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Holidays in the Highlands

The development of mass tourism in the 18th and 19th centuries

by Marion Amblard

Long weighed down by historical prejudice, the Highlands slowly started to attract the public's interest from the mid-18th century onwards. With the development of mass tourism, public perceptions of the Scottish region gradually improved, fostering its integration within Great Britain.

Reviewed: Mathieu Mazé, [L'Invention de l'Écosse. Premiers touristes dans les Highlands](#), Paris, Vendémiaire, 2017, 364 p.

The Home Tour began to develop in Britain during the second half of the 17th century as a reaction to the Grand Tour, which was the traditional trip around Europe undertaken by the British nobility. The Home Tour mainly consisted in visiting Wales, the Lake District located in the north of England, and the Highlands of Scotland. In his book entitled *L'Invention de l'Écosse. Premiers touristes dans les Highlands*, Mathieu Mazé investigates the period stretching from 1750 to 1850, which corresponds to the first stage in the development of tourism in the Highlands. Mass tourism only began to develop from the 1850s, after the completion of the railway line connecting London to Edinburgh in 1848 and Thomas Cook's first organised excursion with a group of tourists in 1846. The author opts for an original approach, as his study does not focus so much on the travellers as on the territory visited, at a time when Scotland began to integrate into Great Britain and forge a new national identity. In his book, Mazé raises the following issues: to what extent has the development of tourism in the Highlands transformed the region and changed its relationships with the rest of the British territory? Has tourism in the Highlands helped overcome the historic antagonism between the Highlands and the Lowlands and between Scotland and England? Has tourism in the Highlands contributed to the creation of a British identity? Has the development of tourism helped bridge the gap between social classes?

To answer these questions, the author has examined a total of 278 travel accounts written by British tourists between 1749 and 1840, including works by noted literary figures such as Samuel Johnson, William Gilpin, Walter Scott and Dorothy Wordsworth. His study is also based on numerous unpublished manuscripts, tourist guidebooks, the regional press, private and municipal archives as well as innkeepers' wills and inventories.

The discovery of the Highlands

Mazé defines the Highlands of Scotland as the area located north and west of a symbolic geographical divide stretching from the towns of Helensburgh, Dunkeld, Ballater to Inverness, and including the Western Isles. After the defeat of the Jacobite troops at Culloden in 1746,¹ the region was pacified and was no longer considered as a threat to Britain's political stability. Before that date, the very few travellers who had ventured to the Highlands and had left an account of their visit were mainly soldiers or agents for the British government. The 1750s marked the dawn of tourism in the Highlands as travellers began to visit the region for leisure. Other factors contributed to making the Highlands a very popular tourist destination. For instance, the international political context, from the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, made journeys to the European Continent more difficult and dangerous, and this undoubtedly enticed British tourists to undertake a domestic tour rather than embark on the Grand Tour.

Even more so than the international context, the publication of several literary works contributed to the discovery and appreciation of the Highland landscapes and way of life. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* written by Edmund Burke and Reverend William Gilpin's *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty [...] on [...] the Highlands of Scotland*, published in 1757 and 1789 respectively, are two aesthetic works which had a deep and long-lasting impact on the appreciation of Highland landscape and contributed to changing perceptions of Highland scenery which, until then, had seldom been appreciated by travellers. The celebrated, albeit controversial, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) by James Macpherson also attracted many tourists to the Highlands as can be noted with the numerous references made to the Ossianic legends in the travel accounts published during the second half of the 18th century. Among the travel accounts, the works by Johnson and Pennant particularly contributed to the Highlands' popularity. But of all the publications devoted to the region, Scott's poems and novels have been by far the most

¹ Jacobite is the term used to refer to the supporters of the deposed James VII-II and his descendants in their claim to the British throne after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. James VII-II had many supporters in the Highlands and in the north-east of Scotland. The battle of Culloden, which was fought on Drumossie Moor, to the north east of Inverness, was the last great Jacobite rising to try to reinstate a Stuart monarch on the British throne. In the aftermath of this uprising, the British government decided to bring the Highlands to heel by economic and cultural sanctions which led to the end of the traditional clan culture in the Highlands.

influential in the development of tourism in the Highlands. For instance, until 1810, Loch Katrine, which had hardly ever been visited by tourists, became one of the most popular tourist destinations after the publication of the poem *The Lady of the Lake* by Scott.

