50 fascinating 'facts' about Mid-Argyll and Lochgilphead

1. The Gaelic name for Inveraray is 'Inbhir aray' meaning the mouth of the River Aray or the settlement at the mouth of the River Aray.

2. Loch Fyne is the longest sea loch in Scotland and at one point is 56 fathoms deep opposite Furnace Quarry.

3. Lochgilphead is the district headquarters of Argyll & Bute Council and the administrative centre of Argyll & Bute. Reorganisation took place in 1975. The town lies at the head of Loch Gilp, an arm of Loch Fyne. It is also the chief town of Mid Argyll, an area of land south of Oban and north of Kintyre, which extends west from Loch Fyne to the Atlantic Ocean.

4. In 1925 the now Crarae Gardens, owned by The National Trust for Scotland, was transformed into an exotic 'Himalayan ravine' by Captain (later Sir) George Campbell.

5. Ardkinglas House at Cairndow, on the shores of Loch Fyne, was designed by the famous architect Robert Lorimer who was also the chief architect of The Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle.

6. The Crinan Canal, constructed between 1793 and 1801 is 9 miles long and has 15 locks. It takes its name from the village of Crinan, which is located at its westerly end. It connects the village of Ardrishaig on Loch Gilp with the Sound of Jura and provides a navigable route between the Clyde and the Inner Hebrides. It was built for commercial Clyde puffers to travel between Glasgow and the West Highlands and was designed by Scots civil engineer John Rennie. Today it is used mainly by yachting craft.

7. Poltalloch Estate, near Kilmartin, was the venue for secret liaisons between Edward VII (Queen Victoria's son) and the actress Lillie Langtry in the 19th Century.

8. Later in life the outlaw Rob Roy MacGregor took the name of Campbell – his wife's surname. They had a cottage in Glen Shirar given to them by The Duke of Argyll. A pile of stones which are the ruins of the cottage are difficult to find in the undergrowth but are still there today!

9. Neil Munro (Hugh Foulis) was born in Inveraray and went on to become a famous writer. His works included 'John Splendid', 'The Daft Days' 'The New Road' and perhaps most famous of all 'The Vital Spark' – The Para Handy stories. There is now a Neil Munro Society who meet regularly and many of his books have been reprinted.

10. "Tigh na Truish" is the name given to the Inn beside the so-called 'Bridge over the Atlantic'. It is where the highlanders changed from trousers into kilts when returning to their islands, during the time when highland dress was forbidden by the British government after The Battle of Culloden.

11. Auchindrain Museum, 6 miles from Inveraray, is one of the few remaining original highland townships existing in Scotland today.

12. The village of Furnace was renamed (original name Inverleacann) after iron smelting was introduced at the end of 18th Century. Bonawe Iron Foundry, near Taynuilt is open to the public today and is a splendid example of the workings of such a foundry (Historic Scotland).

13. The Kilmartin valley, 6 miles north of Lochgilphead contains archaeological monuments, standing stones and cup-and-ring rock carvings. Over 5,000 years of human history are traced across the glen and at least 150 prehistoric sites lie within 6 miles of the village of Kilmartin where there is also an excellent museum and interpretation centre.

14. Dunadd Hill Fort,on the River Add between Lochgilphead and Kilmartin was an Iron Age and later hill fort. It later became the ancient capital of Dalriada or Dal Riata, founded by immigrants from Ireland before 500 AD. Near the top of this ancient fort is a unique footprint, stone bowl and a rock carving of a boar – probably used during anointing or coronation ceremonies of rulers or kings.

15. Loch Fyne Oysters at the head of Loch Fyne is one of the principle employers in the area. It has won many awards and the business now has 45 restaurants operating in the UK. Oysters and mussels are grown nearby in Loch Fyne and the company pays particular attention to a sustainable environment.

