



The railway line from Ayr to Stranraer is arguably Scotland's hidden secret since the South West of Scotland is often by-passed in a rush to get to the more illustrious Highlands. Yet this railway line is full of hidden treasures with views of the Southern Uplands, three Kingdoms – Ireland, Man and Scotland - and two of Scotland's most prominent islands, Ailsa Craig and Arran.

Linking Ayr, the birthplace of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns, to the bustling harbour of Stranraer you will travel through some of Scotland's most varied and picturesque scenery. From the coastal towns of Ayr and Girvan, to the woods between Maybole and Dailly and the panoramic climb up Dow Hill to Pinmore with unparalleled views of the Firth of Clyde, this line is full of panoramic scenes.

Down through the valley of the Asseil and through the tranquility of Pinwherry, which sits astride the Water of Asseil and Duisk River to the forests at Barrhill you will have superb views of South West Scotland. Over the Moors at Chirmorie to the Swan's Neck then down the valley of the Water of Luce, past the ancient remains of Glenluce Abbey to the historic ferry port of Stranraer this railway is a line of contrasts. So sit back and enjoy your journey on 'Scotland's Ireland line'.

Ayr

Ayr is Scotland's archetypal seaside town with miles of golden sand, parks, a bustling regional shopping centre and a racecourse that is home to the Scottish Grand National. Dating from the early 13th century, the town was the birthplace of Robert Burns, Scotland's national bard who was born on 25th January 1759 at a cottage in Alloway two miles south of Ayr. The cottage has been fully restored and nearby is the Burns National Heritage Park.

River Doon

After leaving Ayr the railway climbs through the suburbs of Belmont and Alloway before crossing the A77 and passing the new South Ayrshire multi-hospital complex. Out into the District of Carrick the line becomes single, as the former branch to Dalmellington diverges to the left. You cross the River Doon with views to your right of the Heads of Ayr, the prominent headland that juts out into the Firth of Clyde.

After passing through the closed stations of Dalrymple and Cassillis the line meanders first one way then the other. In the distance are the Glenkens of Dumfries & Galloway and shortly afterwards you arrive at Maybole.

Maybole

The ancient capital of Carrick, Maybole was home to the barons of Carrick and in the 17th century no fewer than 28 lairds and landowners with estates in the area had town houses here. The oldest surviving house is Maybole Castle, once the winter residence and town house of the Earl of Cassilis. Following the arrival of the railway in 1856, most of the gentry moved north to more prestigious addresses in Ayr, and Maybole was industrialised, becoming home to a localised shoe industry. The last factory closed in 1962.



After leaving Maybole an ancient structure can be seen to the right. This is Baltersan Tower House, and dates from 1584, being built for John Kennedy. It fell into disrepair around the middle of the 18th century, but its present owner is planning a full restoration.

Carrick Hills

The large monument to the right is to Sir Charles Fergusson of Kilkerran. Once again the railway meanders its way south, but this time the land is wooded and though it is hard to imagine now, this area was once home to the South Ayrshire coalfield. No fewer than 100 mines were located between Maybole and Girvan, the last closing in 1977 after 550 years of coal production.

Amongst the woods lies Kilkerran, now just a passing place and a signal box. Once a station, the building now houses a sawmill, but for a hundred years the chief cargo from the station was prilygneous acid, which is obtained by the dry distillation of wood and was used ultimately in the textile industry. Further south the closed stations of Dailly and Killochan are passed. The former, now part caravan site was in the centre of the local coal mining industry, the key mines being Dalquharran, Maxwell and Killochan. The latter was the largest facility and coal was sent there for washing before transport by rail to Ayr harbour. Near Killochan station was a quarry for the extraction of lime. There are a number of prestigious houses in the valley, the most notable being Kilkerran, home of the Fergusson clan, Dalquharran and Bargany.

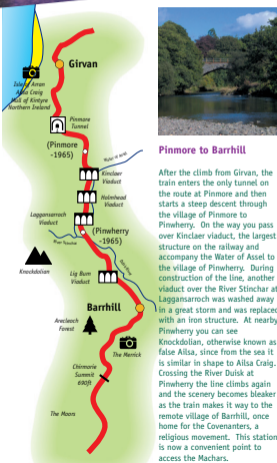
Girvan

The largest town between Stranraer and Ayr, Girvan's history is built upon its harbour and agriculture. Dominated by



the West/North Kirk, the centre of the town lies around Stumpy Tower formerly a gaol and town hall, which was ravaged by fire in 1939. Once a popular tourist destination, the town hosts a picture postcard harbour, but manufacturing is the largest employer with chemical, chocolate and whisky production carried on here.

