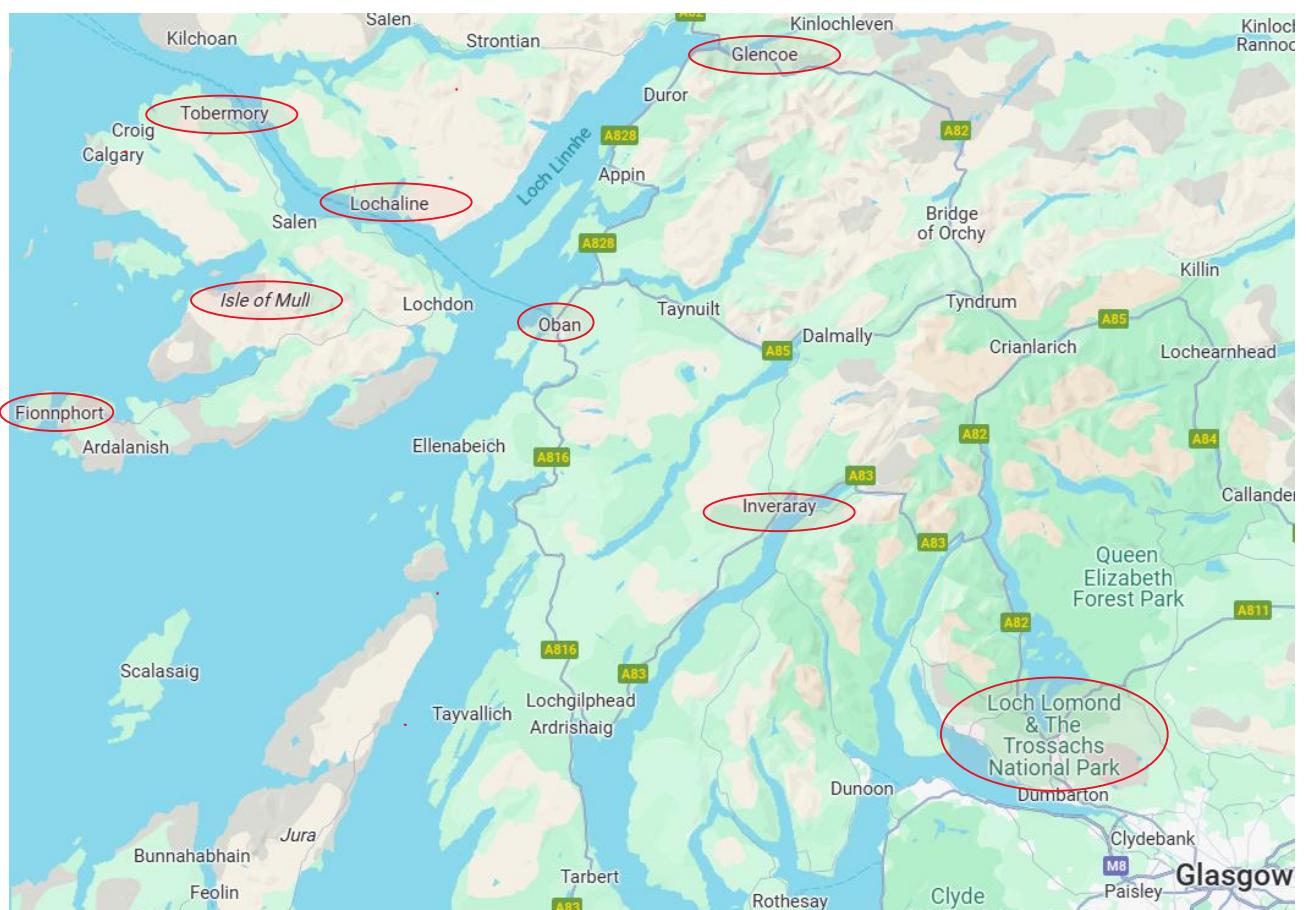


May in Scotland

Part 3: The Isles of Arran, Bute, Mull & Iona (21-25 May 2025)



Map from [Google Maps](#)

Notes: All photos are Lynda's or my own, except otherwise specified.

Wednesday 21 May 2025 – The Isle of Arran

That morning we woke up at 6:00 to meet our guide at 7:15 am at Buchanan Bus Station: we had enrolled in a Rabbie's bus tour to Arran: [A Day on the Island: Isle of Arran 1 Day Tour - Rabbie's Tours](#).



