50 Fascinating Facts about Bute, Dunoon & Cowal

1. The Bute is thought to come from Norse for *patch of land*.
2. The current Marquis of Bute is former Formula 1 racing driver Johnny Dumfries.
3. George Leslie Hunter, one of the four painters known as the Scottish Colourists, was born in Rothesay on Bute where his father was the chemist.
4. 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.
5. HRH Prince Charles bears the title Duke of Rothesay.
6. The present Mount Stuart, home of the Marquis of Bute, was commissioned and inspired by the 3rd Marquess of Bute (1847-1900) along with the Scottish architect, Robert Rowand Anderson, well known as the architect of the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.
7. Cowal was dominated by the Lamont family until the 17th Century when the Campbells improved their land position with royal support.
8. 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.*
9. Flexible Technology on Rothesay, was set up by Peter Timms ex IBM, manufacturing flexible printed circuit boards in 1980. The company was at one time the largest private employer on the island.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (www.cowalfest.org).
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. One of Bute's most colourful past residents was the 19th Century Shakespearean actor Edmund Kean. Kean came from a humble background, but he became one of the most famous and wealthiest actors of his time.
16. Dunans Heritage Project is a restoration project for Dunans castle and should ensure the buildings preservation for future generations.
17. The Isle of Bute is known in entomological circles as the island of fleas. 15 species have been identified on Bute and reported to the Royal Entomological Society. *Are you scratching?*
18. During WWII a decoy village was constructed at the north end of the Isle of Bute and maintained by the Royal Navy. The village was illuminated at night (using generators) in an attempt to confuse enemy bombers, and hopefully to draw them away from Greenock or Clydebank. No bombs fell on Rhubodach, although a German plane returning from the Greenock blitz jettisoned 2 bombs near the Greenan Loch.
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. French Canadians along with 9th (Scottish) Commando used Bute's beaches (and Inchmarnock, a neighbouring island) to train with tank landing craft in preparation for D-Day.

21. 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.
22. Commissioned by Rothesay Harbour Trust in 1899 during Rothesay's hey-day as a holiday resort, the gents lavatory, a most unusual survivor of the Victorian era, was always intended to impress. The convenience is close to the pier and even ladies can view in consultation with the attendants!
23. Many place names in Bute & Cowal are Gaelic and challenge non-locals. Rhubodach on Bute is often phonetically pronounced *rubber duck* by those who are struggling!
24. Wallace and Katherine Fyfe restored the Victorian Ascog Hall when they purchased it in 1986. After 6 years they moved into the house and eventually were able to restore the garden which is open to visitors.
25. 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.
26. Bute has been occupied by man for over 5500 years. An exploration of the island will reveal standing stones, cists and a vitrified fort in the south at Dunagoil Bay.
27. Lord Attenborough, the acclaimed film director and actor has a home on Bute.
28. 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.
29. Sugar refiner James Duncan purchased Benmore estate in 1870, extending it and the house to which he added a very large picture gallery. His collection was one of the most important in Scotland with him being the first Scottish collector to own an impressionist painting. Benmore was sold to the Younger family who retained ownership until 1928 when it was left to the nation. The house is now an outdoor pursuits centre, while the grounds form Benmore Botanic Garden, one of the National Botanic Gardens of Scotland group.
30. Kate Winslet the international film star honeymooned in Dunoon.
31. Possibly Dunoon's most famous resident was Sir Harry Lauder (1870 - 1950) whose mansion, "Laudervale" stood just south of Dunoon on the Bullwood Road.
32. 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 actor Sylvester McCoy.
33. Alexander Reid, the Glasgow art dealer whose picture painted by Vincent Van Gogh hangs in Kelvingrove Gallery, lived in Dunoon for twenty years and was a member of Argyll County Council for fifteen. Reid was influential in changing tastes and introducing impressionist paintings to Scotland.
34. 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.
35. Ardkinglas, near Cairndow, is a spectacular Arts and Crafts country house, built in 1907 by the architect Robert Lorimer and is generally considered his masterpiece.
36. The Castle House Museum in 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.
37. 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.
38. One look at the waters around Bute and the Cowal Peninsula would fulfil every yachtsperson's dream. The beauty and tranquility of the waters of the Firth of Clyde and its many sea lochs make this a truly exceptional sailing destination.
39. Tighnabruaich, from the Gaelic *house on the bank*, has a superb viewpoint over the Kyles of Bute.
40. Castle Toward dates back to the 15th Century and is where Mary Queen of Scots once stayed. It was the scene of the massacre of 200 Lamont clansmen by the Campbells in 1646.

41. 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.
42. The Paper Caves on the shores of Loch Eck are where Campbell clan papers were hidden during the 1685 rebellion.
43. The Palladian style Strachur House, commissioned by General John Campbell in 1785 on his return from the American War of Independence, is now owned by Sir Charles McLean, son of Sir Fitzroy McLean, said to have been the inspiration for James Bond.
44. Kilmun boasts a number of houses built by David Napier, regarded as the father of shipbuilding – four houses for his managers, christened as the tea caddies because of their shape, a hotel, and Finnartmore, a house for his own use. Napier also owned the Glenshellish estate.
45. Knockdow House was originally built by the Campbells around 1750, with the estate being bought by the Lamonts in 1810. Over the years the house was considerably extended, its interiors rich in exotic hardwoods from their estates in Trinidad.
46. Carrick Castle, dating from the 14th century, has spectacular views over Loch Long and Loch Goil. It developed into a strategic base for the Campbells in maintaining control of the seaways and the area. After partial renovation, the castle is today a private home.
47. 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.
48. 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.
49. The garden of Ballimore at Otter Ferry is an important designed landscape, laid out by Thomas Mawson who also laid out the rock garden at Mount Stuart in Bute. Mawson is regarded as the landscape architect who perfected the woodland garden, with Ballimore considered one of his most successful but least known achievements.
50. 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.