

The Robert the Bruce Trail (South Ayrshire)

Robert the Bruce became one of Scotland's greatest kings and he was born in the heart of South Ayrshire at Turnberry Castle in 1274. He was not born to be king but after the death of King Alexander III, a long power struggle between the competitors to the throne led to intervention by King Edward I of England, who subsequently forced the abdication of King John Balliol. When Edward declared himself as Overlord of Scotland, so began the Wars of Independence, the uprisings of Wallace and Murray, culminating in victory for Scotland at Bannockburn. Much of the drama was played out here in South Ayrshire. Locations on the Trail will explain more.

THE NORTHERN ROUTE

This area of the county has many ancient connections with King Robert, his ancestors and descendants.

1. AYR (St John's Tower) - In 1315, one year after victory at Bannockburn, in the ancient citadel of Ayr, King Robert held a Parliament here to settle the succession of the throne. If his only child, Marjorie, did not produce a male heir then his brother, Edward Earl of Carrick, would succeed Robert to the throne.



2. AYR (Wallace's Tower) William Wallace's Uncle, Sir Reginald Crawford had been Sheriff of Ayr in the years before the Wars of Independence. After the invasion by Edward I of England in 1296, men like Crawford were displaced from their positions. This Tower recognises Wallace's association with the town. The English camped at Ayr before talks were held in Irvine. Scots leaders agreed to keep the peace rather than fight in what became known as the 'Capitulation of Irvine'. Wallace was not amongst them, the young Robert Bruce was.

3. PRESTWICK (Bruce's Well) - A well has existed on this spot since at least the 13th Century. It served the needs of the community and St Ninian's Church, but particularly the 'Spital and Lazar House', or hospital and leper colony, nearby. King Robert benefitted from the Well himself and generously endowed the Lazar House.



4. DUNDONALD CASTLE - Dundonald Castle was built for King Robert II (Robert the Bruce's grandson) on his accession to the throne in 1371. It was a royal residence for the Stewart Kings for the next 150 years. It was said to be Robert II's favourite residence and it was here that he died in 1390. The High Stewards had occupied Dundonald Castle from the mid 12th

century. Recent excavations by Historic Scotland revealed the remains of a succession of settlements and fortifications on the Castle Hill dating back to the Stone Age.

5. LOANS - Soldiers returning from the continent were often afflicted with leprosy. To counter this problem, King Robert set up three leper colonies in the area. A hospital was established at a place now called St. Quivox. Loans itself had an Inn (now called Old Loans Inn) and a smiddy (on the site of the petrol station). These places served the lepers of the village.



6. BARNWEIL TOWER - Wallace's uncle, Sir Reginald Crawford was displaced as Sheriff of Ayr. When he and others were invited to the Barns of Ayr to discuss terms with an English judge, the Scots were hanged from the rafters. As many as 300 died. Early in 1297, Wallace 'Raised his head', in vengeance for the death of his uncle and led an attack on the English Barracks around Ayr, housed in the Barns. Wallace and his men showed no mercy to the English soldiers, as Arnulph had done to the Scots. Many were burned alive in the Barns, an event commemorated by this Tower.

7. TARBOLTON - This was an established settlement by the mid 12th century. Nearby was Failford priory (Fail), founded in 1252. At this time, Norman knights settled around Ayr with Bruce's father. They used the priory for rest and prayer. The Friars were known as "The Red Friars" due to the cloaks they wore. In the late 13th century, Robert the Bruce was very active in the area and as Earl of Carrick could recruit tenants into his 'Army of Carrick'. Tarbolton and the Priory would have seen many come and go. The ruins at Fail can still be seen.

THE CENTRAL ROUTE

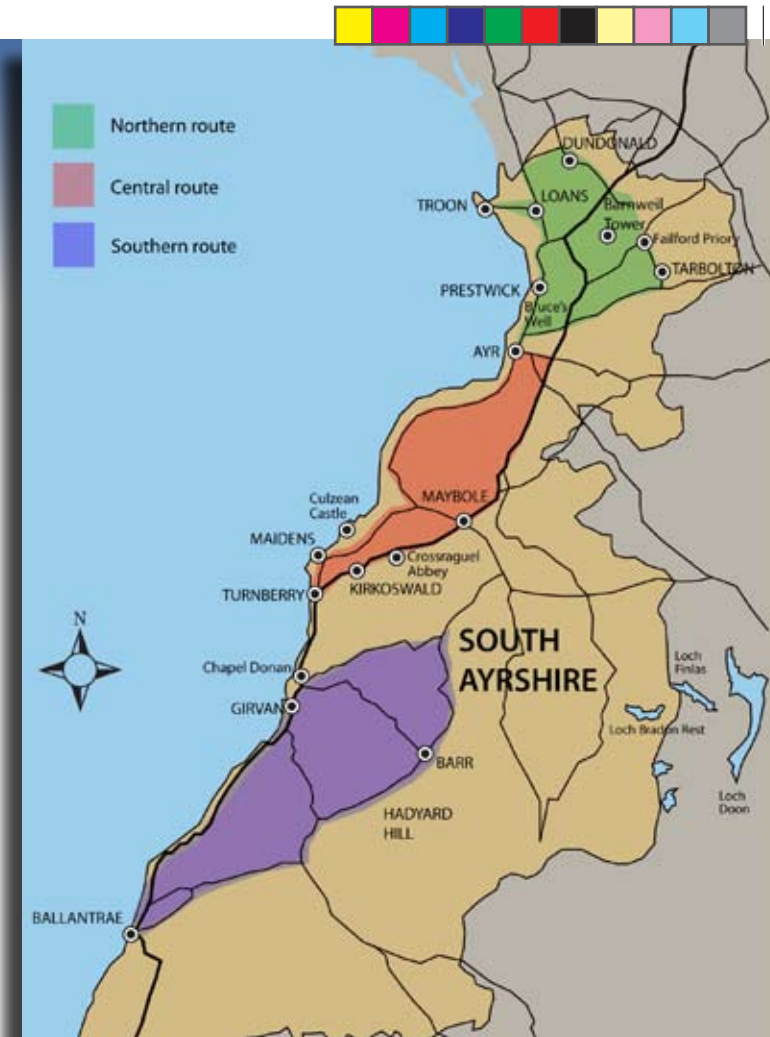
This area is at the heart of King Robert's roots, where he grew up and where he returned to reclaim the kingdom.