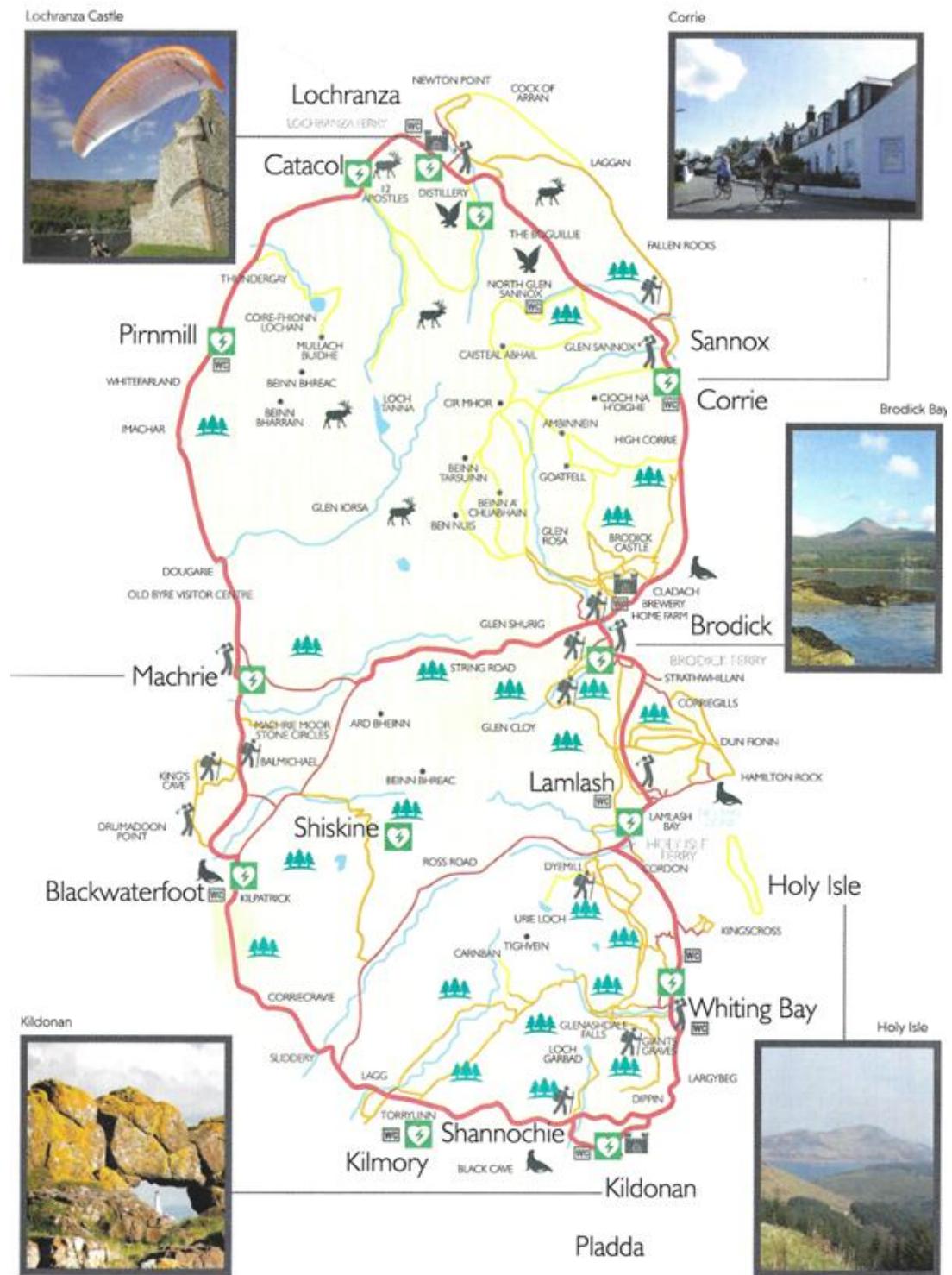
Sculpture in front of the bus station entrance



Wincher's Stance, by John Clinch, in the bus station

We left Glasgow at 7:30 and drove to Troon (see map p. 9) to have a coffee and take the ferry. Troon is a rich little town, with superb villas and a golf along the “millionaire road”. We crossed the Firth of Clyde, and as we neared Brodick, our port destination, saw the first hints of the Isle of Arran.





Arran is said to be “Scotland in miniature” because the “Highland Boundary Fault” just passes through it, dividing the island in two parts: the “Highlands” part in the North, that we explored that day, and the “Lowlands” part, where are the farms and cultivated lands.

We arrived at Brodick around 11:00. A short drive down the road took us to Brodick Castle, the ancient seat of the Dukes of Hamilton, now owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Inside we found rich Victorian decorations and intricately decorated furniture. Then we explored both the formal garden and beautiful woodland trails.





We then hopped back on the bus, which drove on the red road to the North (see map p. 3) exploring the Highlands part of Arran. We passed through Corrie, Sannox and stopped near Lochranza, where we first visited the distillery, then the ruined castle.



Our driver then continued along the seaside road, showing us the “12 Apostles” (a row of 12 fishermen cottages) when we passed near Catacol. On our way to Blackwaterfoot, the driver told us the legend of Robert the Bruce and the spider when we passed the King’s Cave, after Machrie.

In 1306, Robert Bruce suffered two major defeats in his attempt to claim the Scottish throne and oust the English from Scotland. Harried by his enemies and on the run, Bruce sought refuge in a cave. There he watched a spider try and fail to connect its silken thread to the cave wall to make a web. Again and again, the spider tried and failed to attach its thread, but it didn't give up, and after numerous attempts, finally succeeded.

