**The Ramblers - St Andrews & N.E. Fife Group**

St Andrews & NE Fife Ramblers travelled to Dunoon at the end of May for our annual group holiday. Anticipating less favourable weather than last year, when we enjoyed five days of glorious sunshine in Melrose, our expectations were immediately fulfilled as we travelled west through intermittent rain showers. On arriving at our sea-front hotel, most of us gathered for an introductory 3-mile walk up through Bishop’s Glen. Notably absent from the group was the walker who contrived to set out on a walking holiday without walking boots. While the rest of us enjoyed this leisurely walk through the woodland and around the reservoir, our colleague embarked on an impromptu shopping expedition to replace the absent footwear left languishing in a cupboard in Fife. After dinner, as the rain finally cleared, we were treated to stunning views over the Clyde coast in the evening sunshine. This prompted much armchair debate, never quite resolved, over the precise location of the farthest headland we could see...

The next day the majority of the group decided to make the most of the sunshine with an 8-mile linear walk by Loch Eck from Glenbranter to Benmore, home to the resplendent Botanic Gardens. ‘Linear’ on this occasion involved car shuttles, no small feat of organisation for 21 people! With the requisite number of cars eventually positioned at both the start and end of the walk we set off on the gently undulating path; though not before admiring our forgetful colleague’s newly-acquired boots which appeared to pass muster on their inaugural outing. Open, elevated views over the loch were interspersed with wooded sections and waterfalls as we made our way towards Benmore, stopping for lunch in a well-chosen sheltered cove by the water’s edge. We continued to the gardens, where we admired the glorious palette of spring colours as we strolled towards the cafe for well-earned refreshments, meeting others from the group who had enjoyed their day exploring the gardens more fully. After another hearty dinner, and a birthday cake, we were entertained by a fine singer and guitarist who catered affably for a rich tapestry of requests. With dancers also taking the floor (some with great enthusiasm, others rather more reluctantly) an enjoyable evening was had by all.

On Wednesday most of us opted for another linear walk (without the need for car shuttles this time) following part of the Cowal Way by the Kyles of Bute and Loch Riddon. Reaching Tighnabruaich after a scenic drive over single-track roads, as we gathered our walkers together from various parking places in the village, the rain that had been forecast for mid-afternoon seemed to have arrived early. Donning our waterproofs appeared to do the trick; but even as the rain dispersed, all too predictably the midges assembled. Repellents and nets deployed we finally got under way, heading towards Glen Caladh. Under the lowering skies we enjoyed atmospheric views over the Kyles of Bute, hidden at times by the dense, colourful rhododendrons lining the path whose undulations were definitely more pronounced than those on the previous day! While some of the group decided to turn back before lunch, several of us continued along the shore and over a section of boulders which turned out to be less of a challenge than anticipated. Having lunched at yet another scenic waterside location we retraced our steps towards Tighnabruaich. Our timing was good as we reached our destination just as the rain was coming on again, this time to stay, completely obscuring any view on our return journey to Dunoon. Back at the hotel, further entertainment was provided in the form of a Scottish-themed evening with haggis, tartan, piper and a display by four accomplished young dancers with perhaps more skills in this field than those on show the previous evening.

The following day brought heavy rain as forecast. Undeterred, a handful of doughty souls set out for sheltered walks around Benmore and nearby Puck’s Glen while others decided to stay closer to home, exploring Dunoon and its immediate environs. Two carloads abandoned any thoughts of braving the elements, opting instead to take the ferry from Colintraive across to Bute to visit Mount Stuart House. There we enjoyed a highly informative, not to mention entertaining, guided tour of this beautifully appointed ancestral home of the Marquesses of Bute. We also managed to see parts of the extensive gardens despite the rain which persisted throughout the day. Returning to Dunoon, after a convivial dinner served (for some of us) with amusing tales of spontaneously-combusting car seats, our final evening concluded with the now traditional quiz. This included predictable speculative challenges, with your correspondent, predictably, still having the last word.

With the rain showing no sign of relenting the next morning, we gave up on the idea of a final group walk. Nevertheless, and despite the unsettled weather this time, as we headed home we could reflect on yet another entertaining week with good walking, fabulous scenery, excellent company and a hotel with ‘spadefuls of ambience’. Many thanks as always to our organiser, Jim Coates for making all the arrangements and for identifying and leading us on our walks.

Our next walk is on Wednesday 19th June at Shell Bay, Grade C, 5 miles. This is an easy circular walk with fine views of Shell Bay and the Forth. Contact 01334 470066 or 07908 721466. The following Sunday, 23rd June we are walking at Glen Derby, Kirkmichael, Grade B, 7.5 miles. This moderate walk follows paths and tracks through woodland and over moorland, with some sustained ascents. Contact 01334 656137 or 07526 670535.

For more details please visit our website [www.standrewsnefiferamblers.com](http://www.standrewsnefiferamblers.com)

We would be delighted to welcome you to your first walk with us to see if Ramblers is for you!