

GRAND TOURS OF THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES IN CLAN MACNAUGHTON LANDS

By James Macnaughton

After defeating the Jacobites at the battle of Culloden in April 1746, the Duke of Cumberland, Commander of the Government army, decided to ensure that the long series of Jacobite uprisings – with previous flare-ups in 1689, 1708, 1715 and 1719 – were brought to an end once and for all. So, he sent out columns of troops throughout the Highlands to burn every farmstead, croft and house, to murder their inhabitants and to round up all their cattle (20,000 head) and send them South, thus wiping out the entire economy of the Highlands. At one stage, he considered sending the whole population of the Highlands over to the colonies. For all these genocidal horrors, he became known as “Butcher” Cumberland.

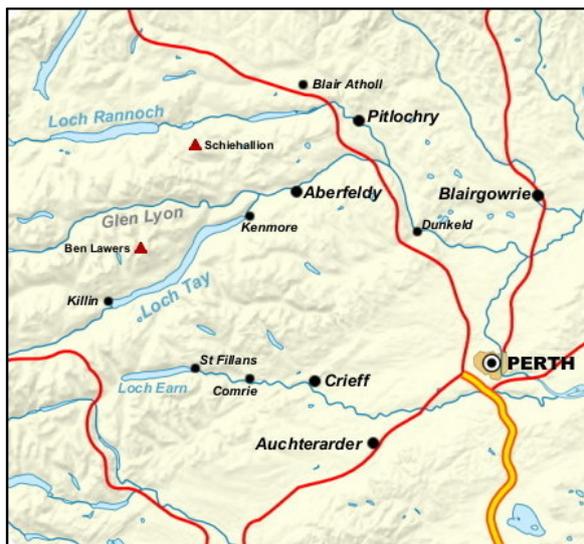


Figure 1: Dunkeld – Gateway to the Highlands.

Peace was eventually declared in 1748, but understandably it took many years for the Highlands to settle down again. Gradually travellers from the South began to venture into the Highlands, attracted by their beautiful and dramatic scenery. One of the first to do this “Grand Tour” was the English naturalist and writer Thomas Pennant (1726-98), who travelled extensively throughout Northern Scotland in 1769, and published his findings in “A Tour in Scotland” (1771). Approaching Dunkeld on the road north from Perth, he writes:

“The pass into the Highlands is awfully magnificent; high, craggy and often naked mountains present themselves to view, approach very near each other, and in many parts, are fringed with wood, overhanging and darkening the Tay, that rolls with great rapidity beneath. After some advance in this hollow, a most beautiful know, covered with pines, appears full in view; and soon after the town of Dunkeld, seated under and environed by crags, partly naked, partly wooded, with summits of a vast height.

Visited the Duke of Athol’s gardens, which are extremely pleasing, washed by the river, and commanding from different parts of the walks, the most beautiful and picturesque views of wild and gloomy nature that can be conceived. In the garden are the ruins of the cathedral, once a magnificent edifice, as appears by the beautiful round pillars still standing: but the choir is at present used as a church.”

Pennant was obviously very impressed by his first sighting of Highland scenery, and describes it with a keen eye for detail. Dunkeld cathedral is, of course, of considerable interest to our Clan, because away back in 1436, Donald Macnaughton, a son of the VI Chief Alexander, became Dean of Dunkeld cathedral, but, when on his way to Rome to be ordained as Bishop by the Pope, sadly died.

Figure 2: Taymouth Castle.

Pennant rode on to Taymouth and Kenmore and again his descriptions of the scenery are very moving. For example, when picturing the beech-tree lined walk on the North bank of the Tay across from the Castle he writes:



“The Berceau Walk is very magnificent, composed of great trees, forming a fine gothic arch; and probably that species of architecture owed its origin to such vaulted shades. The walk on the bank of the Tay is 50 ft. wide and two and twenty hundred yards long; but is to be continued as far as the junction of the Tay and the Lyon, which is about as far more. (In fact, considerably further!). The first (the Tay) runs on the sides of the Walk with great rapidity, is clear, but not colourless, for its pellucidness is like that of brown crystal; as is the case with most of the rivers of Scotland, which receive their tinge from the bogs.”



Figure 3: Village of Kenmore.

