

THE PERFECT WEEKEND IN...

THE FIRTH OF CLYDE

The route: Largs, Kyles of Bute, Caladh, Asgog, Loch Fyne, Tarbert & Arran

The Firth of Clyde is one of Scotland's largest inlets, its outer reaches 15 miles wide between Arran and Ayr. This majestic sound becomes increasingly sheltered further in, flanked by dramatic hills and lush green islands. Here are all the ingredients for spectacular cruising, nicely cocooned from the open sea. Welcoming Largs Yacht Haven lies well into the Firth, looking out towards Great Cumbrae island and the soft east coast of Bute. On Friday evenings there's always an expectant buzz around its bistros and bars, and dinner at the marina's stylish new Scotts restaurant launches the weekend perfectly.

SATURDAY MORNING

You can leave Largs' marina any time. Turning north you pass Largs town, a genteel Clyde resort with elegant spires. Off the tip of Great Cumbrae, head five miles north-west to enter Rothesay Sound, with Rothesay seafront opening up to port. Off Ardmaleish Point hang a left into the East Kyle of Bute, a stunning channel between wooded shores with slopes of heather rising to starboard. Opposite the north end of Bute, rocky narrows lead to a three-way junction between the East and West Kyle and the lonely waters of Loch Riddon. Tucked behind a leafy islet, sleepy Caladh anchorage is the ideal spot for a leisurely lunch, hemmed in by pines and rambling rhododendrons.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

After lunch head down through the glorious West Kyle. You pass Tighnabruaich (pronounced 'Tinnabroo-ich') and Kames villages, their solid houses scattered on the hillside. Tighnabruaich has a fine pier and the paddle-steamer *Waverley* often calls here on her Clyde cruises. The Kames Hotel has a few visitor moorings and its cosy, panelled bar is one of my Scottish favourites.

West Kyle emerges into Inchmarnock Water, a grand expanse with the Arran mountains away to the south. Swinging to starboard towards Lower Loch Fyne, it's not far to a delightful anchorage at Skate Hole, on the west side of Asgog Bay. This hideaway inside Skate Island is sheltered by another island close inshore. Here the water is crystal clear and you can often spot seals swimming.

SATURDAY EVENING

From Skate Hole, it's four miles across Loch Fyne to the picturesque harbour at East Loch Tarbert, buzzing with regattas and their crews in high season. Snugly enclosed by a wooded peninsula and a couple of rocky islets, Tarbert has a lively village packed with bistros – perfect for a Saturday evening. Entering the harbour inlet you

PROFILE

THE AUTHOR
Peter Cumberlidge has often cruised the Firth of Clyde area and Largs is one of his favourite marinas. His weekend trail includes some of the best seafood restaurants in this part of Scotland.



The waterfront village of Tarbert has an attractive, salty buzz during high season



The sun dips below the horizon at Largs Yacht Haven



1 SATURDAY MORNING

Sweeping views: East Kyle of Bute



2 SATURDAY AFTERNOON

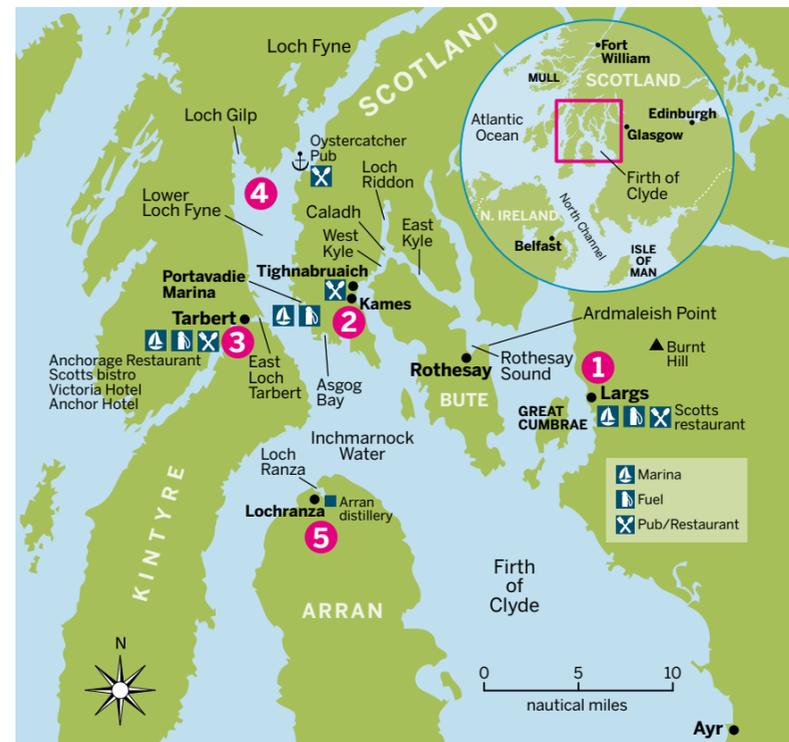
Tongue twister: the small village of Tighnabruaich



Paddle steamer Waverley off Largs



Give me shelter: Largs Yacht Haven



With its dramatic hills and lush green islands, the Firth of Clyde has all the ingredients for perfect cruising, nicely cocooned from the open sea

3 SATURDAY EVENING



Victoria Hotel and the waterfront at Tarbert village



The tranquil scene looking west onto Tarbert village

pass the CalMac ferry slip on the south side before dog-legging through narrows south of Cock Island. Visitors berth alongside the long north shore pontoon, with attractive views of the village and its colourful waterfronts.

