



## **Driving Tour between Old Castle Lachlan and Kilmun – connecting the Mausoleums of two historic Highland families, the Maclachlans and the Campbells**

### **Old Castle Lachlan – Newton - Strachur – Loch Eck - Benmore Botanic Gardens – Historic Kilmun**

This picturesque round trip through Argyll's Cowal peninsula is approximately 50 miles and takes you from Old Castle Lachlan and Kilmorie Chapel on Loch Fyne, to Loch Eck, and ends at Historic Kilmun on Holy Loch near Dunoon. It contains several stopping places worth devoting plenty of time to. We recommend a whole day to see everything with an additional day if you would like to explore the many forestry tracks by mountain bike or on foot.

Beginning at Old Castle Lachlan the tour will lead you down the banks of Loch Eck to the resting place of the Clan Campbell chiefs, the Dukes of Argyll, at Kilmun. There are beautiful views of the mountains with picnic stops and Forestry Commission walks along the way.

*Please remember to drive on the left and take your time on the winding narrow roads.*

### **Starting Point: Old Castle Lachlan, Lachlan Bay**

#### **Old Castle Lachlan**

The ancient seat of the Maclachlan Clan makes a fine looking ruin and easy walking paths encourage you to explore and enjoy your surroundings. It is a hidden gem on Loch Fyne, standing out on the loch since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, once a centre of local life. However, the castle has lain empty since the 17<sup>th</sup> Clan Chief took sides with Bonnie Price Charlie and died on the battlefield of Culloden in 1746. The current clan chief and his family live in the white 'new' castle you can see on your walk. There are information panels and a walking trail guide to give you plenty of interest on your visit. The castle is undergoing vital conservation work at present so please observe the safety signs at the castle.

[www.oldcastlelachlan.com](http://www.oldcastlelachlan.com)

### **Inver Restaurant**

Inver Restaurant, set in the building of a former crofting cottage, is modern Scottish in its style and prides itself on the use of locally sourced ingredients to create world class dishes. They are open for a special night out with a set menu, or simply a tea and scone of an afternoon or a refreshing beer in the sunshine after a walk. Please see their website for more information.

[www.inverrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.inverrestaurant.co.uk)

### **Kilmorie Chapel**

Kilmorie Chapel is the mausoleum of the chiefs of Clan Maclachlan. It is one of the last surviving medieval church buildings in the West of Scotland. The original Church of St Mary is believed to have been built at or near the site where St Molna lived. He brought Christianity to the area from Iona in 571. The chapel was originally part of this church in a small settlement of houses. All the buildings apart from the chapel were pulled down in the 1790s.

### **Old Castle Lachlan to Newton**

*Having visited the Old Castle and chapel, leave the car park at Inver Restaurant and turn left onto the B8000 through **Strathlachlan**. Keep straight ahead on this road for just under 5 miles towards the village of **Newton**. The road is straight but be aware that there are two road turnings to the right which you will need to pass. At the point where you meet the second turn to the right, again keep straight - you will see a sign for the Hidden Gallery which is in Newton. The road then winds down to the shore where Newton is situated. Keep following the signs to Hidden Gallery until you reach the lochside.*

### **Strathlachlan**

On the way to Newton you will pass the 'new' **Strathlachlan Church** which was built in 1792. It is still in use and can be visited by arrangement with a key holder (details on the church notice-board). The church is typical of simple Highland churches of its day and contains a Laird's Gallery with the coat of arms of the Maclachlan chief. Beside the church are the ruins of a blacksmith's workshop.

Across from the church is another ruin, **Garbhalt**, which was once a coaching inn and where the blacksmith also once lived. It was inhabited until the death of the last resident, retired estate gamekeeper, Neil Graham. It was known as 'old inn croft' locally. Garbhalt is Gaelic for 'rough burn or stream'. All the old buildings in the Highlands were built close to sources of fresh water in the days before mains water supplies – springs, wells, rivers and burns were plentiful and put to good use.

It is interesting to note the changes as you pass through Strathlachlan: you will see the community centre on the right which was the local **school** until its closure in 1974. Behind the school is an old bridge leading to the remains of a settlement containing several buildings including a mill. These ruins can be seen clearly in winter. The mill was worked until the end of the 19thC then the 1911 census shows it was a turned into a private residence. The first recorded resident was a retired

gardener from the Maclachlan estate called John Wesley.

After the school you will pass a red telephone box: the building here, Sunfield, was the old post office but is now a private residence.

