable rock jut out from the beach as if a giant has haphazardly chucked them over his shoulder. They have landed at an angle burying themselves deep into the ground. White marble lines snake across the biggest rocks in a loose pattern. I have never seen rocks like these before. Matt black smudges into a pale grey; pale grey merges into a honey brown. They truly are beautiful. Some smaller rocks glitter strangely in the dying light of the sun. Curious, I pick one up. Little chunks of rusty metal are littered throughout like chocolate chips in a cookie. I wonder what sort of metal it is and how on earth it ended up so deep inside these rocks? I wonder if I can dig it out of the rocks? Maybe I will pocket one and try later, but for now I will sit and watch the sun's last rays burst over the horizon casting the beach in a pale golden shadow. Luig.