Inspired by the spider's refusal to give up, Bruce vowed to try again to take the throne. After years of struggle, his efforts led at last to success, as he heavily defeated the English and their allies at Bannockburn and claimed Scotland.¹

As we could see the Kintyre peninsula over the sea from our bus windows, the driver also told us the story about Paul Mc Cartney’s song ‘Mull of Kintyre’, where the singer has owned High Park Farm since 1966. As a bonus we heard the song itself—an enjoyable memory for my generation! We also saw some seals on the beach from the bus windows.

We stopped at Blackwaterfoot, where we could have “a wee wander” along the beach. We did not have time to drive to the South part of the island, so we drove back to Brodick across the island on the “String Road”. We stopped for some shopping at Home Farm, which houses the Arran Cheese Shop, Arran Sense of Scotland (toiletry and candles), and the Arran Gift Shop.

We drove to Lamlash, where we could walk on the jetty, see the Holy Isle (which houses a Buddhist centre where people can retreat) and the “no take zone”, a marine reserve.



View of the Holy Isle from Lamlash

Early in the evening, it was time to say goodbye to Arran and take the ferry back from Brodick to the mainland. We were back to Glasgow around 19:00.

¹ You can read the tale on: [King's Cave, Arran | Robert Bruce and the Spider](#)



View of Brodick from the ferry

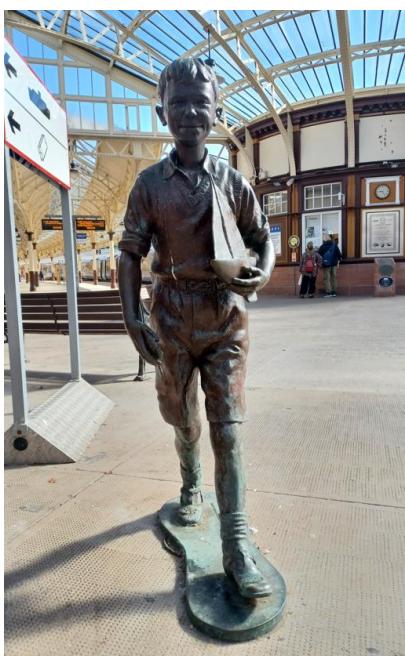
Graham, our driver, was a very knowledgeable guide, who enjoyed explaining details of Scottish culture and language to his passengers. He told us the Roman names of the various parts of the UK: Britannia for England, Caledonia for Scotland, and Hibernia for Ireland. He explained that “firth” is the Scottish name for “estuary” (like the Firth of Clyde, the Firth of Forth, etc.), that the prefix “Kil” means church, like in Kilbirnie, and “Dun” means “castle” like in Dumbarton.



Thursday 22 May 2025: The Isle of Bute

That morning, we also woke up early to go exploring the Isle of Bute on a minibus with Tom, another Rabbie's guide. See: [A Day on the Island: Isle of Bute 1 Day Tour - Rabbie's Tours](#)

We passed by Paisley (A737), Kilbirnie (A760) and Largs to go to Wemyss Bay (A78) and take the ferry. In this little town, the station conveniently links the train station with the ferry embarkment. The Edwardian building is well preserved and the round hub building of the station is worth a visit:



An eternally young passenger...



The station cafe and the covered path to the ferry embarkment



We thus took the ferry for a 35-min passage to the Isle of Bute. Below are two views from the ferry, the first showing Mount Stuart in the foreground, the second of Rothesay, the largest town on the Isle of Bute, where we disembarked.



Our journey carried on to the ancestral seat of the marquesses of Bute, Mount Stuart. This spectacular 19th-century mansion is famous for its ornate Gothic-revival architecture, and its wonderful grounds. Built in 1877, it was one of the most technologically advanced homes of its time, being the first Scottish home with electricity and an indoor heated swimming pool.

As we arrived a little earlier than the opening of the house at Mount Stuart, we had a strolled in the charming garden facing the entrance.



View of the castle entrance and the chapel (on the left) from the garden, seen below





View of the Castle from the visitors' shop...

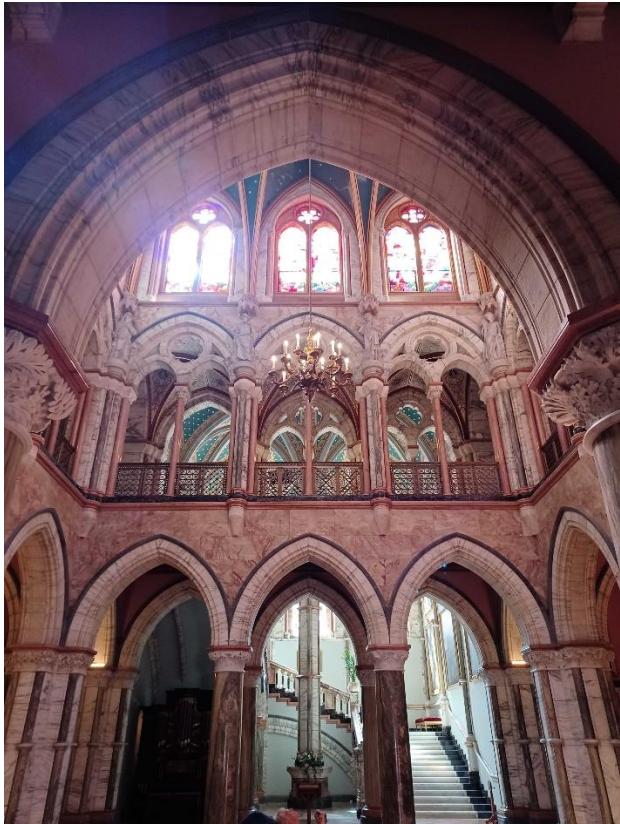


... and a general view of the back, which faces the sea



View of the seaside from the conservatory of the master's bedroom, on the first floor of the castle

