

# Mull of Kintyre

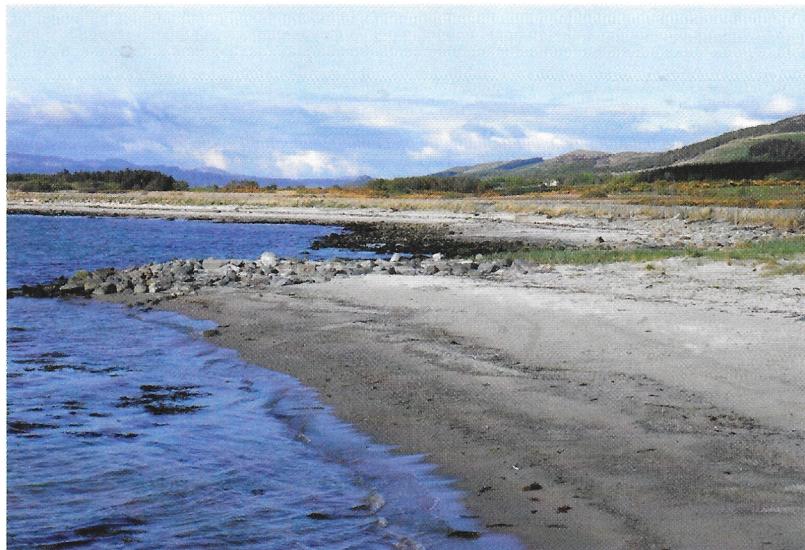
*...a massive hit!*

Spread your wings and head for this lovely peninsula in southwest Scotland; you'll soon be humming the tune!

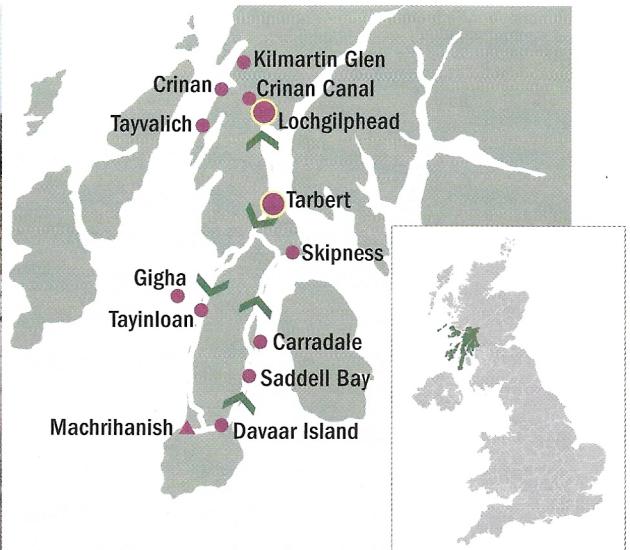
WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



The sheltered harbour at Tarbert\*



ABOVE The white sandy beach at Tayinloan



## US AND OUR 'VAN



Carol Kubicki...

and her husband, Anthony, use their Devon Tempest to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring the historical and natural environments



2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3-litre. This is our third blue campervan and we have called them all the 'Blue Bus'

**D**espite visiting Scotland more times than I care to remember – and being a teenager during the Christmas of 1977 when 'Mull of Kintyre' was at the top of the charts for nine weeks – I have never travelled the long and winding road to the Kintyre Peninsula. This 40-mile-long finger of land in southwest Scotland isn't somewhere you happen upon on the way to anywhere; you have to make the effort to visit Kintyre. Make that detour and you will be rewarded with quiet roads, sequestered beaches and fascinating attractions. The only downside if, like me, you easily pick up a tune, is that 'Mull of Kintyre' might become an irritating earworm!

Taking the ferry into Tarbert helped make our journey to Kintyre feel even more of an adventure to a remote land. We stood on deck watching porpoises sliding through the water and gannets diving for fish as Tarbert got closer.

The ferry takes you into the heart of this charming village where colourful buildings ring a sheltered boat-filled harbour. Smart gift shops and cafés are strung around the waterfront. Above the village sit the fragmented ruins of a medieval castle with a woodland sculpture park in its grounds. We parked our Blue Bus and explored Tarbert before heading south.

On the west coast of Kintyre at Tayinloan, we found the ferry terminal for the Isle of Gigha and Big Jessie's Tea Room, where we scoffed home-made cake with a sea view. That night we overnighted in a field near the café. Opening up our big 'van door, the only thing between us and the Atlantic was a beach of golden sand and our evening's entertainment was watching a stunning sunset over Gigha.

