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Travels in Scotland in Scotland, 1788–1881: A Selection from Contemporary Tourist Journals

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We are already indebted to Dr Alastair Durie for exploring the social and economic history of Scottish tourism in two pioneering and highly readable studies, *To Scotland for the Holidays*¹ and *Water is Best*.² These he has now supplemented with a valuable collection of unpublished writings by six tourists and holiday makers in Scotland spanning the period 1788–1881. Three of his authors are Scots and three are visitors from England; two are women. Only one is a solo traveller. With one exception they come from comfortable bourgeois backgrounds.

Culled from private sources and public archives, some of these accounts of 'home touring'³ were recorded en route, while others were recollected after the event. They take the form of journals and diaries, letters and a commonplace book. One of the texts is illustrated by the writer's own drawings, and another carries a scrapbook of commercially produced scenic snapshots. What these pieces offer in all their variety are fascinating, characterful narratives of leisure ploys and excursions, some lengthy and at least provisionally planned in advance; and a few briefly undertaken on impulse.

As their circumstances permitted our travellers had recourse to private or hired carriages, gigs, public coaches, canal boats, trains, steamboats, ferries and horses. Occasionally they had to row, and often they simply walked. Rain was their regular companion. Taken together their itineraries include Scotland's major cities and extend from Dumfries in the south to Kinlochewe in the north. Their epicentre is the Clyde estuary ranging into Argyll and

Loch Lomond. Locations that occur frequently include Greenock, Dumbarton, Cairndow, Inveraray, Tarbet, Rowardennan and Callander. The Tayside and Deeside areas are also visited but there are only passing references to the islands, and no one explores Ayrshire, Galloway, Caithness or Sutherland.

The writers are not in any sense *literary* tourists though they occasionally pay tribute to the influence of Sir Walter Scott. Some have however been influenced by the agenda of picturesque sightseeing, and seek out waterfalls, hermitages, castles and the other trappings of romantic landscapes. Angling, sketching, wenching, carousing, sea bathing and sermon-tasting are among their incidental pastimes.

Durie's general introduction and individual commentaries greatly enhance the appeal of the publication. He sets his authors within the wider perspectives of tourism in Scotland over a century when improving roads, accommodation, and means of transport were enabling it to expand from an elite to a mass phenomenon. Moreover he assiduously researches census and other records to augment sometimes sketchy biographies. While he is a professional historian presenting fresh documentary sources for future use, he also succeeds in conveying his own delight in the stories, personalities and preoccupations he has uncovered. Of one moving account he justifiably writes 'What we have here is a treasure'; another contribution he describes as 'immensely valuable but ... a major challenge'. He clearly would have loved to meet his authors, and he helps us to share his wryly affectionate curiosity about these lost lives: 'Elizabeth would, one suspects, have been very good company'.

As a means of exploring the quality of these travelogues it is worth juxtaposing the first and last pieces in the selection. Separated in time by nearly a century they take the form of letters to female relatives, and are both by women, Elizabeth Diggle writing in 1788 and Mrs Mary Allison in 1881.

Elizabeth's text is a compilation of lively missives reporting on her adventures mainly to her sister, and with mock severity demanding replies. We can detect a bright, energetic Englishwoman from the Home Counties, seemingly of ample means ... a rather refined precursor of the redoubtable Sarah Murray.⁴ Using her own carriage and accompanied by her aunt and one manservant she threads her way for four hundred miles through Scotland in July and August of 1788. She exploits some useful social contacts in Edinburgh and with

local gentry along her route: 'In the evening we dance reels & I get great credit for my performance here, & at Largo'. Though her language is peppered with banal descriptions in the 'charming' and 'delightful' vein, her observations are often shrewd and humane, as when she comments that the conditions of the labourers in the inferno of the Carron Ironworks will make her take better care of her kettle in future.

By comparison the Allison's excursion is a brief encounter. Mary and her husband James are a working-class couple living in the Anderston district of Glasgow. During the Glasgow Fair holiday of 1881 they decide on the spur of the moment to visit Mary's married sister in Argyll. Travelling by steamboat from the Broomielaw to Lochgoilhead where they call in on a relative, they then hike sturdily over by *The Rest and Be Thankful* to her sister's home at Butterbridge sheep farm at the head of Glen Fyne. A few days later they return to Glasgow by same route. Mary later describes this excursion in a remarkable long letter couched in clear careful prose to her sister's daughter who is in service in Inveraray. In it she conveys her feeling for her niece and brings alive the modest excitements of the journey and the warm hospitality of the all-too-brief family reunion. Among these are the attempts of James ('that blockhead of a husband of mine') to climb Ben Ime, and their encounter with an itinerant fiddler. This endearing account, enriched by her primitively detailed sketches, touchingly preserves a small, bright moment of family history. Durie has discovered that James later drowned accidentally in the Forth and Clyde Canal and that Mary turned up, perhaps finally, in a Glasgow poorhouse.

