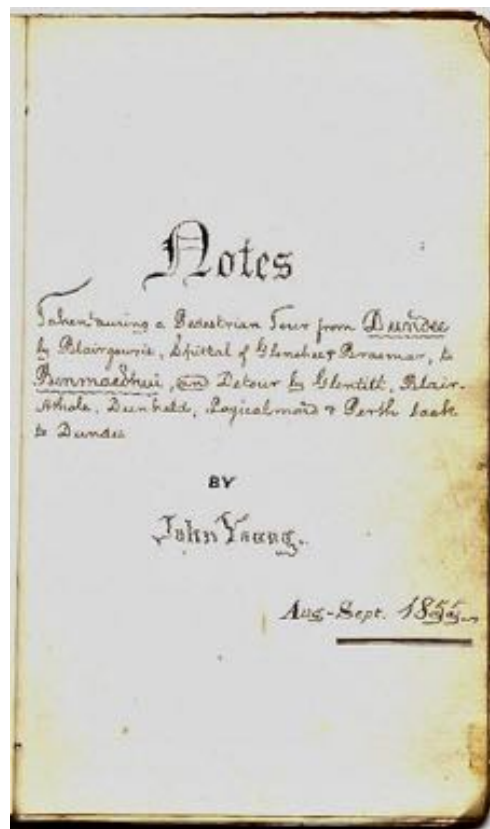


The Young-Black-Smiths' holiday

On Saturday 25th August 1855 John Young set off from his home at 133 Perth Road Dundee with his knapsack, his pipe and his flask, his compass and his copy of the *Scottish Tourist*, and 'took the road for the highlands!' He met up with his two friends, John Black and James Smith, and they headed north for Ben Macdhui.

They were a merry trio of young men and called themselves the Young-Black-Smiths. From census records, street directories etc. it seems likely that all three were 18 or 19 years of age. John Young kept a journal and wrote a tidy copy afterwards that is now in Dundee City Library, and also an article for the Dundee Weekly News called 'A Night in the Grampians'. All three worked in Dundee, but John Black came from Logiealmond and they had three nights with his family on their way back to Dundee.

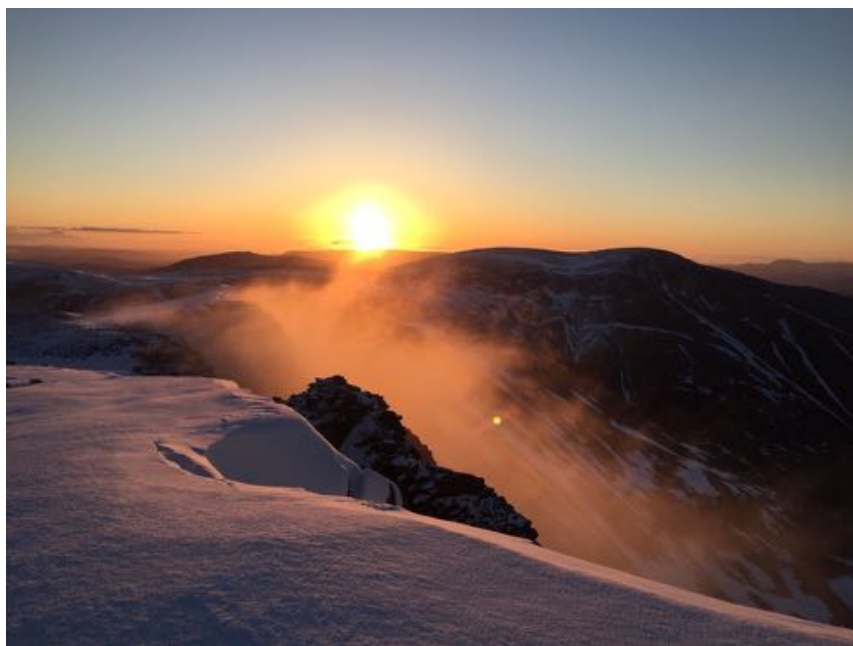


Dundee City Library, Local Studies, the Lamb Collection, L.272/1
 "Notes Taken during a Pedestrian Tour from Dundee by Blairgowrie, Spttal of Glenshee & Braemar, to Benmacdhui, and Detour by Glentilt, Blair-Athole, Dunkeld, Logiealmond & Perth back to Dundee."

They commonly walked 20 miles a day and still had time to enjoy sight seeing, visiting friends, and talking to those they met. They stayed with friends or family when they could, and otherwise in cottages – most of which were good and hospitable, but a few were grim, unwilling and dirty. Their first night was near Bridge of Cally, the next near Spittal of Glenshee and the third outside Castleton of Braemar.

On a lovely morning they set off up the Dee, then Glen Lui and Glen Derry into the Cairngorms. They reached Loch Etchachan in the afternoon (3000 feet), en route to the Shelter Stone for the night, but the cloud came in and rain and wind followed. They were thoroughly lost in the storm. They tried to escape the worst of the weather by going down into a corrie and building a rock shelter but were soaked and very cold.

