

Transcript

Wild for Scotland Podcast

Season 1, Episode 6: 'The Cure' - Isle of Arran

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Hello there and welcome to Wild for Scotland, a podcast that allows you to travel to Scotland through stories. My name is Kathi Kamleitner, I'm a writer and storyteller And I run the Scotland travel blog Watch Me See. After years of helping people from around the world plan their trips, this podcast is my way to help you connect with Scotland regardless of your travel plans. Each episode starts with a travel story about a location or an experience from my travels. Then I'll tell you some of my top tips for visiting to inspire a future trip.

Are you ready?

Great, let's travel to Scotland.

The first season of Wild for Scotland is all about the Scottish isles. Each week, we travel to a different island and spend some time exploring their nooks and crannies, history and landscapes.

This week we are heading to a place that is often called "Scotland in miniature" - that's right, we're going to the Isle of Arran. The island gets its nickname because you will find a little bit of everything Scotland has to offer. There are castles and ruins, mountains, beaches and fields. You will find standing stones, whisky distilleries and lovely seaside villages. There are mountain roads and coastal drives - in short, a full taste of Scotland.

Arran lies right on the Highland Fault Line. Geologically, the top half of the island lies in the Highlands and the bottom half in the Lowlands. That's how you get such a vast variety of landscapes on a fairly small space.

The Isle of Arran is the largest island in the Firth of Clyde and really easy to get to from Glasgow.

All of this makes it the perfect island getaway for first-timers or anyone who is short on time - it's one of my favourite islands to escape to when I want to avoid spending hours on the road, yet feel like doing something different every day. It never gets boring on Arran.

So, let's travel there together and go for a hike.

This is "The Cure".

[Alarm clock beeping]

Time to wake up!

With a mix of reluctance and eagerness, I roll out of bed. My head is splitting. My mouth is dry. It feels like I just got into bed. Who's idea was this?

One glance across the room and I can tell that my partner is struggling too, maybe even more than me. I look outside the window. It looks like it will be a perfectly clear day. Only sunshine and more sunshine, according to the forecast. This promise of a beautiful day makes getting up and into gear a little easier.

A big breakfast, a pill for the headache, lots of water. That's better.

We shoulder our backpacks, tie our hiking boots and make our way to the train station. Packed lunches and lots of snack bars tucked away. Today would be a big day.

We change at Glasgow Central. It is eerily quiet this early in the morning on a weekend. Clearly, we were not the only ones out late in the pubs last night. Only the others are still in bed...

Luckily though, we have a journey ahead of us and there is plenty of time to rest before we hit the trail. Slowly the train pulls away from the platform, crosses the River Clyde. Soon we leave the city behind and zoom through a green landscape. Moving south, towards the west coast.

From the train station in Ardrossan, we make the short walk over to the ferry terminal. The *MV Caledonian Isles* is already docked, patiently waiting for cars to disembark from its bowels. There aren't many. But the queue for cars to go over, the same way as us, is long.

A few moments later, we're setting sail for Arran.

Time for a second breakfast. The crossing from Ardrossan to Brodick takes just under an hour - enough time to indulge in a hot meal from the cafe on the ferry. The outside deck is busy. People sit on the metal chairs, enjoying the sunshine. To the south, in the distance, I can see the *MV Isle of Arran*, a much smaller vessel than the one we are on. It runs additional crossings on the route to Arran during the summer, and also goes to Campbeltown on the Kintyre peninsula. That's where it left this morning, making its way first to Brodick and then on to Ardrossan.

There is barely a cloud in the sky. Blue like technicolour. The sea is dark blue and extremely calm. Smooth sailing all around. I don't think my head could have managed otherwise.

I can see the sun reflecting off the sea, v-shaped, like a silver funnel, channeling all the light towards me. Seagulls and fulmars are flying close above the water surface, accompanying our boat.

And then, we arrive in Brodick, time to disembark and watch the ferry glide away again, back to Ardrossan to pick up more visitors.

Once again, we shoulder our backpacks and set off. The first part of the walk leads through the village. Along the waterfront we see cafes opening their doors for the day, moving chairs and tables outside into the sunshine, hanging signs and propping their doors open.

We continue to make our way all the way through Brodick until we leave the village behind, pass by the shops at the far end of the bay and find ourselves at Brodick Castle, one of the possible starting points for this hike.