Another traveller who was bowled over by the beauty of the landscapes of Taymouth and Loch Tayside was our national bard, Robert Burns (1759-96), who toured the Highlands with a friend William Nicol in 1787, and wrote over the mantelpiece of the parlour in the Kenmore Hotel:

“Admiring Nature in her wildest grace,
 These northern scenes with weary feet I trace;
 O’er many a winding hill and painful steep,
 Th’ abodes of covey’d grouse and timid sheep.
 My savage journey, curious, I pursue,
 Till fam’d Breadalbane opens to my view.
 The meeting cliffs each deep sunk glen divides,
 The woods, wild scatter’d, clothe their ample sides;
 Th’ outstretching lake, imbosom’d ‘mong the hills,
 The eye with wonder and amazement fills;
 The Tay meand’ring sweet in infant pride,
 The palace rising on his verdant side.
 The lawns wood fring’d in Nature’s native taste,
 The hillocks dropt in Nature’s careless haste,

The arches striding o'er the new-born stream,
The village glittering in the noontide beam – “

And on the same wall he mentions his visit to the Hermitage above Acharn:

“Poetic ardours in my bosom swell,
Lone wandering by the hermit's mossy cell;
The sweeping theatre of hanging woods,
The incessant roar of headlong tumbling floods.”

William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1771-1855) also visited Kenmore and Acharn and Dorothy in her “Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland” (1803), described their visit to the Hermitage:

“After having climbed perhaps a quarter of a mile we were conducted into a locked-up plantation, and guessed that we were near the cascade, but could not see it. Our guide opened a door, and we entered a dungeon-like passage, and after walking some yards in total darkness, found ourselves in a quaint apartment stuck over with moss, hung about with stuffed foxes and other wild animals and ornamented with a library of wooden books covered with old leather backs, the mock furniture of a hermit's cell. At the end of the room, through a large bow window, we saw the waterfall, and at the same time, looking down to the left, the village of Kenmore and a part of the lake – a very beautiful prospect.”

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), more than any other writer of his time, created a huge amount of interest in Scotland and the Scots through his Waverley novels, several of which take place in and around Perthshire, such as “The Lady of the Lake”, based on Loch Catrine in the Trossachs; “Waverley”, “Rob Roy”, and “The Fair Maid of Perth”. He was also responsible for arranging the first visit by a reigning Monarch to Scotland since Charles II, when King George IV came North in 1822 accompanied by a large retinue, and was greatly impressed by all things Scottish. General David Stewart of Garth assisted Sir Walter, and after that visitors to Scotland came pouring North in ever increasing numbers.

In 1842, it was the turn of the young Queen Victoria and her Consort Prince Albert to spend their honeymoon in the Highlands, and the Queen loved the romantic scenery and the warmth of the Highland Welcome bestowed on her by the Marquis of Breadalbane at Taymouth Castle. She wrote in her “Journal of our Life in the Highlands”:

“The cheering of the great crowd, the picturesqueness of the dresses, the beauty of the surrounding country, with its rich background of wooded hills, altogether formed one of the finest scenes imaginable. It seemed as if a great Chieftain in old feudal times was receiving his sovereign. It was princely and romantic.”

Mrs. Maule, wife of the Liberal MP for Perthshire was one of the guests, and she wrote in her diary:

7 September. “Awoke at 7 with “Hey Johnnie Cope” from the pipers at the camp. A misty morning, very warm- all anxious and in expectation of our Sovereign lady's arrival. The village of Aberfeldy was very gay, with 2 arches of heather erected, also one at the entrance of Lord Breadalbane's property with the motto “Welcome to Breadalbane”

At 10 people in the park beginning to collect and the mist rising gracefully from the hills. The flags flying, birds singing and the hum of voices all around. From one o'clock we began to see people flocking into the Park, all the ladies with tartan in scarves or ribbons. Fifty of Sir Neil Menzies' tenants clad in their tartan joined the rest in front of the house. Between three and four we began to expect the Queen and Prince and everything was put in readiness for Her reception. Outriders and part of the escort preceded Her carriage and six other carriages followed. H.M. on reaching the door was welcomed by a simultaneous burst of cheering that echoed back again and again and anything so enthusiastic I never saw or heard. Lord Breadalbane at first stood in front of his splendid Highland Guard of 200 men, and then, having made a bow, he came round and assisted the Queen to alight and came upstairs to the drawing room where we were all waiting to receive her."

Describing the illuminations at night the Queen wrote:

"A small fort, which is up in the woods, was illuminated, and bonfires were burning on the tops of the hills. I never saw anything so fairylike. There were some pretty fireworks, and the whole ended by the Highlanders dancing reels, which they do to perfection, to the sound of the pipes, by torchlight, in front of the house."