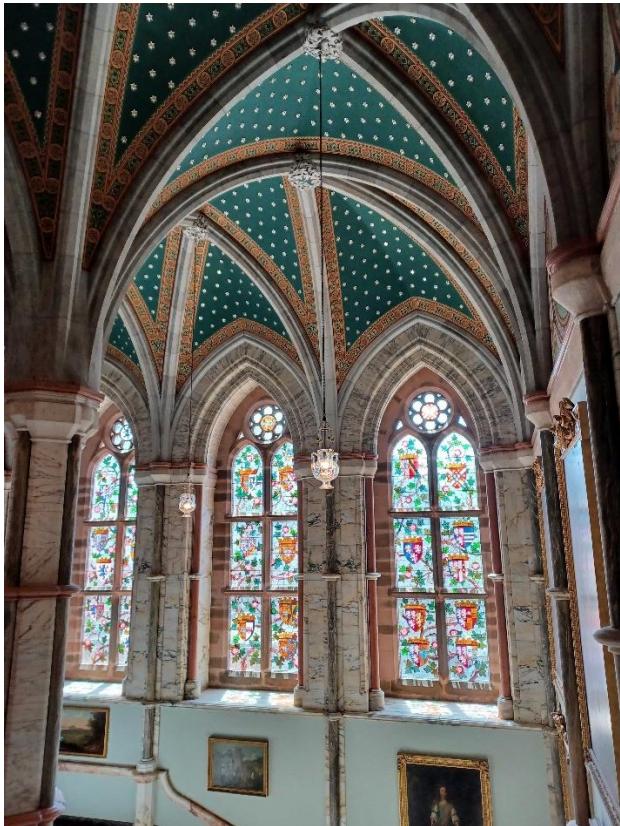
The luxury and feats of masonry and craftsmanship in this building are breathtaking:



