

## WORKING PAPER

# SUSTAINABILITY, ECO TOURISM AND SCOTLAND: THE ROOTS: CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS, CONFLICTS AND CONSERVATION

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### 1. A new concern?

Everyone now is aware of eco tourism and related issues; these shape where, how and with what legacy we travel for pleasure. Holidaymakers and travellers somewhat guiltily recognise that there are effects of travel and of tourism which are not neutral and may be harmful in terms of material damage to the environment of the country or region visited, or indeed in global terms. Does tourism enrich or rob? The challenge to think through the effects- for an ethic of use- has become a significant issue, as part of the key debate over the environment-tourism relationship: this seeks to ascertain if tourism is harmful, or the relationship beneficial. If harmful, can the balance be redressed through sustainable tourism, which looks to put back into the host destination as much as it takes?

The concern here is to ask whether this concern and discussion is only a modern phenomenon- traceable perhaps only as far back as the 1970s. The focus is on Scotland, one of the earliest countries to experience tourism as a large scale activity. It was a destination for which a substantial part of the appeal lay in its natural resources of land and scenery, mountain and sea, air and water, at the seaside, on its moors for health and for sport, for nature and for natural history. It might be thought, therefore, a place where environmental tourism, even if not under that label, could and should have made an early appearance in some form or another, if only in ingredients or strands which now have come together. This is territory which has been recently opened up for debate, by amongst others, T. C. Smout.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T.C. Smout, Nature Contested. *Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600*, (Edinburgh 2000).

## 2. A definition

We are concerned with the interaction of tourism with cultural, economic and ecological resources, what can be labelled the environment. Two views –philosophies or ideologies of use - have been identified. The first is what has been called the **dominant** view, where the environment exists to be exploited by mankind, a view which was not necessarily built on the assumption that resources are plentiful, and change beneficial, but on the experience that livelihoods had to be wrung from the environment. Man might have been given dominion, as the biblical text put it, over creation, but that control was hard wrung and uphill. The classical view in fact was more concerned about the environment's effect on man, rather than vice versa: the renowned Greek medical writer Hippocrates (c460-377BC) in his *Epidemics: Air, Waters and Places* looked at the influence on human health of nature and natural factors, climate, wind and water.<sup>2</sup> And in a world where life was hard, and uncertain, famine a constant threat, as pre-modern Scotland was before it began to industrialise, the problem was how to wring the maximum advantage from limited resources. And the human interest came first. The wolf was wiped out without any concern – the last survivor in Highland Scotland by a certain MacQueen in 1743 - because it was a threat to a subsistence pastoral economy. There was, of course, a degree of respect for the land and nature born out of communal self interest; the need to allow a period of fallow, the restriction of hunting during the breeding season, and so on. But what mattered was what best suited man and his interests; nature was subordinate.

The alternative view, **Eco-centric** view posits a rather different approach- resources are not infinite, humanity does not have the right to take what it wants, nor to alter without restraint or consideration. The environment has 'rights' and commands respect. Tourism enters the equation in that it is a dynamic factor, bringing with it dangers of cultural and environmental corrosion; commercialisation is seen as bringing bad as well as good, a devil's bargain. This, in the form articulated here, is built round a new set of questions. It would have made little sense to Scots –or any other poor nation- in the world before tourism had emerged, or indeed during the rise of tourism as a major industry, when the only the income from tourism was what mattered.

Yet there had been an alternative to the dominant ideology that was and is rooted in an equally biblical emphasis of which Scots could have been aware, and indeed did become increasingly conscious. This was the notion of **stewardship**, that what people held was not just theirs to dispose of as they liked but was held in trust for future generations. This principle, whether applied to reserves of timber or stock or seed, might well come under pressure from the immediate need for cash or for food in times of need, but it was there. As and when society became able to take a longer-term view, so stewardship became a more significant issue.

