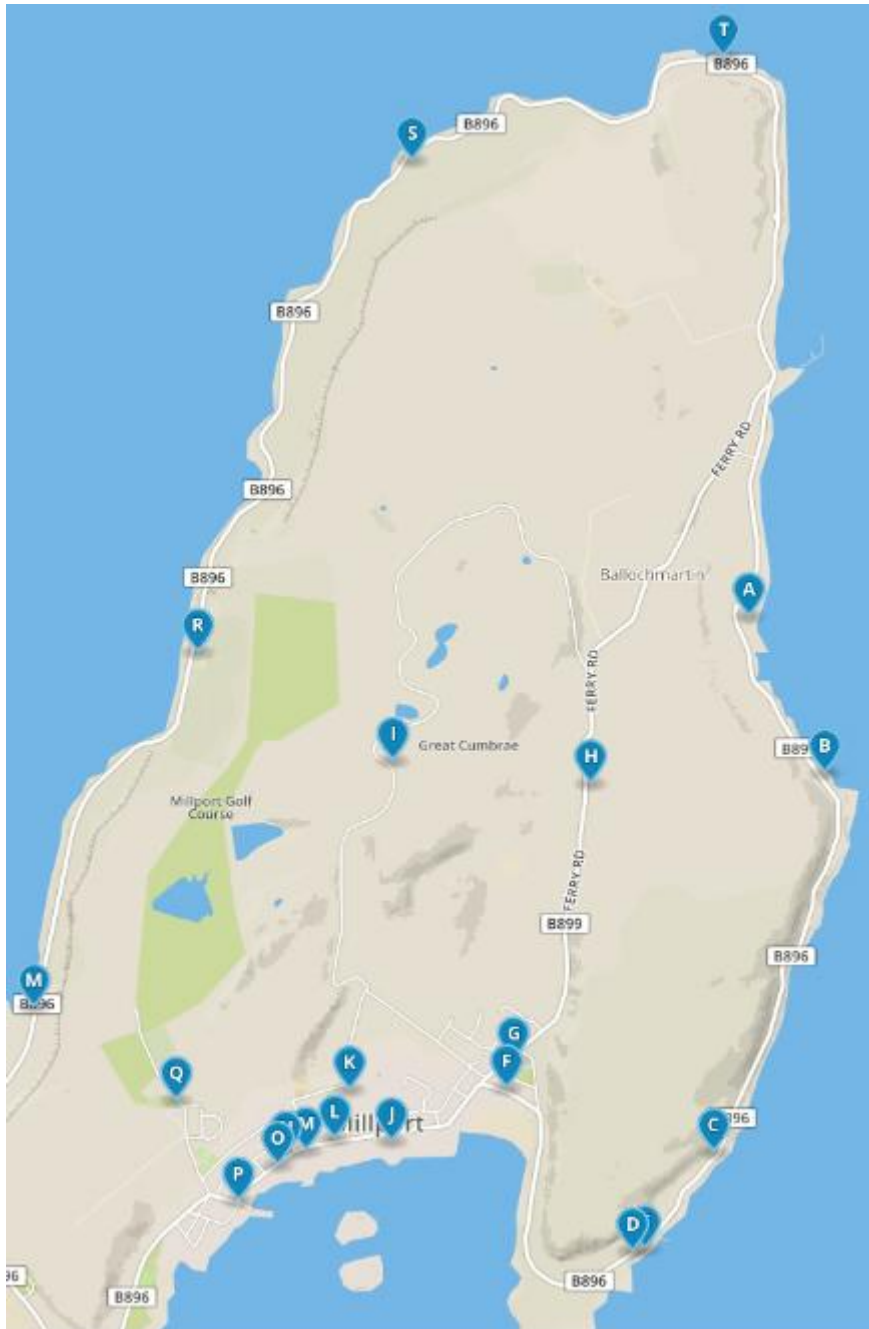


Cumrae Heritage Trail



Letters for each location can be found on the map above.

If you only want to do the Millport Town Walk get the bus to the Field Studies Council buildings where the Marine Station plaque is located.

Start at the Ferry Slip¹

Turn left after disembarking from the ferry.

The first buildings are Scotland's National Water Sports Centre then Ferry House.²
Keep to the coast road past Fairhaven.

(A) Ballochmartin Bay; Site of Special Scientific Interest

B 896

OS Grid Reference – NS 18115 57073

Plaque on plinth next to picnic table.

For the last 30 years or so, Ballochmartin Bay and Kames Bay have been recognised as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by Scottish Natural Heritage; for their educational value especially. As such it is illegal to damage the integrity of these beaches. Ballochmartin Bay is characterised by glacial deposited boulders and cobbles over an underlying layer of boulder clay. An interesting fauna of invertebrates lives within the sand that supports a diversity of wildfowl species. It was a site where native oysters could be found and where eelgrass beds once thrived.



In earlier days, the top of the sand at Kames Bay was sprayed with chemical weedkiller, or raked over and the accumulated seaweed removed mechanically. That practice has now stopped as it resulted in killing-off the marine organisms living in large areas of the beach. The upper beach effectively became a biological desert. This damage to biodiversity was taking place on a beach that is world-famous, scientifically, as a classic

sandy beach. There have probably been more PhDs per square metre on Kames Bay than on other sandy beaches worldwide. Kames Bay is special in having a source of freshwater upwelling from beneath it (hence why the sand is always wet, even when it is not raining!) caused by drainage down the Great Cumbrae Fault (which is responsible for the valley up which the Ferry Road runs). That effectively creates an estuarine character to the biota of this marine beach, probably a unique feature in Britain.