8. MAYBOLE - This ancient kingdom of Carrick is the part of Ayrshire, south of the River Doon. Maybole is a small town built on a sloping hillside which overlooks the Southern Uplands with a magnificent view of these rolling hills.



Photo: Carrick Ayrshire

9. TURNBERRY CASTLE - Little remains of this once-impressive fortress - seat of the ancient Earls of Carrick. Robert Bruce was born here on 11th July, 1274. His mother, Countess Marjorie, was heiress to the earldom and married Bruce's father in very romantic circumstances. They produced a



large family, all of whom played a major role in the Wars of Independence.



10. KIRKOSWALD - Kirkoswald Old Church dates back to 1244. It was built by monks who at the same time were founding Crossraguel Abbey, two miles away. The church holds the font in which King Robert was said to have been baptised.

11. CROSSRAGUEL ABBEY - Crossraguel was founded early in the 13th century by Duncan, Earl of Carrick. He invited monks of the Cluniac order from Paisley Abbey to build an Abbey here in his Earldom. The monks of Crossraguel remained loyal to Robert the Bruce throughout the Wars of Independence. As a result, the abbey buildings were severely damaged.

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12. MAIDENS - In February 1307 King Robert returned to take back his kingdom and it was here that he landed. With him, several hundred Islesmen and Irish supporters. It nearly ended in disaster when Bruce mistook a fire elsewhere for the beacon to signal his crossing from Arran. But by the end of the night, Bruce had destroyed the English barracks, although his castle at Turnberry remained in English hands. He and his men retreated into the Carrick hills to make camp.

THE SOUTHERN ROUTE

Much of this area became Robert the Bruce's natural fortress, providing shelter and places to hide against his enemies.



Photo: Barry Donnan

13. CHAPEL DONAN - It would be easy to miss this ruined chapel just north of Girvan. It is dedicated to St Donan of Eigg, who died c. 617. It was confirmed to the monks of Crossraguel Abbey in a charter of Robert III (1390-1406).

14. GIRVAN - In the years after Bannockburn, the King spent much time in Ayrshire and the Southwest of Scotland. In his



final year, he made a pilgrimage through these lands down to Whithorn in Galloway. Around this time, he held Court in Girvan and granted a Charter to the Friars of Ayr. A plaque on the wall of Knockcushan House commemorates the event.

15. BARR & HADYARD HILL - After the King landed at Maidens to restart his campaign for Scotland, his first strike had limited success. He could not retake Turnberry Castle, but made camp in the hills here. He was in a perilous situation and soon became surrounded by English and Scots enemies. From here he crossed into Galloway and confronted the English at Glentrool - his first victory.

16 BALLANTRAE & LOCH RYAN - Loch Ryan can be seen from Ballantrae. As King Robert landed at Maidens, he sent his brothers, Thomas and Alexander, south to head inland and cut off the English supply chain coming in from Dumfries. However, when the Scots landed near Stranraer they were attacked by the Macdowalls, Bruce's enemies. Thomas and Alexander were handed over to the English. They were executed in Carlisle without trial.

How much do you know about Robert the Bruce? Other than his inspiration from a spider and his victory at Bannockburn, many will not know that South Ayrshire was the county of his birth, where he restarted the campaign to take back his Kingdom after suffering defeat and where he returned time and again after that famous victory.

Follow the South Ayrshire Trail to visit many of the places with a connection to Bruce and his times. The Trail has been divided into three routes to make it easier for you to plan your journey. Take a look at the map and description of each place in this leaflet.



Wallace's Tower, Ayr

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Travel through time
and discover the
reality and the
legends surrounding
Scotland's greatest
king in the land of
his ancestors.



Photo: Cameron Morrison

