

## 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, artisan ice cream from Gigha's Wee Isle Dairy 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 16 – 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, rain and very limited accommodation will rule out the months from November to March for most people. Tarbert is at latitude 56° N and has gloriously long days from late May to mid-July, but by late December there is only seven hours of daylight.

In season, May and September are more likely than other months to coincide with relatively settled weather, with fewer wet and windy days. July and August tend to be busier months for visitors because of school holidays and other patterns. 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

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.





Walking poles may be very useful on the moorland sections, perhaps less so when crossing shingle beaches and awkward rocky shorelines. They are also useful for balance when crossing streams, and for testing their depth. If you use poles, you will become an expert in handling them as you cross many sturdy stiles along the Way. If your rucksack has suitable loops, you can always stow the poles on its outside whenever they aren't helping.

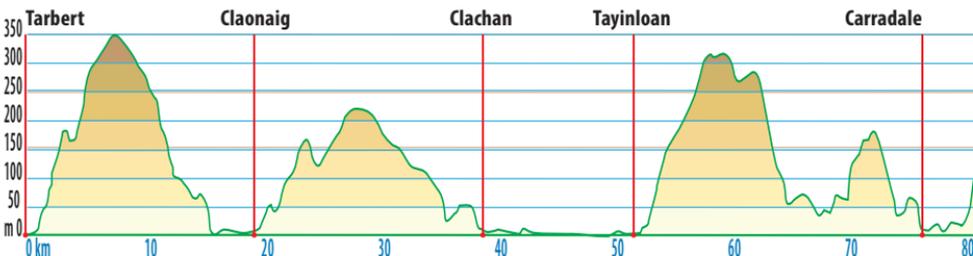
The amount of road-walking is higher than in many long-distance walks in Scotland, though the majority of the distance is along quiet, often scenic roads that carry little traffic. Walk on the right-hand side of the road so as to face oncoming traffic, and be ready to take to the verge whenever there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

## Gradients

The Way criss-crosses the peninsula, traversing the hilly spine in the process. Although the Way never rises above 361 m/1185 ft, completing it involves a total altitude gain of 3140 m (10,300 ft). Sections 3-5 (Carradale to Campbeltown) and 3-7 (Southend to Machrihanish) are particularly strenuous, and at over 21 miles (34 km) 3-5 is too long for most walkers. All sections undulate – with the exception of 3-3 (Clachan to Tayinloan) which is almost all at sea level: its challenge lies more in the terrain.

Look closely at the altitude profile below, and plan your daily distances within your abilities and daylight hours available. If in doubt about any part, read the summary at the start of each section in Part 3 before deciding whether to split it or use public transport or a taxi to shorten it. Remember that terrain, as well as altitude gain/loss, affects your overall progress. To enjoy this walk fully, you need a comfortable itinerary, not one that keeps you anxious about time or fitness. See more about daily stages on pages 9-10, and travel planning on pages 12-13.

## Kintyre Way route profile

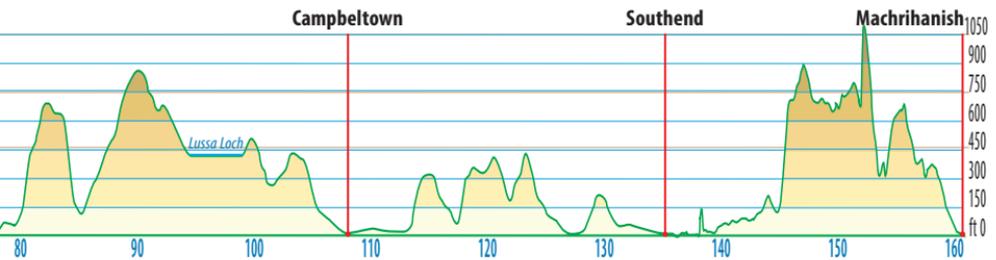


## The Kintyre 66

A more radical idea is to combine walking the Way with options provided by the Kintyre 66 – a circuit formed by two roads, the A83 and the B842. See opposite for a map that shows how it relates to the Way. For more info, visit [bit.ly/kintyre66](http://bit.ly/kintyre66).

This creates options that will allow cyclists to bypass sections of the Way that cannot be cycled responsibly under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The route has six spurs that visit places featured in this book. Clockwise from Carradale, these are Carradale & East Kintyre, Campbeltown, Southend & Machrihanish, West Kintyre, Gigha (by ferry) and Tarbert & Skipness.

The Kintyre 66 is relevant not only to car drivers and campervans, but also to cyclists and bus passengers. If you are bringing an ebike, find out about charging points and if you want to hire, email [bikes@kintyrecycling.org](mailto:bikes@kintyrecycling.org).



## Tide awareness

There are several sections of the Way when you need to be aware of the state of the tide. These include the shore between Clachan and Tayinloan (see page 45) and several places along the stretch of shore from Polliwilline: see page 64. Access could be difficult at high tide or in rough seas, and with a barbed wire fence very close to the shore, it is worth planning ahead. The high tide alternative would impose more road walking: take to the road from near Polliwilline farm and rejoin the Way 2 miles (3.1 km) further west-south-west: see page 64.

The other reason to be aware of tides is if you are keen to visit Island Davaar, which is accessible only by a tidal causeway from about three hours before low tide: see page 61. Given the location of the causeway and the length of the Campbeltown/Southend section, this may be more feasible if you can take a rest day in Campbeltown. Tidal windows are inflexible and it's worth taking time to explore Davaar's caves once you've crossed over. There's plenty else to see in Campbeltown.

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 75.