The higher plant flora that is now evident is part of the natural re-colonisation process by sand-dune pioneer species. These are not 'weeds' that should not be there, they would have been there for thousands of years before man interfered with nature to effectively sterilise that environment. Such vegetation helps significantly to stabilize the sand in the upper reaches of the beach.

In consultation with North Ayrshire Council it was agreed (2011) that the inimical practices of mechanical cleaning would cease and only hand-picking of man-made litter will take place on Kames Bay from now on.

On to the next stop

Continue on the coast road.

(B) King Håkon's Fleet, 1263; Viking long ships and war

B 896

OS Grid Reference – NS 18483 56229

Plaque on plinth at layby.³

In the early medieval period the Cumbraes were Norwegian-controlled islands. They were part of the Sundrays, Southern Islands, contained in the kingdom of Man and the Western Isles. Scotland's young king, Alexander III wanted this kingdom to be part of Scotland once again. He began a series of raids in Skye and other islands to provoke a response.

In the autumn of 1263, King Håkon VI of Norway led an armada of up to 200 ships and 20,000 men to challenge Scotland's Alexander. Scotland's knights would have watched from Ardrossan as the fleet moved up the Clyde to shelter in Lamlash Bay. Then from Ardneil they watched Håkon sail up to anchor off the Cumbrae Isles.

Battle was engaged on the shores of Kelburn. Due to bad weather the Norwegians couldn't land all their men and were overcome by Alexander's 500 knights and 7,000 foot soldiers. Local legend has it that Håkon stood with his captains at Down Craig to watch the battle.

Håkon withdrew with the intent to return next year after the winter with a larger force but died at Kirkwall in the Orkneys. His son, Magnus IV, was a peacemaker with his neighbours and in three years Scotland regained the Western Isles by the Treaty of Perth.



On to the next stop

*Continue on the coast road.*⁴

(C) Lion Rock; geology imitating life

B 896

OS Grid Reference – NS 17895 54814

Plaque on concrete plinth in layby.

This is a fine geological feature of Cumbrae. Lion Rock is a dyke of Labradorite which has intruded into the existing Old Red Sandstone. The last ice age glaciation wore down the softer sandstone to expose the dyke which has been weathered to a shape similar to that of a lion.

Together with a nearby dyke called Deil's Rock they were known as the Keppel Walls and individually as Heatherene Keipel and Houllon Keipel.

After the ice age the dykes would have been at sea level as the land levels in this part of Scotland were much lower. Once the weight of the ice lifted the land rose to form the raised beach and sea cliffs that you can see all round Cumbrae. This raising of the land started approximately 8000 years ago and is still happening; it is called isostatic rebound.

Other interesting geological features in Cumbrae include -

Stromatolites

These are found just south of Westbourne Cove in the exposed rock at the shore. These rock features are the fossil record of colonies of algae that flourished in warm shallow seas.

Sea Cave

At Red Craigs a cave was formed by sea-action in the cliffs and of course there is associated tales of smugglers.

Victoria's Face

Also at Red Craigs when looked at from a certain angle the profile of Queen Victoria can be traced against the sky.

Glead Stane

A glacial erratic found at the very top of the island. Even though it's at a height of 417 feet (127m) it's still worth the climb to see it.

Springs

There are two springs on note on Cumbrae and, following the strange Scottish habit of calling springs wells, are known as the Wishing Well and the Millport Mineral Well. The Wishing Well is on the east coast of the island and flows almost straight into the Clyde. The Mineral Well is near the top of the island on the road up to the Glead Stane.



On to the next stop

Continue on the coast road past Keppel Pier.⁵

Start of Millport Town Walk

(D) The Marine Station, 1897; studying Scotland's sea life

B 896

OS Grid Reference – NS 17566 54472

Plaque on gate post of Field Studies Council buildings.⁶

The Marine Station at Millport is the oldest extant marine station in Scotland, dating back to the late nineteenth century when Sir John Murray (he of the Challenger expedition fame), moved a converted lighter The Ark from its original mooring place in Granton Quarry (Edinburgh) through the Forth-Clyde canal to Millport Bay in the spring of 1885. There it formed a base for the investigation of the rich local marine flora and fauna. He selected Millport due to its relatively sheltered situation and the fact that the esteemed "Cumbrae naturalist" Dr David Robertson lived on Cumbrae (at "Fern Bank", in Kames Bay).

The Station was originally run by the Marine Biological Association of the West of Scotland, but in 1914 that became the Scottish Marine Biological Association (SMBA). Under the SMBA the Station had a long and distinguished history as a research laboratory with many world-famous scientists visiting Millport to work on their specialist projects. Particular mention should be made of Dr Sheina Marshall FRS who spent her entire working lifetime at Millport and was responsible, with her co-

worker Dr A. P. Orr for classic studies on the planktonic copepod (water flea) *Calanus finmarchicus*, the principal foodstuff of the herring.



When the SMBA moved to Oban in 1970 the Universities of London and Glasgow took over the running of the facility. Glasgow University pulled out in 2011, and London at the end of 2013, when the Station was handed over to the Field Studies Council. So a long tradition of resident research in marine science will cease but the equally important tradition of fieldwork teaching in marine biology will continue, albeit on a different basis.

On to the next stop

Cross over the road.

(E) SY Scotia, 1902-04; Scottish National Antarctic Expedition

B 896

OS Grid Reference - NS 17564 54455

Plaque on landing slip buildings.

Plans for a Scottish south polar expedition started in 1899 when William Speirs Bruce first looked for funding. He needed £36,405 and was gifted most of it from the Coats family of Paisley; they contributed £31,000.