In 1866, after the tragic death of her husband in 1861, the Queen, with the Duchess of Atholl, re-visited Taymouth incognito., and wrote:

"We passed to the right the principal lodge of Taymouth, which I so well remember going in by, but as we could not have driven through the grounds without asking permission and becoming known, we decided on not attempting it, and contented ourselves with getting out at a gate, close to a small fort, into which we were admitted by a woman from the gardener's house, close to which we had stopped, and who had no idea who we were. We got out and looked down from this height upon the house below, the mist having cleared away to show us everything and here, unknown, and quite in private, I gazed, not without deep inward emotion, on the scene of our reception, 24 years ago, by dear Lord Breadalbane in a princely style, not to be equalled for grandeur and poetic effect. Albert and I were only 23, young and happy. How many are gone who were with us then. I was very thankful to have seen it again."

Figure 4: Loch Tay in the wintertime.

They went on down into Kenmore and the Queen wrote:

"Immediately after this we came upon the bridge and Loch Tay, with its wooded banks, clear and yet misty, burst into view.



This again reminded me of the past –of the row up the loch, which is sixteen miles long, in 1842, in several boats, with pibrochs playing, and the boatmen singing Gaelic songs."

During the original Royal Visit in 1842, Lord Breadalbane spared no expense in entertaining all the guests – 730 of them- with amazingly generous amounts of food and drink. Between them they ate and drank: 10 Oxen, 163 Sheep, 9 Lambs, 3 Calves; 22 Red Deer, 15 Fallow Deer, 26 Roe Dee, 1 Pig; Fish supplied daily; 194 brace of Grouse, 9 brace of Black Game, 7 brace of Ptarmigan, 2 pairs of Capercailzie, 273 Chickens, 1,200 Eggs; 1524 Loaves of Bread; 9 Bolls of oatmeal; 160 Gallons of Whisky, 900 gallons of Ale and beer. This, as will be seen later on in this article, was a huge contrast to the diet of the poorer Highland population, the common folk.



Sir Walter Scott during one of his many visits to Perthshire wrote about Glenlyon: “The loneliest and loveliest Glen in Scotland.”

Figure 5: Glenlyon.

Dorothy and William Wordsworth had gone on from Kenmore to Aberfeldy on their 1803 Tour and they stopped there to visit the falls of Moness. She was very impressed and wrote: “They tumble from a great height, and are indeed very beautiful falls, and we could have sat with pleasure the whole morning beside the cool basin in which the waters rest, surrounded by high rocks and overhanging trees.”

Figure 6: Moness top falls.



Robert Burns also visited Moness, and, sitting in a rocky embrasure like the Wordsworths, was inspired to write “The Birks of Aberfeldie”:

“Bonnie Lassie will ye go,
Will ye go, will ye go?
Bonnie lassie will ye go
To the Birks of Aberfeldie.

Now simmer blinks on flowr’y braes,
And oe’r the crystal streamlets plays,
Come let us spend the lightsome days
In the Birks of Aberfeldie.

The braes ascend like lofty wa’s,
The foaming stream, deep-roaring fa’s,
O’er hung with fragrant spreading shaws,
The Birks of Aberfeldie.

The hoary cliffs are crown'd wi' flowers,
White o'er the linns the Burnie pours,
And rising, weets wi' misty showers,
The Birks of Aberfeldie."

Dorothy and William Wordsworth had also visited another part of our Clan territory in 1803, namely Inveraray and Loch Awe. She was sometimes less than complimentary about the scenery, for example on the way to Dalmally:

"As we went along, we had frequent reason to regret the want of English hedgerows and English culture; for the ground was often swampy moorish near the lake where comfortable dwellings among green fields might have been. We walked up the hills again, and, looking down into the vale, had a fine view of the lake and islands, resembling the views down Windermere, though much less rich." A true Lakelander!

Describing Loch Awe, she commented:



"There were other small islands, on one of which was a ruined house, fortification or small castle; we could not learn anything of its history, only a girl told us that formerly gentlemen lived in such place."

So much for our Clan Castle on Fraoch Eilean!

Figure 7: A view of Fraoch Eilean Castle from water.

So, for many centuries visitors to Scotland have been amazed by the beautiful Highland scenery, but what were their impressions of the Highlanders themselves as they went on their Tours?

As Robert Burns wrote so perspicaciously:

"O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as others see us!"