The fish quay opposite supplies the fresh ingredients for which Tarbert's eateries are renowned. Anchorage Restaurant on Harbour Street is a sound bet – try their generous seafood risotto. Meanwhile Scotts bistro, on the same street, treats scallops very deftly. Or on the south-west side of the harbour, the yellow-painted Victoria Hotel is run by French chef Pascal Theze and his wife Jacqui, stalwarts of the local culinary scene.

SUNDAY MORNING

After a good Saturday night, most folk get going slowly. It's pleasant to watch the village waking up before strolling round to the Anchor Hotel for breakfast: real porridge; haddock and black pudding; kidneys on toast; or a Full Scottish!

Loch Fyne has many moods, but in quiet weather it feels almost mystical as you cruise inland between gently folded slopes patched with firs and heather. Seven miles above Tarbert, Loch Gilp branches to port and Loch Fyne continues past a drying spit jutting from the east shore. Behind this natural shelter are over a dozen visitors' moorings belonging to the hospitable Oystercatcher pub, which stands behind an old stone quay. Land at the pub pontoon for some skillful cooking and well-kept Fyne ales.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

After lunch, it's back down the loch and across magnificent Inchmarnock Water towards the looming heights of Arran. At the north end of this impressive island, Loch Ranza shoals at its head to provide fair anchoring opposite a sandy spur and a ruined castle. Landing at the beach, a shore party can visit Arran distillery, whose golden single malts are unsurpassed. Nobody will want the weekend to finish, but at the last moment you can cut a swathe back to Largs south of Bute and between the Cumbrae islands, steering for the peaks of Burnt Hill. **MBY**

NEXT MONTH CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX

Do you have any personal cruising tips for, or good quality photographs of, Chichester and its surroundings? If so, email them to hugo_andreae@ipmedia.com and we'll try and include them.

4 SUNDAY MORNING



Calm waters around the Firth of Clyde

Snug fit: motor boats at Largs



Loch Fyne is renowned for lobster

The Arran malt whisky distillery in Lochranza



5 SUNDAY AFTERNOON

HARBOUR CONTACT DETAILS

Largs Yacht Haven (Tel: +44 (0)1475 675 333), VHF 80 (24hrs). **Tarbert Harbour** (Tel: +44 (0)1880 820 344), VHF 14 (open 0900-1700 LT).

HANDY FUEL BERTHS

Largs Yacht Haven has 24hr diesel and petrol at the root of pontoon G. At **East Loch Tarbert** there's diesel at Fish Quay (open 0800-1800 Mon-Fri). **Portavadie Marina** has diesel/petrol, east side of Loch Fyne opposite Tarbert.

FAVOURITE PUBS & RESTAURANTS

Largs Yacht Haven: Scotts is a new summer opening for Largs, the result of its successful Troon bistro, which has always been enjoyable (Tel: +44 (0)1475 686 684).

Tighnabruaich: Kames Hotel overlooking West Kyle is a soothing spot with a classic bar menu offering local fish and game (Tel: +44 (0)1700 811 489).

East Loch Tarbert: Anchorage Restaurant has seafood galore (Tel: +44 (0)1880 820 881). Stylish **Scotts** bistro is in Struan House, a 4-star B&B on Harbour St (Tel: +44 (0)1880 820190). **The Victoria Hotel** is near the pontoons on Barmore Rd – and has great cooking and a sociable bar (Tel: +44 (0)1880 820 263).

Anchor Hotel on Harbour St does the best breakfast in Tarbert (Tel: +44 (0)1880 820 577). **Otter Ferry: The Oystercatcher** pub is a Scottish gem in breathtaking surroundings with local Fyne ales. (Tel: +44 (0)1700 821 229).



Anchor Hotel



The Oystercatcher

NAVIGATION NOTES

Pilotage in this area is mostly straightforward in reasonable weather – but be careful through the narrows at the top of **East Kyle**.

All the routes described are protected from the open sea, but some wide expanses turn rough in strong winds. **Inchmarnock Water** is the most exposed reach. Some anchorages look snug under high weather shores, but in strong winds the down-draughts off hills and mountains can be surprisingly savage. For this weekend cruise use Admiralty charts 2131, 1907, 1906 and 2381.