He first purchased a Norwegian whaler called Hekla and had it taken to Ailsa Shipyard in Troon for re-fitting. Re-named Scotia then left Troon on 25th October 1902. Scotia was captained by Thomas Robertson and carried 6 scientists, 5 officers and 26 crewmen. They sailed down through the North and South Atlantic to the Falkland Islands reaching Port Stanley on 6th January 1903.

After provisioning the Expedition set off on 26th January to survey the South Orkneys and then the Waddell Sea. They managed to reach 71°21' S before returning to the South Orkneys for the winter.

Once the Scotia was free of ice they sailed to the Falklands on 27th November 1903. They left for the second exploration of the Waddell Sea on 9th February 1904 this time making as far south as 74°01' S.



After being trapped in ice they started north on 14th March. Surveying the Ross Deep, Mid Atlantic Ridge and Gough Island they then made of South Africa. The Scotia set sail for Scotland from Cape Town on 21st May 1904 and reached the Clyde on 21st July.

The Scotia was met by the Marine Station's yacht Mermaid, the Coats' Triton and Gleniffer and the steamer Marchioness of Lorne and escorted to Millport. Bruce, Robertson and their scientists took to the Scotia's launch and landed at the Marine Station's slip.

They were met by Sir John Murray, Lieutenant Shackleton, Dr Sommerville, David Robertson, Mr J G Bartholomew, Mr Henry Coates, Mrs W S Bruce, Mrs Robertson and others. Bruce received the Gold Medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Robertson the Silver and the other scientists Bronze. During the proceedings a telegram from King Edward was received congratulating Bruce.

After lunch, purveyed by Messrs White and Smith, Gordon Street, Glasgow, the Scotia set off at six o'clock for Gourock, her final destination.

On to the next stop

Continue on the coast road past the Deil's Rock.⁷ Walk round onto Marine Parade⁸ and the start of Millport town onto Kames Bay.

(F) Duncan Macrae, 1905-1967; leading Scottish actor

Dundonald Villa, Kames Bay

OS Grid Reference – NS 17112 55161

This was Duncan Macrae's Millport home.

Duncan Macrae (20 August 1905 - 23 March 1967) was one of Scotland's best known actors. He worked on stage, on television, radio and in cinema. To relax he had a second home, away from Glasgow, in Millport at Dundonald Villa on Kames Bay.



He was born in Glasgow in Maryhill and his father, James, was sergeant in the police force. He attended Glasgow University to study engineering but never graduated preferring acting. He joined Glasgow's Citizen Theatre for his early acting years before featuring in acclaimed films such as Whisky Galore! and Tunes of Glory. In television he was Para Handy in the first adaptation of Neil Munro's tales. Later in the 1960s he was cast in The Prisoner and The Avengers both cult television shows.

He liked to relax in Millport and was known to his many friends as John, his true first name. When on the ferry he would often chat to the captain and crew. When on the island he loved to talk to the local children and visiting children. He also always had a special word for the island's elderly. He was also known for his support of his wife Peggy who was a Town Councillor and special needs schoolteacher. Indeed it was Peggy who helped establish the annual Cumbrae Queen celebrations.

Duncan Macrae died at Killearn Hospital on 23rd March 1967. His funeral service at Linn Crematorium was attended by many of his Millport friends including the Provost, George Barr.

On to the next stop

Continue along Kames Bay and turn left into Ferry Road.

(G) Andrew Goldie, 1840-1891; Millport's Pacific explorer

12 Ferry Road

OS Grid Reference – NS 17191 55325

This was the Goldie family residence.

Andrew Goldie was born at the Kelburne Estate, Largs, Ayrshire, Scotland, on May 5th 1840, the first-born child of David Goldie and Agnes Clark, and was christened on the 24th of that same month. At the time of Andrew's birth, his father was the Head Gardener at the Kelburne Estate, which belonged to the Earl of Glasgow. David Goldie is also reported to have been an elder in the Established (Presbyterian) Church. The 1841 census records for Largs show that David Goldie was 30 years old at that date, Agnes was 20 years old (this age was confirmed by the date on her birth certificate, even though dates on her gravestone suggest that she was only seven years her husband's junior) and Andrew is their only child, a baby of one year old.

By 1851 we find the Goldies at the Garrison House on the Isle of Cumbrae which was also part of the Earl of Glasgow's estate. George Boyle had died in 1843, passing the estate to his son from his first marriage, James Carr-Boyle, who continued to reside at the Kelburne Estate in Largs. George Boyle's widow, his second wife Julia Sinclair, had removed to the Garrison House after his death and the Goldie family had relocated there also in 1845. The Goldie family grew, with Andrew's siblings in order of age: James, David, Agnes, William, Margaret, Mary Archibald, Catherine and George. By the time of the 1861 census, Andrew is to be found in Fife listed as living in Gardener's Bothie, Caputh, which is near Dunkeld.



The Museum of the Cumbraes holds a document detailing Goldie's first trip to the other side of the world, to Auckland, in 1863 on the clipper ship, the Queen of Beauty. This interesting snapshot of life on board ship for the month that the travel took tells stories of stowaways, death, disease, relationships and more. Goldie stayed in New Zealand for some time.

He arranged a deal in March 1875 with Benjamin Samuel Williams of Upper Holloway Nursery in London to go plant collecting and begins his adventures in Papua New Guinea, where he discovered, amongst other things, the Goldie River, Goldie's Bird of Paradise and various plants. He was also partly responsible for a gold rush there, although this turned out to be false and no quantities of gold were found. It can be seen from his writing that he took great joy in each new experience, whether that was travels, unfamiliar people and their customs, new territories or simply how to take a bath on a ship. His writings, discoveries and collections have made an impact on the history of New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand as well as on the history of North Ayrshire.