Our first traveller after the '45 was Thomas Pennant, and he had some very interesting and at times somewhat patronising remarks to make about the people he met and their dwellings. For example, writing about the inhabitants on the shores of Loch Tay, he describes the "habitations of the Highlanders": "they are very small, mean, and without windows or chimneys, and are the disgrace of North Britain, as its lakes and rivers are its glory."

Further on in his journal he notes:

"The houses of the common people are shocking to humanity, formed with loose stones, and covered with clods, which they call devots, or with heath, broom or branches. They look, at a distance, like so many black mole hills. The inhabitants live very poorly, on oatmeal, barley

cakes and potatoes; their drink whisky, sweetened with honey. The men are thin, but strong; idle and lazy, except employed in the chase, or anything that looks like amusement; are content with their hard fare, and will not exert themselves further than to get what they deem necessities. The women are more industrious, spin their own husbands' clothes, and get money by knitting stockings, the great trade of the country. The common women are in general most remarkably plain, and soon acquire an old look, and by being much exposed to the weather without hats, such a grin, and contraction of the muscles, as heightens greatly their natural hardness of features."

Reflecting this situation, Dorothy and William Wordsworth also had some scathing comments to make about the housing and habits of the Highland people with whom they found shelter for the night. They visited a cottage near Dalmally where the woman said she would make them some porridge and lit the fire to do so. Dorothy writes:

"As to the fire there was little sign of it, save the smoke, for a long time, she, having no fuel but green wood, and no bellows but her breath. My eyes smarted exceedingly, but the woman seemed so kind and cheerful that I was willing to endure it for the sake of warming my feet in the ashes and talking to her. The fire was in the middle of the room, a crook being suspended from a cross-beam, and a hole left at the top, for the smoke to find its way out by; it was a very Highland hut, unadulterated by Lowland fashion."



Figure 8: Highland black house.

Life in the Highlands was still very hard for many of its people, and it was a grim subsistence economy, in which to survive through the winter was a real challenge for many. In 1787, Robert Burns had visited Inveraray and he commented somewhat bluntly about the inhabitants:

"There's naething here but Highland pride,
And Highland scab and hunger;
If Providence has sent me here,
'Twas surely in an anger."

Samuel Johnson, who had toured Scotland with James Boswell in 1773, in his "Dictionary of the English Language", very patronisingly defined Oats:

"A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people."

In 1769 Thomas Pennant writes about the Shielings, the summer quarters up among the mountains where the locals went to look after their cattle, and emphasises the very basic shelter and diet involved:

"Ascend a steep hill and find ourselves on an Aerie or tract of mountain which the families of one or two hamlets retire to with their flocks for pasture in summer. Here we refreshed ourselves with some goat's whey at a Shieling or Bothy, a cottage made of turf, the dairy

house, where the Highland shepherds or graziers live with their herds and flocks, and during the fine season make butter and cheese. Their whole furniture consisted of a few hornspoons, their milking utensils, a couch formed of sods to lie on, and a rug to cover them. Their food oatcakes, butter or cheese, and often the coagulated blood of their cattle spread on their bannocks. Their drink milk, whey and sometimes, by way of indulgence, whisky.”

When Pennant visited Kenmore, he had more positive things to comment on:

“Went to divine service at Kenmore church, which, with the village, was re-built, in the neatest manner, by the present Lord Breadalbane; they stand beautifully on a small headland, projecting into the lake. His Lordship permits the inhabitants to live rent free on condition they exercise some trade, and keep their houses clean; so that by these terms he not only saves the expense of sending, on every trifling occasion, to Perth or Crieff, but has got some good workmen, in common trades, as any in His Majesty’s dominions.”

However, he had more mixed opinions regarding the annual communion service held outside once a year on the Polterrow meadow by the Holy Well to the East of Inchadney church, where various members of our Clan were ministers over the years. For example, in 1523 it was Sir Duncan Macnachtane.

“The devotion of the common people of Highland Scotland, on the usual days of worship, is as much to be admired, as their conduct at the sacrament in certain places is to be censured. It is celebrated but once a year, when there are sometimes three thousand communicants, and as many idle spectators. Of the first, as many as possible are crowded on each side of a long table and the elements are sometimes rudely shoved from one to another; and, in certain places, before the day is at an end, fighting and other indecencies ensue. It has often been made a season for debauchery, and, to this day, Jack cannot always be persuaded to eat his meat like a Christian.”

