



Arran explored

Friend Bob Jones embarks on the tourist trail in Arran

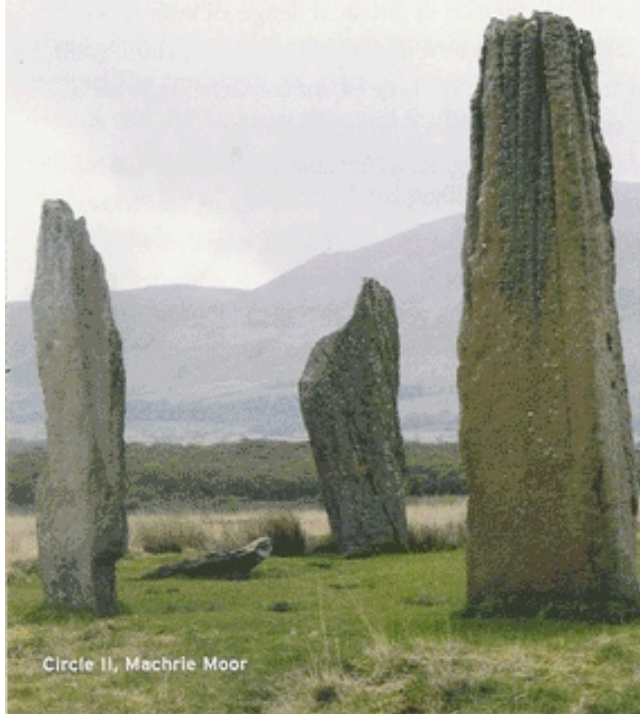
It wasn't a long drive from our B&B in Lamlash to Brodick, then over the String Road to the small parking lot on the west coast of Arran. Across the road from the parking spot was a small Historic Scotland sign pointing inland to Machrie Moor. Through the gate, Anne and I started the short hike that would take us back four or five thousand years.

Along the well trodden path we watched newborn lambs exploring their new environs while gulls and crows swirled and squawked. At least a couple of times, cock pheasants let us get within ten feet as they purposefully strutted their territory. We anxiously watched rain clouds scuttle across the southern Arran mountain tops – the day before, similar clouds had brought a drenching rain that had kept us off a nearby golf course. This day, thankfully, the clouds stayed clear of our trail and even broke up enough to give us spots of sun.

Over our visits to Arran in the last four years, Anne and I have enjoyed seeing and learning about Arran's stone circles, cairns, tombs and stone forts under the care of Historic Scotland.

We started on the main island road, the A841, just east of Kilmory at the signposted forest trail to **Carn Ban** (meaning the 'white cairn' after the white stones at its edge). The round trip hike of six and a half miles leads to one of the best examples of a well-preserved neolithic long cairn. The trail to the cairn flanks the west side of Glas Choiren hill and is passable in almost all conditions – but, of course, will be very wet at times. In good weather, the long walk will seem shorter and Carn Ban is a great place for a picnic.

Carn Ban is the most remote of the Historic Scotland maintained sites. All the remaining locations could be visited in a single day. Continuing around the island, the next monument to visit is the **Torrylin Chambered Cairn** ('Hill of the River Pool', named for the Kilmory Water pool



Circle II, Machrie Moor



Auchagallon Stone Circle



Torr a'Chaisteal dun



just below Lagg Bridge), reached via a signposted footpath from the A841 by the store in Lagg. The path affords nice views to the southeast.

Further around the scenic coast highway west of Corriecravie look for a sign on the west side of the road to **Torr a'Chaisteal dun** or fort ('Hill of the Castle'). Parking along this stretch of road is hard to find, but there are some spots nearby to pull off. To reach the fort, cross over the stile into the barnyard, through the gate, then downhill through the sheep fields. Although the original inhabitants of Torr a'Chaisteal would have gathered there to repel marauders from Kintyre and the fort is rumoured to be the haunt of fairies, the inhabitants now are birds, sheep and lizards, with only the occasional tourist to disturb their tranquillity.

Most impressive of all the archeological sites on Arran is **Moss Farm Road Circle** and **Machrie Moor**, which has been called 'the best group of architecturally varied circles in western Europe.' This one and a half mile walk was the one Anne and I most looked forward to.

Machrie Moor is an area of approximately five square miles of flat fertile sandy soil, 'machair' in Gaelic. The wide moor hosts numerous prehistoric monuments, tombs, and hut-circles besides the six megalithic stone circles currently in the care of Historic Scotland. Of the six circles (a diagram of circle placement can be found on the Historic Scotland information plaque at the site), Circle II contains the largest stones, reaching almost 18 feet in height. Circle V, a concentric ring about 60 feet in diameter, is known as Suidhe Choir Fhionn or Fingal's cauldron seat. Legend says that Fingal, the mythological Scottish giant, tied his dog Bran to a stone in the outer circle while he ate a meal in the inner circle. Circle XI is the most recently excavated, being uncovered in 1985-86.

It was hard to leave Machrie Moor, but we still had three sites to visit. Anne and I had enjoyed the monuments of the moor in solitude – even the crows and gulls seemed to honour the spirit of the Moor.

Next on our trip around Arran is **Kilpatrick Dun**. At Kilpatrick, at the south end of Drumadoon Bay on the A841, there is a small parking area and a sign pointing to the Dun. The walk isn't as easy as some of the other sites – it's uphill and hard to follow.

Last on our tour of ancient monuments is **Auchagallon Stone Circle**, a short walk up a farm track off a minor road just north of Machrie bay golf course. Auchagallon (meaning 'stormy field') is easy to get to, has lots of parking, and affords some wonderful views north and south along the coast and across to the Kintyre Peninsula.



From there it's only about 14 miles to **Lochranza Castle**, located on the shore of Loch Ranza at the northwest tip of Arran. The remains are interesting to wander through and parts of the old hall-house are still evident. The setting of the castle nestled in a bay with the village of Lochranza behind is particularly picturesque.

Anne and I love what we find in this miniature Scotland – the golf, the scenery, the B&Bs, restaurants and pubs, and the people. But it is the stones of Arran – Torrylin, Machrie Moor, Lochranza Castle – that leave the longest impressions. ■