

Campbell's town in Kintyre

CAMPBELTOWN, the town which serves the Kintyre peninsula, is a good place to start a holiday in the west Highlands.

The town, at the head of Campbeltown loch, has a rich and varied history and grew to prominence through its industries of fishing, agriculture, Scotch whisky and coal.

Today it still serves the farming community, whisky is still distilled and the town also claims world-renowned golf courses. It is pleasant to stroll round this small community which boasts shops, a museum, some fine houses and an international reputation for first-class golf.

Kintyre also claims a

place in the founding of early Celtic Christianity. Look out from the Mull of Kintyre nearby, made famous in former Beatle Paul McCartney's song of that name, and you will see the hills of Antrim in Northern Ireland twelve miles away.

St Columba

It was on the Mull of Kintyre that St Columba first landed from Ireland on his pilgrimage to convert the Scots to Christianity. Footprints in a rock by the village of Southend are said to have been left by him.

It is hoped soon to re-establish a ferry service between Campbeltown and Northern Ireland to enable tourism to flourish even more, particularly with visitors interested in Celtic Christianity brought by Columba to Scotland.

In historical terms, Campbeltown is not an old community. It was founded as a royal burgh in 1607 as to a 'plantation' policy of the seventh Earl of Argyll who brought in Protestant settlers mainly from Ayrshire and Renfrewshire in order to



quell what was at the time an area of deep unrest.

Its growth was due to its surroundings – water, both sea and fresh, fertile land and the type of rock on which it stands. In the late nineteenth century the town was an important fishing port, with the landing of herring particularly contributing to its wealth at that time.

Despite the town being only five hundred years old traces of early man have been found throughout its fertile

hinterland, still a strong agricultural region today. As a result, Kintyre is rich in archaeological history. In the Campbeltown Museum visitors can see examples of artefacts left by Mesolithic and Neolithic people such as pottery, flints and Bronze Age cists including a jet necklace.

Red sandstone

Kintyre's red sandstone was quarried and used to build tenements in the town and a coal industry also flourished here from the time of

Machrihanish until its closure in 1931.

At one time Campbeltown could boast 24 whisky distilleries which also contributed to its prosperity, exemplified in some fine nineteenth century houses in Kilkerran Road to the south of the town and Low Askomill to the north. Initially, whisky was only a cottage industry but continued to grow. Nowadays there are just two whisky-making concerns, Springback Distillery, founded in 1828 by the Mitchell family, and still owned by them. Recently the Glen Gyle Distillery has also been helping the town to revive its fortunes.

Sadly the town's affluence suffered when, in the late twentieth century, it saw the loss of its shipyard, its Jaeger factory and the RAF base at Machrihanish. But with attempts to re-establish its ferry link with Ballycastle Northern Ireland and its golf course and tourism it continues to thrive.

There are three golf courses to choose from, all within a few miles of Campbeltown. The most famous is Machrihanish whose first hole is believed by many to be one of the best in the world. Greg Norman, the Duke of York and actor Hugh Grant can't all be wrong – they've all played the

course and praised it. At the mouth of Campbeltown loch is another link with Christianity – Davaar Island where a cave, now a place of pilgrimage, houses a painting of the Crucifixion.

The painting was done by Archibald MacKinnon on bare rock. He was only a youth at the time but in 1934, when he was 80, he returned to repair it. Various art teachers at the town's grammar school now maintain the picture.

Causeway

The cave is one of several reached by a single causeway known as the dhorlin which can be accessed at low tide. The entrance to the cave



The famous painting of the crucifixion in a cave on Davaar Island. Retired art teacher Ronald Togneri has captured the beauty of Kintyre in many of his paintings. He repainted the crucifixion scene in the cave in the late 1970s.

carrying the painting is marked with a plaque outside as well as many small cairns and wooden crosses left by visitors and pilgrims.

The Campbeltown Cross is a fine example of late medieval carved stone and dates from 1380. It was brought from Kilkivan near Machrihanish for use as a market cross. Kintyre is not without its period of bloody warfare so prevalent in Scotland over the centuries, as the site of Dunaverty Castle can testify.

The castle was the scene of a massacre in 1647 after the battle of Rhunahaorine Moss when what was left of the MacDonald army surrendered only to be slaughtered by the Covenanters under General George Leslie.

The site was a fortified area for 1,000 years but little is left of the castle now.

Visitors to Kintyre can also enjoy a taste of island life with a short ferry trip to the island of Gigha with its world-renowned garden, unspoiled beaches, wonderful walking and challenging golf course.

Gigha is now owned by the islanders who offer a cheerful and warm welcome, good food and entertainment and overnight accommodation.

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