

Foreword

From the mainland, Arran is only a dozen miles across the Firth of Clyde, but on stepping ashore at Brodick pier, you feel as though you're entering an older, more peaceful world. The island has always held a special significance for me. It was while descending from the granite slabs of the A'Chir ridge some 35 years ago that I decided I wanted a job that would allow me to spend the rest of my life climbing mountains. The sun-kissed hills of Arran richly blessed me that day, as many times since.

Whilst Arran has always attracted climbers, some walkers are over-awed by the steep, narrow ridges and soaring pinnacles of the north island's mountains. Many would rather tackle something less dramatic, but still challenging enough to make an adventure. And so the 65-mile Isle of Arran Coastal Way was conceived.

Arran's geology makes it ideal for coastal walking. The shallow coastal fringe of its raised beach encircles the island, and the Coastal Way follows it closely, diverting inland only twice. Whilst much of the route follows footpaths and stretches of beach, parts involve road-walking, albeit a very quiet and pleasant road, mostly on the west of the island. The Way has evolved and improved in the five years since I revisited Arran to open it in March 2003.

My own favourite section remains the toughest part of the route, from Kildonan to Whiting Bay, past Dippin Head. No footpath tames this section, although all difficulties can be bypassed on the road. With steep cliffs on one side and open sea on the other, there's something very satisfying in the uncompromising nature of the terrain. Rocky reefs run out towards the little lighthouse island of Pladda. This is rugged coastal walking at its finest.

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