

Gaelic History Trail



THE SOUND OF SCOTLAND'S TRADITIONS



AN IODHLANN

Tiree's Historical Centre

Heanish

Map Number: 1

Fast Facts: Heanish Fever Hospital was built in 1905 to help with outbreaks of infectious diseases such as typhoid, scarlet fever, smallpox, and TB. It is now a private house.

Captain Donald MacKinnon, one of Tiree's many sea captains came from Heanish. He was the captain of the *Taeping* in the 1866 Great Tea Race. This was between clippers which raced from China to England. Captain MacKinnon returned to Tiree in glory and was given *Pairc a' Chrannaig* 'the park of the pulpit' in Heanish in recognition.



Heanish Fever
Hospital around 1900



Scan or [click here](#) to **listen** to
more on Heanish

Scarinish

Map Number: 2

Fast Facts: The Scarinish Hotel was built in 1866. At that time, Tiree was a 'dry' island and it was known as the *Temperance Hotel*. Before the Gott Bay pier opened in 1915, Scarinish was the main harbour on the island. The mail-boat anchored offshore and a small ferry boat was rowed out to meet her. The Reading Room (now An Iodhlann, the island's historical centre) was built as a waiting room in 1886.

The Scarinish Hotel was granted a drinks licence in 1951. Before then, the Tiree men used to go onboard whilst the boat was tied up at the pier to have a drink. One story told of a man who ended up sailing to Barra and back, as he forgot to get back off the boat at the pier after 'one drink'.



Scarinish
Harbour in
the 1930s



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more

Gott and Kirkapol

Map Number: 3

Fast Facts: The Church of Scotland church at Kirkapol was built in 1842 above *An Tràigh Mhòr* 'the big beach'. It has recently been decommissioned.

At the west end of the beach is a small rock known as *Mallachdaig* 'the little cursed one'. It is said that Saint Columba tied his boat to this rock while visiting from his monastery on Iona. When the boat broke free, he cursed the rock, saying that no seaweed would grow on it henceforth. You can judge for yourself whether this is still true.



Kirkapol
Church

Vaul

Map Numer: 4

Fast Facts: A golf course existed in Vaul as long ago as the 1890s. In 1911 an eighteen-hole course, 6,306 yards long, was laid out with the help of a professional golfer, James Hobbins, who married a Tiree woman. In September a club house was gifted by Mr Charles MacNeil of the Colonial Iron Works in Govan.

Before World War II, Tiree was a very popular golfing resort. There were eighteen-hole courses at Vaul, Scarinish and Heanish and a nine-hole course at Cornaig. All were closed during the war and only the Vaul course was brought back into use in 1962 with nine holes.



Golfing at
Kirkapol in
the 1920s

Ruaig

Map Number: 5

Fast Facts: The tidal island of Soay lies just off of Ruaig. It encircles an inlet known as *Am Acarsaid Falaich* 'the hidden harbour'. It is said that it was given this name in the early nineteenth century when smuggling whisky and tobacco from Ireland became an important source of income on Tiree. Boats with their masts down could not be seen from excise cutters patrolling the Tiree Passage or from Tiree itself.

The outermost of the skerries in Gott Bay is called *Clach a` Chomharraidh* 'the rock of the mark'. This was used as a guide by captains navigating the bay.



Soay

Salum

Map Number: 6

Fast Facts: Malcolm MacLean, known as Calum Salum, opened a shop here in 1938. Using a hut from RAF Tiree, this grew into the largest shop in the east end. He sold everything: bakery bread from Glasgow, tins of food, paraffin and methylated spirits for Tilley lamps, crockery, radios and their batteries, and even tractors. He was the first man to sell bottled gas on the island, and was amongst the first on Tiree to set up a windmill on his house to generate electricity.

Dealing with paperwork took second place to all his other activities. Inside the house at Salum, the dining table would often be covered with letters and accounts waiting to be dealt with. His favourite saying was: "It's here, but where?"



Calum Salum
outside his
shop 1960s.

Caolas

Map Number: 7

Fast Facts: Caolas is at the extreme east end of Tiree, looking across Gunna Sound to Coll. It was once the main ferry-port for Coll, and it had an inn for travellers who were waiting for the ferry.

The poet, John MacLean, was brought up in Caolas. He achieved recognition as Poet to the Laird of Coll, before he emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1819. He was shocked to find thick woodland there, and he composed a famous song about the 'gloomy wood' that he had to cut down before he could build a house.

In March 1973, MV Loch Seaforth was sailing to Tiree when she hit a rock to the south of Caolas. The captain ordered the passengers and crew to abandon ship, and the stricken vessel was towed to Gott Pier, where she sank. She was raised by a crane from Germany, and then taken to Troon to be scrapped.

MV Loch Seaforth at Gott Bay Pier



Balephetrish

Map Number: 8

Fast Facts: Frustrated by a lack of land, eight cottars raided Balephetrish Farm in 1918. They cultivated an area, but were arrested and imprisoned for ten days. The farm was broken up into crofts two years later.

A pier was built in the bay during the Second World War. Set on sand, it collapsed after the first storm.

Balephetrish pier
around 1940.



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on Balephetrish

Crossapol

Map Number: 9

Fast Facts: The Reef was taken over by the Ministry of War in 1939. Three runways and a camp for 2,000 service men and women were built. At first, RAF Tiree played a role in search and rescue during the Battle of the Atlantic.

In 1943, 518 Squadron moved to Tiree. Using adapted Halifaxes, missions to collect weather data were flown deep into the Atlantic.

518 is credited with discovering a weather front off Iceland that forced Eisenhower to delay D-Day by one day in June 1944, one of the most consequential decisions of the Second World War.