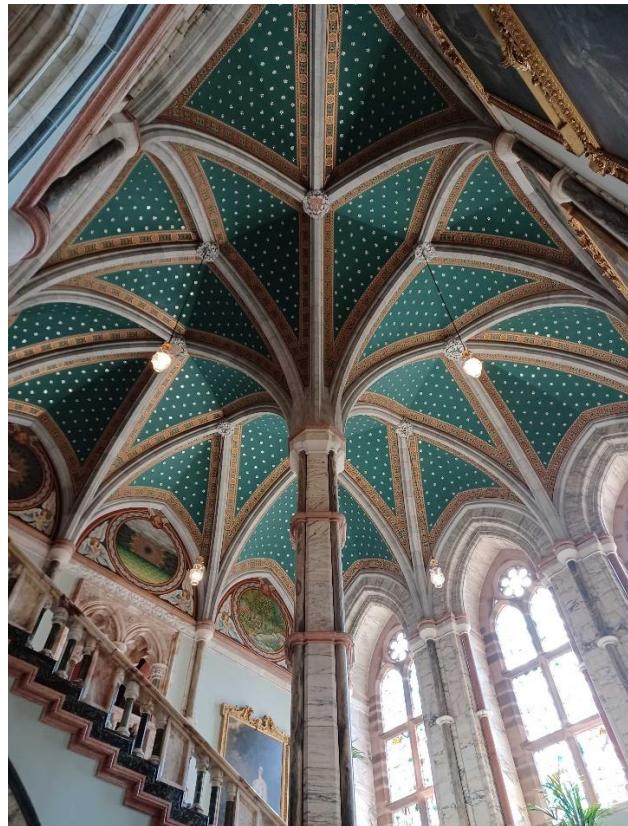
The entrance of the marble hall

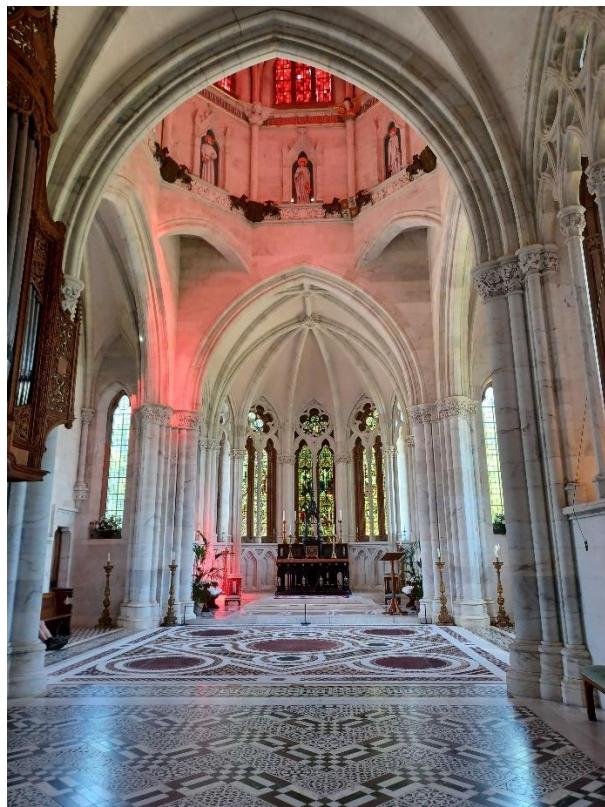


The stunning ceiling of the marble hall

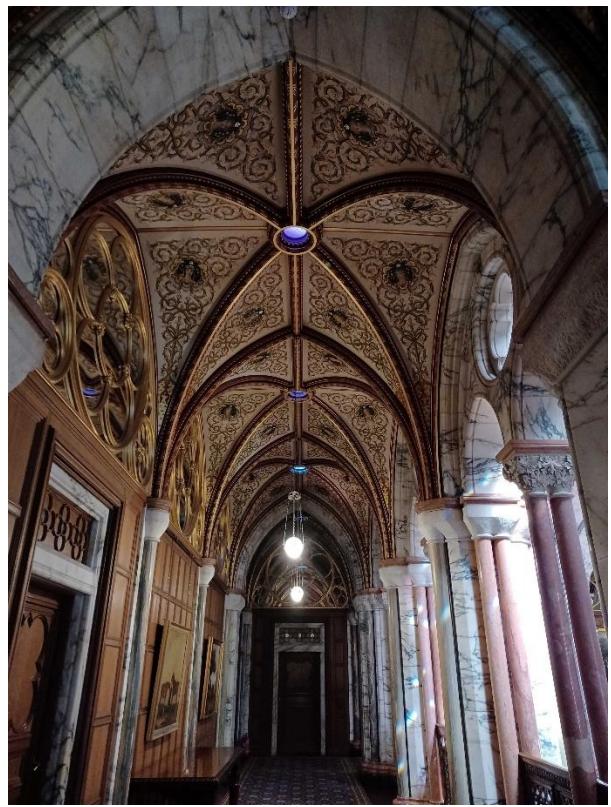


Marble staircase to the gallery, from two different viewpoints.





General view of the Marble Chapel



View of the lavish Gallery



The Dining Room



Detail of the chimney in the Drawing Room

After a lunch on the terrace of the Castle's coffee shop, we had time to wander in the grounds and walked the path towards the property's private beach:



From Mount Stuart, our guide drove us to Ettrick Bay, on the other side of the isle, from where we had beautiful views over the Sound of Bute towards the Isle of Arran.



En route to Rothesay, our guide told us about the Rothesay Witch Trial in 1661. Of the six women accused of witchcraft, only one woman, Janet McNicol, escaped from prison before she could be executed but when she returned to the island in 1673 the sentence was implemented. Read more on: [Bute witches - Wikipedia](#). In Rothesay, we had some time to explore this delightful little town before the next ferry. We found a map and some information in the tourist office, housed in the impressive Winter Garden building on the sea front:





Shopping street on the sea front in the background



Ruins of Rothesay Castle

We then took the ferry back to mainland and returned to Glasgow through Greenock and Paisley (see map p.9).



Picture from : [Paisley Pattern Background Free Stock Photo - Public Domain Pictures](#)

Our driver gave us some information about the “Paisley Pattern”. Paisley designs became popular in the West in the 18th and 19th centuries in the form of imported Kashmir shawls, and were then replicated locally in the town of Paisley, a centre for textiles where paisley designs were reproduced using jacquard looms (more information on: [Paisley \(design\) - Wikipedia](#)).

He also explained that all sheep farmers in the UK are required to send their wool to market via the Wool Marketing Board, a non-profit organisation. Every single fleece is graded by a specialist. The bottom quality is used for insulation, the top quality for yarn and garments. More information on: [Where does all the wool go.... - Hilltop Cloud](#) and [Promoting great British fleece wool - British Wool](#)

Once back in Buchanan Bus Station in Glasgow, Lynda and I went to a restaurant nearby, that our driver had recommended for sea food: Kelp Restaurant, 114 Cowcaddens Road:

[Kelp Restaurant, Glasgow – Sustainable Scottish Seafood](#)

Friday 23 May 2025: Mull

That Friday morning we embarked on a 3-day tour to Mull organized by Rabbie's, again with Tom, our previous driver (see: [Isle of Mull, Iona, Oban & Loch Lomond 3 Day Tour - Rabbie's Tours](#)). The following Monday being a bank holiday, the bus station was terribly crowded that morning. We passed by Dumbarton towards Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. "The flat terrain of the Lowlands soon gave way to rugged peaks, forested glens, and the vast, shimmering expanse of Loch Lomond, which has inspired poets and songwriters for centuries. Our first stop [was] the conservation village of Luss, with its quaint houses and stunning views across the loch". I had already been there ten years before, but was enchanted again by this area (see more on: <https://eternal-student.com/2024/03/23/my-first-trip-to-scotland/>).