Some of the objects that Goldie brought home to his family members are on permanent display at the Museum of the Cumbraes. And the museum has been informed in the course of investigating the collection that a headdress that they care for is particularly rare, there being only 18 known examples existing in the world.

The Museum of the Cumbraes holds a handwritten memoir of Goldie's travels in New Guinea and other papers relating to his life.

Although Goldie is not well known in Britain, he is considered noteworthy in Australia and New Zealand. Recently, National Museums Scotland staff have been investigating Goldie's place in the history of Pacific collections, so we may hear more soon about how the Cumbrae collection fits in with other collections around Scotland. Goldie's later life was plagued with fever and ill health, and he set up a trading store in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

He returned to Millport and died in Whinfield, 12 Ferry Road, his sisters' house, in 1891. His death is recorded on the family's gravestone in Kirkton Graveyard.

On to the next stop

Return to the bottom of Ferry Road and turn right onto Kelburn Street to continue the Millport Town Walk.

Start of Inner Circle Walk

Continue up Ferry Road and into the countryside.⁹ On the left is the road to Ballikkellet Farm.¹⁰ Near the top of the hill is a farm road on the right and 3 metres further is a trail into the woods. Follow it staying close to the fence.¹¹

(H) Standing Stone; Cumbrae's rich prehistoric archaeology

B 899

OS Grid Reference – NS 17617 56412

Plaque on plinth near to the stone.

This is Cumbrae's sole standing stone though there are records of two more nearby. Its old name was the Gouklan Pillar and is sited in Craigengour Wood at the top of the Ferry Road. Over the years it has been toppled and reset in concrete. People have also dug under and around the stone but no artefacts have been found. In the 20th century its surface was carved with many initials.

Other pre-historic sites to be found on Great Cumbrae include -

Lady's Grave NS 1830 5888

A cairn at Holm Bay, Tomont End. Found in the field near the road it is 10m in diameter with a hollowed centre. It was excavated in 1878 and an urn and burnt bones found.

Down Craig Fort NS 1819 5796

A narrow promontory 60m long protected by cliffs on three sides and a ditch and rampart.



On to the next stop

Return to the road and continue upwards. Where the road forks turn left and continue upwards.¹² You are heading for the top of the island.¹³ Continue on down the hill.¹⁴

(I) Little Cumbrae; Great Cumbrae's sister island

OS Grid Reference - NS 16698 56513

Plaque on plinth next to public benches.

After the Treaty of Perth in 1266, Little Cumbrae became Crown property and was maintained as a hunting ground for the king by the Hunters of Hunterston. In 1577 the island eventually became the property of the Earls of Eglinton. It remained part of the Eglinton estates until 1913 when the island was purchased by Evelyn Stuart Parker for £5,000. It was inherited by his son Ian in 1936.

The island has been sold several times lately. In 1960 it was bought by Peter Kaye of Highland Engineering Ltd, in 2002 by Mr Steven and Mrs Rhoda Worrallo of Holt Enterprises and lastly by Sarwan and Sunita Poddar in 2009 to use as a meditation and yoga retreat.



Little Cumbrae Castle

The castle of Little Cumbrae sits on a tidal island (Castle Island) adjacent to Little Cumbrae House on the east side of the island. It is a plain keep of the 14th century and comparable in the style to nearby Law, Fairlie and Skelmorlie Castles.

The ground floor is vaulted and entrance to the castle is by ladder to the first floor - a good defensive feature. Externally it has ashlar quoins, checkered corbelling and projecting parapet and castellation. Internally the ground floor has two basement rooms, the first floor is also vaulted with a great hall and kitchen. The second floor has one large room and garderobe.

Lighthouses

The first lighthouse on Little Cumbrae sits on the very top of the island. It was constructed in 1757 and was the first lighthouse to be built on a Clyde island. It measured 28 feet in height and had a coal fire on its roof to serve as its navigation light.

The second lighthouse was built on the west side of the island in 1793 and was installed with 32 whale oil lamps and reflectors. These were replaced with 15 Argand lamps in 1826. Today the lighthouse has electric solar-powered lamps.

Little Cumbrae House

The 'big' house was originally the farm house of the island which Evelyn Stuart Parker enlarged shortly after buying Little Cumbrae. He also had a Red and Gold garden planted by the famed garden designer Gertrude Jekyll. The house was again altered in the late 1920s with the addition of the square tower and an upper floor.

On to the next stop

Continue down through Breakough Farm buildings.¹⁵ After the farm turn right then left to head back to Millport.¹⁶ This road takes you onto Kames Street which leads onto the bottom of Ferry Road. Turn right then right again onto Kelburn Street.

Resume Millport Town Walk

Follow Kelburn Street and cross over to the promenade path and follow it round.

(J) Crocodile Rock, c.1900; the Clyde's fiercest stone

OS Grid Reference – NS 16639 54981

Plaque on plinth at path adjacent to Crocodile Rock¹⁷

Indeed the fiercest stone on the Clyde! The origins of the Crocodile Rock are steeped in legend. Images of the rock first appear in postcards from the 1900s but it may have existed before then. We know that it was painted for a while by Robert Brown a local architect. Another tale attached to it is that it was first painted by drinkers from the nearby bar.

Whatever the truth no visit to Cumbrae would be complete without a visit to the world-famous Crocodile Rock. Generations of visitors of all ages have posed on the rock for photographs through the years. Today the rock is painted by local volunteers and shows no decline in popularity.

Indian's Face

Another painted rock on Cumbrae is the Indian's Face. This is found on the old sea cliffs on the west side of the island.