*Island Davaar, accessible by a shingle causeway around low tide*



*Tide times may be displayed in places*



## Days and stages

The official advice, and our recommendation, is to complete the walk from north to south – Tarbert to Machrihanish. There are two reasons: you will tackle the longest days in the later part of the week when you're well into your stride. Also, it's extremely satisfying to complete the route at Machrihanish after visiting Kintyre's historic, rugged south coast at Southend. This also leaves you very close to Campbeltown airport and not far from its harbour; either of these may offer a different way to return home for some readers.

The Way can be completed in seven days if you can manage three long days (16-17 miles) and one very long day (21 miles): see Table 1. A 21-mile day is a showstopper for many:

consider using a bus e.g. from Carradale to Saddell and visit the Abbey before rejoining the Way. Note that Saddell is a detour from the main route, but you need not backtrack through Saddell Glen to resume the main Way: see the map on page 53 and directions on page 55.

Some walkers are content to make their own arrangements for transport and accommodation. Some accommodation providers offer a pick-up/drop-off service – check before you book. As of 2022 we knew of no dedicated baggage handling service, so if making your own arrangements you should either carry all you need, or else negotiate with local taxis. Other walkers prefer to have arrangements made for them as a package, and to avoid unduly long days by means of vehicle transfer to overnight stops. For a current list of such support services, visit [www.rucsacs.com/books/ktw](http://www.rucsacs.com/books/ktw) and scroll down to the yellow button to **View services**.

Before finalising your plans, consider which side-trips are of interest: for example, the Isle of Gigha (pages 25-7), Saddell Abbey (page 54) and Island Davaar (page 61).

**Table 1**

*Distances and possible overnight stops*

|                         | <i>miles</i> | <i>km</i>    | <i>pages</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Tarbert                 |              |              |              |
| 3-1                     | 12-1         | 19-4         | 34-38        |
| Claonaig                |              |              |              |
| 3-2                     | 9-9          | 15-9         | 39-41        |
| Clachan                 |              |              |              |
| 3-3                     | 9-3          | 15-0         | 42-45        |
| Tayinloan               |              |              |              |
| 3-4                     | 15-5         | 25-0         | 46-50        |
| Carradale               |              |              |              |
| 3-5                     | 21-2         | 34-1         | 51-57        |
| Campbeltown             |              |              |              |
| 3-6                     | 15-7         | 25-3         | 62-65        |
| Southend                |              |              |              |
| 3-7                     | 16-9         | 27-2         | 66-71        |
| Machrihanish            |              |              |              |
| <b>Total (Mainland)</b> | <b>100-6</b> | <b>161-9</b> |              |

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. If you have trouble finding accommodation in Southend and/or Machrihanish, you could instead stay in Campbeltown for several nights.

For section-by-section advice on local public transport, refer to the *Walk and Ride* leaflets that are available from the official website: see the top of page 76.



*The Way through Innean Glen*

*Rugged coastline near 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, some with mileage marker discs. 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.

Some waymarker posts carry a small metal disc with an arrow to confirm direction. However their angular tops are sometime rotated by livestock, so the 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 10-20 minutes, or if you reach a junction without a marker, you may be offroute. In doubt, retrace your steps to the last marker, and check your position from the map and printed directions. Note that the official mileages don't always coincide with the mileage markers on our mapping. All references to 'mile X' in our directions are to the numbers shown on our maps. Be aware that North is rotated by 10° on all map pages.



## 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 Glasgow/Fort William railway.



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. In summer Calmac runs a ferry between Campbeltown and Ardrossan/Troon, and the Kintyre Express links Campbeltown to Ballycastle, Antrim. Local bus services link Tarbert and/or Campbeltown with the towns and villages on the Way: see page 76 for details, 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. For links with other routes, see page 77.

## Accommodation and refreshments

Although there are several good hotels on and near the Way, there is a general shortage of B&Bs, bunkhouse/hostels and campsites. There is only one B&B near Claonaig (Crossaig Lodge, 3 miles offroute 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 10 for other options. When staying in a small place, be sure to ask your B&B host about how to find an evening meal. If the village has no provision, some hosts (such as Kirkland House in Clachan) will cook for you. People open and close B&Bs from time to time as their life changes, and since the pandemic some have switched to self-catering. Within the shelf life of this book the options will change further. There are campsites in Carradale, in Machrihanish and on Dunaverty Bay. Independent walkers may find a taxi service to move baggage or book a support package: see page 76 for support services.

## Facilities along the Way

|  | B&B/hotel              | hostel/<br>bunkhouse | campsite | pub/café | food shop,<br>carryout |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|
| <b>Tarbert</b>   | ✓                      |                      |          | ✓        |                        |
| <b>Skipness</b>  |                        |                      |          |          | ✓                      |
| <b>Claonaig</b>  | 3 miles ✓ offroute     |                      |          |          |                        |
| <b>Lochranza (Arran)</b>  | ✓                      | ✓                    | ✓        | ✓        |                        |
| <b>Clachan</b>   | ✓                      |                      |          |          | ✓                      |
| <b>Tayinloan</b>   | minimum ✓ 2-night stay |                      |          | ✓        | ✓                      |
| <b>Carradale</b>   | ✓                      |                      | ✓        | ✓        | ✓                      |
| <b>Torrisdale</b>  |                        |                      |          | ✓        |                        |
| <b>Ifferdale</b>   |                        | ✓                    |          |          |                        |
| <b>Campbeltown</b>   | ✓                      | ✓                    | ✓        | ✓        | ✓                      |
| <b>Southend</b>  | ✓                      |                      | ✓        | ✓        | ✓                      |
| <b>Machrihanish</b>  | ✓                      |                      | ✓        | ✓        |                        |

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

# Selected bus and ferry routes



See p76 for information on operators

