

Introduction

Famous as Scotland's only 'mainland island', Kintyre is both romantic and remote. From Tarbert in the north to Dunaverty Bay in the south, the Kintyre Way criss-crosses the peninsula for 100 miles (161 km), across pathless moorland and rolling hills, along forest roads and deserted beaches. From the Atlantic coast you may watch glorious sunsets over Jura and Islay, whilst from its eastern shores, you'll see Arran's craggy mountains. Stay in fishing villages and enjoy freshly caught seafood, cheese from Campbeltown Creamery and whisky from Springbank. There's a wealth of history in Kintyre's castles and chapels; seabirds, dolphins and sharks are just some of the wildlife highlights; and, above all, a warm Kintyre welcome awaits you.

The Kintyre Way – in Gaelic, *Slighe Chinn-tìre*, see page 14 – opened in August 2006. It was set up by local businesses with major support from the Forestry Commission Scotland and HIE Argyll and the Isles Enterprise, with marketing help from VisitScotland and the Kintyre Marketing Group. The Way was later extended to cover more of the very scenic southern parts of the peninsula and its terminus moved from Southend to Machrihanish. Keep your mind open for adventure, stay vigilant for waymarkers, be game for some rock-hopping at high tide and expect some boggy ground. The Kintyre Way will reward you with surprising beauty and a deep sense of achievement.

Tarbert's waterfront



1 Planning and preparation

Best time of year

In theory, the Kintyre Way could be an all-year route because snow and ice are unlikely even in winter. In practice, short hours of daylight, near-certainty of strong winds and heavy rain and very limited accommodation will rule out the months from November to March for most people.

In season, May and September are more likely than other months to coincide with relatively settled weather, with fewer wet and windy days. Bear in mind that the midge season usually runs from May to September, and take protection.

Locally, the prevailing wind is from the south-west. The weather is very changeable, sometimes hour-by-hour, so be prepared for all four seasons in one day! Conditions on the eastern side of the peninsula, wind-sheltered to some extent by the central ridge, are often more favourable than on the western side.

Terrain and gradients

The Way criss-crosses the peninsula, traversing the hilly spine in the process. Although the Way never rises above 350 m, completing it involves a total altitude gain of 3140 m (10,300 ft). Sections 3-5 and 3-7 are particularly strenuous, and undulations occur throughout. Refer to the altitude profile on the inside back cover.

The terrain underfoot varies from tarmac roads to trackless moorland, together with forest and farm roads, specially constructed paths, rocky shores and sandy beaches. The paths and tracks are mainly well drained, apart from various places between Southend and Machrihanish. Almost all stream crossings are bridged. In normal conditions, problems are unlikely. After heavy rain, however, keeping your feet dry can be a challenge almost anywhere.

The amount of road-walking is higher than in many long-distance walks in Scotland, though the majority of the distance is along quiet, often scenic roads that carry little traffic. For safety's sake, walk on the right-hand side of the road so as to face oncoming traffic, and be ready to take to the verge whenever there is one. Stay alert, especially near blind corners, and expect large farm and commercial vehicles.

Walking poles may be very useful on the moorland sections, perhaps less so when crossing shingle beaches and rocky shorelines, where you have to go carefully to maintain balance. If you carry poles, you will become an expert in handling them as you cross many sturdy stiles along the Way.

Tide awareness

Along the shore between Clachan and Tayinloan and in several places along the stretch of shore from Polliwilline (page 62), access could be difficult at high tide or in rough seas. Because of a barbed wire fence very close to the shore, high tide may impose more road walking: if need be, take to the road from near Polliwilline farm and rejoin the Way 2 miles (3.1 km) further west-south-west: see page 62. It's important to check tide times: refer to the EasyTide website which gives predictions for ports including the Sound of Gigha, Campbeltown and Southend: see page 72.

Northward up Loch Fyne, from the viewpoint

Days and stages

The first question is in which direction to walk the Way. We describe it from north to south (Tarbert to Machrihanish) for two reasons: the longest days are thus tackled in the later part of the week, when you're well into your stride, and there is something extremely satisfying about finishing at Kintyre's historic, rugged south coast.

The Way can be completed in seven days, which includes some long days: see Table 1. See page 8 for accommodation options from Claonaig.

Many independent walkers will prefer to have their baggage transferred, and (in 2017) there's a choice of three baggage handlers listed on the links page of www.rucsacs.com. If you book a Kintyre Way package with a tour operator, their arrangements can avoid unduly long days by means of vehicle transfer to overnight stops. Some accommodation providers offer a pick-up/drop-off service – check in advance.

Before finalising your plans, consider which of these side-trips are of interest: the Isle of Gigha (pages 23-5), Saddell Abbey (page 52) and Island Davaar (page 59).

