



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

Historic Kilmun – Benmore Botanic Gardens – Strachur – Newton - Old Castle Lachlan

This picturesque round trip is approximately 50 miles and takes you from Historic Kilmun on Holy Loch near Dunoon, to Loch Eck and ends at Old Castle Lachlan and Kilmorie Chapel on Loch Fyne. 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 Historic Kilmun the tour will lead you from the resting place of the Clan Campbell chiefs, the Dukes of Argyll, up the banks of Loch Eck to Strachur and finally at Old Castle Lachlan on Loch Fyne, ancestral home of the Maclachlan Clan and resting place of its chiefs. 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.

Strating Point: Historic Kilmun

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 14th 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 15th 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 10th 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 9th 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

Historic Kilmun to Benmore Gardens

From the car park at Historic Kilmun turn right onto the A880 and follow this road for 2.8 miles to the T-junction. Turn right at this junction onto the A815 heading north. After approximately 2 miles you will see Benmore Botanic Gardens on the left. There are flags at the roadside to look out for and a large car park.

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 Loch Eck to Strachur

*From Benmore Gardens turn left and keep on the A815 which will lead you up the full length of **Loch Eck** and take you to the village of **Strachur**. If you wish to stop in Strachur you will find parking at the Memorial Hall – take the first right after the petrol station for the car park. Proceed on foot in the village. In Strachur, there are beautiful woodland walks at **Strachur House**, **Strachur Smiddy Museum**, and **Strachur Church**.*

www.strachur.org.uk

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 9th 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>

Strachur House

(On foot, turn right at the bottom of the car park then walk a short distance until you see a gate on the left. Follow the paths to explore the woods)

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 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 shop. 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

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 Newton

*From the Memorial Hall car park turn right onto the A815 and then take the first left signposted Tighnabruaich (A886). You will pass the post office on your right which has a coffee shop and parking. Continue through Strachur keeping the loch on your right. Follow the A886 for three miles until you see a brown sign for Old Castle Lachlan – B8000. Turn right at this sign and round the bend you will meet a t-junction. Take the right turn with a sign for the Hidden Gallery. Follow this bendy road for 0.7 miles down to the lochside and the village of **Newton**.*

Newton

Newton was built by the 19th chief of Clan Maclachlan in the 1790s. Its Gaelic name is 'Ballure' which means 'the new township'. It was specifically built as a new 'model

The Lachlan Trust

www.oldcastlelachlan.com

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.

Newton to Strathlachlan and Old Castle Lachlan

Return back up the bendy road from Newton (0.7 miles) until you meet the junction once more with the B8000. Don't turn left to go back to the junction with the main A886 road, but go straight ahead and continue along the B8000.

Please be careful on these single track roads, watch your speed and use the passing places to allow oncoming traffic to pass. Keep on the left!

*Travel just under 5 miles through **Strathlachlan** and follow the signs to **Inver Restaurant** where there is parking for both the restaurant and walks to **Kilmorie Chapel** and **Old Castle Lachlan**.*

Strathlachlan

On the way through Strathlachlan it is interesting to note the changes in the area over the years. You will pass a red telephone box: the building here, Sunfield, was the old post office but is now a private residence. Just after this on the left is the community centre 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 turned into a private residence. The first recorded resident was a retired gardener from the Maclachlan estate called John Wesley.

You will pass the whitewashed building of 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.

A little way down the road and you will see Strathlachlan caravan park followed closely by **Kilmorie Chapel**. There is a large layby here to park here if you wish.

This peaceful site is thought to be the only medieval church remains left in the west of Scotland. As well as being the local burial ground it is the traditional resting place of the Maclachlan Clan Chiefs. There are interpretation panels at the chapel for further information and paths linking to the castle and restaurant.

*Park your car at **Inver Restaurant**. After you have taken in the magnificent views over Loch Fyne to **Old Castle Lachlan**, please take a look at the information panels and pick up a walking trail. The return walk to the castle and chapel takes approx 1 hour and is suitable for most walking abilities.*

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

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

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 15th Century, once a centre of local life. However, the castle has lain empty since the 17th Clan Chief took sides with Bonnie Prince 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

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 or find us on Facebook at Old Castle Lachlan or Twitter @loveourcastle.

The Lachlan Trust

www.oldcastlelachlan.com

Thank you!

The Lachlan Trust
Registered charity SC032246