



REVIEW

Reviewed book: *The Whispers of Rock: Stories from the Earth*

Reviewed Book

Khatwa, A. (2025).
The Whispers of Rock: Stories from the Earth.
London, UK: The Bridge Street Press

Reviewed by

Richard Holliman 

Abstract

In her book Anjana Khatwa combines geological and Indigenous ways of knowing from across the globe, offering a wide-ranging guide to an area of science communication that can be overlooked, the Earth sciences. This would be sufficient to recommend it to science communicators. The book goes further, however, offering a deeply personal perspective on exclusion and inclusion in academia, and multicultural society. For anyone interested in equitable approaches to science communication, this is an essential read.

Keywords

Decolonising science communication; Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in science communication; Environmental communication

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‘Do we really understand the relationships between abiotic nature and human cultures in all their extraordinary complexity?’ would have been a far less catchy title for Anjana Khatwa’s book *The Whispers of Rock*. The book combines geological knowledge with Indigenous and spiritual ways of knowing from across the globe through selected episodes of geological time and human history. It explores stories of geological intrusions with societal exclusions in a way that I have only seen once before. In this sense, *The Whispers of Rock* does for geology what *Braiding Sweetgrass* [Kimmerer, 2013] has done for ecology and environmental studies.

Courage and authenticity are admirable traits in any scholar, and even more so when an author is aware that they are challenging the boundaries of accepted practice in a field of enquiry they care passionately about.

“For some, the alliance of spirituality and science [...] will feel deeply uncomfortable. Western science is grounded in a systematic approach which places theory, measurement and observation above all other ways of knowing. [...] in recent years, I have reflected on how this distance has stagnated our relationship with rock to the point where, for most people, they have become invisible even in plain sight. [...] The human experience is critical to how people relate to land and nature, and for the most part it is not driven by science but by lots of other factors.” [Khatwa, 2025, pp. 254–257]

In this sense, *The Whispers of Rock* is anything but a typical book about geology. Appeals to observation and empirical fact in this account sit comfortably alongside accounts of traditional and contextual ways of knowing. As Khatwa acknowledges, not everyone will feel comfortable with this approach. But there is a fundamental point to the author’s approach that convinced me. Geology is the literal and metaphorical bedrock of all human existence, and yet it is often hidden in plain sight. Society needs geology in all its many and varied forms in the same way that humans cannot live sustainably without biodiversity. My only quibble with the title, therefore, is whether ‘whispers’ are sufficient to give voice to the essential social nature of geology.

The book is organised into ten chapters, each of which is led by a geological underpinning. The book starts with a statement about the author’s positionality in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing, which is to be welcomed. But Khatwa goes further than this. Throughout the book, the author offers a deeply contextualised account of geology combined with Indigenous ways of knowing from cultures across the globe, interwoven with a personal account of exclusion and inclusion. The author gives voice to ‘the whispers of rocks’, Indigenous and spiritual ways of knowing, and the authenticity of her story as an academic, science communicator and campaigner for equity. In so doing, Khatwa bridges knowledge cultures [Lepore et al., 2023], recalibrating what has been, and continues to be in places, a damaging and extractive relationship between geology and society. She offers a different vision through *The Whispers of Rock*, one where forms of expertise and (lived) experience are combined through respect, inclusion, and equity.

I had the pleasure to read the earlier drafts of chapters. The final product demonstrates how the author has developed these drafts into a beautifully written and sophisticated book, representing an enhanced way of knowing the Earth sciences, a form of scholarship that is

both respectful and insightful. Yes, the author's research could have been enhanced further through embedded research with Indigenous communities, but in all likelihood this would have reduced the range of examples. Instead, ontologies and epistemologies are woven throughout Khatwa's book, although without overplaying these academic perspectives. That may be an issue for some science communication researchers, but I found this a refreshing approach that is accessible to those invested in either professional or popular science communication.

Why should you read this book? Well, I am not an Earth scientist. My knowledge of geology prior to reading this book was limited to compulsory school geography, oxbow lakes, a first level university course in the sciences, and car share conversations with my 'metamorphic friend' Clare Warren. In this sense, geology has never been an area of knowledge that I have been fascinated by, or actively sought further information. *The Whispers of Rock* changed this for me. It is the first book about geology that I have read cover to cover. It challenged me, enriched me, and invited me to reflect on equity in academia and science communication in new ways. In my view, it should become a generative text for anyone thinking about equitable science communication.

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About the author

Richard Holliman is Professor of Engaged Research at The Open University, UK. He examines tensions between theories and practices of knowledge exchange, arguing that engaged research should have a moral imperative to promote epistemic justice. Select <http://oro.open.ac.uk/view/person/rmh47.html> to view his publications.

✉ Richard.Holliman@open.ac.uk

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