Clearly there in the pre modern world there concern over the availability of particular resources- timber, masts, gold and strategic materials. To what extent was there an awareness in pre modern Scotland that resources were limited? Peat, once cut, was gone

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind. A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present Day*, (London, 1997), pp.57-60

but there was always more. With fish, the challenge was to catch even a fraction of what was thought to be a boundless resource. The Victorians added some debate, for example, over the extent of coal reserves. But not until twentieth century was there any sense that resources being worked out in a global sense. There was some sense, however, that land was a resource that – unlike the American West- that was fixed, and over which there would be competing demands, with the newly appeared tourist interest only one of several. Moreover tourism was itself divided; the interests of the stalker and of the walker conflicted. Hydro electric schemes and forestry plantings had their claims and costs: the historic and scenic Falls of Foyer, which had amongst others inspired Burns, were but one casualty. When the 1896 scheme was proposed, the crofting community was strongly in support of this development, and at the public meeting only two old ladies dissented.

### An Agenda

This article looks, therefore, at some of the forms of tourism in Scotland to see what concerns, if any, there were as to longer-term use of the environment and whether tourism in particular might abuse or degrade the environment. It will reflect on concerns in the past about the impact of tourism on the **physical, the natural (i.e. flora and fauna)** and the **cultural** environment.

- ◆ Early concerns, while tourism was still an elite experience, included **vandalism**. Tourists, even those who were supposedly respectable, were apt to be rather unrestrained in their behaviour when on someone else's property. It might be simply the picking of flowers as a remembrance: the guides at the Duke of Atholl's estate at Dunkeld were expressly instructed in 1814 not to leave tourists unsupervised in the pleasure gardens lest they do damage. Or the widespread practice of carving their names or inscribing doggerel verse on any accessible surface. At least Burns left some sharp lines to mark where he had travelled or stayed. More serious was the damage done to the attractions by, for example, lighting tar barrels so as to illuminate the interior of caves, which blackened them. Above all there were the souvenir hunters, a bad tradition that had long been part of European tourism, from which neither classical ruin nor Egyptian pyramid nor geological feature was safe.<sup>3</sup> Scotland was not immune from this kind of depredation. The English barrister, W. C. Dendy, complained in 1859 about a kind of visitor whom he dubbed the 'desecrating vagrant' whose 'highest pride was to carve his initials on one of the holy tombs on Iona, chip off a morsel of moulding from the prentice pillar in Roslyn, and filch one of Macalister's stalactites in the spar cave of Strathaird.'<sup>4</sup> The schoolmaster on Iona, who because he had English doubled as the island's guide to visitors, slept with a stone lion from an early tomb under his bed, which he had confiscated from a souvenir seeking tourist.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Sanderson visited Egypt in 1586 and was lowered into a pyramid where he spent an afternoon breaking off pieces of mummies to take home as souvenirs. (The Travellers Gazette, reviewed in the *Guardian* 30 June 2007).

<sup>4</sup> W. C. Dendy, *The Wild Hebrides*, (London 1859)

<sup>5</sup> E. Mairi MacArthur, *Columba's island, Iona from Past to Present*, (Edinburgh, 1995), p.66.

- ◆ The Victorians' passion for **amateur science**, for inquiring and collecting, whether orchids, birds' eggs, or butterflies could be an ecological disaster. Travis<sup>6</sup> has described what the craze for ferns meant in the South West of England, with professional hunters moving in to supply demand and stripping Devon bare of the rarer species and other botanical specimens. Yet there was no parallel in Scotland—heather sprigs could be spared, as could Cairngorms gemstones. It is recognised that amateur botanists did good work in recording what was to be found, and this was a positive contribution to science. This was, however, off set by returning home with specimens as trophies, regardless of how rare they were. There appears to have been no sense of despoilation. This is shown in an account given by a small party of Lancashire collectors to the December meeting of the Manchester Botanists Association in December 1876. Theirs had been a summer expedition in the Grampians to find rare Scottish alpine plants, and their success was not just in locating them but bringing home specimens of most of the rarities e.g. *Lychnis alpina*<sup>7</sup>. Nor were they alone: in Glen Clova they meet a Dr Thompson who was just leaving with a gig full of botanical papers and plants. Their work was applauded. There was no sense of what this taking away might do to the environment, any more than there was concern about what tourists might be bringing in unwittingly. After all, gardens and grounds were being deliberately planted with seeds and seedlings carried from abroad by travellers.
  
