

# The 'Great Highland Myth' and post-war Scottish Countryside Policy

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*Who possesses this landscape? –  
The man who bought it or  
I who am possessed by it?<sup>1</sup>*

The calendar for February offers a familiar, even stereotypical, picture: a lone male bagpiper, dressed in rich tartan plaid, stands in the foreground, against a backdrop of misty loch and mountains (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Even without a caption, the scene is instantly recognisable as Scotland. With the possible exceptions of Scottophile communities in Canada or New Zealand, it could hardly be anywhere else. The photograph thus captures several elements of a well-known and long established iconography that is as widely deployed as it is derided. Such images have become so recognisable, and so marketable, that they have for a long time sublimated other, more realistic and more typical imagery. They fill Scotland's souvenir shops, decorate tourist traps such as Edinburgh's Royal Mile, and find their way onto stereotypical Scottish exports such as shortbread tins and whisky bottles. They present the entire country in one specific landscape type, to the exclusion of the diversity the Scottish countryside actually offers, and the Scot as a curiously dressed male highlander, rather than reflecting the equally

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<sup>1</sup> Norman McCaig, 'A Man in Assynt', *The Poems of Norman McCaig*, 2005  
<<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/man-assynt-extract>> [accessed 18 November 2015].

<sup>2</sup> 'Scottish Landscapes' (Broxburn: Lomond Books, 2016).

diverse and more soberly clad population. But this is more than simply the way in which public relations people summarise Scotland for visitors. This paper seeks to show the origins of this representation of the land and its people, against a background of wider theories of landscape, applying these to the Scottish context. It goes on to explore how one particular construct of the landscape has influenced the evolution of landscape policy in Scotland, especially in relation to landscapes of recreation and tourism.

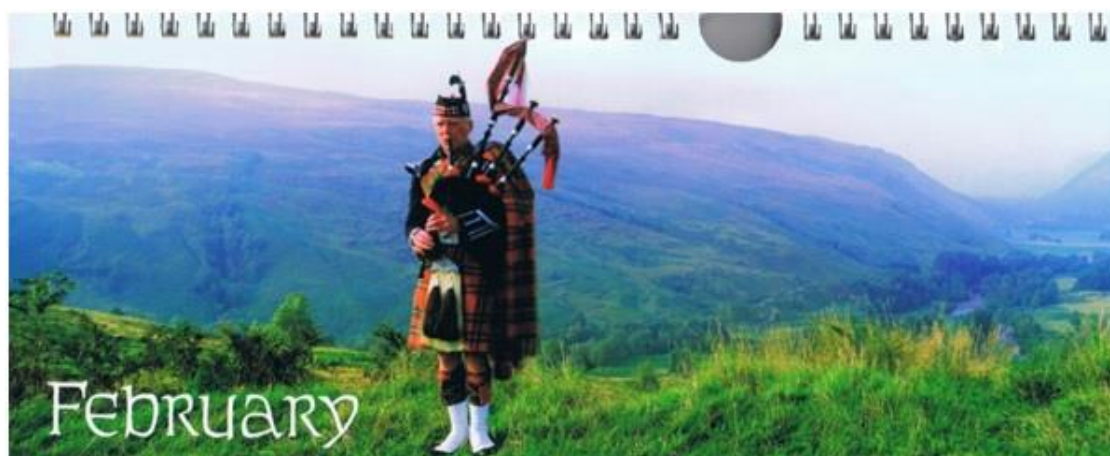


FIGURE 1: FEBRUARY, FROM SCOTTISH LANDSCAPES CALENDAR 2016. (BROXBURN, LOMOND BOOKS)

The passing of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 was a watershed moment in countryside policy in Scotland. It enabled the creation of a new type of recreational space in the form of the country park, and it sought to establish a firmer basis for access to the countryside, generally through access agreements and other measures. It also created a Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) to manage and indirectly resource, recreation in the Scottish countryside, and representation in the countryside interest, both in local planning matters and in wider policy issues.

The legislation came about as a result of significant pressure from rural interests, including farming, forestry, and field sports, to protect them from the risk of damage caused by excessive use of the countryside for informal recreation. Much of

the argument these interest groups deployed was economic; the visitors threatened to damage landscapes of production, and those drawing their livelihoods from the land were rallied to the cause by the likes of the Scottish Landowners' Federation, whose spokesperson at the 'Countryside in 1970' conference, A.N. Balfour, claimed that sporting rights 'of economic importance to the nation' would be threatened by uncontrolled access to the countryside. He received support from Lt. Col. Grant, a landowner in the Cairngorms, who urged delegates to consider the over-riding importance of land for food production.<sup>3</sup> But the proponents of the Act also raised an aesthetic argument, drawing attention to the risk that visitors would, by their presence in large numbers, damage and detract from the very landscape qualities, including both the scenery and tranquillity that many of them came to experience.<sup>4</sup> This was an argument that had already been heard in other contexts—for example by Robert Grieve in a 1962 conference address in Edinburgh—and which would continue to be utilised not only by landowners but also by others keen to protect and preserve the natural environment and the tranquillity of remote places.<sup>5</sup> It is an argument easily over-stated, as exemplified in Smout's contention 'Now we have the problem that our use has become so intensive that not only is our delight threatened, but possibly our survival.'<sup>6</sup>

