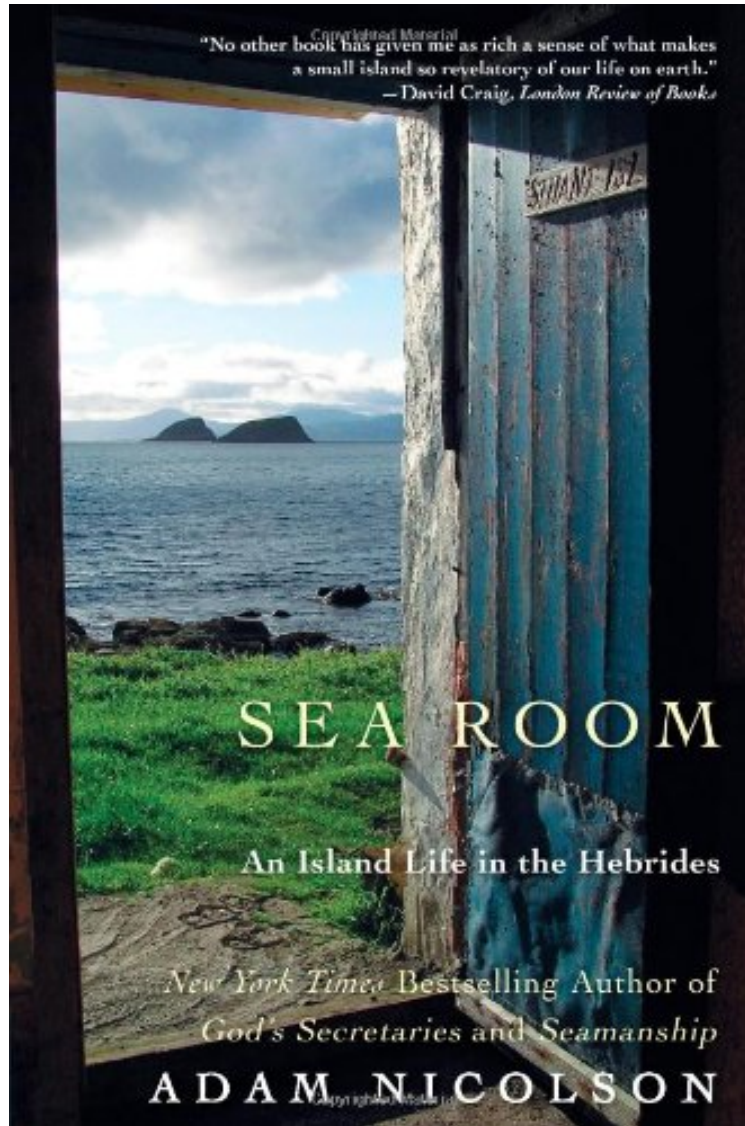


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## Sea Room: An Island Life in the Hebrides

Adam Nicolson

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**Adam Nicolson : Sea Room: An Island Life in the Hebrides** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sea Room: An Island Life in the Hebrides:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A glorious trustBy John the ReaderReminiscent of Heat-Moon's  
PrairyErth: A Deep Map Nicolson's work is also a map in depth of the Shiantis; tiny islands off the coast of Skye, in the  
Hebrides that his father gave him. Nicolson, born in 1957, lives with his family in Sissinghurst Castle, and is the 5th  
Baron Carnock, although we are told he never uses the title. (Can I borrow it then please Adam?) His father author