The community-owned Isle of Gigha is

only seven miles long and, with little traffic, is ideal for exploring by bike.

From the turquoise-blue sea of Ardminish Bay we headed south to the luxuriant Achamore Gardens.

A former owner brought his plant collection, including rhododendrons and camellias, to Achamore because of its warm microclimate. Today, the enchanting and colourful 54-acre maze of trees and flowering bushes and the sheltered walled garden ready with floral scents are tended by gardeners and volunteers.

Back on the bikes we rode to the island's southern tip and, after a tea room stop, tackled a headwind to the opposite end. The spectacular view of the Paps of Jura, three distinctive steep-sided hills on the island of Jura, was worth the effort.

Machrihanish's campsite is a short walk from a magnificent beach, more than three miles long. Overlooking Machrihanish Beach is High Park Farm, bought by Paul McCartney in the 1960s. Later, after marrying Linda, a photographer, musician and animal rights champion, this isolated farm became the family's holiday retreat.

It is easy to see why the McCartneys loved this stunning location and the band, *Wings*, featuring Paul and Linda, recorded 'Mull of Kintyre' as a celebration of this blissful place. I practiced saying the name Machrihanish until it rolled off my tongue as smoothly as the 'Mist rolling in from the sea' as we strolled along the beach and beyond the village around rocky bays to the bird observatory.

Campbeltown, a short bus ride from Machrihanish, still has some fishing boats working from its bustling harbour. Three whisky distilleries remain from the dozens there once were and, as we explored, I ➤



wondered how whisky-soaked the air would have been in the nineteenth century.

I found the sheltered Linda McCartney Memorial Garden, a tribute to a woman remembered fondly on Kintyre for her kindness and generosity. 'Far have I travelled and much have I seen ...' I sang under my breath as I admired the flowers and sculpture, the song now firmly lodged in my head. 'Mull of Kintyre' features the bagpipes and drums of the Campbeltown Pipe Band, who were recorded playing outdoors for the track, adding a tingle factor and Scottish authenticity.

Campbeltown has a vibrant music scene, but we were here to see a very special cave. Three hours either side of low tide, you can walk out to Davaar Island from Campbeltown along a causeway, a pebbly spit of land covered in seaweed and shells. Flocks of oystercatchers and terns swooped around us and, as the sea receded on either side, I felt (perhaps appropriately given what we were looking for) as if the tides were parting just for us.

On the island we followed a family also scrambling around the rock-strewn coast looking for the cave with the painting. The children excitedly ran into each of the numerous cliffside caves, returning disappointed until they eventually called us eagerly to 'the one'. On a wall of the dark and narrow cave is an astonishingly vibrant

## INFORMATION

Tarbert Castle Heritage Park; bringing history and nature to life

 [tarbertcastle.info](http://tarbertcastle.info)

For everything about the Isle of Gigha

 [gigha.org.uk](http://gigha.org.uk)

Information and blog posts about Machrihanish

 [machrihanish.net](http://machrihanish.net)

Campbeltown Heritage Centre's website is useful for local history

 [campbeltownheritagecentre.co.uk](http://campbeltownheritagecentre.co.uk)

Information about the significant archaeological landscape of Kilmartin Glen

 [kilmartin.org](http://kilmartin.org)

The Crinan Canal is 'open' from April to September

 [scottishcanals.co.uk](http://scottishcanals.co.uk)

**ABOVE** Kintyre has a pretty bay around every corner

**RIGHT CLOCKWISE** Crossing the tidal causeway to Davaar Island; Inside a cave is this vibrant painting of the crucifixion; Colourful rhododendrons at Achamore Gardens on the Isle of Gigha

nineteenth-century painting of the crucifixion by local artist, Archibald MacKinnon (take torches if you visit).

Anthony drove our Blue Bus at the leisurely pace that the winding narrow coastal road north from Campbeltown deserved. After a particularly sharp bend we reached the hamlet of Saddell and pulled into the small car park.

The ruins of Saddell Abbey are meagre, but what is worth stopping for is the remarkable collection of medieval grave slabs. These are carved with beautifully detailed images of animals and weapons and three of the stones have impressive life-size effigies of the lords whose grave they marked, each one proudly dressed in full armour.

