

40 Facts around Largs and northern Ayrshire

1. The Gaelic name for Largs is Na Leargan, which means 'the little plain with a slope'.
2. This part of the Ayrshire coast is known as Cunninghame.
3. Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae are the two small islands that can be seen just off the coast of Largs.
4. Europe's smallest Cathedral is to be found on Millport, the main village on Great Cumbrae, with seating for barely 100 worshippers – roughly the equivalent number of inhabitants per square kilometre within Ayrshire.
5. Millport gasworks was the last in Scotland to use solid fuel, closing only in 1981.
6. Great Cumbrae is home to the National Water Sports Centre of Scotland, housed in the former Downcraig ferry terminus. Sailing, canoeing and windsurfing training courses are available to the public and to national teams and squads.
7. The first lighthouse in Scotland was built on Little Cumbrae in 1757 by the Clyde Lighthouse Trust.
8. In 1999 the isle of Little Cumbrae was sold to its inhabitants.
9. Kings Robert II and III of Scotland maintained Little Cumbrae as a deer forest in the 1300s.
10. Both Largs and Millport were very popular seaside holiday destinations until the mid 1970s with people from Glasgow and across Scotland.
11. Largs is currently probably best-known as a yachting centre, both for competitive dinghy and yacht sailing and for pleasure yachts. It is home to the largest yacht marina in Scotland.
12. Largs is also the home to the national training centre for football coaches in Scotland. The centre is internationally recognised as a centre of excellence and trains coaches from countries around the world through its multi-level qualification system.
13. Sir Thomas Brisbane (1773-1860) was born in Largs, became Governor of New South Wales in Australia and gave his name not only to Brisbane in Australia, but also to Brisbane St, Brisbane Road, Brisbane Glen Road, the Brisbane Queen Festival, Brisbane House Hotel and Brisbane Taxis in Largs itself.
14. Brisbane called his children Eleanor Australia and Thomas Australius MacDougall Brisbane, after their new home!
15. The Pencil Monument in Largs commemorates the Battle of Largs in 1263 when King Haakon of Norway's fleet of 200 ships was defeated not so much by Scottish forces as by the storm which gave them a helping hand. It is often forgotten that less than 750 years ago the Western Isles belonged to Norway, but were ceded to Scotland after this battle. Each year in September this 'victory' is celebrated in a Viking Festival in Largs.
16. Nardini's celebrated restaurant in Largs with its the iconic art deco exterior may yet reopen following the decision in December 2005 to allow the redevelopment of a building behind the café.
17. Kelburn Country Centre near Largs offers a range of activities for families on the land around Kelburn Castle, home of the Earl of Glasgow. In 2007 the castle hit the headlines when Lord Glasgow invited some internationally-renowned graffiti artists to use part of the castle walls to express their art. The sections of wall were due to be re-rendered at a later date so the display was only ever going to be temporary.
18. Fairlie, just south of Largs, was served by Clyde steamers until as late as 1972.
19. The hot water from the nuclear power station at Hunterston 'A' was used to assist the farming of turbot from about 1979...that's one way to get the fish to grow large!
20. Hunterston industrial complex was also a coal and ore-importing terminal serving Scottish steelworks from the late 1970s and various Scottish power stations subsequently.
21. Also in the mid 1970s, there was a special offshore fabrication yard constructed in deep water off Hunterston. It was used to build oil drilling platforms but only operated briefly, though it has been re-opened sporadically since then.

22. Skelmorlie Aisle chapel has a magnificent painted ceiling from the 17th century and an 18 foot sculpture with weapons, fruits, figures and instruments.
23. Near Skelmorlie Aisle there's a mound which is said to be the remains of a medieval gallows site.
24. At Wemyss Bay there is a magnificent Victorian railway station that has a vast curved, sloping glass roof supported by ornate iron-work. It's a sight worth seeing for its mix of elegant beauty, ornate detailing and excellent engineering design.
25. Wemyss Bay is the station that serves the ferry to the Isle of Bute, which was a favoured holiday and weekend destination for rich businessmen from the 19th century onwards. Some even commuted from Rothesay (the island's capital) to Glasgow on a daily basis.
26. Bobby Lennox, a fine footballer and one of the celebrated Lisbon Lions who won the European Cup for Celtic in 1967 when they beat Inter Milan 2 – 1 at the Lisbon National Stadium, was born in Saltcoats and until recently ran Bobby's Bar in the town.
27. James H Moffat who built A T Mays into a very successful nationwide travel company was born in Saltcoats.
28. David Dale, creator of New Lanark, a model industrial town for the cotton mill industry, was born in Stewarton in 1739.
29. The world's first short wave radio transmission across the Atlantic was made from Ardrossan. The plaque on the sea facing wall of Abbotsford Nursing Home reads: 'Near this site in December 1921 radio signals transmitted by radio amateurs were first heard across the Atlantic.'
30. The first Open Championship was held at Prestwick in 1860. It was organised by the members who subscribed £25 to purchase a red morocco belt with silver clasps. It was won by Willie Park of Musselburgh with a score of 174 over 36 holes. A replica belt was presented to Sandy Lyle when he won the 125th Open at Royal St Georges Golf Club.
31. On March 3rd 1960 the 'King' himself, Elvis Presley flew into Prestwick. He was finishing his American army national service and stopped over in Prestwick for two hours. It was the only time he set foot in the UK.
32. The first Burns Supper was founded in Greenock in 1801. Irvine Burns Club claims the longest record of consecutive Burns Suppers, holding its 180th in 2006.
33. Gourock has one of the few remaining outdoor swimming pools in Scotland. It's best enjoyed in the Summer!
34. Gourock is a gateway to some of the quietest and most scenic landscape in Argyll, via the short ferry link to Dunoon and the Cowal peninsula.
35. From the mid 1980s until the mid 1990s IBM had their major European manufacturing plant for PCs at Greenock. It later evolved into software and support functions rather than manufacturing.
36. The key figure in the industrial revolution, James Watt, who perfected the steam engine which was used to revolutionise manufacturing as well as (maritime) transport was born in Greenock in 1736.
37. Abram Lyle was born in Greenock in 1820. After working as a cooper, he moved into shipping, mainly of sugar. Then he bought a share in a sugar refinery in 1865, because Greenock was the major sugar-importing port in the UK. In 1921 Lyle's joined sugar-cube makers Tate's to create sugar-giant Tate & Lyle. Greenock was a huge sugar-refining location until the 1970s. Happily, it still has one of Scotland's largest sweet-making factories, at Fort Matilda.
38. At Castle Semple Loch near Lochwinnoch there is a peel tower dating from 1555 on an island in the loch...hence its name.
39. There is an RSPB visitor centre beside the Loch, which also offers various water sports options as well as interpretative facilities for wildlife and landscape.
40. Calderhaugh Mill in Lochwinnoch was established on the river Calder in 1788 working cotton and linen and then eventually, from 1951, silk which was woven and printed there.