Nigel Nicolson who gave the islands to Adam, bought the islands when his mother, authoress, Vita Sackville-West found them listed for sale by author Compton McKenzie! All this talent, Nicolson claims, descended from an early branch of marauding Hebridean pirates and shepherds. Indeed, the Shiant Islands were actually owned by the Nicolson clan centuries before his father's gift but were lost to one of those perpetual clan wars and raids the featured in this glorious region's long history. Adam decide on conservation and archeology, not profit, eventually opening up the isles to scholarly research international archeology teams and camping Boy Scouts. He has the honour of preserving these wonderful, floating, tiny bits of man's history but later argues against his own 'ownership' in context and principle. Early in his ownership, whilst visiting his mentor and tenant he meets a typical "Jock of the North", looming over the author he challenges; "Ar ye the man who says he owns the Shiant Islands?" "Yes," I said, smiling charm, the English defence, "I am actually". "Will, yer a sackful o' shite". Adam commissions an appropriate boat, a sixteen-foot, clinker built replica of the ancient boats with a Viking heritage. Declaring her a beauty he hesitating asks the dour, neat Hebridean builder if he will be able to become a proper sailor of her. "Aye, if you had another life" is his reply. But, in fact, he is a quick learner and studies his craft as closely as his windswept and near-barren islands, uses his 'little ship' well, joins the shepherd's in their annual roundup and gets the local accolade of knowing "every inch, rock and pebble" of his glorious heritage. He notes that ladies never find the 'house island' (Eilean an Tighe) a welcoming environment and later archeology reveals a valid reason for such feminine detection of vibes - a limpet pile in the byre that shows the famine years, even decades, of starvation and hardship when the residents were reduced to eating this, the island's most repellent resource. Adam has deeded his islands to his son in turn and they remain a glorious resource in trust for us all (...). 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Man And The Shiant Islands By Daniel Myers This book is, as one reviewer accurately puts it, a "scattershot" account of one man and his deep, abiding love for the Shiant Islands (pronounced "Shants"), the three barren islands he has inherited in the Outer Hebrides. The man is Adam Nicolson (Baron Adam Nicolson, mind you, though he never mentions the title here, in keeping with his ambivalence toward "ownership" of them, described quite thoroughly herein). This love and attachment to place and his experiences - sometimes quite harrowing - constitute the theme of the book in the first several chapters and the last. N.B. - The web page here, for some reason, puts the book's length erroneously at 256 pages. My copy and those of other reviewers with different editions who mention the length all seem to have the correct page number: 391. The middle of the book - especially compared with the poetic prose of the first chapters - is a bit weighted down for my tastes with geological, socio-economic and historical minutiae about these islands. It's all quite interesting at first. But, caveat lector, Nicolson does go on a bit. In fact, the middle of the book would serve quite well, I think, as the foundation for a doctoral dissertation. But let me get on with what I loved about the book. Nicolson is a highly reflective, poetic and yet dogged writer who writes with a lovely relish about the desolate, frequently perilous beauty of these islands. He describes - better than I can - his instincts in life and writing beautifully: "One of the reasons I loved the Shiant Islands was that they were away from the world of definition.... I never think things through. I never have. I never envisage the end before I plunge into the beginning. I never clarify the whole. I bank on instinct, allowing my nose to sniff its way into the vacuum, trusting that somewhere or other, soon enough, out of the murk, something is bound to turn up." He goes on to quote some lines from poet Denise Levertov: "There's nothing The dog disdains on his way, Nevertheless he Keeps moving, changing Pace and approach but Not direction - every step an arrival." He also mentions Emily Dickinson and quotes Yeats and Shelley. These are the sections I truly loved. Other reviewers have tended to dwell on the last chapter and the question of whether Nicolson should "own" the islands. The question is very much a non-starter for me. He should. In his passage describing medieval solitaries, Nicolson writes: "All the solitaries of the past have lived with that intense inner sociability. Their minds are peopled with taunters, seducers, advisors, supervisors, friends and companions. It is one of the tests of being alone: a crowd from whom there is no hiding." It is the great wonder of the best parts of the book that the reflective Nicolson describes his own inner personae, but that also the reader meets actual people - fulfilling these same roles - whom Nicolson has encountered during his long enchantment with the Shiant Islands. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It's a great read for those of us that travel by armchair By Betty J Andreas The author owns three small islands in the Hebrides. This book is his tribute to those islands. He discusses their history (both geologic and human), flora and fauna, and his experiences on the islands. It's a great read for those of us that travel by armchair.

