40 Fascinating Facts about Cowal

1. The name Cowal is said to derive from 'Comhal', and early Dalriadic Scot.
2. The Holy Loch Navy base was the subject of the 1988 film Down Where the Buffalo Go. It starred the famous Hollywood actor, Harvey Keitel and many of the scenes were shot around Dunoon and the Navy base.
3. Cowal was dominated by the Lamont family until the 17th century when the Campbells improved their land position with royal support.
4. Dunoon is the sole burgh on Cowal. It was popularised as a destination until the 1960s when fleets of paddle steamers brought holidaymakers from Glasgow *doon the watter.*
5. Dunoon takes its name from the Gaelic for *fort on the river*. The river is the Clyde and the fort preceded the Castle whose ruins are still visible.
6. It's quicker to get to Dunoon from Glasgow by ferry from Gourock than to drive on the road around by Loch Long.
7. The ferry ride from Gourock takes 25 minutes and you can jump straight on or off the train to or from Glasgow and the Clyde coast.
8. Dunoon's architecture is classic Seaside Victorian, Edwardian and Clydeside resort, as it owes its existence almost entirely to its popularity as a holiday destination for Glaswegians who went 'doon the watter' in the summer.
9. Modern Dunoon was planned in the late 1790s by none other than James Craig, the chap responsible for laying out the famous 'New Town' of Edinburgh. The reason for the Dunoon plan was to support a linen factory set up by the Duke of Argyll.
10. The Earls of Argyll are the hereditary keepers of what's left of Dunoon Castle but a condition of their tenure was that they should be able to supply a red rose on demand. This custom was revived in 1958 when the visiting custodian presented the Queen with a red rose to mark her visit to Dunoon.
11. Dunoon reputedly has – or had, when the submarine base was still functioning in the Holy Loch – more taxis per head of population than anywhere else in Britain. We wonder who counted them!
12. The submarine base operated from 1961 til 1992. In 1991 one quarter of Dunoon's population was American so the impact of their departure was massive.
13. James Braid, a famous golfer and golf course architect from St.Andrews, laid out the Cowal golf club's parkland course in 1890.
14. The Cowal Way is a long distance footpath running the length of the Cowal Peninsula. It starts in the SW at Portavadie beside Loch Fyne and finishes in the NE at Ardgartan, by Loch Long. It is 47 miles (75 km) long, climbing 5050 ft (1540 m) on the way.
15. Scotland's largest walking festival, CowalFest, is now also a major arts festival with a 10-day long programme of walks, arts, cultural and social events that celebrate landscape and the natural world's influence on creativity. 5th-14th October 2007 www.cowalfest.org
16. Dunans Bridge, on the Dunans estate, is an A-listed structure, designed by Thomas Telford the celebrated Scots civil engineer. The bridge was constructed to commemorate the battle of Waterloo. The three-arched rubble construction is considered internationally important, as it is the only extant bridge of this type.
17. Dunans Castle was originally home to the Fletcher Clan who moved to the site c.1745 carrying with them the door of their previous home at Achallader Castle.
18. Dunans Heritage Project is a restoration project for Dunans castle, and should ensure the buildings preservation for future generations.
19. Castle Toward, built in 1820 and formerly owned by the Lamont clan is 6.5 Miles South of the town. It is now used as an outdoor education centre.
20. Julianne Moore, the four-time Oscar-nominated actress, has connections to Dunoon as her mother is originally from the town. Moore still has family in the area.
21. Many place names in Cowal (and Bute) are Gaelic and challenge non-locals. Rhubodach on Bute is often phonetically pronounced *rubber duck* by those who are struggling!

22. The Cowal Highland Gathering is the highlight of Dunoon's year and attracts hundreds of contestants and many thousands of spectators from all over the world. The largest Highland Games in the World, it is held annually on the last Friday and Saturday in August. This year it runs Thurs 27 – Sat 29 August.
23. The Arboretum at Benmore Botanic Garden, part of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, is situated 7 miles north of the town just before the scenic Loch Eck. The garden, formerly a private garden for the Younger family, is now open to the public. Its 150 acres feature some of the tallest trees in Britain, including a spectacular Avenue of Giant Redwoods, some of which are over 40 metres high.
24. Kate Winslet the international film star honeymooned in Dunoon.
25. Possibly Dunoon's most famous resident was Sir Harry Lauder (1870 - 1950) whose mansion, "Laudervale" stood just south of Dunoon on the Bullwood road.
26. Dunoon Grammar School is over three hundred and fifty years old and has many well-known former pupils, including the Labour Party politicians, John Smith, George Robertson (later head of NATO), Brian Wilson and Dr Who actor Sylvester McCoy.
27. Arkinglas Woodland Garden, near Cairndow is home to champion trees - including a Grand Fir (Abies grandis) measured at 203 feet in 2002, one of the tallest trees in Britain.
28. The Castle House Museum, Dunoon details the history of Cowal from ancient times to the present day. It documents the history of the Clyde pleasure steamers, the Clyde during wartime, and the American Naval base at the Holy Loch.
29. A statue of Highland Mary can be found in the grounds of the Castle House Museum. Mary was a tragic love of Robert Burns'. She was born, Mary Campbell, at Auchamore near Dunoon.
30. One look at the waters around Bute and the Cowal Peninsula would fulfil every yachtsperson's dream.The beauty and tranquillity of the waters of the Firth of Clyde and its many sea lochs make this a truly exceptional sailing destination.
31. Tighnabruaich, from the Gaelic *house on the bank*, has a superb viewpoint over the Kyles of Bute.
32. Tighnabruaich was a popular steamer destination for Glasgow workers from around 1820 onwards…tourism even back then!
33. These days Tighnabruaich is still a busy yachting resort. No steamers though!
34. The sport of shinty (like a mixture of hockey and lacrosse and a precursor of ice hockey) is popular in many parts of Argyll, with teams such as Kyles Athletic prominent in national leagues.
35. Castle Toward, which dates back to the 15th Century and was the scene of the massacre of 200 Lamont clansmen by the Campbells in 1646.
36. The depths of Loch Eck is home to "powan", a freshwater herring trapped in the loch when glacial moraines blocked the outlet to the sea. This survivor from earlier ages is found only in Loch Eck and Loch Lomond.
37. The present Kilmodan Church in Glendaruel, the second on the site, was built in 1610. It has a Lapidarium in which there are preserved carved gravestones of the 15th and 16th Centuries. These stones once covered graves in the Kirkyard, and demonstrate the carver's skill with Celtic design.
38. Otter Ferry is not on the Ring of Bright Water trail. The place takes its names from the Gaelic word for a shingle bank or sand bank, 'oitir'. There was a ferry across the Loch many years ago, so it is easy to see how the place got its name.
39. Otter Ferry can be reached from Glendaruel either by taking the turn-off from the A886 which takes you over the Bealachandrain, the steep, twisting high road over the hills, with spectacular views.
40. **Cove Park** (01436 850123; www.covepark.org) runs a residency programme for artists from May to October. The rest of the year, the accommodation is available for private hire. It's a mix of the 'pods' from the BBC's Castaway programme in Taransay, and converted sea containers…