The aesthetic argument implies a perceptual framework in which some uses of the land are welcomed as contributors to a predominant notion of the landscape and

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Countryside in 1970', *Proceedings of the First Conference, 1963* (London: HMSO, 1964), p. 33; J. P. Grant, 'Land Resources for Recreation in Scotland', in *Planning for Countryside Recreation*, ed. by J. Tivy and G Dickinson (Glasgow: Landscape Research Group/ CCS, 1975), pp. 60–61.

<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh: Scottish Development Department Archive: DD12/896: Papers from 'The Countryside in 1970' Study Group 9; Paper 14, J. McBoyle and R. Russell, 'Reception, Information and Access to the Countryside',

<sup>5</sup> R. Grieve, 'Planning for Tourism' (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> T.C. Smout, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 7.

its value, while other uses are of less consequence, or seen as damaging. It also implies that alternative constructs of the landscape are discounted. Geographers and historians have expounded several narratives of the landscape, but these are almost always considered in an English context. It is interesting, therefore, to explore how these understandings of landscape might apply to Scotland as well, not least as a distinct nation with a strong sense of its own identity, as recent political events have shown.

Lowenthal identifies three factors which make landscape culturally significant: the natural environment, the use of a place for human activity, and the sense of place associated with cultural and historical values.<sup>7</sup> He states that 'landscape has become a compelling symbol of national identity' and suggests, somewhat contentiously, that this symbolism is at its strongest in Britain (though his examples suggest he means England).<sup>8</sup> Propaganda uses of landscape, with their built-in assumptions of shared values and aesthetics, exploit this, and exemplify what Meinig characterises as the ambiguous nature of landscape, interpreted against a set of values—the significance of which may change with taste and re-appraisal.<sup>9</sup>

One dimension of this ambiguity, reflecting contrasting sets of values again in an English setting, is highlighted by Matless: the case of Potter Heigham in the Norfolk Broads. The village, set within an area of scenic beauty and with several historic properties on its streets, is a popular place with trippers and holidaymakers, and provides several facilities that both support and target the tourists. Matless points

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<sup>7</sup> D. Lowenthal, 'Landscape as Heritage: National Scenes and Global Changes', in *Heritage: Conservation, Interpretation and Enterprise*, ed. by J. M. Fladmark (Wimbledon: Donhead, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6, 9.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 2. Frank Newbould's war posters, defining Britain using landscapes from the south of England, are an English example of this.

out, though, that the Broads Authority deplores the kind of approach seen at Potter Heigham, which it believes is ugly, lacking in 'Broads character', and promoted with 'scant regard for the unique character and fragile nature of the area, encouraging visitors to come to the Broads for the wrong reasons.'<sup>10</sup> Matless thus draws attention to the issues of cultural value implicit in defining landscape and character, which are different when seen from differing cultural viewpoints, and which require conformity to standards of behaviour and limits to development which derive from the perspective of those with the power to enforce them.<sup>11</sup> Matless relates this to the Country Code: a document produced in 1951 to promote good behaviour on the part of visitors, couched in polite language but nevertheless clear that it is not so much welcoming visitors as setting out the terms by which they can be tolerated.<sup>12</sup>

One of the problems of places like Potter Heigham (and there are plenty of other examples) is that they offend against a long-established trope of the countryside: the 'rural idyll'. This is the idea that the countryside is a refuge from the stresses and complexities of urban life, and a repository of time-honoured values of tranquillity, pastoralism and closeness to the land, and that it is emphatically not a place to which urban lifestyles and other characteristics should be exported. The idyll requires that the countryside live up to the expectations of it imposed by urbanised people with an artificial and idealised view of what the countryside should be. Bunce identifies this as 'one of the contradictions of modern urban civilisation' and notes that influence over the character of the English countryside has accreted to bodies that are middle-class, conservative, and committed to the preservation of the established order of

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<sup>10</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 248.

things.<sup>13</sup> He also draws attention to the way nineteenth-century artists and writers created a stylised and idealised vision of the countryside, and how this iconography has been perpetuated in the twentieth century through the work of authors like 'Miss Read', Laurie Lee and H. E. Bates, and in popular dramas such as *The Archers*.<sup>14</sup>

Most of these commentators are writing about England and about the English national identity; but their observations can also be related to Scotland, where several commentators link the nation's identity firmly to its landscape. David Wilkie, writing in 1817, noted that 'Every district [of Scotland] has some scene in it [...] treasured with a sort of religious care in the minds of the inhabitants.'<sup>15</sup> McCrone acknowledges that 'Scotland's identity is partly derived from its landscape, the "land of mountain and flood" idealised in tourist imagery.'<sup>16</sup> But he also takes the view that the prevalent icons of Scottishness, with the landscape at their heart, eclipse a more rounded view of Scots' culture, and risk presenting the country as a theme park.<sup>17</sup> He has elsewhere described Scotland as 'a landscape of the mind' with associations that include both the real and the fabricated, and a mystique deriving both from its history and its wildness.<sup>18</sup> Paterson, in a polemic about the failure to conserve Scotland's landscape adequately, contends that 'only Scottish history is as powerful as its landscape as a

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<sup>13</sup> M. Bunce, *The Countryside Ideal : Anglo-American Images of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. i, . 182.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by D. MacMillan, 'Our Heritage: Not Just an Armchair at the Fireside of History', in *Heritage: Conservation, Interpretation and Enterprise*, ed. by J.M. Fladmark (Wimbledon: Donhead, 1993), p. 285.

<sup>16</sup> D. McCrone, *Understanding Scotland : The Sociology of a Nation* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16. The quotation is from Walter Scott, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

<sup>17</sup> David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely, *Scotland - The Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> D. McCrone, 'Land, Democracy and Culture in Scotland', *Scottish Affairs*, 23 (1998), p. 75

source of identity' and deplores the fact that 'an essential part of national identity' has become commodified to meet the demands of tourism and wider economic interests.<sup>19</sup>

And Scotland certainly has its own equivalents of Potter Heigham; among several that spring to mind, Aviemore is one of the most compelling. The village expanded rapidly through the 1960s as the nearby Cairngorms were developed as a skiing centre and visitor attraction, growing with the infrastructure needed to support tourism in such a remote area, and with significant political backing. Aviemore was no stranger to controversy: on the one hand, the Scottish Office saw Aviemore's development as a highly positive move, widening the tourism market, and especially extending the visitor season into the winter. Other interests, including the Nature Conservancy and the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), saw it as an aberration, an encroachment into a fragile landscape, and in direct contravention of environmental policy.<sup>20</sup> The controversy was complicated further in 1974 when Aviemore's architect, John Poulson, and a senior Scottish Office official, were jailed over planning irregularities and corrupt practices arising from the development of tourist facilities in the village.<sup>21</sup>

Cosgrove has argued that 'landscape is an ideologically charged and complex cultural product'.<sup>22</sup> These complexities come into sharp relief at Aviemore; the NTS' objections over development had to be muted, for fear of antagonising a Scottish Office whose role was compromised, and whose approval was needed for NTS proposals at Glencoe, while the Nature Conservancy's objections were hardly helped by plans for a new hotel on land adjacent to Aviemore owned by Lt. Col. Grant, a

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<sup>19</sup> Anna Paterson, *Scotland's Landscape : Endangered Icon* (Edinburgh: Polygon at Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 1, 10.

<sup>20</sup> I. Levitt, 'Too Deeply Committed: Aviemore, the Scottish Office and George Pottinger 1959-72', *Scottish Affairs*, 51 (2005), pp 33-34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> D. E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, WI, 1984), p. 11.

Board member of the Conservancy as well as a major local landowner.<sup>23</sup> Magnus Fladmark, a former senior officer at CCS, identified the attempt to make Aviemore 'the St. Moritz of Scotland' as one of the major failures of post war countryside policy, assessing the negative planning and environmental outcomes as of greater long-term consequence than any economic gain.<sup>24</sup>

If Aviemore offends against Scottish notions of the 'rural idyll', it also demands that we consider what values and ideals it is being judged against: what model of the countryside is being applied to Scotland, and where the boundaries of city and countryside lie. One of the early tasks assigned to CCS was to define the limits of 'countryside' in Scotland; it concluded in 1968 that 98% of the land mass of Scotland fell into the category of 'countryside', and drew lines on the map accordingly, demarcating the area where it would take an interest and where its funds would be available to applicants.<sup>25</sup> But this apparently homogeneous rural Scotland concealed huge variation in the character and nature of the landscape that constituted the countryside, ranging from the deserted hills of the Southern Uplands to the wooded glens of Perthshire and Argyll, from the cultivated landscapes of Angus and Buchan to the rural coalfields of Ayrshire and Lanarkshire, and from the desolate tranquillity of the Solway Firth to the equally desolate, but quite different, Flow Country of the far north. Above all, it included the grandeur of the Scottish mountains, castles and lochs of the north and west Highlands: the landscape with which Scotland had become associated in the minds of many, and especially those who lived outside the country, the landscape which featured so prominently in tourist

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 35, 48

<sup>24</sup> J.M. Fladmark, 'Cultural Capital and Identity: Scotland's Democratic Intellect', in *In Search of Heritage: As Pilgrim or Tourist?* (Shaftesbury: Donhead, 1998), p. 229.

<sup>25</sup> J. Foster, 'The Countryside Commission for Scotland', *Town and Country Planning*, 37 (1969), p. 498. This definition included Aviemore within the countryside.



brochures, railway advertising, and in other media representations of Scotland, and which has become Scotland for many outside the country. This association has persisted. When national parks for Scotland were being discussed in 1944, seven of the eight areas proposed for designation were in the mountains and lochs of the Highlands; the only exception was St Mary's Loch, in the Southern Uplands.<sup>26</sup> And more recently, a study of tourist websites in 1998 found that Highland imagery was still the most deployed portrayal of the country as a whole to potential visitors.<sup>27</sup>

How is it, then, that this one particular landscape type has become archetypal of the country, and especially of its countryside, while other landscapes, including some of great aesthetic merit, have been sublimated? Hills calls it the 'Great Highland Myth'; the idea that the Highlander is the paradigm of Scottish society, and by extension that his environment alone is the repository of Scottish cultural tradition.<sup>28</sup> The myth originates shortly after the failure of the 1745 Jacobite rising, and three key people can be identified, all celebrated and feted in their day. One is now unknown, one unread, and the third unloved, but their legacy lives on in the iconography of Scotland.

It began in 1760, with the now little-known James Macpherson and the publication of the poems of Ossian, a work which Macpherson claimed to have discovered in the Highlands, and translated personally from the original Gaelic writings of a blind bard, but which was actually a fabrication of his own. This was followed by other publications, including an epic poem *Fingal*, describing (and claiming to originate in) a lost highland world and describing the life and times of

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<sup>26</sup> G. E. Cherry, *Environmental Planning, 1939-1969. Volume 2 National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> Cara Aitchison, Nicola MacLeod and Stephen Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes : Social and Cultural Geographies* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> P. Hills, 'The Cultural Potency of Scotland', in *Cultural Tourism*, ed. by J.M. Fladmark (Wimbledon, 1994), pp. 89–101 (p. 95).

mystical, heroic, highland figures, brave and chivalrous but surrounded by melancholy and loss. Okun reflects that 'The setting is more real than the people who inhabit it [...] drowned in an eternal mist [...] everything in this world points to some loss, toward the instability of life'.<sup>29</sup> The Ossian poems were highly popular in their time, and began to be translated into European languages in 1762; by 1800 they existed in French, German, Danish, Spanish, Russian and Swedish. Artists who were inspired to paint Ossianic themes included Ingres, Carstens and Runge. Ossian also inspired musical works by Mendelssohn, Haydn and Beethoven.<sup>30</sup> Even after Macpherson was exposed as a literary fraud, his poetry nevertheless inspired the foundation of a society to celebrate and promote 'highland culture', by which was meant the portrayal of the highlands in Ossian.<sup>31</sup> The Ossian craze lasted for sixty years, and its toponymic legacy includes Fingal's Cave on Staffa, the Hermitage at Dunkeld, and Ossian's Grave in the Sma' Glen; it is also the origin of the personal name 'Fiona'.<sup>32</sup> But in spite of these tangible relics, the magic of Ossian is in the mystery. As Kelly says, 'What remains of Ossian? ... mist.'<sup>33</sup>

Walter Scott proved to be Ossian's natural heir. His work is full of legend and folk-tale, and his extensive use of toponymy means it is possible, indeed expected, that the reader will associate events and characters with specific named places, whilst his device of using non-Scots as main characters allows him to use these protagonists to explain the cultural significance of these settings to his wider audience. Although he is now almost unread, he was originally enormously popular: *The Lady of the Lake*

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<sup>29</sup> H. Okun, 'Ossian in Painting', *J. of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 30 (1967), p. 328.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 37-40; P. Scott, 'The Image of Scotland in Literature', in *Cultural Tourism* (Wimbledon: Donhead, 1994), pp. 365-366.

<sup>31</sup> S. Kelly, *Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented a Nation* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> J.R. Gold and M.M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly, *Scott-land*, p. 28

(1810) sold 30,000 copies in its first year; *Ivanhoe* (1819) sold 10,000 copies in two weeks.<sup>34</sup> By 1840 around two million of Scott's books were circulating in the French language alone.<sup>35</sup> Cannizzo credits him with the invention of both the historical novel and the sequel, and his collected works were illustrated by artists who set out to recreate the world Scott was describing, reinforcing the association of story, place-name and landscape.<sup>36</sup> Ellen's Isle in Loch Katrine (Figure 2) is the perfect example, renamed as such (its original name was Eilean Molach) for its association with the heroine of *The Lady of the Lake*, allowing tourists to locate—and to experience for themselves—one of the settings described in the poem: Scott's counterpart to Ossian's Fingal's Cave.

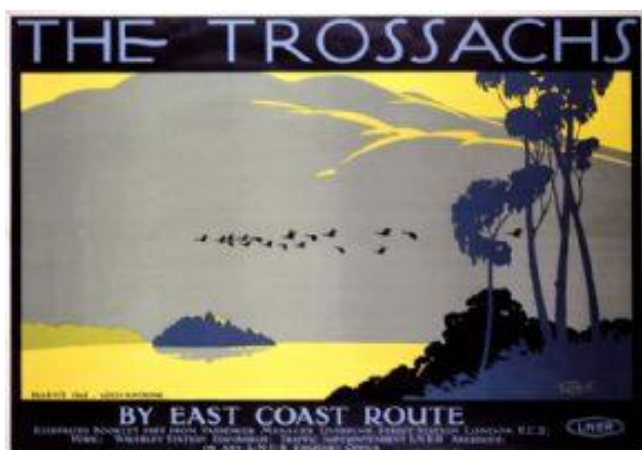


FIGURE 2: ELLEN'S ISLE, LOCH KATRINE: LNER TRAVEL POSTER BY TOM PURVIS, 1926 (NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM COLLECTION 1986-9163)

Scott succeeded in turning the Highlander from a rebellious and uneducated enemy of the state into the archetypal Scot, not least by his insistence on the Royal Visit of 1822 becoming 'a gathering of the Gael' where tartan and philibeg would be worn, adding

<sup>34</sup> Kelly, *Scott-land*, p. 79; Cannizzo, *Monumental Images*, p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> J. Cannizzo, 'Monumental Images: Scott and the Creation of Scotland', in *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity*, ed. by J.M. Fladmark (Shaftesbury: Donhead, 2000), p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174

both to the iconography of Scotland in the process.<sup>37</sup> Scott's writing also transformed the Highlands from an alien and savage place into the source and repository of all that was truly Scottish, making them a place of romance and cultural heritage for the whole country. He even served to rehabilitate Bonnie Prince Charlie, transmuting Jacobitism from a reactionary anti-unionist force into harmless romantic folklore. Cameron describes this as the 'paradox of recent Scottish national identity that many of its most potent symbols have come from the [...] Highlands [...] for much of Scottish history, the Highlands were viewed as separate and different from the rest of the nation'.<sup>38</sup>

Scott's timing was perfect; he wrote at a time when tourism was taking on a less European and more British focus, due to the Napoleonic wars, and although the first waves of visitors were limited to the well-heeled, the emergence of railways in the mid-nineteenth century made the locales of Scott's works accessible for the masses as well. P. H. Scott suggests 'you might say that [Walter Scott] started the tourist industry in Scotland'; Kelly agrees that Scott's work encouraged an awful lot of people to visit.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Cook organised an early Trossachs tour to Loch Katrine, backdrop to *The Lady of the Lake*, in 1846, and by the 1870s Cook was running 'tartan tours' taking in additional locations associated with Scott's characters, including remoter locations such as the east side of Loch Lomond (*Rob Roy*), the Grey Mare's Tail (*Marmion*) and the Skye Cuillin (*The Lord of the Isles*). As Gold and Gold observe, 'Scott made Highland Scotland the authentic Scotland.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> H. Trevor-Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 30. Trevor-Roper also notes that both the tartan and the philibeg were invented by Englishmen.

<sup>38</sup> E. A. Cameron, 'Embracing the Past: The Highlands in Nineteenth Century Scotland', in *Image and Identity: The Making and remaking of Scotland Through the Ages*, ed. by Dauvit Broun, R.J. Finlay, and Michael Lynch (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 195

<sup>39</sup> Scott, *The Image of Scotland*, p. 368; Kelly, *Scott-land*, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland*, p. 83.

Scott's influence was enormous, and remains so. He not only has his commemorative monuments in Edinburgh (which include the largest literary monument in the world) and in the Borders, but even in New York City's Central Park. His name is used for a festival in Selkirk, and a long distance path in the Southern Uplands; his image appears on every banknote issued by the Bank of Scotland. His novels and characters have not only named streets throughout Scotland (and well beyond), but also a railway station (*Waverley*), a steamship (The *Lady of the Lake*, on Loch Katrine), and even a football team (*Heart of Midlothian*). He inspired Hamish MacCunn's well-known overture *Land of Mountain and Flood*, typically Scottish in its tone and phrasing.<sup>41</sup> He was quoted by Donald Dewar in his inaugural speech as first minister of the reconvened Scottish Parliament, and is one of twenty-four Scots commemorated through quotation on the Canongate wall of the Parliament building. Extracts from Scott's writings, with epigrams much better known than their sources, were also extensively used throughout Waverley Station in a 2014 exhibition linked to the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Waverley*. Hardly anyone reads Scott nowadays, but his legacy is found everywhere in Scotland.

The third personality involved in developing the highland myth was Queen Victoria, who claimed that Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) was the first book she ever read. Her royal visit to Scotland in 1842 was redolent of George IV's 1822 pageant, and she invested it with Highland clannery by comparing it to 'a great chieftain in olden times [...] receiving his sovereign'.<sup>42</sup> She enjoyed it so much she visited Scotland again in 1844 and 1847, capping these visits with the acquisition of the Balmoral estate in 1848, which would allow regular visits to the Highlands and the

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<sup>41</sup> Hamish MacCunn, 'Land of Mountain and Flood' Cantata, Op. 3 (Edinburgh, 1887).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted by Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland*, p. 80.