In 1937, Adam Nicolson's father answered a newspaper ad—"Uninhabited islands for sale. Outer Hebrides, 600 acres. . . Puffins and seals. Apply."—and thus found the Shiant Islands. With a name meaning "holy or enchanted islands," the Shiant Islands for millennia were a haven for those seeking solitude, but their rich, sometimes violent history of human habitation includes much more. When he was twenty-one, Nicolson inherited this almost indescribably beautiful property: a landscape, soaked in centuries-old tales of restless ghosts and Bronze Age gold, that cradles the heritage of a once-vibrant world of farmers and fishermen. In *Sea Room*, Nicolson describes and relives his love affair with the three tiny islands and their strange and colorful history in passionate, keenly precise prose—sharing with us the greatest gift an island bestows on its inhabitants: a deep engagement with the natural world.

From Publishers Weekly For his 21st birthday, Nicolson's father gave him some islands among the Scottish Outer Hebrides, 600 acres worth of land that the elder Nicolson had purchased on a whim in 1937. At various times, the Sussex-based writer recalls, the Shiant islands "have been the most important thing in my life," and he has produced a vivid, meticulously researched paean to his "heartland," examining its geology, its flora and fauna, and its history as he reminisces about his own idylls there. The islands, now uninhabited except by the Nicolsons, are outcroppings of grass and rock and stark black cliffs, surrounded by churning waters that are notoriously difficult to negotiate. Until 1901, they were continuously inhabited for thousands of years by an eighth-century hermit, medieval farmers, Irish Jacobite rebels and others documented by Nicolson. The islands are also an important breeding station for birds, and Nicolson observes the comings and goings of geese, puffins and razorbills. Throughout the book, Nicolson explores the troubling idea of ownership; Hebrideans view English landowners with a mix of resentment and derision, and Nicolson acknowledges that his rights to the islands, like those of previous landlords, are morally ambiguous. His mix of scholarship, reflection and lyrical description brings his beloved atolls to life, and the genre-bending book should win some fans among those interested in nature writing and memoir. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal Nicolson has what most can only dream of: his own island. Actually, the property consists of three remote Scottish islands, the Shiant, located in the Hebrides and purchased by Nicolson's father through a 1937 newspaper advertisement. The grandson of Vita Sackville-West, Nicolson, who was given the islands with their cliffs, sheep, rats, and birds on his 21st birthday by his father, has written *Sea Room* as a self-proclaimed "love letter" that captures the character of the place. More intellectually weighty than most travel narratives, Nicolson's book offers as much information about the geological origins of the islands, the seasonal details of the flora and fauna, and the melding of Norse language into the culture as it does about the author's solitary boat rides and peaceful beachcombing adventures. The comprehensive bibliography and index indicate a love and knowledge of the island that goes well beyond that of an occasional visitor or tourist. Nicolson is the islands' resident historian and scientist, and as he prepares to give the islands to his own son, he can do so knowing that his gift is not merely sentimental but substantive. Recommended for all travel collections. Mari Flynn, *Keystone Coll., La Plume, PA* Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From Booklist \*Starred\* When Nicolson was 21, his father gave him the tiny Shiant Islands a few miles east of Lewis, the biggest of the Outer Hebrides, and somewhat more miles northwest of Skye, largest of the Inner Hebrides. Nicolson already knew the place well, having spent many holidays there with family and friends, and alone. There is a two-room house near the easiest landing, and Nicolson repaired to it for the year that this rhapsodical tribute records. He conducts us through the months in the Shiant, for each unfolding part of Shiant history and telling of the experts he brought in to see what the place could tell them, which included the shepherds with whom he rounded up the fattened lambs in the fall. He demonstrates that the Shiant was a vital part of several cultures, which became remote only as industrial capitalism centralized enterprises and profits. This history is finely and personally relayed, but what is best in the book is Nicolson's intensely sensual detailing of his sailing of the waters around the islands; of air, rock, soil, flora, and light; of the spirituality historically assigned to the place and which lingers there; and of what it must have been like to live there over the centuries. Magnificent and poetic, this is a literary and ecological masterpiece. Ray Olson Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved