

USEFUL INFORMATION

Cycle Repairers

Islay Bike, Bowmore Tel: 01496 810 653
Jim Lutomski, Port Ellen Tel: 07760 196 592

Cycle Hire

Bowmore Post Office Tel: 01496 810 366
Port Charlotte Bike Hire. Tel: 01496 850 488
Jura Bike Hire Tel: 07092 180 747

Tourist Information Centre

Morrison Court, Bowmore Tel: 01496 810 254

Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries

The Kennacraig to Islay CalMac ferry will carry cycles on the car deck for a relatively small fee. Check calmac.co.uk for current tariff.

Jura Ferry

There is no additional charge for bicycles to and from Jura

Citylink Coaches

The coach service between Glasgow and Kennacraig Ferry Terminal will carry bicycles subject to available space. All bicycles must at least be contained in a bike bag, or box. Tel: 0845 50 50 50

Loganair

The airline will carry cycles on the aircraft, but require advance notice. And it would be naive not to have it encased in a reputable bike-box to ensure its travelling safety.

Argyll & Bute Council Road Safety

01546 604182

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photos: Kirsten Farent & Jez Hastings



THOSE FIRST STEPS

Cycling on Islay and Jura can be a very rewarding experience - there are no roundabouts, no traffic lights and no designated pedestrian crossings. At certain times of year it is possible to cycle a substantial distance without encountering any motorised traffic at all.

But in most cases, cyclists share the roads with other users who usually have differing needs or priorities. While it would be nice to take the moral high ground and hope to enforce the 'steam gives way to sail' principle, this is unlikely to endear you to local road users. And if you insist on such, it won't endear you to the local cyclists either, who will have to live with the backlash year round. Courtesy is the key to enjoying your cycling holiday on Islay and/or Jura.

ISLAND ROADCRAFT

Many of the roads on Islay (and pretty much the only one on Jura) are single track, and few are in possession of a glass-like surface. Much of this is due to these roads being used for agricultural purposes, one of the basic principles to bear in mind during your daily cycling excursions. Simply put, though you may be on holiday, the guy in the tractor behind you probably isn't.

Therefore it would be only courteous and common sense to ensure that you do not hold up traffic by cycling two abreast where it is inappropriate to do so. This applies just as much to Islay's two lane roads as to the single track roads.

However, due to the preponderance of four wheel drive vehicles these days, and the ever increasing size of the wing mirrors attached to same, it can prove either difficult or impossible to leave enough room for certain vehicles to pass. If safe to do so, pull off on the grass verge, but do be aware that



THE DIGESTED READ

- Remember: You may be on holiday, but other traffic may not - please consider others and give way where practical.
- Islay's roads are relatively safe from traffic, but please consider wearing a helmet
- On single track roads, use Passing Places to allow motorised traffic to pass.
- Please do not ride more than two abreast where traffic conditions dictate. Move to single file on narrower roads if necessary.
- Approach livestock on the roads with caution - make sure they know you are there.
- On single track roads cycle on the outside of blind corners - oncoming traffic will see you earlier. Bright clothing always helps.
- If you're reading this on Islay or Jura, it's probably too late, but make sure your bicycle is mechanically sound before you leave home. And carry spare cables, tubes and spokes. Oh, and a pump.
- It's windy over here, but the sunsets are great.

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many of the islands' verges are bordered with ditches, which may not always be visible until you fall into one. If in doubt, cycle defensively by claiming your road space until a designated passing place* is reached. Wherever practical, pull into a passing place to allow following or oncoming traffic to pass. This is particularly relevant if you meet the numerous articulated trucks and tankers that service the distilleries. For safety, please try to approach blind corners on the outside of the bend, thus alerting oncoming traffic to your presence sooner, rather than later. And if there is more than one of you meeting traffic from either direction on a single-track road, please position yourselves on one side of the road to let traffic past. There is nothing guaranteed to cause more confusion than a motorist trying to avoid cyclists with both wing mirrors.

*Passing places are signified by a pole bearing black and white horizontal stripes. Either pull in or stop opposite to allow traffic to pass.

THE HERD MENTALITY

Concomitant with the agricultural nature of both islands is a preponderance of both sheep and cattle, either at the side of some roads or, in one or two cases, actually on the road itself. Cows are larger and heavier than you are, and can cause quite serious damage to you and/or your bicycle if they become alarmed. Though it may seem silly, the best way of dealing with cows, either on or at the side of the road, is to start talking to them well in advance. Cows apparently have things on their minds other than cyclists, (like grass) and your sudden appearance in close proximity can startle them. Talking alerts them to your presence, and should see you past without further incident. Do not attempt to herd cows off the road, they can be more dangerous than you'd think. Sheep, on the other hand are the most predictably unpredictable animals you are likely to meet, and the best we can advise is to keep your wits about you - watch both sides of the road, particularly during lambing season. Pay particular attention if there are oncoming vehicles.

WEATHER

Between Islay and the east coast of Canada is nothing but Atlantic Ocean. This means breezes, wind and oft times, gales. Since there are numerous exposed roads with no real shelter from these winds, don't overestimate your stamina, particularly on a loaded bicycle. If necessary, stop for a break now and again. Make sure your water bottle is full before setting out (you do have a water bottle, don't you?) and pack something munchy for those 'light-headed' moments.

CYCLING ON ISLAY AND JURA



...a guide to the dos and don'ts and the whys and wherefores.



SIGHTSEEING

If you plan on stopping either occasionally or regularly to take in the sights, bird or wildlife, or just to take some photos please move yourself and your cycle(s) off the road. Islay and Jura are probably best seen from the saddle of a bicycle, a mode of transport ideally suited for the instant gratification of a spectacular view. It seems almost churlish to point out that those ensconced in a tonne of metal and glass may not find your abrupt stopping power as convenient as you do. Please always check behind you before stopping. It may seem a seemingly obvious thing to state, but if cycling into a headwind you are unlikely to hear other vehicles approaching from behind. Standing at right angles to the direction of the road, lost in idyllic contemplation is likely to end in tears.

MECHANICALS

Stunningly efficient though the modern bicycle is, there is always the unfortunate chance of something breaking. With a bit of luck (who are we kidding?) it will be something irritatingly minor like a broken gear cable, and you packed a spare one of those anyway, didn't you? But in the event that it is something more serious, there are a couple of cycle repairers listed on the back of this leaflet who will do their best to keep you mobile. Neither are likely to be wildly enthusiastic about being asked to repair a puncture, so try to cover the basics and carry at least one spare inner tube and a pump. Don't be a hero and try to fix a puncture at the side of the road - that will just mark you out as eccentric - replace the tube. However, please bear in mind that, however cycle friendly you find Islay and Jura to be, hardly any of the indigenous population share your joy. Therefore, don't expect either of the cycle repairers to be stocked with the latest hi-tech gizmos. Basic repairs are the name of the game.



CYCLE ROUTES

Bridgend - Mulindry - Storakaig - Knocklearach - Ballygrant - Bridgend

A relatively short twelve mile (20km) loop, or at least it is if you leave from Bridgend. Since this is where you arrive back, it's a practical place to leave the car if necessary.

Heading out from Bridgend towards Bowmore, turn first left up towards the Episcopal church, and effectively just keep following the road, because, until we get to Cluanach cottage at Mulindry, there's nowhere else to go. The first part gently takes you uphill for a while, and since it's all farm country round this way, just keep an eye out for tractors and the like - always give way where practical, because they're not on holiday like you are.

Continue past the colourfully named 'Puddle Hole' cottage up towards 'The Raw' (pronounced 'raa') at which point there's a slight downhill, followed by an immediate upward movement past Ballitarsin farm road end. This part of the route rolls round to the right, and then gently up and left after a few more wheel revolutions passing Neriby and Mulindry farms, before running down into what the Mighty Dave-T refers to as the 'village of weak bridge'. (You'll see why when you get there). The field entrance to the left, just before rolling over the bridge, leads to the unexcavated Iron Age fort of Dun Nosebridge (don't ask).

Now, as you approach Cluanach Cottage on the left corner, follow the road straight on, and not round to the right. This road will now eventually take you up towards the village of Ballygrant. Dunlossit Estate keep pigs in the fields along the first part of the road before Cattadale Farm. Since these

animals are often quite large, and certainly prone to being frightened by the sight of passing cyclists, just be aware of their presence - cyclists can be frightened by sudden movements too, you know.

At Cattadale Farm, the road starts heading upwards slightly, levelling out shortly before Barr Farm (on the left) then rolling down towards a cattle grid. From this point, it's all very much uphill. You are also likely to encounter cattle feeding in the middle of the road on this stretch - in such case, start talking loudly to them, well in advance, asking them kindly to move out of the way. In most cases this works fine, but don't get too close if you can avoid it - they're usually bigger than you are.