Leaving Girvan you climb one of the steepest sections of railway in the UK and get one of the best views into the bargain, overlooking the Firth of Clyde and the 1114ft (339m) Ailsa Craig 10 miles off shore. It is now a seabird sanctuary, but is famous for its granite from which curling stones are fashioned.



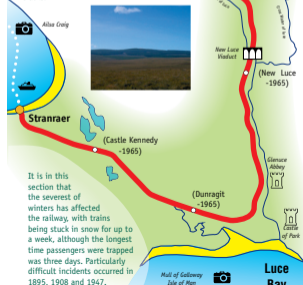
Pinmore to Barrhill

After the climb from Girvan, the train enters the only tunnel on the route at Pinmore and then starts a steep descent through the village of Pinmore to Kincler Viaduct, the largest structure on the railway and accompany the Water of Asseil to the village of Pinwherry. During construction of the line, another viaduct over the River Stinchar at Laggansarroch was washed away in a great storm and was replaced with an iron structure. At nearby Pinwherry you can see Knockdolian, otherwise known as false Ailsa, since from the sea it is similar in shape to Ailsa Craig. Crossing the River Duisk at Pinwherry the line climbs again and the scenery becomes bleaker as the train makes it way to the remote village of Barrhill, once home for the Covenanters, a religious movement. This station is now a convenient point to access the Machars.

Barrhill and Chirmorie

Leaving Barrhill arguably one of the last traditional rural stations in Scotland, the train climbs onwards to Chirmorie, the highest point on the line at 690ft (210m). To the east lies Merrick, the highest mountain in southern Scotland at 2765ft (843m). The area is a mixture of forests and remote moorland.

There are plans to extract the timber and transport it out by rail, as the local roads are not that suited for large articulated trucks.



It is in this section that the severest of winters has affected the railway, with trains being stuck in snow for up to a week, although the longest time passengers were trapped was three days. Particularly difficult incidents occurred in 1895, 1908 and 1947.

Water of Luce

After passing Chirmorie the scenery becomes bleak, indeed this area is known as the Moors. Soon you reach the lonely signal box at Glenwhilly, surely one of the most remote in Britain. Once there was a station here.

The line generally falls steeply now down into the valley of the Luce and slows a little for one of the main features of the line, the Swans Neck, where by a series of reverse curves it changes from a south westerly direction to a south easterly one. As the landscape becomes more lush, the ancient remains of Glenluce Abbey soon come into view. The Abbey was built around 1192 and remained in use until the reformation in 1560, when it fell into disrepair. It was acquired by the State in 1933.



Stranraer

After passing Glenluce Abbey, you join the former railway that linked Dumfries to Stranraer and Portpatrick. On a clear day you can see Luce Bay and beyond to the Isle of Man. What looks like a ferry is in fact The Scares rocks midway between the Mull of Galloway and Burrow Head. The land is flatter now as you approach Stranraer. This is dairy country and enjoys a wonderfully mild climate. Nearby are a host of gardens featuring sub-tropical plants.

Prior to reaching Stranraer, you can see evidence of a small amount of industrial activity and the remains of Stranraer Town station, which was the original station for Stranraer, on the way to Portpatrick. Because of local conditions and its susceptibility to bad weather, the Admiralty were reluctant to sanction development of a port there and Stranraer was favoured instead. The first regular sailing left Stranraer Harbour station on October 1st 1862. It is the oldest surviving harbour station in the UK still in regular use. The town dates back to 1511, and is home to the Castle of St John and a local museum.