We pick up the trail and wander through a light woodland with coniferous trees. The path is framed by bright green grass and tall ferns. Slowly, the trail begins to climb, the trees become sparser and the undergrowth takes over. Near the path, I can hear the soft trickling of a little stream. I wave my hands before my face. Water nearby and shelter from wind on a hot summer's day can only mean one thing. Midges. These tiny black flies are a nuisance in Scotland, especially when you're hiking and can't escape to your car or a cafe while they're out and about. Midges love me, and they quickly start attacking me, biting my legs through my leggings. But, I won't let midges ruin my day.

Soon enough, we emerge from the woodland. As the vegetation gets lower, I can feel a breeze - the midges won't like that very much. Their tiny bodies - so practical when you want to sneakily attack a hiker - stand no chance in even the slightest wind. They wouldn't bother us again that day.

Without the shade of the trees, we are now fully exposed to the summer sun. It is an exceptionally hot day, pushing 30 degrees Celsius which is a rare occasion even at the peak of summer. The breeze, while strong enough to keep the midges away, doesn't really do much to cool me down. Soon, I'm a sweaty mess and am regretting the decision to have a few drinks last night even more. But best to sweat it out, I guess.

I can see the top of Goatfell in front of me now. The gravel on the path is almost white, reflecting the sunlight. To the right of the path, heather stretches as far as the eye can see. It's only July, but it's already blooming in shades of pink and purple. To the left, the ground looks completely different. Covered in bright green ferns until it drops steeply towards a gully.

We come to a wooden bridge that crosses a stream running down from the mountain range towards the sea. A glance at our water supplies and we decide to stop for a break and fill up our bottles. The water is crystal clear and fast flowing. I take my shoes off and dip my toes in. Ice-cold water running over my feet. Feels like heaven.

From here onwards the path and the landscape changes. Instead of loose gravel, we are soon walking on large slabs of rock. Ferns and heather make space for grass littered with boulders. As we keep going up, the grass becomes thinner and more and more rocks appear on the ground.

Behind us, we can see Brodick with its neat fields separated by lines of trees. Behind Brodick Bay there is a pointy hill. It belongs to Holy Isle, a small island just off the coast from

Lamlash, another village on Arran. It has long been believed to be a sacred island. The saint Molaise lived here in a cave during the 6th century and there is evidence of a medieval monastery. In the 1990s, the Holy Isle was given to a Tibetan Buddhist community, who continue to run retreats and courses at their Centre for World Peace and Health.

Looking east towards the mainland, I can see the coastline of Ayrshire unfold before me. The islands of Great and Little Cumbrae. The gentle rolling hills of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park in Northern Ayrshire.

On our way up, we take frequent breaks. To drink water. To catch our breath. To curse at the heat. And our hangover. Who's idea was it anyway to go for a hike in this heat? - Oh yeah, mine.

Eventually, we get to the steepest bit of the hike, the final ascent to the peak of Goatfell. It is the tallest mountain on Arran. Not quite a Munro - that's a Scottish mountain over 3,000 ft - but still quite a substantial climb. Eventually, the path fizzles out into a number of smaller tracks leading right up to the top. We choose our line of attack and a few moments later, a white concrete trig point appears in front of us. Next to it, a stone cairn marks the summit and a plaque points out the names of the landmarks along the horizon.

The view from the summit is a spectacular 360 degrees. Aside from the views of Brodick and the Ayrshire coast, which we enjoyed plenty of on our way up, we now also get to see what's north and west from here. We can see the other peaks in the Goatfell range. Cir Mhor [Kir Voor], Caisteal Abhail [A(c)hail], Beinn Bharrain.

Pronunciations: <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/arran/cir-mhor.shtml>,
<https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/arran/caisteal-abhail.shtml>,
<https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/arran/pirnmill-hills.shtml>.

Beyond those peaks to the west, I can see the Kintyre peninsula, Scotland's index finger pointing towards the coast of Ireland. And even further in the distance rise the Paps of Jura, the characteristic, rounded peaks on the Isle of Jura.

The spacious summit is perfect for a break to enjoy the sunshine. The breeze cools me down and ruffles my hair, but isn't too strong to make it unpleasant. People come and go, tapping the summit cairn and setting off again, either back down to Brodick or on towards one of the neighbouring peaks.

Lying there in the sun, I feel something changing inside me. Maybe I've finally sweated out everything that needed out of my system from last night. Maybe the views simply washed it away. Either way, my hangover is gone and I feel like a whole new person. With this new energy, I walk around the summit and take photos of everything. The moss growing between the boulders. A little cushion of purple heather. The rocks piling up on each other.