At the top of the first climb (Storakaig) you can often see numbers of wild deer behind the fence on your right and you'll probably want to stop at this point anyway (puff, pant). After the next cattle grid, the road heads upwards again before rolling onwards and downwards towards Knocklearach Farm and on down into Ballygrant village. This is quite a short, but steep downhill, incorporating a blind bend halfway, so make sure you check well enough ahead for on-coming traffic.

Pass Ballygrant Hall on your right, then Ballygrant Quarry on the left, and give way at the junction before turning left onto the main Port Askaig - Bridgend road. Since this road gently slopes downhill pretty much all the way for the next four miles or so, you should have a pleasant ride all the way home. Unless of course, there's a head-wind. Total time depends on how good you are at cycling uphill, but it's do-able in under the hour if need be, though if you're on holiday, who cares?

And I believe Bridgend Hotel serves decent espressos and cappuccinos.

Happy days.

JURA

A few hundred pedal strokes further on, sitting comfortably back from the road, is Rockside Farm Pony Trekking Centre, and Kilchoman Farm Distillery. The former should alert you to the possibility, especially through the summer months, of horses on the road. Please adopt a softly, softly approach in either direction: make sure the riders know you are there, and pass when safe to do so, leaving plenty of clearance. Do not race past - you may live to regret it.

Ahead are the formidable waves at Machir Bay, and if you wish you can sidle on down for a look-see. Up on the left is the derelict Kilchoman church and further towards the beach is a military cemetery for allies lost in tragedies off Islay during the wars.

If Machir is not your intended destination, follow the road to your right towards Coull point and Saligo Bay, where you are also likely to witness the power of the Atlantic breakers. In the distance is the oddly shaped escarpment of Dun Bheolain (it looks like Sydney Opera House) - not somewhere you could cycle to.

Birdlife is frequently numerous around here, hence a proportion of the land adjacent being overseen by the RSPB. Riding past Ballinaby Farm on the left, keep an eye open for agricultural traffic and errant sheep - this is a pleasant area to cycle, and you wouldn't want any inadvertant mishaps. The road is all single track and little used, to which the tell-tale grass growing in the middle will bear witness.

As it veers round to the right and up towards Carnduncan, it is also possible to take a detour left, to the sandy bays at Sanaigmore. If you've all day to spend, and fancy an often idyllic spot for a picnic lunch, this might not be a bad idea.

Past Carnduncan, there is the option of carrying straight on to join up with the Foreland road you started on, or turning sharp left uphill a bumpy road eventually leading past the RSPB Reserve at Aoradh Farm. The road descends quite steeply towards the latter, and there is a hidden entrance to the farm, on the right. While I would normally advise you take in wonderful views across Gruinart Flats, it might be a more prudent option to watch where you're heading at this point. Again, watch out for agricultural and tourist traffic.

The road across the Flats will often surprise with deer sightings and an array of birdlife, before rounding off to the right and towards Uiskentuie Farm. At the junction, head right down Uiskentuie Strand, (turning left will take you, eventually, to Bridgend) a long, flat piece of road that will take you back to Bruichladdich, and that cappuccino or espresso you'd be so looking forward to.

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Bruichladdich - Port Charlotte - Kilchiaran - Portnahaven - Port Charlotte - Bruichladdich

I make no excuses for starting a second ride from Bruichladdich - it's always nice to start with a coffee and bun, or finish with same.

The prevailing wind on Islay, while it might seem to come from pretty much every direction you're headed into, is actually southwest. Assuming this to be the case more often than not, then you are likely to experience a headwind most of the way to Portnahaven. Also bear in mind that you will be cycling down the Atlantic Coast and there is absolutely nothing (and I mean nothing!) to break the wind before it hits the Islay coast. You may think you've experienced headwinds before, as the saying goes, 'you ain't seen nuthin' yet.' Of course yours may be one of those unnaturally calm days. There may also be a blue moon or rain going up!

Head south past Bruichladdich Distillery going towards Port Charlotte, taking you past St Kieran's Church on the right hand side about mid-way along this 5km road. As you come into the village of Port Charlotte, the Museum of Islay Life is up on the right, the Croft Kitchen on your left before crossing the small bridge. Straight past the Youth Hostel and the Islay Wildlife Centre on the left hand side, then Port Charlotte Hotel and along Main Street. Keep well into the left, in case something comes wide past the parked cars. Nobody wants to come off before they've actually started.