### **Newton**

Newton was built by the 19th chief in the 1790s. Its Gaelic name is 'Ballure' which means 'the new township'. It was specifically built as a new 'model village' for the tenants on the Maclachlan estate as an alternative source of living and income when the land where they previously had their crofts was designated for agricultural improvements. At that time herring was plentiful in Loch Fyne and the fishing industry booming. Tenants rented houses and boats provided by the chief to encourage them in their new life. Today the village is a quiet and picturesque place to stop and admire the beautiful views of the loch.

*Return back up the bendy road from Newton (0.7 miles) until you meet once more the road from Strathlachlan (B8000). At this point take the sharp left turn up to the main road. This will take you to the T-junction with the A886. Turn left (signposted to Glasgow) and drive 3 miles to Strachur.*

### **Newton to Strachur**

*Driving along Loch Fyne through Strachur, you pass the post office and tearoom. Parking is available. Just past the post office you will approach a T-junction with the A815. To explore Strachur village, turn right and first left to The Memorial Hall which provides ample parking. Proceed on foot in the village. In Strachur, there are beautiful gardens and woodland walks at **Strachur House**, **Strachur Smiddy Museum**, and **Strachur Church**. [www.strachur.org.uk](http://www.strachur.org.uk)*

### **Strachur House**

*(Turn off the A815 at Strachur House Farm entrance and park in the farm square)*  
Strachur House, was built by General John Campbell in the 1780s and has been added to over the years since. There are four hundred acres of pasture in the grounds broken up by stately avenues of mature trees. There are two designated woodland walks plus nature trails offering an abundance of wild flowers and wildlife. There is also a small river running through it and a secluded lochan. The house has a private formal garden which is open to the public three weekends a year. Please see [www.scotlandsgardens.org](http://www.scotlandsgardens.org) for further information.

### **Strachur Smiddy**

*(Walk from the car park at The Memorial Hall by following the signs into the village)*  
Smiddy is a Scots word for a blacksmith's. Strachur Smiddy dates from 1791 and was worked by four generations of the Montgomery family. It closed in 1950 and remained untouched until its restoration in the 1990s by Strachur Smiddy Trust. It is a unique record of the blacksmith's trade and is still worked in today by skilled blacksmiths. The Smiddy is open Easter - September, 1-4pm with a small admission price.  
[www.strachursmiddy.org.uk](http://www.strachursmiddy.org.uk)

## **Strachur Church**

*(A short walk from the car park at The Memorial Hall. Follow the village road to your right. The church is on your left.)*

The churchyard holds some interesting and ancient gravestones including eleven sculpted grave slabs which have been built into the outer wall of the church. Most date back to the 1300s and 1400s and have carvings typical of West Highland grave slabs of the era such as a knight, carved swords, and lots of lovely Celtic knotwork.

## **Strachur to Loch Eck to Benmore Gardens**

*From the car park at Strachur, make your way back to the A815, turning left to drive south and following signposts for Dunoon. This will lead you down the full length of **Loch Eck**. You will then pass the Stratheck Caravan Park on the right and shortly after that you will reach **Benmore Gardens** which is clearly signposted on your right. There is plenty of parking available, with easy walks, mini bus tours and a cafe for snacks or lunch.*

## **Loch Eck**

Loch Eck's name comes from the Gaelic language so rooted in the heritage of this area. It means 'loch of the horses' and is so called because of the white waves that are seen on the water on a windy day.

The western hillside of the loch hosts the famous 'Paper Caves' hidden in a deep cleft of the rocks. This was where the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll hid the deeds and charters for the Campbell clan's land in a time of threat, and ultimately saved Inveraray Castle and their estate as a result.

Loch Eck is now popular for kayakers and hikers with the surrounding hills easily accessible for walkers of all abilities. There are many stopping places along the lochside for launching kayaks and the Forestry Commission have many well maintained tracks with parking for cars. The paths are clearly marked with map panels. It is possible on these paths to walk round the loch in its entirety but this requires proper planning with the proper footwear and clothing. Please take your litter home with you and keep our hillsides and lochs clean.

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/forest-parks/argyll-forest-park/loch-eck>

## **Benmore Gardens**

Benmore Botanical Gardens has a truly magnificent collection including an avenue of Giant Redwoods planted in 1863 and extensive displays of plants from Bhutan and other parts of the world. These include many species of rhododendron which give an impressive display in spring and early summer. The garden also has a formal pond, a recently refurbished Victorian Fernery and a cafe and gift shop. Guided tours are available all year round.

Admission charges apply April-October but entry to the gardens is free in winter.