possibility of field sports for her husband.<sup>43</sup> The publication of Victoria's diaries, chronicling her enchantment with the Highlands in general and Balmoral in particular, opened up the Highlands to further mass tourism and cemented the idea of Highland landscape as the Scottish landscape; a national contemporary fascination with the Queen meant that her approbation carried disproportionate weight and influence. The Balmoral example also encouraged those with means to acquire their own Highland estates, and helped to popularise field sports generally; thirty-seven new deer forests were established between 1840 and 1869, providing new opportunities to assert class and wealth, and in many cases social privilege also.<sup>44</sup>

This is not to say that three people alone created the entire iconography of Scotland. Robert Burns is recognised the world over as an authentic voice of Scotland, and his poetry includes evocative landscape work (such as *Afton Water*, *My Heart's in the Highlands*). But his legacy lies much more in the realms of social commentary and romance than in the creation of a landscape typology, whilst the landscape-based poems are more often than not associated with a recollection of an associated romantic encounter, rather than a celebration of the scenery for itself. Burns' epic poem *Tam O'Shanter* (1790) was popular, and identified strongly with the Ayrshire locality in which it is placed, but although the sites identified in Tam's wild ride are part of a modern heritage trail, they have never caught the imagination of the travelling public in the way *The Lady of the Lake* did. No doubt Burns contributed to an overall impression of Scotland, including among non-Scots—no-one could deny Burns the legacy of *Auld Lang Syne*, or the celebration of the haggis—but his poetry's

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 111; the deer forest, paradoxically, is largely a treeless landscape of open heath and moorland, used for the stalking and shooting of red deer.

impact on perceptions of the landscape is much more limited and localised than that of Scott.

The 'Kailyard' school of writing romanticised the simple, rural life and created the enduring Scottish tradition of the young man whose ability would win out against his unpromising background.<sup>45</sup> Grassic Gibbon's classic *Sunset Song* (1932), one of the most notable pieces of twentieth century Scottish literature, savages this myth, both by focussing on a female lead character, and by having her undoubted ability subverted by the powerful pull of the land on which she lives. But even this work, Nicola Sturgeon's favourite book, set in an agricultural landscape every bit as powerful as any of its characters, has done little to change the external, self-proclaimed perception of Scotland as a country of mountain and mist.<sup>46</sup>

And so this Highland myth emerged as the stereotype for Scottish landscape: 'the notions created and codified by Scott ... propagated by countless guidebook writers and given the royal stamp of approval.'<sup>47</sup> Adams asserts that 'Sir Walter Scott and Queen Victoria were by far the best sales team that ever sold holidays in Scotland to the English.'<sup>48</sup> It is all artificial, of course. Edwin Muir, never an advocate of nationalism, described Scott and Burns alike as the 'sham bards of a sham nation.'<sup>49</sup> But it was, nevertheless, incredibly powerful, so much so that VisitScotland (the present incarnation of the Scottish Tourist Board) developed the motto 'Discover the Real Scotland' to encourage visitors to penetrate beyond Scott's archetypes.<sup>50</sup> Not too far beyond, though; they did not advocate visits to Maryhill, Airdrie or Cowdenbeath,

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<sup>45</sup> McCrone, Morris and Kiely, *Scotland: The Brand*, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1932); *The Herald*, 28 November 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland*, p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> G. Adams, 'The Pull of Cultural Assets', in *Cultural Tourism*, ed. by J.M. Fladmark (Wimbledon: Donhead, 1994), pp. 113–22 (p. 113).

<sup>49</sup> Muir.

<sup>50</sup> Kelly, *Scott-land*, p. 124.

though these are real enough to the people who live there. But even the 'real Scotland' can be elusive. Arthur Freed, when producing the whimsical Scottish-set musical *Brigadoon* (1954), complained that he was unable to find in Scotland any suitable location for filming, saying, 'Scotland no longer looks like Scotland'.<sup>51</sup>

These perceptions of the landscape were not only critically important in selling Scotland to visitors, but they also played a part in the formulation of wider Scottish countryside policy. In the first place, they allowed the owners of the Highland landscapes—mostly the lairds of large country estates—to present themselves as the custodians of the beautiful but fragile destinations of the visitors, charged with protecting them and ensuring that they remained unspoiled for future generations. An apologist for the lairdly classes suggested that 'they should be remembered [...] for what they did. They cared for the land and for their dependants with as much thought as does the modern state, and often with more discrimination'.<sup>52</sup> The Duke of Buccleuch describes his tenure of the Bowhill estate as that of 'a life trustee dedicated to the constant improvement of a vital asset to the benefit of everyone concerned', while Wright described the NTS, also estate owners in the Highlands, as 'the keepers of the nation's soul'.<sup>53</sup> This claim of stewardship was more than a little disingenuous—many owners would have preferred to choose their visitors rather than have them imposed on them—but it allowed them to position themselves as defenders of a heritage, and of a landscape under threat, as demands for recreational access intensified in the 1950s and 60s. It is at least arguable that the landowners' activities in protecting and securing their sporting estates, in afforestation, and in providing access

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<sup>51</sup> Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland*, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> James Fergusson, *Lowland Lairds 1949*, quoted in D. McCrone and A. Morris, 'Lords and Heritages: The Transformation of the Great Lairds of Scotland', in *Scottish Elites*, ed. by T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1994), pp. 170–86 (p. 171).