We walked through woodland to Saddell's hidden bay with its picturesque white sandy beach overlooked by a castle (Landmark Trust) and an Antony Gormley statue. The cast-iron figure standing among the rocks and gazing over the sea to Arran is called *GRIP* and was created for this bay as part of the Landmark Trust's fiftieth anniversary celebrations.

You might recognise Saddell Bay as where the memorable 'Mull of Kintyre' video was filmed. Many local people were involved and remember the event.

At Carradale we picked up a small part of the Kintyre Way, a 100-mile waymarked path

## TOP TIPS

The B842 from Campbeltown to Claonaig Bay is a pretty drive, but it is winding and slow. If you are in a rush, use the A83

You can take your motorhome across to the Isle of Gigha but it does only have about six miles of road and no campsite (at the time of writing). Booking is not required; vehicles just wait their turn

that runs the length of the Kintyre Peninsula. Above the conifers, the path climbs gently to moorland.

On the summit of Cnoc nan Gabhar we sat in the sunshine watching a shower advancing over the sea towards Arran.

Later, we made the most of a fine evening to walk from the campsite along the gently sloping golden sands of Carradale Bay and cutting across the point to the tiny sheltered harbour.

Continuing on the narrow coastal road, we reached Claonaig and the summer ferry terminal for Arran.

Just beyond, we parked at Skipness and found delightful woodland enclosed by stone walls covered in velvety moss.

A track took us to Skipness Castle, a medieval fortress that is now a substantial and fascinating ruin. The castle was abandoned around the end of the seventeenth century and later used as a farm. The tower house and enclosing walls remain and visitors can climb steps to the ramparts to take in the views to the nearby chapel on the point and Arran.

Returning to Tarbert, we followed the shore of Loch Fyne towards the Crinan Canal and Lochgilphead. Opened in the nineteenth century, the canal was built as a shortcut for boats across the Kintyre Peninsula, avoiding the sometimes perilous long journey around the Mull of Kintyre. Just nine miles long – from Ardrishaig to Crinan and the Atlantic – the attractive towpath is a favourite nowadays with cyclists and walkers but, before the railways, a boat through this canal was the quickest way to get to northern Scotland.

In the pleasant village of Ardrishaig, the Crinan Canal joins the mouth of Loch Gilp and the deep waters of Loch Fyne, a sea loch off the Firth of Clyde. On the waterfront we found the memorial to John Smith, the Labour Party's leader in the early 1990s. Smith was bought up here in the 1940s ➤

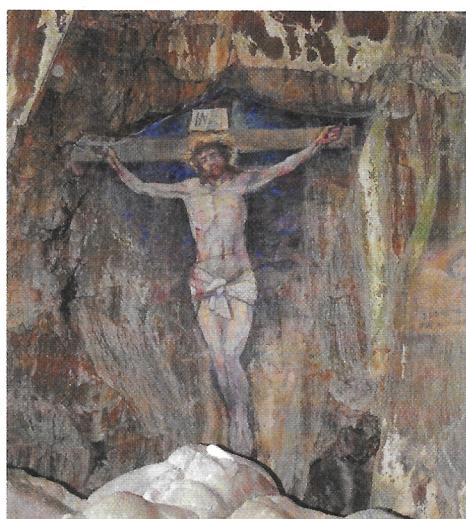
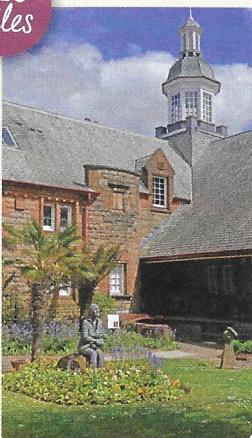
## THE JOURNEY