On to the next stop

*Cross over the road on to Glasgow Street continue along and turn right into College Street.
Continue up.*

(K) Cathedral of the Isles, 1849; smallest cathedral in Great Britain OS Grid Reference – NS 16488 55173

The ecclesiastical complex today called the Cathedral of the Isles was constructed as an Episcopalian college with adjoining church and residences for students and choir boys. It was the idea of G F Boyle, who became 6th Earl of Glasgow, and was designed by William Butterfield. Construction started in 1849 and was completed in 1851. In 1876, a cathedra (bishop's chair) was installed in the church and it became a seat of the Bishop of Argyll and the Isles. So now the college's small church was now a cathedral.



Today the church is still a cathedral, possibly the smallest in the world. It holds Sunday services and is popular for weddings. Music recitals also take place sometimes using the cathedral's own organ, harpsichord or grand piano. The residences have been converted to bed and breakfast accommodation for visitors to the island. Carved Stones

In the entranceway to the church are a collection of early medieval carved stones. They are gravemarkers from the Kirkton Graveyard and the Trahoun Cross which was found at the Garrison near to the Guildford Street entrance.

On to the next stop

Return down College Street and enter Garrison grounds.

(L) The Garrison, c.1745; summer house of Earls of Glasgow

OS Grid Reference – NS 16418 55009

Plaque at front door.

Garrison House was originally built around 1745 by Captain James Crawford of the Revenue Cutter Royal George. In Crawford's time the front wall at the Garrison was pierced with gun slits and had cannon.

It was then purchased by George Boyle, 4th Earl of Glasgow, in 1819 and enlarged to become a family residence. The land was leased from the Marquis of Bute to whom he was bound to supply a rose on the 11th July each year if required. In 1843 upon the death of George it was used as a dower house by his widow for many years and was called the Priory.

In 1887 the Marquis of Bute bought the Garrison and used it as a dower house until 1919. For a short time it was a hydropathic hotel but this closed before World War II. During the war it opened to house Mearns Kirk Hospital when its staff and patients were evacuated there from Glasgow.



Garrison House - Millport

In 1948 Millport Burgh Council took on the lease and used the building as office, chambers and library. In 1972 the council used part of the building as a restaurant and built trampolines and a paddling pool in the grounds. (The tennis courts were built in 1950.) The Museum of the Cumbraes opened in the Garrison in 1978.

The Garrison closed in 1997 when it was declared unsafe. It was gutted by a fire in 2001 but re-opened in 2008 after restoration by Cumbrae Community Development Company funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Today it forms the heart of Cumbrae's community and houses a museum, library, council services, café, crafts shop and NHS centre.

On to the next stop

Continue through Garrison grounds and cross over street.

(M, Part 1) War Memorial, 1922; remembering Cumbrae's sacrifice OS Grid Reference – NS 16305 54940

Millport's war memorial to the dead of World War I was unveiled on Sunday 15th October 1922 in Guildford Street. Earlier in the day flags in the town were flown at half-mast and on the steamer. After church services the townspeople made their way to the unveiling. Also present were the Largs Territorials and ex-servicemen who came over by motor boat.

A memorial service was held in the West United Free Church and the Territorials and Boys Brigade marshalled at the Drill Hall before parading to the church.

After the service they proceeded to the memorial which was unveiled by Col Colin McLeod Robertson who had led the local brigade to war in 1914. The names of the dead were then read out by Captain J

C M Murray and the Boys Brigade Band played The Flowers of the Forest. The memorial was then given over to the Town Council to guard and protect it.



The memorial was built using public subscription money under the guidance of the Memorial Committee. It was made of silver-grey granite with scrolls on its base, a pinnacle and topped with a lion holding the Millport Burgh Crest. It was made by Glasgow monumental mason Mr R Gray.

It is inscribed with "To the memory of our heroic dead, 1914-1919". And the names of the forty-eight dead:

Allan Archibald M.
Atkinson Robert
Boyd Alexander
Campbell William M
Clark Duncan
Crawford John
Ferguson Peter
Forrest Ernest L.
Forrest James A.
Forrest William S.J.
Gollan James
Gordon William
Graham James
Graham John
Hood John
Hunter Andrew
Hunter George
Hunter Neil
Lang David
Lewis William J.

Little Neil
Maley Joseph S.
Maycroft Thomas G.
McDavid Alexander
McInnes Donald
McKean William
McLauchlin Daniel
Paton Alexander
Paton John G.
Paton Robert
Pickett Joseph
Rae John
Rae William
Seaton Henry L.
Shearer Alexander G.
Sinclair Archibald K.
Sinclair Frederick B.
Stuart James
Taylor Robert
Turnbull George K.
Waddell James
Weir Duncan

After World War II it was further inscribed "1939-1945", and the names of the nineteen dead from that war:

Allan Hugh
Elliott William
Frame James M.P.
Graham William
Hamilton Graham
Hunter H. Laird
Hunter Thomas
Kennedy John
MacDonald John M.M.
McConnochie J. Hunter
McDavid Joseph
McDavid Kenneth McK.
McLachlan James
Neil Alexander
Sharp W. Clark

Smith Robert
Taylor Robert
Walker Alexander
Wright Norman

German Howitzers

In 1919 Millport Burgh was selected, along with many other Scottish burghs, to be given captured German ordnance as a form of memorial. This act by central government proved to be very unpopular as the public felt they were an unwelcome reminder of the war. Millport was to receive two howitzers (small field guns). Largs had been given a machine gun that was in such poor condition they sent it back!