The narratives of these two women, dramatically different in so many ways, are brought to life by the fact that they take the form of letters in which the writer is speaking directly, affectionately and, we feel, honestly to a familiar recipient; and to us.

The most bizarre personality to emerge from Durie's selection of texts is Adam Bald, a Glasgow youth whose father owned a prosperous drysalter's business. In the 1790s young Bald evidently had money enough and time to escape on frequent racketsorties with his cronies 'doon the watter' into Argyll, or across to localities such as Falkirk, Stirling and Edinburgh. These escapades he recorded in a strange commonplace book which Durie describes feelingly as 'a mixtermaxter', and

which he seems to have maintained for his own satisfaction, with no other readership in mind.

His style is certainly an acquired taste, with its chaotic syntax and its addiction to faded classical and pastoral clichés. The Carron works are 'the dominion of Pluto'; when he and his friends have been drinking heavily at Strachur, he has 'sacrificed at the shrine of Bacchus', and a typically surly Highland ferryman is described as 'old Charon'. Near Balloch the 'buxom wenches' with whom they attempt to flirt are 'robust and sprightly Highland nymphs' and 'mountain Goddesses'. Moreover he has an annoying propensity for inserts of McGonagallesque doggerel.

He tends to see his perambulations in Quixotic terms but reveals himself as a callow, hyperactive young buck with a good conceit of himself and little empathy with others. And yet, and yet ... the selections from his *Commonplace* book are rich in raw, vivid episodes. He watches the 'murderous' trapping of salmon at a friend's estate at the Pot of Gartness; a tinker offers Bald and his friends the services of his beautiful wife in payment for helping him manoeuvre his horse and cart over the brae between Tarbet and Arrochar; he furtively does a solo climb of Ben Lomond without the assistance of a guide; he escapes from a Rothesay fair to Greenock in a small wherry crammed with 'fiddlers, ravy showmen, swindlers, etc. etc. who disgusted us with their low slang and dissolute manners'.

Thomas Adam, the only solitary traveller represented in Durie's selection, produces its most impressive piece of thoughtful reportage. There is some uncertainty as to biographical details, but Adam is possibly to be identified with someone of that name who later became a Secretary of the Clyde Navigation Trust. Setting out from St Andrew's in June 1857 on a three weeks' excursion he makes his leisurely way north by train, coach and gig, stopping off and sightseeing en route. He heads via Dundee, Blairgowrie, Braemar, Aberdeen, Inverness and Achnasheen to his destination on Loch Maree. After six rewarding days using Kinlochewe Inn as his base, he reluctantly turns south by coach and ferry to Loch Duich, and shouldering his knapsack trudges with great difficulty over Kintail to Kinlochhourn and Glengarry. At Fort Augustus he picks up a boat to Fort William and finally disembarks at Greenock.

His scrupulously maintained journal reveals an alert curiosity and a wide range of interests. For example, near Braemar he detects a movement in the heather:

I saw two white sticks out of a peat moss looking hollow and then a beautiful roe's head and eyes looked up. John 'shu'd' and flung a stone, but the roe would not stir till we were within a yard of her when she suddenly seemed to see us and then made a noble spring & bounded out of the hole, turned to look at us, and then bounded off down hill, though not as quickly as I expected.

This same alertness operates on landscapes, on weather conditions, art, architecture and religion; and on local language. Here he picks up a specimen of the use of diminutives in North-East Doric by the crew of the Ballater coach speaking of some lost property: '... an there's a wee laddie's clokkietee but a donna kin faa's eest'.

Unlike many tourists he takes a close interest, sympathetic or critical, in the local people he encounters ... the hotel staff, the fellow travellers and the guides, as well as curiosities such as a sadly incompetent minister in Kinlochewe, and an Irish quack doctor plying his trade in Aberdeen.

In the concluding sections of Adam's journal there is a powerful contrast between his warm account of the idyllic domesticity of his stay in the Kinlochewe Inn, which is the highpoint of his tour; and the inhospitable treatment he experiences later in traversing the great deer estates further south. He makes his damning scorn of their absentee landlords abundantly clear:

No man or indeed woman either is likely to travel thirty or forty miles through a houseless country, or over precipitous mountains to steal spoons at a shooting lodge. I know of nothing else they can be afraid of.

Adam can be strong on indignation.