- ◆ Tourists took an easy approach to flowers, fish and fowl; and tended to do what they liked, unless restrained by keepers and land managers. In 1861 Thomas Cook<sup>8</sup>, in what has been called an early instance of the 'ecological blight that tourism so often brings in its wake' became embroiled in the alleged shooting by one of his tourists of an eagle on Iona. This was a slightly surprising furor, given that gamekeepers and their masters on the big Highland estates were no friend to this bird or any raptor. It was bad publicity for him and his tourists, which could not be deflected by the spin that the eagle was intended for a museum on natural history on the island. Nor was it offset by Cook's collection of funds from his visitors for fishing boats to help the locals, one of which was called '*The Thomas Cook*'.
  
- ◆ The **seaside** in Scotland was a magnet for increasing numbers of visitors, of all social classes. But while there was the collection of shells and fossils, the raiding of rock pools for crabs and sea life, the cheerful use of the sands, there was little worry about the impact on the beaches. There was, however, concern over the impact of mass tourism at the seaside, in terms of behaviour of the day-tripper and the excursionist. There were tensions over mixed bathing, the use or non-use of the Sunday, over dress and language. There was occasional damage to property, and more regularly to public order. But there seems to have been no concern in Victorian times over the use of the sea or the condition of the beaches, though access to the seaside itself could provoke objection by local landowners. Bigger numbers did lead to concerns over amenities at

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<sup>6</sup> John Travis, *The Rise of the Devon Seaside Resorts*, (Exeter, 1993), pp. 170-171

<sup>7</sup> T. Rogers, *A fortnight on the Grampians*, paper read to the Manchester Botanists' Association, December meeting 1876, (Oldham 1877)

<sup>8</sup> Piers Brendon, *Thomas Cook. 150 Years of Popular Tourism*, (London, 1991), p.76

the seaside resorts: there were real questions of water supply, sewage and sanitation for the swollen summer populations. The overloading of systems could lead to outbreaks of epidemic disease e.g. the typhoid epidemic at Bournemouth in 1936, which was due to contaminated ice cream and milk.<sup>9</sup> But resort enteritis, or beach tummy, was a small price to pay for the pleasure of a summer break from the harshness of the urban environment.

- ◆ **Transport** issues did make an appearance. There was the distaste of some for the impact of the railways on the landscape, and also in terms of whom they carried, the so-called common order. ‘What beasts the English are, the middle orders when they go touring. The railroads are the great curse of this country’, moaned one snob in 1864<sup>10</sup>. Indeed some landowners could and did obstruct whether or where lines were built. John Stirling of Kippendavie near Dunblane insisted on a tunnel to hide the line from sight as it passed through his pleasure grounds.<sup>11</sup> But while there were concerns about the soot and the noise, there was nothing noted in terms of their effect on the environment, other than an occasional complaint about effect on fishing. They were seen as such an asset to work and to leisure that their presence was only welcomed, their use an unquestioned aid to the quality of life. To be able to travel was a privilege that all Victorians valued. There was to be much more concern about the motor car, cycle and bus, when they made their appearance in the years before World War One, over the dust, mud, noise, smell and dangers brought. Livestock, horse drawn traffic and bystanders were all at risk from the reckless and untrained driver (there was no driving test until 1936), and there was much resentment. Sunday travel was a particularly vexed issue in Scotland. ‘You cannot hear the kirk bells for the hooting of horns’ insisted one writer to *Motor World* in 1910. The bona fide legislation, which meant that in order to get a drink at a hotel on a Sunday you had to have travelled, brought another hazard to the day of rest; the over refreshed motorist.

**The cultural dimension** is a significant one. While scenery, sport, nature and of course the cult of Ossian were major draws for early visitors to the Highlands, part of what drew Johnson north to the Highlands was the search for a ‘primitive society’. This was a society untouched and therefore unspoilt by industrialisation, but emerging from feudalism, in which old and untainted values such as hospitality to the visitor still stood, part of manners. A restatement of this urge for the unspoilt remote was to remerge in the form of what Burchard has called ‘rural nostalgia’ in the 1920s, a desire to preserve the countryside as a reservoir of values in an increasingly urban world.<sup>12</sup> Preservation was not in the mind of early visitors to the Highlands, who observed and described, but a few did begin to question what the influx of tourists was doing. Nineteenth century writers were concerned by the impact on Highland **values**, the growth of begging and a dependency culture in places such as Iona and St Kilda. ‘Now’ said one Glaswegian visitor of the St Kildans in 1888, they appear ‘to be not a great deal above the level of

<sup>9</sup> J.A. Hassan *The Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales since 1800*, (Aldershot 2003), pp 130-132.

<sup>10</sup> Glasgow City Archives TD 1/913 M. Babbington to Mrs Archibald Smith, : October 15, 1864

<sup>11</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Scottish Central Railway*, (Oakwood, 1998), p.17

<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost. Rural Idyll and Social Change Since 1800*, (London 2002).

professional beggars.’<sup>13</sup> Later commentators from a socialist perspective, such as Edwin Muir, criticised what they saw as the debasement, which tourism had induced, of Highland society into a culture of servility, and in particular the deference to sporting interests, ‘performing whatever menial services, these people may require’.<sup>14</sup> There was the political question of who owned the land, and overlapping with that within the question of how the country was to be used, and in whose interest?

- ◆ **Language.** In terms of the distinctive identity of Highland Scotland, there was a marked decline in Gaelic. While many factors were at work, this was hastened by the value of English when dealing with the tourists. In 1807 a Quaker lady from Hull, Mrs Robinson, was told by the girl ferrying her on Loch Lomond that while her mother spoke good Gaelic, it was little in use amongst them now, ‘especially young people’.<sup>15</sup> Tourists did not need Gaelic, and guidebooks to the Highlands, such as *Andersons or Blacks*, unlike those for France, gave no guidance sentences or phrases for the visitor; the best they would do would be to list some Gaelic topographical words. There was one peculiarity: visitors might not learn the language of the Highlands, but they did ‘go native’ in terms of adopting its dress – it became a standing joke that anyone seen in full Highland gear in the North could be assumed to be an English tourist. It was part of the cult, or kilt, of Balmoralism.
  
- ◆ There was a general awareness that the influx of tourists, not just the wealthy not just of rich sporting tenants) was part of what was changing society, in re orientating it from feudalism to commercialism. There was an impact on **manners**, in practice towards strangers of which hospitality is an example. Accommodation, food and drink, had used to be given free, but that was to change as the numbers grew and social composition widened. In 1788 Mrs Diggle, thanks to letters of introduction, could stay free at Murthly Castle ‘in the stile of ancient hospitality before inns were invented’. But a century later, only the select few were houseguests, Charged and charged high was the complaint often to be heard. After Culloden chieftains had become landlords; wealth was measured in income not in muscle, and many of the new owners were incomers who saw their estates, or so critics alleged, only in terms of their amusement, not their responsibilities.
  
- ◆ Probably the greatest tension that tourism induced was over **land use** away from the coast, especially in terms of questions of access to inland and Highland areas. Issues of access to the countryside, particularly in the Highlands, were always problematic. There were questions there of privacy and of private rights: with the support of the law, landowners could restrict or deny access. There were points of increasing friction over rights of way, over alleged interference with grouse moors, deer forests and game preservation. A *Scottish Rights of Way Society* was established to contest the ground, and in 1847 it fought the Duke of Atholl in a very high profile case.

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<sup>13</sup> Nick S. Robins and Donald E Meek, *The Kingdom of MacBrayne*, (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey*, (Edinburgh 1935), p.203.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur R.B. Robinson, *Seeking the Scots*,(York, 2006), p.62