Millport Council was split over the guns with Bailie Robertson and Provost Cockburn keen but Councillors Sinclair and Gardner opposed saying people didn't want them and it cost too much to transport them. So keen was the Provost that he said he would pay for the transport cost himself.

In January 1920 the guns had been delivered from Rothesay and left at the pier. No-one seemed interested in them now and the council couldn't be bothered deciding where they should be sited. Eventually the burgh moved them in March to inside the gate of West Bay Park.

As related these ordnance weren't popular in Scotland and the burghs started getting rid of them. Some were sold for scrap - as told in one of the Para Handy tales. Some "disappeared" it is said into the Clyde. Millport buried hers under the sea wall of the West Bay Park. Today one has been exposed by the weather and is becoming an additional attraction for visitors to Cumbrae.

New Memorial

In 2005 a new War Memorial was built on the west side of Cumbrae. It consists of a path, memorial garden, monument and metal artwork. The memorial was the idea of Ian Forsyth and was dedicated by Rev Marjory Mackay of the Parish Church.

The land it is on was donated by Willie and Matthew McIntyre. It was built by David Stevenson and the metalwork was by Ian McBay.

On to the next stop

Cross back over onto Guildford Street and continue west.

(N) The Wedge; world's narrowest house

50 Stuart Street

OS Grid Reference – NS 16185 54913



Officially recognised as the world's narrowest fronted house. Once inside the walls angle away from the entrance to form a wedge shape. Downstairs is a room and kitchen and going upstairs we find a bathroom and bedroom.

Other properties of interest on Cumbrae include -

The Royal George Hotel

This is named after the customs cutter that sailed out of Millport Bay to catch smuggling vessels in the Clyde. The Royal George has been popular with visitors and residents for generations.

The Ritz Café

The café was last refurbished in 1963 and retains its formica and pvc '60s feel. Known for its ice cream and hot peas it's a well loved Millport business.

Millburn House

This fine Georgian house stands at the top of Cardiff Street looking down to the harbour. It was built about 1805 by Captain James Miller when he succeeded to the command of the cutter Royal George from his uncle Captain Crawford.

The house gets its name from the burn that runs through its grounds and powered the grain mill that once stood where Cardiff Street is now and gave its name to the town of Millport.

On to the next stop

Cross over road to sea wall and continue west.

(O) Cycling; national sport of Cumbrae

OS Grid Reference – NS 16108 54827

Plaque on sea wall.

Whether you bring your own bike or hire one here cycling round Cumbrae has become almost a compulsory activity for summer visitors. For generations the ten and a half mile road around the island has provided a welcome bit of exercise and fresh sea air.



The first bike hire shop in Millport opened in 1936 and there have been shops ever since. Today there are 1000 bikes for hire of every type and size.

Outside of Millport the road is flat and almost car-free making it ideal for families to cycle on. However, there are more challenging routes over the Ferry Road and up to the Mineral Well and Glead Stane on the top of the island.

On to the next stop

Continue west onto Stuart Street.

(P) Cumbrae's Piers; jetties, slips and harbours

OS Grid Reference – NS 16043 54758

Plaque on pillar of sea wall at corner.

The harbour at Millport was initially a quarry for stone to build a pier at Portpatrick. It was larger than you see today as it covered the area where the buses park at the pier head.

In 1833, the need for steamers to land goods and passenger in Millport was realised and the Millport Pier and Harbour Company was formed to build a pier at the harbour. So successful was this pier that it was enlarged in 1861.



In 1905, Millport Town Council bought the pier and spent a year repairing, extending and modernising it. In 1975 the pier came under the control of Strathclyde Regional Council but was later bought in 1991 by Cunninghame District Council. Today North Ayrshire Council own and maintain Millport Pier.

The Leck Pier and Strathwerry Pier are both in Millport town and were used mainly by boat hirers. The Leck Pier had an interesting gents toilet next to it as it relied on tidal seawater to flush it.

Keppel Pier was built in 1888 to take some of the pressure off Millport Pier. It too was bought by Millport Town Council in 1905. Keppel Pier was used by the Marine Station to moor its boats but it also maintained a small slip nearby. In 1972 the Marine Station bought the pier and in 1984 built a new pier next to it and demolished the old one. Balloch Pier was built by the Earl of Glasgow in 1872 at the old ferry point the islanders had used to reach the mainland. It wasn't very popular and with the building of Keppel Pier in 1888 it was used only in emergencies. The iron pier was removed about 1900 but the jetty part of it can still be seen. Next door the Scottish National Water Sports Centre has built a jetty and slip. Indeed there is also a private jetty just south of the old pier at Fairhaven.

Next is the Tattie Pier. It was traditionally used to export the island's potatoes and other produce to the mainland. It was also used by puffers to unload goods for the farms at the north end of Cumbrae. In 1971 Caledonian MacBrayne reconstructed it as the Cumbrae Ferry Slip.

On to the next stop

Cross over to Cardiff Street¹⁸ and continue up to your right on Golf Road passing Millburn House.

(Q) Kirkton, c.700; Cumbrae's medieval centre

OS Grid Reference – NS 15802 55179

Plaque on gatepost of old graveyard.¹⁹

Kirkton was the main medieval village of Cumbrae and existed for many centuries before Millport was first built. As the name suggests this was a town which formed about the church that was erected there.

The Church

The church stood at the centre of the old graveyard there and Christian gravemarkers found on site are of a type unique to the Clyde islands of Bute, Arran and Cumbrae. At Kingarth in Bute there is the church of St Blane the first monastic church in the Clyde islands. Kirkton would have been a daughter church. The churches are quite close as communication at that time was by sea and it is no great distance from south Bute to Sheriff's Port.