Tom told us one of the tales about the famous folk song 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond', associated with the 1745 Jacobite rebellion and two brothers, one sacrificing himself for the love of his brother. He also told us the story of the legendary outlaw Rob Roy Mc Gregor (see the movie with Liam Neeson in the title role!) who was given £ 1.000 by the Earl of Montrose to buy cows, but whose money was stolen by his friend James Mc Donald...

Continuing north on the A 82 in the direction of Fort William, we traversed Rannoch Moor, 50 square miles of nothingness, desolate and beautiful. We stopped at Buachaille Etive Mòr (The Great Herdsman of Etive), a large ridge of four main peaks. Its pyramidal shape, as seen from the northeast, makes it one of the most recognisable mountains in Scotland.



Panoramic view of Etive Mor

We then reached Glencoe, “one of Scotland's most iconic natural landmarks. Known for its dramatic, rugged slopes, this beautiful area has been featured in films and has many stories to tell”. Indeed, Tom shared the tragic tale of the massacre of Clan Mac Donald of Glencoe on 13 February 1692, that has haunted this valley since then (see: [Massacre of Glencoe - Wikipedia](#)).



The Three Sisters at Glen Coe, under a glorious sun

We stopped nearby at Glencoe Visitor Centre for lunch and a visit of the Turf House, a reconstruction of the lost homes of the Mac Donalds of Glencoe. For centuries, earth-built structures like this were common in the Highlands. Indeed, it reminded me of the structure of ancient houses I had seen in Lewis two years before (see: [My trip to the Highlands – The eternal student – anglophilic version](#)).



Panoramic view of the Three Sisters from Glencoe Visitor Centre



We headed west to catch a ferry across Loch Linnhe. At Corran, Tom showed us a lighthouse built by the grandfather of the famous Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894). Then we winded our way through the towering mountains of Morvern before reaching Lochaline, where we caught another ferry to the Hebridean island of Mull. We arrived in Fishnish and started our journey towards Tobermory, for a two-night stay. "With its brightly coloured houses, Tobermory, meaning 'Well of Mary,' is often described as one of the most picturesque harbour towns in Scotland".



That evening we enjoyed a delicious dinner of fresh sea food at The Mishnish, the hotel-restaurant where Lynda and I stayed two nights (see: [The Mishnish – Tobermory's Iconic Hotel, Bar & Restaurant](#)). From that evening on, the weather turned cloudy and misty, showing us an even more romantic picture of Scotland, expected by most tourists!

Saturday 24 May 2025

We woke up and started our tour of Mull under a persistent rain. From Tobermory we drove by Fishnish Bay, where we stopped for photographing the nostalgic display of abandoned fishing boats:





We travelled along Mull's rugged coastline, and stopped at Craignure, a delightful coastal village, where we stretched our legs:



These little flowers reminded me of the machair in the Outer Hebrides ²

² See the narrative of my 2023 trip in the Highland on : [My trip to the Highlands – The eternal student – anglophilic version](#)



As we winded through lush pastures, dense woodlands, and peat bogs, we reached Fionnport, where we boarded a ferry to Iona—known as ‘The Cradle of Christianity’ in Scotland, since St Colomba established the Abbey in the year 563.



As we had decided to visit the island of Staffa in the afternoon, we did not have enough time to visit the inside of the Abbey, only its surroundings and the beautiful little chapel of St Oran.



The outside of St Oran's Chapel on the side of the Abbey, and a view of the cemetery

St Oran's Chapel (free entry) was the burial chapel of the Mac Donald Lords of the Isles. Built in the 1100s, it is the oldest intact structure on Iona. Going through the decorative doorway, we see the remains of an impressive tomb and a collection of elaborately carved West Highland grave slabs.





The ruins of a convent, “Iona’s world of religious women”



Iona’s gallery and pottery shop



The red granite crags of the Isle of Mull, on our way to Staffa

In the afternoon, we had booked an optional boat trip to Staffa. When we left Iona, we passed through the red/pink granite rocks of Mull (see photo above). This area is described in Stevenson's novel *Kidnapped* (1886), set around real 18th-century Scottish events which occurred in the aftermath of the Jacobite rising of 1745. Though a fiction, many of the characters (including Alan Breck Stewart) were real people.



When we took the little boat to Staffa, the sea was rough, and we could not board on the island because of maintenance work on the jetty. So, we just sailed around its southern end, to spot puffins and see "the awe-inspiring Fingal's Cave that is one of the most remarkable geological sites in the world. The island, made of striking hexagonal columns, was formed millions of years ago by volcanic eruptions. The cave was first brought to the attention of the English-speaking world by Sir Joseph Banks in 1772" [and] became known as 'Fingal's Cave' after the eponymous hero of the Ossian cycle of poems 'translated' (or rather written?) by James Macpherson (1736-1796).