- ◆ Botanists, naturalists, ramblers and mountaineers all laid claim to access to the Scottish hills and countryside, which was largely resisted by landowners pre 1914, and then very reluctantly accommodated.<sup>16</sup> The Scottish Rights of Way Society (founded in 1884) worked hard to get footpaths and old drove roads opened up, particularly in the Cairngorms, with a mixture of direct action and legal pressure. Some lairds were prepared to co-operate, others were not. And locals were not necessarily on the side of the walkers and tourists. The repeated breaking down in August 1891 of a fence across a disputed right of way at 1891 prompted a call in verse –(‘shall we basely crouch to tourists.. shall Southron strangers rule the day?’) from the laird at Invercauld to his ‘kilted ghillies’.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ Deer forests were a particular source of contention, with observers worried about the effect on local populations and their livelihoods of the conversion by moneyed proprietors of estates into sporting preserves. It was a debate in which economics and ethics, more than the environment, featured large. In 1926 the writer J. M. MacDiarmid issued a powerful pamphlet that criticised deer forests as a waste of land, and misused to provide sport for a few rich people. He held out a vision of the land as a vast area which might be turned from deer forests and provided a livelihood for tens of thousands of landholders, foresters, hotelkeepers, and others. Others argued that the economic gain of this kind of sporting tourism substantially outweighed the losses- a *golden stream of tourism* was a term much used, part of progress for the receiving society, essential for estates, hotels and the railway companies<sup>18</sup>. It brought a lot of money into the Highlands, or so the Duchess of Atholl argued, because it brought holidaymakers and sportsmen. The case for the defence of sporting rights was not helped by actions of people like the American millionaire W.L. Winans<sup>19</sup> who attempted to clear his ground of crofters, and even went to law against a crofter whose pet lamb had stayed onto Winan’s ground. He had also sent a servant down to chase a naturalist away who was studying flies! The ironic thing is that for all his litigiousness, and alleged enthusiasm for deer, he left his Highlands properties unvisited year after year.
- ◆ **Hunting** is often seen as a culture of killing, the antithesis of an environmental or conservationist force. Yet the management of stock, when a longer-term perspective was induced by commercialisation, did require restraint and control. Preservation of game was of course something of a misnomer in that preservation meant extermination of predators in favour of game as against predators: crows, foxes, hawks and polecats.<sup>20</sup> Certainly neither osprey nor red kite nor any other big hawk, now tourist attractions as at Boat of Garden, were seen as assets. The objective of a

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<sup>16</sup> Robert A Lambert, *Contested Mountains. Nature, Development and Environment in the Cairngorms Region of Scotland, 1880-1980*, ( Cambridge, 2001), chapter three.

<sup>17</sup> Lambert, p. 49

<sup>18</sup> J. M. MacDiarmid, *The Deer Forests, and How they are bleeding Scotland White* (Glasgow, for the Home Rule Association, November 1926)

<sup>19</sup> See W. Orr, *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters. The Western Highlands in Victorian and Edwardian Times*, (Edinburgh, 1982), p41-42.

<sup>20</sup> See Smout, *Nature Contested*, pp.134-136.

Highland moor was not diversity but a monoculture of grouse. What added a particular challenge to the management of the grouse was that, unlike partridge or pheasant, it could not be bred, and there was a total reliance on wild stock, in which predation and weather, rather than shooting, were key variables. Amongst some landowners, or those with long term leases, there did develop the notion of stewardship, that cropping rather than as heavy bags as possible was the objective. King George Vth summed this up in his statement that ‘the wildlife of today is not ours to dispose of as we see fit. We must account for it to those who come after.’ But this perspective appears to have been narrowly focused on game.

- ◆ **Health.** Much was made of Scotland, not that it was alone in this, as a healthy destination, an image which the railway companies did much to promote. The Caledonian Railway, for example, in 1909 published a poster ‘Come to Scotland for your Holidays by the West Coast Route, with the heading ‘clear, bracing air,’ and featuring a welcoming Highland shepherd with attractive landscape behind him. Its rival, the North British invited visitors to holiday amongst the unspoilt mountains, lochs, and glens of the West. The climate and the activities complemented each other- golf, walking, and swimming. Its sea resorts competed well with those on the Continent or in England in terms of the sands and ‘ozone’, that essence of seaside air for which all sorts of healing powers were claimed. For their part, inland resorts stressed how well their clean hill air catered for those in need of a tonic to their health or recovery from illness. In 1919 one medical writer<sup>21</sup> pronounced of Braemar that no finer locality could be found for those convalescing from pneumonia or typhoid. And of course Scotland had its hydro hotels, alcohol-free (mostly), centres of health and activity for the respectable. Bonnie Scotland did not cater for the dissolute; it was a clean destination in every sense of the word.