In sampling the varied writings to be found in *Travels in Scotland, 1788–1881* I have not commented on two other journals, one written anonymously, covering two excursions in 1817 and 1818; and the other by Henry Underhill in 1868. These differ from Adam's solo narrative in that they are records of family reunions, group excursions in which occasionally the more energetic younger members, 'the Light Brigade', break off for a time on their own ploys, to rendezvous later with their more sedate elders. These are both well worth reading.

The author of the anonymous two-part journal is a young Englishman who comes north to Edinburgh to join his parents and other family

members, male and female, on summer tours in Scotland. Apparently a reasonably prosperous group, their preferred means of travel is by hired carriage with pedestrian interludes. The 1817 expedition is a circuit of some of Scotland's picturesque and 'sublime' sites, with obsessive focus on romantic waterfalls. Starting at the Falls of Clyde they head north through Glasgow to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. After taking in Dunkeld with the cataracts and hermitage of Braan, they turn south by Aberfeldy and Scone, finishing up in Edinburgh. The author's descriptive commentaries tend to gushy admiration, drawing on what Tom Furniss has identified as 'the trope of indescribability'.⁵ For example, at the Trossachs end of Loch Katrine the travellers 'enjoy a scene indescribably divine', and later the vale of Dunkeld is 'beyond description grand'.

The 1818 summer tour covers mainly the Argyll coast with overlap into previously visited areas around Loch Lomond. Its tone is less earnestly aesthetic and more entertaining. We learn for example of the barbarous treatment the visitors receive at Inveraray and their subsequent warm welcome as house guests of Campbell of Minard, where they participate in a week's shooting, fishing and hunting. At the Inversnaid ferry their observations on local churchgoers recall those of Dorothy Wordsworth in 1803. The main appeal of this journal is however its firsthand account of a foolhardy, comic and near fatal final escapade by two younger members which involves them in rowing all the way from Tarbet down Loch Lomond and the river Leven to Dumbarton, and then next day with their father attempting to hitch a lift to Greenock on a passing steamboat ... and all in pouring rain.

Henry Underhill, a sober Wolverhampton lawyer is taking an autumn break from professional pressures with his son, two student nephews and a younger legal colleague. The all-male group journeys from Glasgow up the west coast to Fort William, across to Inverness, Aberdeen and Deeside. They then cross-country to Atholl and move south towards Tayside and the Trossachs. The tour terminates prematurely at Edinburgh when Underhill is called back to Wolverhampton on political business.

It is clear from his journal that by the 1860s the main Scottish touring circuits, with new hotels and more reliable transport, have been substantially commercialised. The party passes between resorts without major problems, usually by train or hired carriage. The one notable exception is when they traverse on foot the

spine of Scotland from The Linn of Dee to Blair Atholl, perilously boulder-hopping across the Tilt in full spate. On several occasions Underhill ruefully acknowledges that at forty-six and overweight he has less resilience, social and physical, than his young companions. In the dining and smoking rooms of their hotels he is sensitive to social distinctions in the clientele, between gentlemen and those he labels the 'Snobs' (in the older, pre-Thackeray sense of the term⁶). His observant, fluent narrative nicely catches the congenial bonding nature of the group's experiences. One evening on the banks of the Tay at Dunkeld:

We indulged in a little luxury at dinner, taking a bottle of Claret, the first wine we have had since our start! After dinner we tried the Athole Brose, a mixture half honey and half whiskey, very potent but not to be despised if taken simply as a liquor. We then adjourned to the garden with young Macpherson and lying on the grass of this beautiful river spent the early evening in conversation and the joys of the weed.

Overall this volume is a most welcome addition to the canon of Scottish travel writing. It is to be hoped therefore that it can be made available to a wide reading public, who will certainly appreciate the activities and antics of early 'staycationers', young and old, in the Georgian and Victorian eras. In the past hardy souls have attempted to follow the jaunting steps of Boswell and Johnson in the Highlands. Now some of Durie's readers may well be tempted to retrace the itineraries of his motley band of excursionists, and record for posterity what they find.

Jim Alison
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Notes

- 1 Alastair J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays, A History of Tourism in Scotland, 1780–1939* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2003)
- 2 Alastair J. Durie, *Water is Best, the Hydros and Health Tourism in Scotland, 1840–1940* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006)
- 3 Zoë Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682–1812* (London: Ashgate, 2008)
- 4 Sarah Murray, *A Companionable and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland*, first published in 1799, edited by W. F. Laughlan (Hawick: Byway Books, 1982)
- 5 Tom Furniss, 'A place much celebrated in England', Loch Katrine and the Trossachs before *The Lady of the Lake*, in *Literary Tourism in Scotland the Trossachs and Walter*
- 6 William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs* (London: Punch, 1848)



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