Halifax over
Tiree.



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Heylipol

Map Number: 10

Fast Facts:

The Duke of Argyll's residence in Tiree is Island House. This was built in 1748. Today it sits on a small peninsula. But in earlier days this was an island, on which there was a medieval castle. Until 1679, the island was owned by the MacLeans of Duart.

In front of the house and by the roadside, there is a small rise known as 'Bac' a'Chrochaidh' - 'the dune of the hanging'. It was said that the last man to pay his rent was hanged there.



Bac' a' Chrochaidh



Island House

Balemartine

Map Number: 11

Fast Facts: Balemartine grew to be the biggest village on the island, with almost two hundred people living here in 1861. There used to be three shops, a couple of which had travelling carts and then vans. There were many fishermen, with a small ruined pier still visible at the shore.

The township was home to John MacLean, who was known as *Bàrd Baile Mhàrtainn* 'the Balemartine poet'. Known as one of the island's finest poets, his songs covered love, emigration and politics, and he also poked fun at his neighbours.



Scan or [click here](#) to **listen** to the Balemartine Bard



Balemartine 1920

Hynish

Map Number: 12

Fast Facts: The lighthouse shore station comprised a dock, signal tower, workshops and lodgings for those involved in the building of Skerryvore Lighthouse. Skerryvore Lighthouse was designed by Alan Stevenson and sits eleven miles off the coast of Tiree.

Building work started in 1837. Stone came from the Ross of Mull. They were hard carved by a workforce of eighty masons and then shipped out by boat to be assembled on *An Sgeir Mhòr* 'the big skerry'. The light first shone in 1844. The four lighthouse keepers lived in a row of cottages above the Signal Tower.



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Balephuill

Map Number: 13

Fast Facts: Located at the far end of Balephuill Beach (Travee) is Kenavara, one of only three hills on the island. On the South of Kenavara lies *Teampall Phàraig* 'St Patricks Temple', the remains of a medieval chapel on the site of a 6th-century monastery.

On the 8th July 1856 it was a calm and sunny morning and only an arc of a rainbow in the west warned Archibald Campbell (*Am Bòidheach*) from Barrapol not to go to sea that day. He warned the other men but seven boats set out from *Am Pòrt Mòr* in West Hynish for the Skerryvore fishing banks. At midday a sudden storm scattered the fleet and nine men were drowned. There is now a memorial cairn over-looking *Am Port Mòr* for the men lost in *Fuadach BraillePhuill* 'the Balephuill Fishing Disaster'.



Memorial cairn over-looking *Am Port Mòr* 'the big inlet'

St Patricks Temple



Sandaig

Map Number: 14

Fast Facts: HMS *Sturdy* ran aground on the Sandaig shore in 1940. A local sea captain, Donald Sinclair from Greenhill, who was home on leave, sent morse signal with a torch and saved lives by telling the men they had come aground on an island and not a rock. Some men had already jumped and lost their lives as they thought they had just hit rock out at sea.

Tiree's Kelp Factory located in Sandaig was known locally as the Glassary and was owned by the North British Chemical Company from 1864 to 1910. The kelp was gathered all over the island and was dried on walls behind Ben Hough and then taken to the factory where it was burnt.

The ash from the seaweed was exported off the island and used in the manufacture of iodine, soap, glass and other medicinal products and explosives during the Napoleonic wars. The waste product from the kelp was then used to tar roofs instead of the marram thatch. This is the origin of the unusual traditional Tiree felt roof houses.



Gathering Kelp 1960

Moss

Map Number: 15

Fast Facts: While Tiree was a dry island, one of Tiree's many illegal shebeens was located in Moss. A man known as *Rìgh na Mòinteach* 'the King of Moss', used to live in a thatched cottage here beside his daughter *Mairi-Ann' a' Rìgh*. Mairi-Anna ran the shebeen. She only opened the door if you knocked in a particular way.

Tiree people used to cut their peats here, but later went to the Ross of Mull.



Mairi-Anna A'Rìgh's
illegal Shebeen in
Moss

Balevullin

Map Number: 16

Fast Facts:

The SS Vivo was wrecked on Balevullin beach in 1890 as it carried a cargo of coal from Newcastle to Dublin. The crew of eighteen were able to row to shore safely. The captain was found guilty of poor navigation and demoted to sail as chief mate for six months. The ship's engine and crankshaft are exposed at low tide at the west end of the beach.

In 1912, some skeletons were found by the antiquarian Andrew Bishop in some dunes behind the beach. The skeletons proved to be Neolithic, with one showing signs of rickets, the earliest example found in Britain. Nearby was a tanged flint made around 11,000 years ago by the first people to reach Scotland from the Continent.

Scan or [click here](#) to
listen to another story on
Balevullin



The Green

Map Number: 17

Fast Facts: Local and East Coast fishing boats used to sail round to Port Bhiosta harbour and come ashore to dry and spread their nets on the large grassy section above the beach and this is what the East Coast fishermen named 'The Green'.

Croish farm house was a licenced inn and this was very popular with the fisherman.



The Green

Scan or [click here](#)
to **listen** to more on
The Green



Cornaig

Map Number: 18

Fast Facts: The Cornaig mill is the only visible mill left on the island. It was built by the fifth Duke of Argyll in 1803, servicing the whole island. Millers lived and worked at Millhouse until 1945. The mill wheel has been restored and still turns.

Cornaigmore School opened its doors in 1876, one of five schools on the island. It was rebuilt in 1936, with the island's first flush toilets and electric power. In 1983 it became a six-year secondary, meaning island children no longer had to spend their last two years at school in Oban.



Cornaig Mill
in the 1920s.