On the other side of the line is Stair Park, home of Stranraer Football Club. Soon you are at Stranraer harbour, Scotland's gateway to Northern Ireland and the Galloway coast.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Local Tourist Information

For more information on things to do, where to eat and where to stay, contact the tourist information centres, detailed below:

Ayr Tourist Information Centre (open all year)
22 Sandgate, Ayr KA7 1BW **01292 290 300**

Stranraer Tourist Information Centre (open all year)
28 Harbour Street, Stranraer DG9 7RA **01776 702 595**

Travel Information

National Rail Enquiries
08457 48 49 50
for timetable & fares
information

For enquiries about Scotrail
0845 601 5929
scotrailcustomerrelations@firstgroup.com

Lost Property
0141 335 3276

Disabled Assistance
0845 605 7021

Traveline
0871 200 2233
www.travelinescotland.com

For general travel information nationwide

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Thriving in the 21st Century

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The route between Ayr and Stranraer comprises four railways and like so many lines was born out of competition. The railway had reached Ayr in 1840 but it was further to the south that the reason for the Stranraer to Ayr line can be found: the link to Ireland.

The first railway of the four was the 5½ mile Ayr and Maybole Junction Railway, opening in 1856. This terminated just to the north of the existing station at Maybole. Four years later the Maybole and Girvan Railway extended the line to a small terminus close to the harbour at the port of Girvan. From the outset, both railways were worked by the Glasgow and South Western Railway (G&SWR), which took over the former company in 1871 having absorbed the latter six years earlier. In 1862 a railway opened between Castle Douglas and Portpatrick, built as part of a deal between the Government and the Royal Mail. This was to restore a ferry link that had operated between 1662 and 1849 across the Irish Sea to Donaghadee in County Down, Northern Ireland. In the event it was Stranraer and Larne rather than Portpatrick and Donaghadee that became the terminal points of the North Channel ferry crossing. This railway, the Portpatrick Railway, colloquially known as the "Port Road", provided the only railway link between Glasgow and Belfast. Within Scotland this involved a journey down either the modern day West Coast Main Line, then owned by the Caledonian Railway to Lockerbie and on to Dumfries, or the Glasgow and South Western Railway via Cumlock to Dumfries, a distance of at least 155 miles depending upon the route chosen. It was actually quicker to board a steamer at Ardrossan and sail to Belfast than to follow the circuitous route via Dumfries.

Finally in 1877 the missing link was opened. This was the Girvan and Portpatrick Junction Railway. Joining the Maybole and Girvan Railway about ½ mile short of the Girvan terminus, this line ran through the villages of Pinmore, Pinwherry and Barrhill to join the Portpatrick Railway at Challock Junction. At one time an alternative route along the coast was considered through Ballantrae and Cairnryan, but the costs associated with rock blasting led to the current alignment being adopted. As with the lines to Maybole and Girvan, the G&SWR operated the line but its relationship with the owners was not easy, eventually acquiring it in 1892. However, the story doesn't end there - under the Beeching proposals all lines south of Ayr and west of Dumfries were to be axed. Fortunately a concerted attempt was made to retain a link to Stranraer. The Ayr route earned a reprieve and this is the line we have today.



Fauna and Flora

The land traversed by the railway varies quite considerably, from the gentle woodlands in the north, which fringe the Galloway coalfield to the rural south of Galloway. Unlike the Highlands, most of the scenery is not dramatic and harsh. In contrast to the bare rock often associated with lines further north, the hillsides are covered in various shades of verdant green according to the season, often punctuated by gorse which flowers in May and June.

Between Ayr and Girvan the line crosses two rivers, the Ayr and the Water of Girvan. Both are good for fishing and in them can be found mullet, trout, salmon and eels. Further south, the River Stinchar has the highest quality of the Ayrshire rivers as it was not exposed to the colliery workings found to the north. Otters are to be found living by all of these rivers along with roe deer, kingfishers, dippers and ducks.

Around Girvan it is sea birds that dominate. Ailsa Craig is home to a colony of some 70,000 birds, chief being the gannet, but also to be found are guillemots, razorbills and a small colony of puffins. By Loch Ryan you can see widgeon and sand martins. In the waters around Girvan and Loch Ryan can be found seals and occasionally porpoises. In the middle are the moorlands of South Ayrshire and Galloway. Here you are likely to see birds of prey such as kestrels and sparrowhawks. If you go walking in these areas be careful where you tread, for it is a popular habitat for adders as the signaller at Glenwhilly signal box once found out! As in many Upland areas the most common animals to be seen are sheep.