<sup>53</sup> Bowhill Estate Guidebook, quoted by McCrone and Morris, *Lords and Heritages*, p. 185; *On Living in an Old Country*, quoted by McCrone, 'Land, Democracy and Culture in Scotland', p. 81.



to roads and accommodation for their own favoured activities, was at least as detrimental to the landscape as any damage caused by recreational visitors. But it suited the lairds to present themselves as defenders and conservers of the landscape, rather than economic exploiters of it.

Thus the NTS conference in Inverness in 1964 described itself as an attempt 'to find some means of resolving the conflict between conservation and development', placing the landowners firmly in the stewardship role.<sup>54</sup> It recognised an 'urgent need to reconcile policy for economic growth and for conservation of landscape, with particular reference to areas of outstanding natural beauty'.<sup>55</sup> A Saltire Society event in 1941 had urged an 'equation of interest' to balance the needs of farming, forestry and recreation; its conference in 1968 similarly sought to find ways of enabling public access without detriment to other land use.<sup>56</sup> In the interval between these two conferences, the major countryside policy initiatives in Scotland had been the rejection of national parks in 1949, and the arrival of country parks through the Countryside (Scotland) Act in 1968. It is interesting to see how much the lairdly influence came to bear on these two decisions.

As has been noted, the Ramsay Committee proposed eight national parks for Scotland, at the time when similar measures were being planned for England and Wales. These would have been defined areas, demarcated by formal boundaries, within which stricter controls would operate on development and other damaging activities, and where access would be made easier and better supported. The Scottish national parks never came about, and a variety of reasons have been put forward for this. Crofts attributes it to the absence of any meaningful restrictions on access, and

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<sup>54</sup> Edinburgh: National Trust for Scotland archive: NTS Annual Report, October 1967, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Edinburgh: Carnegie Trust archive GD 281/136/1/18: 1964 NTS Conference brochure.

<sup>56</sup> Edinburgh: Saltire Society Archive: ACC 9393/341: 'Scotland Tomorrow', 1941; ACC9393/355: 'Remaking the Countryside' 1968.

thus accepts the landowners' argument at the time that their benevolence in allowing informal access made designation unnecessary.<sup>57</sup> MacEwan and MacEwan, on the other hand, detect a more active, albeit subtle, resistance by landed interests, which they view as decisive.<sup>58</sup> Arnott adds in the opposition of local authorities (many of which were dominated by landowning interests), and Cherry the relative weakness of the voluntary and amenity lobby which might otherwise have pressed the case for access (again, largely dominated by landowning interests).<sup>59</sup> Whichever of these is right, it is clear that the opposition of landowners, and their allies in local authorities, was a significant element in the rejection of national parks for Scotland. It was also an outworking of landowner influence in reinforcing their own societal and cultural boundaries rather than allowing the imposition of new boundaries and rules from outside, even though these might have contributed more to landscape conservation. Cherry discusses the national parks legislation in terms of what landowners were willing to concede, as much as what Government sought to gain, and remarks on the domination of what he describes as strong vested interests, which the Scottish Office had no wish to confront.<sup>60</sup>

Landowner influence also meant that countryside policy adopted a defensive position, aiming to protect the countryside and those users perceived as legitimate, from the threat posed by recreation and visitors. Thus, when CCS was set up in 1967, the Secretary of State welcomed his new commissioners with the hope that their work would serve to 'retain all that is best in the beauty and unique character of our

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<sup>57</sup> R. Crofts, 'Access to Our Natural Heritage: A New Framework for Scotland', in *Sharing the Earth: Local Identity in Global Culture*, ed. by J.M. Fladmark (Wimbledon: Donhead, 1995), pp. 201–11 (p. 202).

<sup>58</sup> Ann MacEwan and Malcolm MacEwan, *Greenprints for the Countryside? : The Story of Britain's National Parks* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning*, p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning*, pp. 25, 143.

countryside'.<sup>61</sup> He said nothing at all about the possibility of widening access to this countryside, nor of rehabilitating those landscapes that might have failed tests of beauty or character; CCS' initial remit was a defensive one.

