

In 1807 and 1808 in the southern extremity of Cumberland, Captain William Mudge and his team of surveyors hauled hundreds of pounds of books, theodolite, scopes, and supplies atop Black Comb Mountain. With its extensive view, the summit served as a primary station for one of the great triangles in the national ordnance survey of Britain, the first of its kind executed with such precision and scale by any nation. After visiting Black Comb in the summer of 1811, William Wordsworth became interested in local stories of Mudge's survey and wrote two poems in honor of the triangulation atop the mountain, "Written with a Slate Pencil on a Stone, on the Side of the Mountain of Black Comb" and its companion piece "View from the Top of Black Comb" (Broglio 1).

WRITTEN WITH A SLATE PENCIL ON A STONE, ON THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN OF BLACK COMB—William Wordsworth

The circumstance alluded to at the conclusion of these verses was told me by Dr. Satterthwaite, who was Incumbent of Bootle, a small town at the foot of Black Comb. He had the particulars from one of the engineers who was employed in making trigonometrical surveys of that region.

STAY, bold Adventurer; rest awhile thy limbs
On this commodious Seat! for much remains
Of hard ascent before thou reach the top
Of this huge Eminence,--from blackness named,
And, to far-travelled storms of sea and land,
A favourite spot of tournament and war!
But thee may no such boisterous visitants
Molest; may gentle breezes fan thy brow;
And neither cloud conceal, nor misty air
Bedim, the grand terraqueous spectacle,
From centre to circumference, unveiled!
Know, if thou grudge not to prolong thy rest,
That on the summit whither thou art bound,
A geographic Labourer pitched his tent,
With books supplied and instruments of art,
To measure height and distance; lonely task,
Week after week pursued!--To him was given
Full many a glimpse (but sparingly bestowed
On timid man) of Nature's processes
Upon the exalted hills. He made report
That once, while there he plied his studious work
Within that canvas Dwelling, colours, lines,
And the whole surface of the out-spread map,
Became invisible: for all around
Had darkness fallen--unthreatened, unproclaimed--
As if the golden day itself had been
Extinguished in a moment; total gloom,
In which he sate alone, with unclosed eyes,
Upon the blinded mountain's silent top!

1813.

VIEW FROM THE TOP OF BLACK COMB

Mrs. Wordsworth and I, as mentioned in the "Epistle to Sir G. Beaumont," lived some time under its shadow.

THIS Height a ministering Angel might select:
For from the summit of BLACK COMB (dread name
Derived from clouds and storms!) the amplest range
Of unobstructed prospect may be seen
That British ground commands:--low dusky tracts,
Where Trent is nursed, far southward! Cambrian hills
To the south-west, a multitudinous show;
And, in a line of eye-sight linked with these,
The hoary peaks of Scotland that give birth
To Tiviot's stream, to Annan, Tweed, and Clyde:--
Crowding the quarter whence the sun comes forth
Gigantic mountains rough with crags; beneath,
Right at the imperial station's western base
Main ocean, breaking audibly, and stretched
Far into silent regions blue and pale;--
And visibly engirding Mona's Isle
That, as we left the plain, before our sight
Stood like a lofty mount, uplifting slowly
(Above the convex of the watery globe)
Into clear view the cultured fields that streak
Her habitable shores, but now appears
A dwindled object, and submits to lie
At the spectator's feet.--Yon azure ridge,
Is it a perishable cloud? Or there
Do we behold the line of Erin's coast?
Land sometimes by the roving shepherds wain
(Like the bright confines of another world)
Not doubtfully perceived.--Look homeward now!
In depth, in height, in circuit, how serene
The spectacle, how pure!--Of Nature's works,
In earth, and air, and earth-embracing sea,
A revelation infinite it seems;
Display august of man's inheritance,
Of Britain's calm felicity and power!

1813.