There is also considerable variety in types of flora too, as the railway leaves the gentle undulating lands of Carrick, passing over the Moors with their varieties of grasses before entering the mild climate of Galloway and Wigtownshire. Galloway is home to some interesting and exotic plant species and many of these are to be found in the numerous gardens and nurseries in the area. These include Ardwell, Castle Kennedy, Dunskey, Glenwhan and Logan Botanic Gardens. In Agnew Park, Stranraer you can see palm trees. This is a consequence of the North Atlantic Drift, an ocean current that brings mild weather to the area. However there are concerns that with climate change the effect of this phenomenon may be reduced.



Where to visit

In an area 60 miles in length there are a host of attractions and activities to be pursued, catering for all tastes. Here are just a sample:

Robert Burns
Alloway is home to three major tourist attractions associated with Robert Burns, *The Burns Cottage*, the *Burns Cottage Museum* and the *Burns Heritage Park*. These are premier attractions in Scotland. Nearest station: **Ayr** - regular bus services from Burns Square, 2 minutes walk from the station. Journey time 7 minutes.

Culzean Castle
Set in 200 acres of Country Park, this castle was built in the late 16th century for Thomas Kennedy and reconstructed 200 years later by Robert Adam. It was acquired by the National Trust in 1945. Nearest station: **Maybole** - hourly bus service from outside the station usually at 54 minutes past the hour. Journey time 6 minutes

Crossraguel Abbey
Two miles south of Maybole by the A77 are the remains of a Clunian Abbey dating back to 1215. It lasted as an ecclesiastic institution until 1569. It is one of the best preserved abbeys in Scotland. Nearest station: **Maybole** - no regular bus service. Contact local taxi operator.

Girvan
The key attraction at Girvan is *the harbour* with its panoramic views of Ailsa Craig, Arran and Holy Island. From here it is possible to take a boat trip to Ailsa Craig and the paddle steamer Waverley makes occasional visits in the summer months. The town is an interesting mix of architecture. The highlight to be found in the main street is the red stone *McKechnie Institute*, dating back to 1888. Nearest station: **Girvan** - 10 minutes walk from the station.

Barrhill
Barrhill is the home of the *Martyrs tomb* connected to the Covenanters, an important movement in the social history of Scotland in the 17th century. Here are buried the remains of John Murchie and Daniel Micklewick, shot by soldiers in 1665 on account of carrying bibles and thus assumed to be Covenanters. Nearest station: **Barrhill** - 15 minutes walk from the station.



Portpatrick
A picturesque port on the Rhins of Galloway, the town has the best sunshine record in Dumfries and Galloway. It lies at the western end of the *Southern Upland Way*, the long distance walk through the Borders to Berwickshire, has a traditional harbour with a pitch and putt course adjacent. Nearby are the ruins of *Dunskey Castle* and *Dunskey Gardens*. Nearest station: **Stranraer** - bus services from Port Rodie bus stop 7 minutes walk from the station. Journey time 25 minutes.

Gardens
There are five gardens within easy reach of Stranraer. The nearest is *Castle Kennedy*, one of the showpieces of Galloway and built around the 17th century castle four miles east of Stranraer. It is owned by the Earl and Countess of Stair. Further east at Dunragit is *Glenwhan*, one of the best gardens created in recent times. On the Rhins to the south of Stranraer are located *Dunskey Gardens* near Portpatrick, *Logan Botanic Garden* at Port Logan, unrivalled as the country's most exotic walled garden, and *Ardwell Gardens*. Nearest station: **Stranraer** - bus services from Port Rodie bus stop 7 minutes walk from station. Journey time 25 to 35 minutes.

Mull of Galloway Lighthouse
Marking the southernmost point of Scotland and with a light 325ft above sea level, this lighthouse built in 1830 and now automated is open to visitors on Saturdays and Sundays. Nearest station: **Stranraer** - note the nearest bus service to the lighthouse terminates at Drummore.

Stranraer
An attractive town with narrow winding streets, Stranraer was home to Sir John Ross the famous Arctic Explorer who lived in the *North West Castle*, now a hotel. The town's origins date back nearly 500 years to the construction of the *Castle of St John* in 1511. It was a headquarters of Graham of Claverhouse, who was responsible for suppressing the Covenanters in the 17th century. The *Stranraer Museum* housed in the town's historic Old Town Hall contains displays on Wigtownshire's historic past. Nearest station: **Stranraer** - 10 minutes walk to the town centre.



See the sights from the train.

A traveller's guide to the Stranraer to Ayr line.

The Stranraer to Ayr Line Support Association
(SAYLSA)