The graveyard is roughly circular in shape which indicates an early Christian occupation. St Blanes is on a hillside with a water supply. It also has good views of the sea to watch for any attackers and behind it are hillsides to hide in. When you compare this to the Kirkton site we find that it has all of these too.

In later medieval times Great Cumbrae was part of Largs parish and the Kirkton church was under the control of Largs church both of which were dedicated to St Columba. Largs in turn was controlled by Glasgow diocese until 1318 when Walter the High Steward of Scotland transferred Largs parish to Paisley Abbey. Its revenues were to help with its reconstruction after its destruction during the Wars of Independence.



In 1612 at Kirkton the old 'Sanct Colmis Kirke' was replaced by a new parish church of 'fine hewn stone'. This in turn was taken down and a church of 380 seats built on its site in 1802. But by this time fewer people lived in Kirkton and the population of the parish had grown too large for the Kirkton church. In 1837 the little Kirton church was pulled down and its stones carted down the hill to the new town of Millport and used to build a new church of 750 seats.

The old graveyard of the Kirkton church continued to be used and is full of interesting monuments to Cumbrae's inhabitants.

The Lands of Kirkton

After the Treaty of Perth in 1266 Kirkton and other lands on Cumbrae belonged to the Crown. They were managed by the Sheriffs of Bute who used Cumbrae as a hunting forest.

The first sheriff was John Stewart, the Black Stewart, illegitimate son of Robert II. In 1385 he was made Sheriff of Arran, Bute and Cumbrae and Buteshire was thus created. He was succeeded by his son James who in turn was succeeded by his son Ninian. Ninian's son John was known to reside in the manor house of Upper Kirkton and his two sons, Patrick and John, obtained feus of the farmlands in 1566. But those Stewart families became extinct and the lands reverted to the Bute estate.

One of the Sheriffs, James Stewart, who succeeded in 1539 got himself into trouble with the Regent and had to mortgage Kirkton to his father-in-law John Fairlie of Fairlie. His son John managed to redeem the property.

John's grandson, Sir James Stewart of Kirktown, was created a Baronet of Nova Scotia in 1627. His son Sir Dougald Stuart suffered losses in the civil war and mortgaged Kirkton to John Boyle of Kelburn. His son Sir James, who was created Earl of Bute in 1703, paid his father's debt of £76,169 for the Cumbrae lands.

Kirkton remained the property of the Stuarts of Bute until 1999 when most of their land on Cumbrae was put up for sale.

²⁰This is the end of the Millport Town Walk.

On to the next stop

To continue round the island return down to the bottom of Golf Road and turn right. Walk along West Bay.²¹ The road will turn north to take you round the west coast of the island.²²

(M, Part 2) War Memorial

OS Grid Reference – NS 15301 55786

On to the next stop

*Continue north.*²³

(R) Fintry Bay Lemonade Factory; Kennedy's Aerated Waters and Tea Room

OS Grid Reference – NS 15914 56915

Plaque on post at car park across from the tea room.²⁴

John Kennedy was an employee of the Marquis of Bute who gave him a small piece of land on the foreshore of Fintry Bay. There he built a tearoom and a small lemonade factory in 1908 to exploit a nearby mineral spring. Normally the Marquis of Bute didn't allow any development on the west coast of Cumbrae as it would spoil his view from Mount Stuart on Bute. John resolved this by planting hedges to mask his building facing the shore.

John Kennedy and later members of his family produced aerated waters of many flavours. They always kept up with public tastes and made drinks that were fashionable at the time. Their products included - Ginger Beer, American Cream Soda, Champagne Cider, Dry Ginger Ale, Grape Fruit Squash, Sparkling Hop Ale (Non Intoxicating), Iron Brew, Kola Champagne, Lemon Barley Water, Lime Juice and Soda, Peach de Lux, Queen's Toast and Sarsparilla.



In 1986, the original tearoom and lemonade plant were in a run-down condition and the business was bought by Dave and Nicky Smith of London. They gained planning permission to build a new tearoom

and house across the road. Work started in 1987 and the old buildings were eventually demolished and the land used as a car park. In 2003, Bill and Margaret Steele took over the business and expanded it to the present day tearoom and car park. However, empty buried gas canisters still to this day appear on the edge of the beach causing bomb scares much to the amusement of the local fire service.

On to the next stop

Continue north.

(S) "Hush Hush"; WWII Anti-Submarine Detection Base OS Grid Reference – NS 16850 58902

The Osprey Centre Site is private land. Please do not enter.

These buildings called Greycraigs at Eerie Port started off as part of the Clyde defence against submarine attack in World War II. The larger building contained equipment which was used to listen for enemy vessels, the smaller one was accommodation for the staff and the smallest was the listening room. Using amplification devices and hydrophones they hoped to detect submarines trying to get to the upper parts of the Clyde. The complex was protected by a small machine-gun emplacement.



The buildings became know to the locals as 'Hush Hush' partly because of their clandestine nature but more because of the quiet needed to detect the enemy.

After the war they were acquired by The Community Association of St George's and St Peter's Church in Easterhouse, Glasgow and used as a holiday centre. However, the 'Hush Hush' became run down and dangerous and the Association had to stop using it.

Then in July 1992 the buildings were renovated in a television programme called Challenge Anneka. The presenter, Anneka Rice, had to persuade local businesses to donate time and materials to complete the task in three days. This was accomplished with the help of Harcros Mactaggart builders, Ian McBay blacksmith and Pirie Roofing. Other local help came from the Ritz Café who supplied ice cream and Jim Newton who owned the amusement arcade who donated a pool table.