My partner doesn't look so happy. Seems like *my* hangover cure doesn't work for him. We might have to try something else.

We return down the same way we came up. It's pretty tough going and I'm certainly glad I brought my hiking poles to make my way down the steep boulder field. Before we know it, we are back at the wooden bridge over the stream. We reach the woodland, but there aren't many midges out this time of the day. They probably had their fill.

Instead of returning to the castle, we keep on walking straight down the woodland path and emerge from the trees to find a litter of houses. A few gift shops selling local crafts. The local brewery - unfortunately already closed for the day. And then, we see it - the pub.

We sit down in the spacious beer garden and order a couple of drinks. Crisp, cold pints in tall glasses. Water droplets running down the side, glistening in the sun. We both take a sip. I look over to my partner and all of a sudden his face looks a lot like mine did just a few hours ago when we reached the summit. Something is changing inside of him. In an instance, his hangover is gone. The strain of the hike is forgotten as if it never happened. Finally, a smile on his face.

Eventually, we return to the ferry port in Brodick. We sail back to Ardrossan on the last boat of the day and take the train back to Glasgow. Tired but happy, cured by the island, the mountain, the views and the beer.

Looks like Arran has a hangover cure for everyone.

I hope you enjoyed this day trip to the Isle of Arran and our hike up to the top of Goatfell. Which hangover cure would do it for you?

Now, it's time for the practical part of the show - you know the drill, here are my top 5 travel tips for a trip to Arran, whether you're hiking or enjoying the mountains from afar.

Tip Number 1: Find my detailed hiking guide for Goatfell on Watch Me See

If you want to try this hike for yourself, head to my Scotland blog Watchmeseesee.com to find a full description of the trail, some tips for getting to and from Arran, and a suggested packing list for a day hike like this. I'll drop the link in the show notes.

Tip Number 2: Arran makes for a great day trip from Glasgow

It is, of course, worth spending more time on Arran because there is a lot to do & see. But hiking Goatfell or even doing something else on the island is also just a great day trip from Glasgow. With a rail & sail ticket, you'll be on the island in no time. It's super easy to organise. You could bring your bikes, jump on a bus or of course, you could also bring your car across. Visit the distillery in Lochranza, hike to the standing stones on Machrie Moor or spend a day by the beach.

Tip Number 3: Avoid Goatfell in bad weather

It might not be a tall mountain, but the Goatfell range can be really vicious when the weather is bad. The approach to the top is super exposed and high winds, fog and snowfall can turn

this into a really dangerous situation. It's best to avoid Goatfell in bad conditions unless you are confident in your mountaineering and navigation skills.

Tip Number 4: For a longer route, hike via Glen Rosa

If you have more time and want to walk a longer route, you could turn this hike into a loop by following Glen Rosa. The glen is a lush green valley to the west of Goatfell. At the end of the glen, the trail climbs up to the ridge and from there, you can make your way to the summit - or you can go the other way around and descend into the glen after the summit.

For an easy walk, just explore the glen by itself.

Tip Number 5: Try the local produce while you're on Arran

The islanders of Arran are incredibly productive and you could easily fill up your larder with food and drink made on the island - particularly if you are an omnivore. Arran cheese was actually my favourite before I went vegan. You can also find a local brewery, a popular ice cream brand and of course some whisky distilleries - it wouldn't be Scotland without them. I'd say, leave some space in your luggage to stock up!

And with this, I send you off to dream about your own trip to the Isle of Arran. Maybe I've inspired you to plan a day trip to the island or a longer stay - but remember, for most of us it is still not advisable to make any plans that are set in stone. Luckily, the island will always be there, waiting for us at the end of travel restrictions. It will be so good to return when it's safe!

Thank you so much for tuning in and listening to Wild for Scotland. If you enjoyed the podcast, please subscribe to it, leave a review on Apple Podcasts or share your favourite episode with a friend. Sign up for my email list, connect with me on socials or visit the website, WildforScotland.com. There you will find photos from today's travel story, transcripts and other episodes.

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You'll find all the links in the show notes.

Wild for Scotland is written, hosted and produced by me, Kathi Kamleitner, with additional support by Fran Turauskis. Podcast art is by Lizzie Vaughan-Knight, the Tartan Trailburner and all original music is composed by Bruce Wallace.

Until next, time when we travel to a different place in Scotland.