On the right hand-side is the Lochindaal Hotel just before the junction where we turn right up the hill towards the ex-village hall which, in years gone by, was the village school. The current school is in to the right. Carry on past the hall - a bit of an uphill drag for a mile or two, not too steep but not too flat either. Pass Port Charlotte water works on your right, still pedalling uphill a bit, but when the road starts to venture downhill it's a welcome relief (unless you're particularly keen on uphill cycles). About

a kilometre (half a mile or so) before reaching Kilchiaran, the road heads seriously downwards.

If you haven't already sussed, Islay is an agricultural island, with farms dotted all across the landscape. With farms generally come herds of cattle and it might not have escaped your notice that they seem to spend almost as much time on the road as they do in the attendant fields. And cattle never clean up after themselves. So as you're hurtling down this 14% gradient and turn the bend at Kilchiaran Farm, please be aware that you are just as likely to run slap bang into cattle on the road as you are to free-wheel on past the ruin of Kilchiaran Chapel on the right. Or a car heading towards Port Charlotte. Or large quantities of mud and sh*t which may have an adverse effect on braking efficiency. You have been warned (though it is such a great downhill that you may just be tempted to ignore all the above). The track on the right just prior to the chapel leads up to a point known as 'Granny's Rock' and there is a piece of singletrack that will take you round the coast (all downhill from the top) to Kilchoman and Machir Bay. Also, atop the hill are the remnants of a 'listening station' used during the war to track ships etc. in the Atlantic. However, only venture up this way if you are on a suitable bicycle.

Assuming we have not chosen this latter option, the worst is yet to come. Having sped down a 14% gradient, now you have to climb one, and if you can

muster the energy to look to your right, there are wonderful views of Kilchiaran Bay and beyond (next stop eastern Canada). Granted if it's a lousy day, you won't see much at all, though if that's the case, you may not have made it this far.

After such a heavy climb, the road levels out a bit, though it doesn't get any straighter. A few kilometres along the road is a track leading to Tormisdale Croft, which still indulges in many traditional forms of rural craft such as spinning, knitting, carving etc. If you've time, it could be a nice idea to drop by. Failing that, carry on towards the south, past Cultoon farm on the left and the mysterious Cultoon Stone Circle on the right.

This latter feature is really a stone circle in waiting. Only two stones made it to the upright position before the site was abandoned in the pre-Christian era. All the stones are lying next to the holes dug for them and there they have been for well over 2000 years, and nobody really knows why. It's a bit of a trudge across to the circle, so unless you are wearing particularly stout footwear (not always a pragmatic choice for cycling) make a mental note to return later in the week and carry on. The road passes Kelsay farm on the left and Lossit farm on the right. There is a pathway to Lossit Bay and along the promontory if you fancy a dramatic view of Atlantic breakers, but please bear in mind that Lossit is a working farm and while it might be a pleasant walk through the farm for you, it's somewhat akin to folks taking a walk through your front garden. So just think how you would feel about that, tread carefully and have a bit of respect (this goes for all

farmland - there is no law of trespass in Scotland, but cyclists in bright lycra traipsing across farm fields are unlikely to win many friends amongst the local farming community).

There's a couple of hilly bits both up and down before you branch onto the road leading past Claddach and into Portnahaven. The road into the village overlooks the bay and across to Orsay lighthouse - do yourselves a favour and stop to admire the view.

Taking into consideration the earlier remarks about prevailing winds on Islay, you could now look forward to about 12/13 kilometres with a tailwind. Or more likely, the wind will have changed direction while you were out and you'll have to slog into a headwind again back to Port Charlotte. On a clear day, there are excellent views up Loch Indaal to the Paps of Jura and across to the Oa, the Strand and Laggan point (eventually). The road back to Port Charlotte is just as twisty turny as the road was on the way down, but there is no climbing to speak of. There are no outstanding features on the road until it reaches Nerabus where there are the ruins of a chapel along with carved headstones. And should you make the trip down to the shore, there are the ruins of a former mill. On the last stretch of road before Port Charlotte village is the new Port Mòr centre with a large wind turbine in its back garden. Now there's only those last 5km to reach your starting point in Bruichladdich.

The total time taken pretty much depends on how much sight-seeing you've done on along the way, though if we assume that you didn't stop once and you're reasonably fit, it can be completed in about an hour and a half or marginally less. Now for that espresso.