Thanks to the development of means of transportation, trips to the Highlands gradually became safer and faster. From the first quarter of the 19th century, instead of undertaking a perilous voyage to the Western Isles and Hebrides on a sailing boat, tourists could travel safely by steam boat. This also contributed to reducing considerably travel time: for instance, the journey from Glasgow to the Isle of Skye which, until the beginning of the 19th century generally required ten to fifteen days, only took thirty-six hours by steamer. Internal communications within the Highlands were also made easier thanks to two major road building programmes undertaken by General Wade in the 1720s and then by Thomas Telford from the beginning of the 19th century. This, in turn, led to the development of regular stage coach services from Inverness to some of the remotest parts of the Highlands. Alongside these improvements in communications, the number of hotels increased and the quality of accommodation and services which had long been criticised by travellers greatly improved.

The first tourists and their itineraries

A great number of British tourists began to flock to the Highlands from the 1770s and they came from different social backgrounds. Unlike the Grand Tour, the journey to the Highlands was not the preserve of the upper class, as many travellers belonged to the middle class. Mazé claims that this experience brought these two social classes closer together but it created a divide within the middle class: fewer tourists belonged to the lower middle class as they hardly had the time and the money to undertake such a journey. Over the period stretching from 1750 to 1850, the great majority of tourists were men. Mazé has been able to determine that travellers were on average thirty-seven years and seven months (p. 108), which means that they were much older than the average Grand Tourist, who was in his early twenties when he embarked on his continental journey to complete his education. The Highlands progressively became a popular destination with women and families.

Tourists decided to visit the Highlands for many different reasons. Several naturalists and geologists travelled to the north of Scotland to make scientific observations. Others took advantage of the popularity of the Highlands and of travel literature, to visit the region in order to write and publish their travel accounts. Some came for their health, and a great number of tourists who had read Gilpin and Burke decided to venture to the north to have first-hand experience of the picturesque and sublime beauty of the landscape. From the beginning of the 19th century, with the increasing number of sporting estates and deer forests, many tourists also went to the Highlands to fish for salmon, stalk deer and shoot grouse.

From the end of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century, tourists generally followed three itineraries. The first one, known as the short tour, included a visit to Loch Lomond, Inveraray in the west and Perth, Dunkeld and Taymouth in the north. The second, called the Grand Tour of Scotland, consisted of a trip to Inverness and the Inner Hebrides – Skye, Mull, Iona and Staffa. The third tour included a journey to the Grampians, Inverness, Loch Ness, Fort William and, from there, tourists could either go to Staffa, Iona and Mull or to Inveraray and Loch Lomond.

Along with the views of the rugged mountain landscape, a tour of the Highlands also included many different places of interest for tourists. Iona abbey and Dunkeld cathedral were the two most popular religious sites in the Highlands. During their tour, travellers generally visited Blair, Taymouth and Inveraray castles and gardens, seats of some of the oldest Scottish aristocratic families. With the growing interest in national history, they also went to some historic battlefields: Glencoe, Killiecrankie and Culloden being the most visited.

Conclusion

Adapted from Mathieu Mazé's Ph.D. thesis (University of Paris 1), this academic book is thoroughly researched (its footnotes and bibliography stretch over 70 pages) and will interest both a general audience and specialists in Scottish studies. Mazé's investigation clearly highlights the reasons why the Highlands, which until the 1750s had had little or no interest for British travellers, became within a century one of the most popular tourist destinations in Britain. He also clearly demonstrates that at a time when the Highlands were going through a major social and economic crisis, tourism stimulated the economic activity and contributed to the integration of one of the poorest regions to the British economy. Mazé argues convincingly that the development of tourism led to the reappraisal of the Highlands and its inhabitants: the Highlanders, who had long been considered cruel and bloodthirsty robbers, were, from the end of the 18th century, seen as courageous and trustworthy people willing to die in the defence of Great Britain. This both contributed to the integration of the Highlands into Great Britain and to the reconciliation between the Highlanders and the Lowlanders, who forged a new Scottish identity in which the Highlands symbolise nature and tradition and embody the specificity of Scotland within Great Britain.

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