## Conclusion.

- ◆ Tourism fed into **preservation** of the historic environment, of battlefields such as Culloden, of cultural sites – Burns’ Cottage, Abbotsford -, of the ruins at Iona, the cathedrals and castles, the heritage of Scotland. Before the state became involved this was undertaken partly for local or civic or estate pride, or through interest by voluntary groups, and partly for profit. It could be the work of individuals: the ruins of Elgin Cathedral were lovingly tended in the early nineteenth century by a ‘worthy garrulous’ guide, John Shanks,<sup>22</sup> kept going in whisky and enthusiasm by visitors’ coins. It could be landowners, in the 1830s the Duke of Argyll took fenced off the ruins on Iona, or it could be associations: the Society of Antiquaries undertook major preservation work here in the 1850s. Interest groups for the preservation of culture and heritage were to proliferate in the later nineteenth century, for scenery, buildings and wildlife e.g. the Society for the Protection of Birds in 1889. That protection and preservation might require the purchase of ground and buildings, especially as land ownership and land use were in such flux, was recognised, and led to the foundation

<sup>21</sup> T. D. Luke, *Spas and Health resorts of the British Isles*, (London 1919) p. 168

<sup>22</sup> Lord Cockburn, *Circuit Journeys*, (Hawick, 1983) p.9: entry for 17 April 1838.

of the National Trust for Scotland in 1931. Its objective was not just to preserve ‘beautiful country, good architecture and ancient monuments, battlefields like Bannockburn and Culloden’ but to safeguard natural historical features, which included slums<sup>23</sup>. Its membership then was small and elite; the 1939 Council was knee deep in the great and the titled good, but it was to enjoy great expansion post World War Two, as did other bodies such as Historic Scotland.

#### Membership of the National Trust of Scotland <sup>24</sup>

Year	membership
1939	1,300
1960	14,000
1976	70,000
1993	235,000
2007	291,000

Amenity for tourists and visitors became a significant cause, working against development whether estate roads, rural quarrying or wind farms. And the effect on tourism was often cited as an important factor. After the Second World War, arguments about the possible impact on tourism carried much more weight than there had been before, when economic development had taken top priority. From the 1920s the Forestry Commission planted vast areas with monotonous fir forests; the national need for timber took precedence over the preservation of the traditional landscape. The need for power had led to an acceptance, albeit with regret, of hydro electric schemes (with huge pylons striding over the hills) in the interwar years: it was ‘the toll levied for progress’ was the contemporary view.<sup>25</sup> Neither of these developments would have been carried through, or at least not without major opposition and enquiry by the later twentieth century. It is significant that both now buttress their primary function and seek to offset their impact by visitor centres and recreational facilities.

There had long been concerns, as we have seen over the impact of tourism, as to its cultural, economic and other effects. Against the adverse effects which some saw, and the serious tensions over land use which went with growing numbers of tourists of all classes and differing interests within the tourist ranks, there was the reality that tourism brought welcome income. Tourism was not an add-on, but a key activity, indeed the leading sector in some areas. And in the context of declining manufacturing and mining industry, of the difficulties in agriculture and in the countryside, tourism was seen as a key agent for employment and income, whose benefits were widely spread. It brought people with money to spend to cities such as Edinburgh, to seaside and summer resorts, and to areas where scenery, history and sport combined to provide pleasure. It seemed to be an

<sup>23</sup> Robert Hurd, *Scotland Under Trust*, (Edinburgh 1939) preface, p.xv.

<sup>24</sup> Robin Prentice, *The National Trust for Scotland Guide*, (London, 1975) p.27

<sup>25</sup> C. Nairn, (1936) cited in *Rosemary Gibson, The Scottish Countryside. Its Changing Face 1700-2000*, (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 168.

industry that was all benefit to those were the tourists, those that organised tourism, and those that satisfied their demand. The cost to the physical and cultural environment was not yet a campaigning issue, although aspects, which were to be part of the portfolio were already on the agenda. There were, and had been, causes: there was not yet a cause. But, and this is ironic, the very success of tourism, which would have delighted previous generations, bred a concern amongst a generation of concerned consumers who could afford to take critical stock of its impact.