16. In the 19th Century Ardrishaig was one of the most important herring ports in the Mid-Argyll area. It was also a popular destination for early tourists taking trips on the steamers from Glasgow, down The Clyde and through The Kyles of Bute to Loch Fyne.

17. Tarbert, Loch Fyne once an important fishing port, now concentrates on the exportation of shellfish, primarily to Spain where there is a ready market for velvet crabs, prawns, lobsters, scallops and squid.

18. The late Rt Hon John Smith MP, leader of the Labour party, was born in Dalmally and brought up in Ardrishaig. He was interred, at his request, on the island of Iona. His grave can be seen in the local burial place beside Iona Abbey.

19. Loch Fyne was once famous for the herring fishing, which provided plentiful work for hundreds of men and women who moved round the various ports when the herring were landed. Although today the herring have moved on, smokeries still cure and smoke herring brought in from other ports and sell them as 'Loch Fyne Kippers'.

20. Cruachan Power Station on Loch Awe was opened in 1965 after many years of excavation beneath the granite mountain of Ben Cruachan (3,689 ft). The underground cavern houses turbines, which provide electricity for the National grid.

21. The famous Adam architectural family were prominent figures in the design of Inveraray, an 18th Century planned town.

22. The Clan Campbell is one of the strongest clans in Scotland with many hundreds of Campbells abroad in countries such as Canada, USA and Australia forming part of the Clan Campbell Society. The present Duke – Torquil, the 13th Duke, is married and has two young sons. Inveraray Castle is the family home, although the Duke and his family spend most of the time in England. The castle is open to the public from April – October.

23. There were two prominent quarries in the Mid-Argyll area. Crarae Quarry (now closed) at one time produced curling stones and from Furnace Quarry, still working in a small way today, came the slabs for the pavement sets in front of Glasgow City Chambers.

24. Film and TV producers find the area excellent for locations. Film and TV productions of note have been 'My Life So Far', 'Lovejoy', 'Parahandy' 'The Crow Road' and Michael Winner's 'Bullseye'.

25. The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders was named Princess Louisa's regiment. The 91st Argyllshire Highlanders amalgamated in 1881 with the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders. Louise, the daughter of Queen Victoria, married the 9th Duke of Argyll, later Governor-General of Canada.

26. A wealth of local produce can be found in the Mid-Argyll area – venison, mussels, oysters, crabs, organic beef and lamb, cheese, not to mention ale from the small family-run Fyne Ales at the head of Loch Fyne near Cairndow.

27. Carnasserie Castle is located to the north of Kilmartin. The castle was built by John Carswell, Bishop of Argyll, in the 16th Century for the Earl of Argyll. Carswell, who published the first book in Gaelic - a translation of John Knox's Book of Prayer - later bought the castle from the Earl. Later, in 1643, the 8th Earl sold Carnasserie to Dougall Campbell. Following the 9th Earl's failed uprising in support of the Monmouth Rebellion, against James VII in 1685, the castle was burned down. The ruins were never repaired.

28. Historic Scotland take care of many ancient monuments in the district – ruined churches and chapels, castles, monuments and of special interest, the wonderful sculptured stones from the famous schools of sculpture in the Argyll area. Fine examples of these can be found in the churchyard and the small building next to Kilmartin Church.

29. The Bridge Over the Atlantic – the Clachan Bridge is a single-arched, hump-backed masonry bridge spanning the Clachan Sound, 13 kms south-west of Oban. It links the west coast of the mainland with the island of Seil. Thought to be originally designed by Scots civil engineer, Thomas Telford, built between 1792 and 1793 by local engineer Robert Mylne. It was designed with a high arch, roughly 22 metres wide and 12 metres above the bed of the channel, to allow the passage of vessels of up to 40 tonnes at high tide!

30. Easdale island was an important centre for slate quarrying from the mid 17th Century to early 20th Century. The island had as many as seven working quarries, some of which extended down to 300 ft below sea level! The neighbouring islands of Seil, Luing and Belnahua were also famous for the Easdale slate which was exported to Glasgow, Ireland, London and New

York. The population was more than 500 when in 1881 a storm flooded the quarries. Thereafter the industry declined and in the 1950s the quarry had virtually stopped working. The population by 1960 had dwindled to only 4 people!

31. The Corryvreckan whirlpool (3rd largest in the world) is situated between the islands of Jura and Scarba. It is on the northern side of the gulf, surrounding a pyramid-shaped basalt pinnacle that rises from depths of 70m to 29m at its rounded top. Flood tides and inflow from the Firth of Lorne to the west can drive the waters of Corryvreckan to waves of over 30 ft (9m) and the roar of the resulting maelstrom can be heard 10 miles (16kms) away.

32. George Orwell completed his novel 1984 on Jura when he stayed there in 1948. The book's title came directly from reversing the digits of the year.

33. The Cadzow family are well known in the spheres of worldwide cattle breeding for the work they did establishing White Park Cattle on Luing. White Park cattle are truly an ancient herd.

34. George Malcolm of Poltalloch was one of the founders of the Edinburgh Festival.

35. Duntrune Castle, home to the Malcolm family, is now accepted as the oldest continuously inhabited castle in Scotland. The vaulted rooms on the ground floor date from the 12th Century, and the remainder of the Keep is from the 16th Century.

36. The Moine Mhor or Great Bog is one of the most important bog sites in Britain. A site of special scientific interest, it contains important habitat for insects, including butterflies and dragonflies.

37. Eilean Righ in Loch Craignish was formerly the home of Sir Lionel Johnstone, tutor to the last Emperor of China. Peter O Toole depicted him in the film of that name.

38. Dorus Mhor, the notorious sea lane which lies between Craignish point and the island of Garbh Reisa, was where the Bell's *Comet*, the first seagoing steamship in the world, was wrecked.

39. In 542 AD the celtic missionary, Brendan the Navigator, founded a Christian community on the southern island of the Garvellachs.

40. Inverliever Forest, with numerous forest walks, was one of the first plantations acquired by the state in the 20th Century. The land was acquired from the Malcolms of Poltalloch in 1907 and quickly planted by the Office of Woods, which later became the Forestry Commission.

41. Argyll has a lot to offer those who have the bug for gardening, Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute highlight nineteen very different offerings.

42. At Portinisherrich – the port of foals – the small island of Innis Searaiche can be reached by a submerged causeway.

43. The 19th Century Episcopal church in Inveraray is dwarfed b y its 125ft Bell Tower erected as a memorial to the Campbells killed in WWI. Its peal of bells is the second heaviest peal of 10 in the world.

44. Queen Victoria likened the Pass of Brander to the Kyber Pass in India.

45. The Brander Pass was the scene of defeat of the MacDougalls by Robert the Bruce in early 1300s. He was aided by Douglas' and Campbells charging from above the MacDougalls from Ben Cruachan. Cruachan is said to still be the battle cry of the Campbells.

46. Ben Cruachan stands at 1101m [3689 ft] and is therefore a Munro. The name Cruachan means *shoulder*.

47. In the 15th Century, Muriel Calder was kidnapped by the Campbells and held captive at Kilchurn Castle. The child heiress to the substantial Cawdor lands she was married to John Campbell at the age of 12. Their marriage in 1510 was the beginning of the family Campbells of Cawdor, who have inhabited Cawdor Castle since 1524.

48. The local men of Ardrishaig are known as Grey Gulls after the name of the pub!

49. Loch Awe has evidence of 20 crannogs, which date from 300 BC to 1700 AD. Crannog is the name given in Scotland to an artificial island or natural island, used for a settlement. They date from around 3200 BC.

50. Duntrune Castle is said to be haunted by a handless piper. Legend says that in 1615 during a raid on the castle, the piper let loose with a skirl to let the attackers know they were discovered. The defenders killed him for his efforts.