On that same meadow, the locals all gathered on 1 May to celebrate the ancient heathen ceremony of Beltane, and Pennant writes:

“On the 1st of May, the herdsmen of every village held their Bel-tein, a rural sacrifice. They cut a square trench on the ground, leaving the turf in the middle; on that they make a fire of wood, on which they dress a large caudle of eggs, butter, oatmeal and milk; and bring, besides the ingredients of the caudle, plenty of beer and whisky; for each of the company must contribute something. The rites begin with spilling some of the caudle on the ground, by way of libation; on that everyone takes a cake of oatmeal, upon which are raised nine square knobs, each dedicated to some particular being, the supposed preserve of their flocks and herds, or to some particular animal, the real destroyer of them; each person then turns his face to the fire, breaks off a knob, and, flinging it over his shoulders says, This I give to thee, preserve thou my horses, this to thee, preserve thou my sheep, and so on.”

Pennant also has some interesting descriptions of Funeral customs and Wakes:

“On the death of a Highlander, the corpse being stretched on a funeral board, and covered with a coarse linen wrapper, the friends lay on the breast of the deceased a wooden platter, containing a small quantity of salt and earth, separate and unmixed, the earth an emblem of the corruptible body; the salt, an emblem of the immortal spirit.”

“The Late-wake is a ceremony used at Funerals. The evening after the death of any person, the relations and friends of the deceased meet at the house, attended by bagpipes or fiddle; the nearest of kin, be it the wife, son or daughter, opens a melancholy ball, dancing and greeting, i.e. crying violently at the same time, and this continues until daylight, but with such gambols and frolics among the younger part of the company, that the loss which occasioned them is often more than supplied by the consequences of that night. If the corpse remains unburied for two nights, the same rites are renewed. Thus, Scythian-like, they rejoice at the deliverance of their friends out of this life of misery.”

This mention of Scythia is very interesting, because the original Celts came from Scythia on the shores of the Black Sea many centuries previously, before some of them settled in Scotland as the Picts.

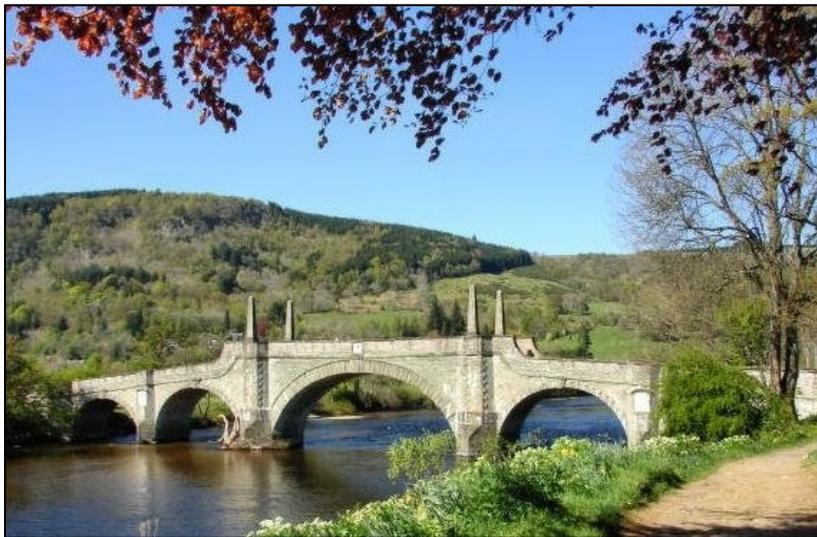


Figure 9: Wades Bridge – Aberfeldy.

Until General Wade built his network of roads throughout the Highlands in the 1730s, to make it easier to keep the unruly Highlanders under control, getting from one part of the country to another was a very slow and uncomfortable journey even on horseback:

“Had you seen these roads before they were made, you would lift up your hands and bless General Wade.” Anon.

This situation prompted Pennant to comment on the roads built by Lord Breadalbane:

“I must not omit that on the North side of this lake (Loch Tay) is a most excellent road, which runs to whole length of it, leading to Tyndrum and Inveraray in Argyshire, and this is the route which travellers must take who make what I call the Petit Tour (Not the Grand Tour, which was all over Europe!) of Scotland. This whole road was made at the expense of the present Lord Breadalbane; who, to facilitate the travelling, also erected 32 stone bridges over the torrents that run from the mountains into the lake. They will find the whole country excel in roads, partly military, partly done by statute labour, and much by the munificence of the great men.”

Let Sir Walter Scott, whose novels and poems stimulated massive interest in his native Scotland, and resulted in ever increasing numbers of visitors from South of the Border, and indeed, from all over the world, have the last word:

“O Caledonia! Stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of my sires!” (From the Lay of the Last Minstrel).