Table 1

Distances and possible overnight stops

| | miles | km | pages |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Tarbert | | | |
| 3-1 | 12-1 | 19-4 | 32-36 |
| 3-2 | 10-1 | 16-2 | 37-39 |
| 3-3 | 9-3 | 14-9 | 40-43 |
| 3-4 | 15-9 | 25-6 | 44-48 |
| 3-5 | 19-9 | 32-1 | 49-55 |
| 3-6 | 16-3 | 26-2 | 60-63 |
| 3-7 | 16-9 | 27-2 | 64-69 |
| Machrihanish | | | |
| Total | 100-4 | 161-6 | |

Distances are measured along the route of the main Way: alternatives differ in length.

The sections from Campbeltown to Southend and from there to Machrihanish are long and strenuous. To lighten your load to just a day pack, you could base yourself in Campbeltown and return there by 400/444 bus from/ to Southend (except on Sundays); check the timetable beforehand. There is also a limited service from Machrihanish (200/442) – also not on Sundays. Given the sparse accommodation in Southend and Machrihanish, you may prefer to stay in Campbeltown for several nights. If you opt for the Saddell detour (page 52) you need not backtrack to resume the main Way: see the map on page 51 and directions on page 53.



The Way through Innean Glen

Waymarking

The Way is mostly waymarked with pale blue round posts bearing its distinctive logo, but sometimes with flimsier stakes, some blue-topped, others unpainted with mileage marker discs attached. You need to be extra vigilant on the cross-country sections where the Way does not follow a path or track. It's easy to overshoot a turning where the marker is hidden by vegetation or just out of sight. In late 2017, the paint on many marker posts had faded or disappeared completely, making them more difficult to spot.

Not all of the route's waymarker posts show direction arrows, but some carry a small metal disc with an arrow. Their angular tops may be oriented at random, so a post may mean 'carry on' or 'turn here': to resolve doubt, try to spot the next waymarker. In poor visibility, or where markers are sparse, navigation can be tricky.

If you haven't seen a waymarker for about 10 minutes, or if you reach an unmarked junction, you may no longer be on the Way. If in doubt, retrace your steps and check your position from the map and printed directions. Note that North is rotated by 10° on all map pages.



Rugged coast near Machrihanish

Travel planning

Kintyre is well served by public transport. Twice-daily Loganair flights link Glasgow with Campbeltown. The Scottish Citylink bus service 926 departs Glasgow at least four times daily, booking advisable, and reaches Tarbert in 3¼ hours and Campbeltown in 4½. This service also passes through Tarbet (Loch Lomond) on the First ScotRail Glasgow to Fort William line.



Bus service 926 at Kennacraig ferry terminal

There are CalMac car ferries between Portavadie (on Cowal) and Tarbert; between Lochranza (Isle of Arran) and Claonaig (summer only); and between Tayinloan and Gigha. The Kintyre Express ferry links Campbeltown to Ballycastle (April to September). Local bus services link Tarbert and/or Campbeltown with the towns and villages on the Way: see page 73 for details of all these, and check timetables carefully. By car via Lochgilphead, Campbeltown is 140 miles from Glasgow, although it's only 55 miles as the seagull flies. You could reduce the road miles to 95 by taking the ferry from Ardrossan to Brodick, then driving around Arran to Lochranza for the ferry to Claonaig. However, this makes sense only if you have time to spend on Arran. It's a beautiful island in its own right, with fine walking, notably the Arran Coastal Way. You can also link your walk with the Cowal Way (which starts at Inveruglas on Loch Lomond) using the Portavadie ferry: see inside back cover for our guidebooks to both.

Accommodation and refreshments

Although there are several good hotels on and near the Way, as of 2017 there is a shortage of B&Bs and campsites, and bunkhouses/hostels. There is only one B&B near Claonaig (Crossaig Lodge, 4 miles to the south, lifts provided). Other options are to take transport back to Tarbert or forward to Clachan, or else to sail to Lochranza on Arran (summer only, 30-minute ferry trip). At Southend (near Dunaverty) choice is also restricted, but see page 8 for other options. In Kintyre, people open and close B&Bs from time to time as their life changes, and within the shelf life of this book the options will change further. There are campsites near Tayinloan (1 mile to its north) and in Carradale, in Machrihanish and on Dunaverty Bay. Several taxi and baggage companies serve the independent walker, see page 72.

Facilities along the Way

| | B&B/hotel | hostel/ bunkhouse | campsite | pub/café | food shop, carryout |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|
| Tarbert | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Claonaig | 4 miles ✓ south | | | | |
| Lochranza (Arran) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Clachan | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tayinloan | ✓ | | 1 mile ✓ north | ✓ | ✓* |
| Ifferdale | | ✓ | | | |
| Carradale | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Campbeltown | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Southend | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Machrihanish | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Linked to Claonaig by ferry (summer only) – useful accommodation alternative

* limited hours

Selected bus and ferry routes

See p73 for information on operators