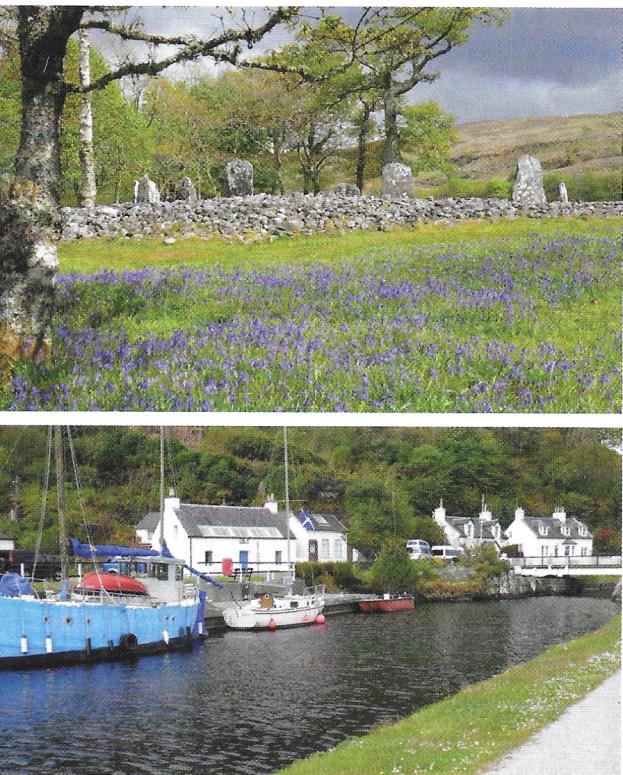
We travelled from home in Morecambe to Kintyre via the M6, M74, Loch Lomond and Portavadie, returning via Inveraray. We spent seven days touring/six nights on sites in May

## THE COSTS

Fuel Average 34mpg.....	£97
Ferry costs Portavadie-Tarbert one-way with 'van and two foot passengers to Isle of Gigha.....	£25.05
Site fees.....	£109
Attractions Two adults: Achamore Gardens.....	£12
Public transport Two adults: return bus Machrihanish-Campbeltown.....	£5.98
<b>Total costs.....</b>	<b>£249.03</b>

610 miles





and 1950s when Ardrishaig was a bustling port with a fishing industry and steamers arriving from the Clyde. The Steamer Terminal is now a modern café and is next to the extended timber pier, specially designed to load long tree trunks onto ships, thus reducing the number of timber lorries on Scottish roads.

The lovely town of Lochgilphead, beside the canal, has a campsite that makes an ideal cycling base. However, with an overflowing laundry bag, washing was our priority. This is easy as Lochgilphead Caravan Park operates a large launderette for campers and locals.

With me still humming 'Mull of Kintyre', we pedalled along the canal, passing pretty lock-keepers' cottages and waving at passing boats. On our first ride we turned off onto the undulating road through Knapdale Forest. In 2009 beavers were reintroduced here and you can follow a trail to look for signs of the beavers, particularly gnawed trees. If you are very lucky and patient, you may even spot one! We turned back at Tayvallich, a scenic village strung around a horseshoe-shaped sheltered bay.

The following day we cycled to Crinan at the Atlantic end of the canal, where the loch gates into the sea are marked by a tiny lighthouse. Heading back, we followed the arrow-straight single-track road over Moine Mhòr, a desolate raised bog fringed by saltmarsh, which was a contrast to the lush Knapdale woodland.

**ABOVE CLOCKWISE**  
**Bluebells at Temple Wood Stone Circle; Skipness Castle has a tower you can climb; At Crinan the canal meets the Atlantic**

Beyond the nature reserve is Kilmartin Glen, an extraordinary Scottish landscape, packed with stone circles and chambered cairns. As we explored the Temple Wood Stone Circle, built around 5,000 years ago, the weather changed dramatically in seconds from sunshine to wintry showers, adding to the 'magical' atmosphere.

I am so glad that we eventually made the detour into this relaxed corner of Scotland. The quiet roads, magnificent beaches, curiosities and lovely scenery of the Kintyre Peninsula made it a perfect place to tour in our 'van. As *Wings* sang, 'Smiles in the sunshine and tears in the rain / Still take me back where my mem'ries remain'.

*PS Does anyone know the cure for earworms?*

## WE STAYED AT

**Ferry Farm and Big Jessie's Tea Room,**  
**Ferry Road, Tayinloan, Tarbert PA29 6XQ**

01583 441141

Tearoom open February - December, but ring to check first

No charge for overnight parking

**Machrihanish Holiday Park,**  
**Machrihanish, Campbeltown,**

**Argyll PA28 6PT**

01586 810366 campkintyre.com

Second week of March - October

Two adults, pitch and electric:  
 From £25

**Carradale Bay Caravan Park,**

**Carradale Estate, Carradale,**

**Campbeltown PA28 6QG**

01583 431665 carradalebay.com

1 April - 31 October

Two adults, pitch and electric:  
 From £24

**Lochgilphead Caravan Park, Bank Park,**

**Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8NX**

01546 602003

lochgilpheadcaravanpark.com

1 April - 31 October

Two adults, pitch and electric: £30