Our approach to Staffa



After a day spent exploring these remarkable islands, we landed back on Mull. On our journey back to Tobermory, I saw Scotland's landscapes as I had dreamt of them: misty lochs, cascades, lively rivers and rivulets running down the slopes of hills!



The mist covering a loch, viewed from our bus window

As the rain subsided and Tom, our guide, stopped on the port, we hopped off and took a few pictures of the seafront. We then had dinner at Mac Gochans' ([Bar Restaurant | Macgochans, Tobermory, Isle of Mull](#)), near the distillery, which, unfortunately, was closed at that hour...





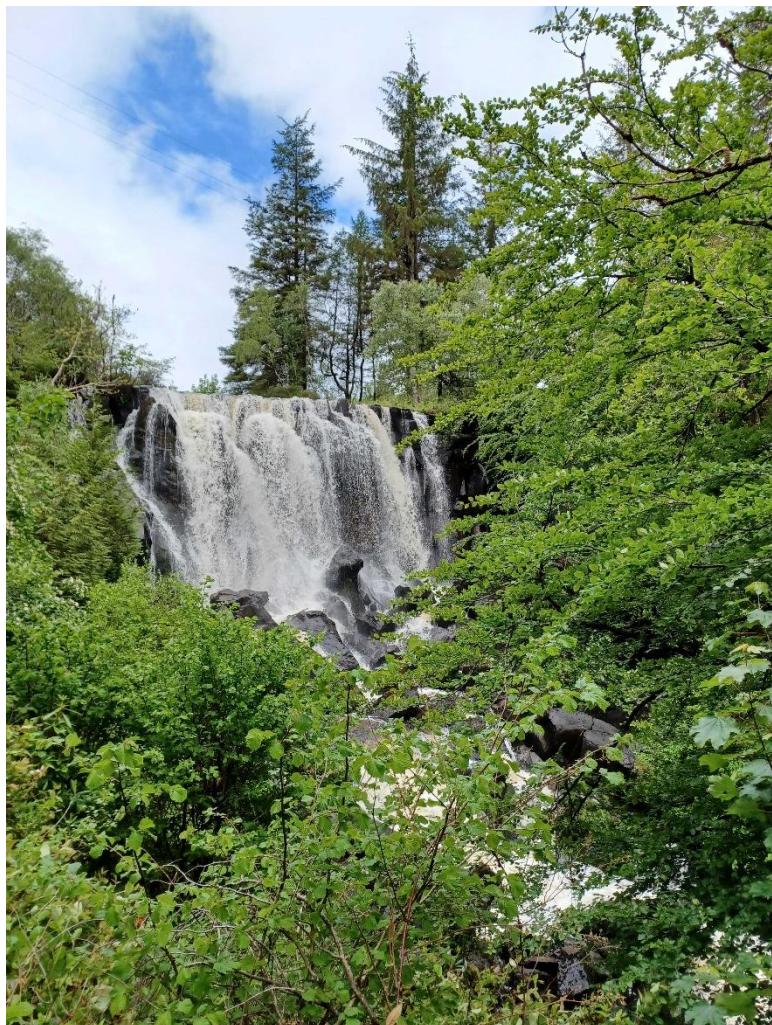
But when we strolled along the picturesque harbour to go back to our hotel, the rain started again...

Sunday 25 May 2025

That morning, I woke up early and walked up the top of the hill where stands the Western Isles Hotel, which offers stunning viewpoints on Tobermory Bay and harbour.



After breakfast we said farewell to Tobermory. As we headed south to Craignure for the ferry to the mainland, Tom stopped at Arros Fall to take a few pictures:



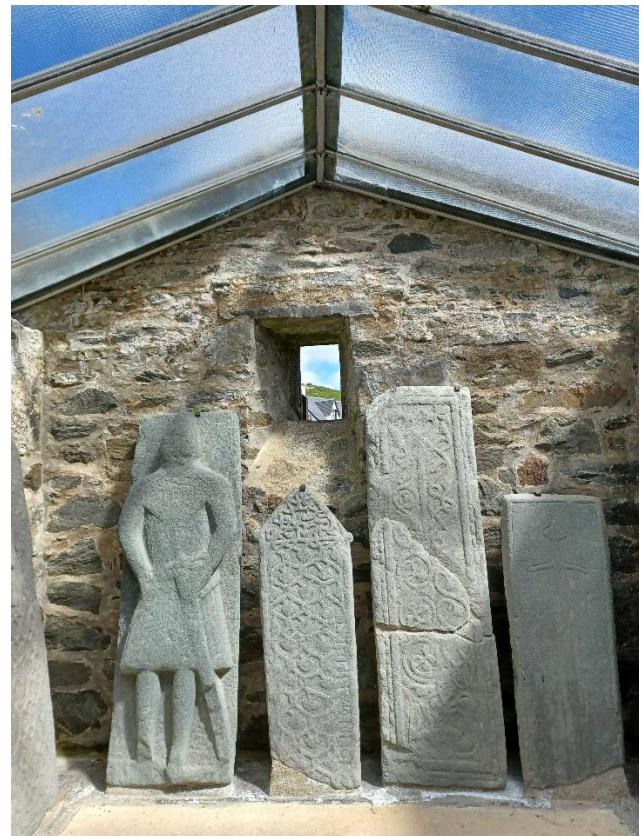
At Craignure, we took the ferry to Oban. As it passed by Duart Castle, the rain was pouring down so I could only take a poor photo of it from inside the cabin!



