

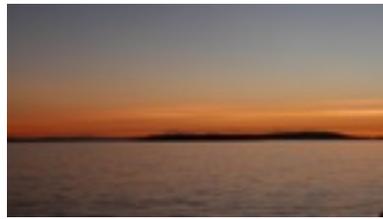
Cambeltown to Callander

This is a trip to be undertaken in the Summer, as it is dependent on seasonal ferries.

Why Campbeltown? Because the ferry sails from Ardrossan up till the end of September.

Why Callander? Because that is where my daughter and cycling companion lives.

So having decided against relying on trains in case there were no bike spaces available, we were lifted to Ardrossan by car, battling against the rush hour, to arrive there with literally minutes to spare for a ferry departure time of 18.40. Whew! Once we settled down, we were rewarded with a fabulous sunset as we rounded the southern tip of Arran. We arrived at Campbeltown at 21.20 and found our way easily to Campbeltown Backers, which is a relatively new community project and is to be greatly recommended.



Day 1 of cycling was to be one of big undulations - over 1000 metres of climb - as we made our way up the east coast, having been strongly advised against trying the flatter A road to the west. "Are you mad?", asked Nicola's friend. We took time to explore the fishing village of Carradale on the way, and had more great views of Arran. We stayed the night at the incredibly picturesque town of Tarbert, where I was able to renew my acquaintanceship with Springside bed and Breakfast. There was a music festival in the town, so I was glad I had booked ahead. There are several nice restaurants, and if you like seafood I can recommend The Anchorage. Nicola's friend came to join us there and the two of them had a lot of catching up to do. Sue now owns a small farm with 200 sheep.



Day 2 was going to be a big challenge. Only 31 miles to Dunoon, but with three big climbs, two of which I had done earlier in the year on my 5 Ferries trip. Just to be sure we got up to catch the early ferry. The view from the top of the biggest climb north of Tighnabruaich was every bit as stunning as at my last visit. Reminiscent of the Queen's View as you look all the way down the Kyles of Bute back to the north Ayrshire coast. On arrival at Dunoon we stayed at St Ives, one of a row of small hotels very close to Dunoon Quay, with fabulous views over the sea. Accommodation and food proved to be both cheap and good value in Dunoon and we had a bit of time in the evening to explore the local park and admire the stature to Burns's Heilan' Mary.



Day 3 was going to be interesting partly because we had a combination of two ferries and a boat bus to meet, and partly because we were intending to cycle the full 48 miles back to Nicola's home town of Callander. Also rain was forecast. We need not have worried. We caught the early ferry to Gourock. As we approached the quay we could see the tiny ferry to Kilcreggan on the point of pulling up the gangplank. However, we just made the connection in time, and twelve minutes later were climbing back ashore. The journey up the peninsular was uneventful, with a beautiful road surface no doubt thanks to national military interests, and quite busy traffic. We arrived at Loch Lomond in good time for the boat bus from Tarbet to Inversnaid. The little boat was crammed with trippers off the waiting Lochs and Glens coach, as a consequence of which it was running slightly late. However, we enjoyed our mini-cruise up the loch, and were thankful to see various rain showers missing us. By the time we had had a [somewhat disappointing] lunch at Inversnaid Hotel, the showers were well ahead of us. The final leg of the trip was classic Trossachs, A steep climb up to Loch Arklet, the undulating route beside Loch Katrine and finishing with Loch Venachar as we rolled into Callander in good time for supper at Nicola's house.



The story doesn't quite end there. The next morning I set off for home. The first part of the journey is a gentle climb on traffic free ways to Lochearnhead via Strathyre. There is a new "missing link" at Kingshouse, and the one steep zig-zag remains. After taking the South Loch Earn road I had intended to follow a couple of back roads to Comrie and then to Crieff. However, I found the A85 a very pleasant surface, and not too busy with traffic, so I stayed on the main road and was rewarded with a superb bacon and egg roll and oodles of hot chocolate at the garden centre cafe near Twenty Shilling Wood. Having stayed high, I decided to take the Amulree road over the top to Dunkeld which would cut off about 10 miles. Oh dear, I had allowed for the hills but not the head wind...I arrived home tired but happy, as they used to say in the stories.



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