Country parks, the central provision of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, can certainly be seen in this light. The initial intention was they would act as honeypots, drawing a growing number of casual car-borne visitors away from the places where they and their vehicles could cause damage, and into defined places of lesser consequence, where their activities, noise and cars could be contained and managed. The White Paper proposing country parks for England described the policy as enabling people 'to enjoy [their countryside] leisure without harm to those who live and work in the country and without spoiling what they go to the countryside to seek'.<sup>62</sup> CCS promoted country parks as offering reassurance to visitors that they were not trespassing or upsetting landowners, again hinting at the defensive nature of the provision.<sup>63</sup> Harrison believes that the policy of the 1960s was directed largely by aesthetic motives, which tended to play out in favour of the landowners; in the wider countryside, it encouraged the kinds of countryside behaviour most amenable to landowners, whilst directing less acceptable behaviours into the more expendable landscapes defined as country parks.<sup>64</sup> Marion Shoard adds that 'the setting up of country parks [...] as miniature Red-Indian [*sic*] reservations for the urban underclass marked a moment when the hegemony of the landowner was as complete as it had ever been [...] the landowners [...] had few complaints about the direction which

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<sup>61</sup> Edinburgh: Countryside Commission for Scotland Archive: CCS3/1: CCS (68) A1 minutes of meeting 8 April 1968.

<sup>62</sup> PP: Leisure in the Countryside, Cmnd. 2928 (HMSO, London, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> J. Foster, 'What Is Meant by Outdoor Recreation', in *Leisure Research and Policy*, ed. by Ian Appleton (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), p. 158.

<sup>64</sup> Carolyn Harrison, *Countryside Recreation in a Changing Society* (London: TMS Partnership, 1991), p. 2.

public policy was taking'.<sup>65</sup> It was in fact the car-owning middle classes, rather than any underclass, who were taking advantage of these facilities, but Shoard's point about the landowners' victory nevertheless has a ring of truth about it.

A further aspect of countryside policy enshrined in the 1967 Act was the possibility of access agreements. These were to be negotiated between local planning authorities and landowners, and would provide a basis for access under certain conditions, and at certain times of year, to try and achieve a balance between the interests of the landowners and those seeking access to the land. The possibilities here were initially attractive to landowners, and both Lord Burton of Dochfour (a field sports enthusiast) and Lt. Col. Grant of Rothiemurchus had by 1971 entered negotiations with Inverness County Council over the terms of possible access. Interestingly, the agreements failed to be concluded because the Ramblers' Association felt their terms would be more onerous and restrictive than the informal arrangements for access they already enjoyed. This suggests that the landowners were attempting to use these agreements to codify and impose restrictions, rather than to genuinely widen access to their property. In the end, very few access agreements were concluded in Scotland, and they faded away fairly quickly from the frontline of CCS policy-making.

Jackson suggests that the dominant class not only achieves supremacy, but also ensures that the dominant values and understandings are accepted and adopted by subordinate groups.<sup>66</sup> Extending this argument, it is possible to arrive at a situation where the dominant idea is so well established that it becomes accepted as the natural order of things, so that challenge can be dismissed not only as uninformed and

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<sup>65</sup> Marion Shoard, *This Land Is Our Land: The Struggle for Britain's Countryside*. (London: Paladin, 1987), p. 390.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography*. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 53.

ignorant of reality, but also as threatening the stability and order which are in the interests of everyone. This philosophy is evident in the debates surrounding the 'Countryside in 1970' conferences, where certainties abounded, and where it was generally accepted that the solutions to countryside challenges could be found in education—by which the protagonists meant bringing people to the understanding they themselves held. Meanwhile, those whose knowledge lay outside the boundaries of the dominant cultural norms, outside the catechism of the lairdly class, could be legitimately excluded. Elements of this catechism included the primacy of production (food, fisheries and timber), resistance to urban (i.e. uninformed) interference in country ways, the threat of modernity, the economic importance of field sports, and a benevolent local autocracy; its creed was the Country Code.

The lairds found opportunities to exercise their influence not only in Scottish local government prior to reorganisation, but also as clan chieftains, Lords-Lieutenant and MPs, and as patrons or Board members of significant financial, commercial and voluntary bodies. At the 'Countryside in 1970' conferences, landowners represented not only the NFU and the Scottish Landowners' Federation, but also the National Trust for Scotland and the Scottish Tourist Board.<sup>67</sup> CCS was not totally beholden to the lairds, but landowning interests were well represented on its management committee, and when the Commission's membership was reviewed in 1971, the proposed appointments of the Duke of Atholl and the Marquess of Bute were resisted on the grounds that landowners were already sufficiently represented among commissioners.<sup>68</sup> Thus the weight of numbers, the tradition of influence and the

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<sup>67</sup> 'The Countryside in 1970', *Proceedings of the Second Conference, 1965* (London: Royal Society of Arts, 1966), pp. 169–176.

<sup>68</sup> Edinburgh: Scottish Development Department Archive: DD12/3347: File note for Secretary of State on appointments, October 1971. They ultimately appointed Jean Balfour as Chairman, perhaps not realising that she too was a landowner.

tightness of the lairds' network ensured that they carried weight in deliberations over countryside policy; they also managed to convince their audience that they spoke for the whole of Highland Scotland.<sup>69</sup> And in speaking for Highland Scotland, they saw themselves representing the part of the country that really mattered, the part that was worth defending, the part which held the soul of the nation.

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<sup>69</sup> T.C. Smout, *The Highlands and the Roots of Green Consciousness, 1750-1990* (Inverness: Scottish Natural Heritage, 1990), p. 27.