Unfortunately, no thought was given to the historic nature of the contents of the 'Hush Hush' and any war-time remains were destroyed.

Today the buildings are Greycraigs Outdoor Centre and Osprey Holiday and Conference Centre.

On to the next stop

Continue north. The road will take you to the north end of the island.

(T) HMS Shearwater, 1844; memorial to two young seamen

OS Grid Reference – NS 18176 59294

Plaque on plinth next to obelisk.

In the summer of 1844 Shearwater under the command of Commander Charles Gepp Robinson was surveying the west coast of Scotland. By mid May they had reached Largs Bay and on the afternoon of Friday 17th was at anchor.

Two young midshipman friends from the Shearwater, Charles Cayley and William Jewell, borrowed a small sailing boat to amuse themselves. They were out near the north end of Cumbrae when a strong north-east wind caught them and drove their boat bow-first under the waves taking the boys with it.

This was observed by the crew of another Government steamer in the bay called Vulcan which, having its steam up, went to the rescue. Unfortunately all they could recover were the boys' caps. There was a thorough search for their bodies but they could not be found.

Later Commander Robinson and his crew erected a sandstone obelisk at Tomont End in memory of Charles and William. Inscribed on it is -

IN MEMORY OF

MR. CHARLES D. CAYLEY

AGED 17 YEARS

AND
MR. WILLIAM N. JEWELL
AGED 19 YEARS
MIDSHIPMEN OF
H.M.S. SHEARWATER
TWO PROMISING YOUNG
OFFICERS DROWNED BY
THE UPSETTING OF THEIR
BOAT NEAR THIS PLACE
17TH MAY 1844
THIS MONUMENT IS
ERECTED
IN TOKEN OF THEIR WORTH
BY
CAPTAIN ROBINSON
AND
OFFICERS
OF THE ABOVE VESSEL

H M S Shearwater was a wooden paddle steamer Royal Navy surveying ship with a displacement of 328 tons. She was constructed in Harwich in 1827 and launched as a Post Office Steam Packet called Dolphin. In 1837 she was acquired by the Royal Navy and commissioned in 1840 at Liverpool as Shearwater. After surveying the coasts of Wales and Scotland she was sold off in 1857.



Charles Gepp Robinson was born in 1805 in Devon and joined the navy in 1819. For two years he was stationed in the North Sea. He then sailed the coasts of east and west Africa until 1829 searching for slave ships and indeed managed to capture three. Robinson then joined the Surveying Department working mainly in Scotland, Wales and the Mediterranean until 1856. He became a Rear-Admiral in 1864 and Vice-Admiral in 1871 and died in 1875 at his home in Oban.

Continue on the road round to the east coast²⁵ of the island and back to the ferry slip.²⁶

This is the end of the walking tour.

¹ The slip is constructed on the site of the old Tattie Pier which was used to export potatoes and other produce to the mainland. It was used mostly by puffers until Caledonian MacByayne built the slip in 1971.

² Ferry House is next to Balloch Pier and behind it is Down Craig Fort which dates to the Iron Age.

³ Note the sign post for the Cumbrae Sensory Trail. There are five sign posts round the island for the trail. Web Site - <http://www.cumbraesensorytrail.com/>

⁴ In another layby you will find the Wishing Well.

⁵ The pier was built in 1984 to replace the original of 1888. Also here is the Scotia Monument which was unveiled by Princess Anne in 2004.

⁶ Inside you can visit the Robertson Museum and an aquarium of Clyde sea life.

⁷ This forms the Keppel Walls along with the Lion Rock.

⁸ On the left is a path you can take going round Farland Point.

⁹ This area was known as Over Kames and was a medieval settlement.

¹⁰ In the field here was the mansion house of the Montgomeries of Skelmorlie. In medieval times they owned the eastern half of the island with the western half belonging to the Stewarts of Bute.

¹¹ You can also see the stone by going up the farm road and looking into the woods.

¹² Just after a farm road forks off the right is the Millport Mineral Well.

¹³ At the top of the hill is the Glead Stane deposited there by a glacier.

¹⁴ On the right you will see a flat area with a bothie – that's the curling pond and club house of the Millport Curling Club. Further on a road leads down to a property called Sheriff's Common. This alludes to this part of the island being used as hunting ground by the Sheriffs of Bute.

¹⁵ Note the red sandstone building on the road – this was the farm's mill.

¹⁶ Turning left after the farm would take you to Lady Margaret Hospital.

¹⁷ The Crocodile Rock is next to the Leck Pier which was used by boat hirers.

¹⁸ This was the oldest part of Millport where the burn ran down to the sea and the crew of the cutter Royal George built one storey thatched houses on either side of it in the second part of the eighteenth century.

¹⁹ The graveyard contains many fascinating memorials. These include the Crawfords, of the Royal George cutter, Andrew Goldie, the explorer, and James Laverton, a veteran of Waterloo.

²⁰ Continuing up Golf Road takes you past the old Manse (set back from the road), Millport Cemetery and at the end of the road Millport Golf Club.

²¹ If you cross the football pitch to the sea wall you will see a WW1 German Howitzer built into it.

²² You will see a kissing gate giving access to a path across a field. The small bay across from it is Sheriff's Port where the Sheriffs of Bute landed when visiting the island.

²³ Look out for the Indian's Face painted on the cliffs.

²⁴ This was the site of John Kennedy's lemonade factory.

²⁵ As you come onto the east coast you will see a small bay. This is Lady's Bay and in the field on the other side of the road is Lady's Grave cairn.

²⁶ Note the sandstone sculpture at the slip. It was made in 2000 by the Hosenberg Partnership in Galloway.