<http://www.rbge.org.uk/the-gardens/benmore>

## **Benmore Gardens to Historic Kilmun (Argyll Mausoleum)**

Turn right on leaving the car park at Benmore and keep on the A815 towards Dunoon. Just under 2 miles along the road you will come to a left turn signposted **Kilmun A880**. This turn is directly before a petrol station. Follow this road for 2.8 miles. You will pass a green sign for the Kilmun Arboretum and just after that you will see a large church on the hillside. This is Kilmun Parish Church overlooking Holy Loch and the River Clyde beyond. Turn into the spacious parking area on your left and park. **Historic Kilmun** includes Kilmun Parish Church along with Argyll Mausoleum. Follow the short steep path on foot up to the church.

### **Historic Kilmun**

Historians have spoken of Kilmun as the “Rosslyn of the West”. (Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh is one of Scotland’s most important Christian buildings and was made famous worldwide by the 2003 best seller *The Da Vinci Code* and its 2006 film adaptation.)

Evidence of local settlement goes back to Neolithic times and the Holy Loch had all the elements which would attract early settlers – fresh water, land to cultivate, shelter from the hills, stone and wood for building. The sea, rivers and freshwater lochs provided food and were the main communication routes of those far off days.

Around the year 600 an Irish monk, Fintan Munnu, established a religious community here. Munnu helped establish Christianity in the West of Scotland and was made a saint. A religious community continued on the site as centuries passed and, as the diocese of Argyll developed, Kilmun (St Munn’s) Church served as a parish church linked to Paisley Abbey.

The close relationship between Kilmun and the mighty Campbell clan began in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when the chief became an important local figure. The Campbells were Lords, Earls, then Dukes of Argyll and at different times both allies and rivals of the Maclachlans of Maclachlan.

Duncan Campbell of Loch Awe supported the church at Kilmun financially and won the support of the Pope to have it elevated to the status of a Collegiate Church. These communities had a group or college of priests who were actively involved with local people, and had religious duties including saying prayers and masses. Sir Duncan, the first Lord Campbell, began a tradition of family burials in the church and this continued with close family members being laid to rest in a side chapel when the reformation banned burials within the main church. This small building eventually developed into the family mausoleum where the fine 15<sup>th</sup> century effigies of Sir Duncan and his wife Marjory can be seen today.

The Argyll Mausoleum, so close to Kilmorie Chapel where the Maclachlan clan chiefs are buried, means that many generations of the leaders of two historic Highland clans lie nearby one another in the land they dominated for centuries.

The current church was built in 1841 when tourism from Glasgow and further afield started to develop in the area. In 1890 the slate roof of the Mausoleum was replaced by the current cast iron dome. The last burial in the Mausoleum was of the

10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Argyll, in 1949.

The church has some remarkable stained glass windows and a rare water organ. There is on-site interpretation and a Visitor Centre where artefacts on display include a very special statue made by Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, wife of the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke and fourth daughter of Queen Victoria. A growing library provides information for genealogists and gravestones bear witness to the loves, hopes and work of the people who held Kilmun close to their hearts. These include Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to be registered as a doctor both in the USA and the UK, an early Christian stone and many others of interest.

Open from April: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, 11am-4pm. Guided tours are available at 11:30 and 2pm for visitors. Groups should pre-book their visit to assure a tour and refreshments will be made available. Please note this is a working church and services may be in progress. Telephone (Visitor Centre Manager) 07501764059

[www.historickilmun.org](http://www.historickilmun.org)

### **Return Trip: Historic Kilmun to Strachur**

*Leave the car park at Kilmun Church and return on the A880 to the T-junction with the A815. Turn right to return back to Strachur (approx 15 miles). To continue up Loch Fyne, please see our Loch Fyne Driving Tour which will take you around the north end of Loch Fyne to Inveraray and Auchindrain Outdoor Museum.*

### **Extra Addition: Historic Kilmun to Dunoon**

*Alternatively turn left for the town of Dunoon, only 4 miles away, with access to the Clyde Ferries. To follow the coastal road to Dunoon, drive just over 2 miles through the village of Sandbank and take the first left (at the clock) signposted Arndnam and Hunters Quay. Follow this road along the shore of the Holy Loch to Western Ferries' terminal at Hunters Quay and continue until you reach Dunoon.*

We hope you have enjoyed exploring this beautiful, historic corner of the Highlands.

If you would like to give us feedback or make a donation to our ongoing work please visit [www.oldcastlelachlan.com](http://www.oldcastlelachlan.com) or find us on Facebook at Old Castle Lachlan or Twitter @loveourcastle.

**Thank you!**

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[www.oldcastlelachlan.com](http://www.oldcastlelachlan.com)