After a short ferry ride across the Firth of Lorn we arrived in Oban, “the bustling port town in Argyll. Once the heart of feuding clans, is now known as the ‘Gateway to the Isles’ and famed for its fresh seafood.” McCaig’s Tower, a prominent local landmark, was started in 1895 to give work to local stonemasons, but its construction ceased in 1902 on the death of its benefactor. We had time to go shopping—including at the town’s small distillery.

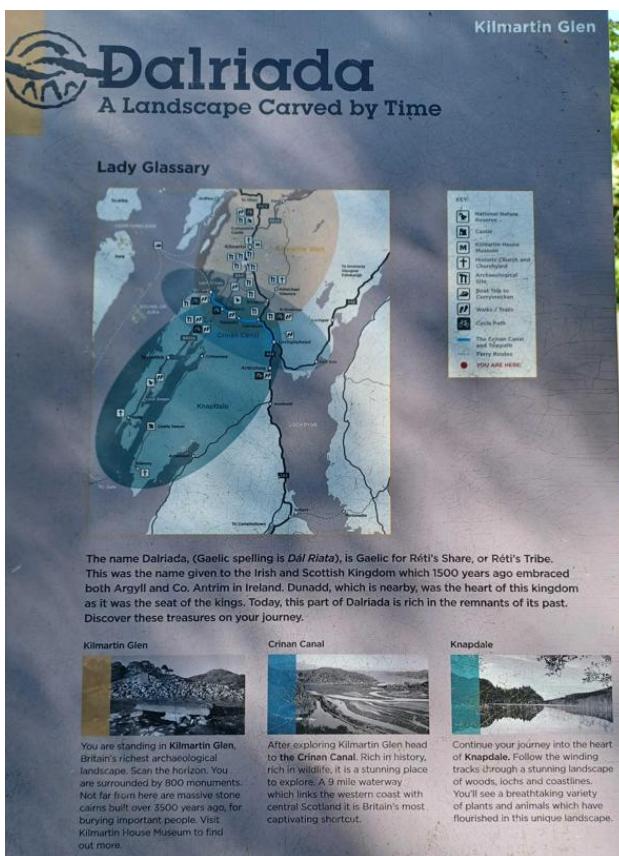


After lunch, we passed by Loch Melfort and continued through Kilmartin Glen. We first stopped at Kilmartin where we saw, nearby the church, a stunning collection of carved stone slabs. The earliest stones date back to the 13th or 14th centuries, with the most recent ones dated 1707 and 1712.





We then stopped at Kilmartin Glen, Dalriada, where we explored standing stones that date back over 1,500 years.



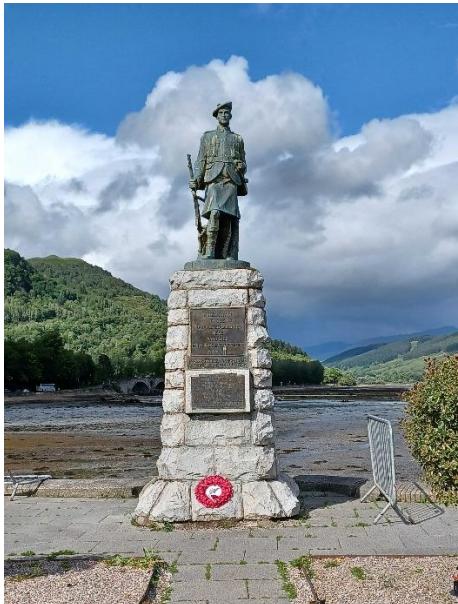
Traveling east, we passed through the scenic landscapes of Argyll and Bute:



We stopped in the picturesque town of Inveraray, on the shores of Loch Fyne, the longest of Scotland (24 miles long).



Inveraray Castle is still the house of the Duke of Argyll, also Chief of Clan Campbell. It was used as the setting of the 2012 Christmas Special of the famous TV series *Downton Abbey*.



Monument to Highlanders who died
during World War I



Inveraray little harbour on Loch Fyne

We continued through the wild landscapes of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park, where we had to take the Old Military Road (OMR) because a portion of the A83 was closed to avoid any risk of landslide. We passed by Loch Long, where we admired a rainbow, then by Loch Lomond. “With time, the rugged mountain peaks and forest-filled glens of the majestic Highlands gradually give way to the flat, fertile plains of the Lowlands, bringing us back to Glasgow,” where we arrived around 18:30.

See the end of my trip in *May in Scotland, Part 2: Four days in Glasgow (18-20 & 26 May 2025)*:
[May in Scotland: Part 2 – Glasgow – The eternal student – anglophile version](#)