At two in the morning the weather improved and a full moon rose. They scrambled back up the back wall of the corrie and reached the plateau as the sun rose at four a.m. 'The moon was sailing calmly northwards, while the new risen sun was gilding the whole of the eastern horizon. Looking around from this elevation a scene burst upon my view, the most terribly sublime I ever saw or imagined'. They reckoned Ben Macdhuì was about two miles to the south-west, but tramped wearily down the path to the forester's house.



Sunrise Ben Mcdui, Malcolm Clark, 2019

Restored after a good meal, warmth, a night's sleep and help with repairs to clothes and shoes, they headed south through Glen Tilt to Blair Atholl. Crossing the Garry by the Blue Frog ferry, they stayed with friends at Boat Pendicle. The next day they walked south to lunch at Moulinearn Inn, and on to John Young's relatives at Dunkeld.

In Dunkeld they visited the Cathedral, the Duke of Atholl's unfinished mansion, and the hotel famed for a local beauty, where they wrote poems and appreciative comments in the Visitors' Book. But the highlight of the day was the Hermitage. They went with a guide and the journal gives a detailed description of the wonderful sequence of experiences as they moved from the porch, to the concealed inner room, to the opening of the folding plate-glass doors that let in the sound as well as the sight of the waterfall. The guide manipulated convex and concave mirrors to give magical effects.



Engraving c.1803. Ossian's Hall, The Hermitage, Dunkeld
<http://canmore.org.uk/collection/1660063>

John Black had relatives in the Trochry area and they stayed two nights with his grandfather, before walking through Little Glenshee to stay with his family at Leadmore in Logiealmond. (The ruins of this small cottage are at the edge of the wood, to the east of Drummond Park). There was a lot of visiting, eating and drinking – mostly milk – talking about the War (Crimean?) and showing off his pocket compass. They visited Craiglea slate quarry where Mr Black's father worked (there the quarriers 'cut 10 to 1200 slates a day on an average'). John Young much enjoyed an evening listening to an exceptional fiddler, but soon lost patience with trout fishing.

Trinity College had been established in 1842 and the first phase of building completed in 1847. The Young-Black-Smiths went to visit and were lucky to find a guide who gave them a thorough tour. John Young's description is attached below. He comments that the College was about to install gas for lighting but until then were spending £200 a year on candles.



*The Original Design, from The History of Glenalmond,
G. St. Quentin, 1956*

On Wednesday 5th September the trio walked the 12 miles to Perth where they had Pies and Porter and bought souvenirs in the shape of fancy tobacco pipes, before 'the Young-Black-Smiths dissolved on the High Street'. John Black went back home, and the other two took the train to Dundee.

John Young concludes his journal with the estimate that they had walked no less than 300 miles in the 12 days. Finally in Dundee, 'Walked west [up] the Perth Road with my knapsack and cudgel, and with the firm independent step of one who knows he is a Scotchman, and who is also conscious he has seen better places than Dundee, of one who – in short - has walked to BenmacDhui; causing no little sensation among the small boys on the street'.

Appendix:
The visit to Trinity College
 (Pages 41-2, some paragraphs added)

From Harrietfield we 'went down to the banks of the Almond. Crossed the bridge purporting to visit Trinity College on the south side. Entered the grounds and wandered about looking at every thing worth observing. Entered the Court or Square; approached a Waiter-like fellow. Enquired at him if we could see the interior of the Chapel. O Yes! Took us through the Chapel – magnificent building: as large as an ordinary Presbyterian Church. In the lobby there is a fine old painting (and there is only one yet) of the Crucifixion which was given to the Church by Mr Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer – he being a Puseyite. The interior of the building is elegant. The rafters are dark oak and also the Pews which are wide and spacious and nicely cushioned. The roof over the altar is coloured azure, and spangled with gold stars. The Baptismal Font in the centre is a fine elegant piece of work in freestone. The Reading Desks, Pulpit etc, are all of the most beautiful designs: and there is a magnificent Organ on one side of the Church. Much struck with the Gorgeous stained glass windows, and at the rich and costly binding of some of their Prayer and other Service Books.

Were then shown through the Students' Dining Hall, School rooms, private Class rooms, Gymnastic Hall, Bed Rooms, Baths etc etc;

were even upon the leads of the little castellated turret crowning the College. Were also through the Professors' private Sitting and Bed Rooms. Some fine collections of Books and Pictures. Museum very small. They have not yet got gas in the College, but are about to get it. At present they expend £200 annually on Candles.

After spending a happy hour rewarded the English Waiter who so successfully acted as Guide and strolled down the Banks of the beautiful Almond. Had a very cold bathe here.

Question Does anyone know when walkers began to use a compass to navigate in the hills?

John Young's father was a ship master so perhaps he got one from him.

Ros Pearson
May 2021